



Steve Turnbo

Public Relations Executive, Chairman
of Schnake Turnbo & Frank

Chapter 01 – Introduction

Announcer: As a public relations man, Steve Turnbo was a fixture in local Tulsa business and civics for more than five decades, helping clients and nonprofits tell their stories in the media, at community gatherings, and wherever decision-makers congregated. His behind-the-scenes work over the years helped build toll roads, construct stadiums and arenas, pass bond elections, and manage crises.

He established Turnbo and Associates and, after a year, he joined his mentor Chuck Schnake to form Schnake Turnbo & Associates, which in time became Schnake Turnbo & Frank.

His many recognitions include: The University of Tulsa College of Business Hall of Fame, The Public Relations Society of America's Paul M. Lund Public Service award, and he was named to the prestigious College of Fellows of the Public Relations Society of America.

In his oral history interview, Steve will tell you about his love for baseball, people he knew in the community, and Will Rogers' quotes — on VoicesOfOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 – 8:00 Baseball Glove

John Erling (JE): My name is John Erling, and today's date is November 18th, 2022. Steve, would you state your full name, please?

Steve Turnbo (ST): Steven Wayne Turnbo.

JE: Your birth date?

ST: September 26, 1945.

JE: And your present age?

ST: 77.

JE: And where are we recording this interview?

ST: From my apartment here at Montereau.

JE: Here in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

ST: Correct.

JE: Where were you born?

ST: I was born in Belleville, Illinois.

JE: Let's talk about your life. Let's talk about your parents, your mother's name, and her maiden name, and where she was born and grew up.

ST: Her name was Sudie McAllister, Slover, and she was from McAllister, Oklahoma. And then my father was Thomas Gerald Turnbo, and he was from Atoka, Oklahoma.

JE: All right. I think that's so great that her parents gave her the name of McAllister. She had a distant relative who was a baseball player. She was from the original McAllister family. So that's how that all came to be.

JE: Oh, great. I guess it wouldn't work if that was her first name. They'd call her Mac.

ST: Mac, that's right.

JE: Well, describe her personality. What was she like?

ST: She was wonderful. She had a job. She was the cook. She cooked all the meals. She went to work every day. And in that era, having both parents

work was not... It was not uncommon. And she was a hard worker and helped me as a kid develop... She got me in Boy Scouts and other things that helped mold me, so to speak.

JE: Your father's personality?

ST: He was more of a quiet guy. He was an insurance adjuster for an insurance company. But he wasn't as outgoing toward the family. He wasn't as outgoing toward the family as my mother was, not derogatorily, but he was just more of a loner.

JE: Yeah. All right. You were born in Illinois.

ST: Belleville.

JE: So how does the family get to Oklahoma?

ST: Well, Belleville was the home of Scott Airfield, and my dad was in the Army Air Corps. So that's how we were born there, or I was born there. And then eventually, when he got out of the service, he moved back to McAllister, Oklahoma, and he ran the American Legion building down there in McAllister.

JE: Your first grade school?

ST: Bache, Oklahoma.

JE: Bache Elementary?

ST: Yes.

JE: And then how long were you there?

ST: Oh, for probably three years, and then we moved to Tulsa.

JE: And you went to which school?

ST: McKinley.

JE: All right. McKinley Elementary. So since you were a baseball player, I have to bring you back to when did baseball become of interest to you?

ST: Well, one year I got a baseball glove from my uncle as a Christmas present, and that got me interested in baseball. And in those days, there weren't recreation centers or any of that, so you'd get up in the summer in the morning, and you'd play baseball from morning till dark. And that's what we did. It had an empty lot nearby, and we'd play baseball all day long.

JE: Yeah. Pick sides, I suppose, with the bats.

ST: Yep. Chews up a whole nine yards.

JE: Right, right. Those have to be fond memories for you.

ST: Very fond memories.

JE: Right. Were you excelling at any position at that time?

ST: No, I was slow, but I was a left-handed thrower and a right-handed batter. So because I was a lefty, I wound up pitching more because there's not too many lefties. There's not too many left-handed pitchers.

JE: Right. The name of your uncle who got you interested?

ST: Bill Slover, Uncle Bill Slover.

JE: Wow. I bet you thanked him a few times. Yes, I did. Yes, I did. We need people like that in all our lives to encourage us. Let's bring you back to about eight, nine, ten years old, I suppose.

ST: Yep.

JE: Did you listen to baseball? Did you listen to radio back then?

ST: Absolutely. I grew up listening to Harry Carey and the St. Louis Cardinals.

JE: And let's see, at that time, was Stan Musial playing?

ST: Number six, Stan Musial, yes.

JE: Who you idolized, right?

ST: Yeah, absolutely.

JE: And there was a hit record about Stan.

ST: Yes, it was. I got it. It was published by, I think, Phillips Petroleum, and I had the record.

It has the 3,000th hit and how Harry Carey described it and all of that.

Harry Carey: Here's the stretch, no hesitation. Now the pitch. Low and the count is evened out. Two balls and two strikes. Dick Schofield would be next. A home run here would tie it up for hit number 3,000. A base hit would score a run. The Cardinals trail three to one. We're in the sixth. Mo Dabrowski getting set. Ready now. Two balls, two strikes. The hesitation at the belt.

Now the pitch. Swung on. A high foul ball out of play. Into the left field corner. Two balls, two strikes.

They're all scampering for the souvenir out there. Boy, I'd like to see them give somebody in those bleachers a souvenir. On hit number 3,000. Two balls, two strikes. Stan waits. Two balls, two strikes. Now the stretch from the belt. Here's the pitch. Line joined. There it is. Into left field. Hit number 3,000. A run is scored. Lucille around first. On his way to second with a double. Holy cow, he came through. Scully goes over to second base and gives him the ball. He throws it into the Cardinal dugout. Terry Moore has it. Here are the photographers out on the field.

JE: Wow. It was great. So then grade school and how did school work come for you? Were you interested in it or was it easy for you?

ST: It wasn't hard. I basically, because of baseball, I knew I had to do good in school or my parents would not let me play baseball. So that was the motivation to do good in school.

JE: Okay. So then out of McKinley you went to where?

ST: Well, Bell Junior High. And then from there to Whitney Junior High we moved.

JE: Okay.

ST: And then to Nathan Hale High School.

JE: All right. First of all, when did you graduate from Nathan Hale?

ST: 1963.

JE: All right. Let's talk about your time at Nathan Hale. Were you involved in clubs, organizations, or were you?

ST: Well, I was, interestingly enough, I was a member of the chess club. Believe it or not, I played, liked chess. That was pretty much what I did.

JE: Right. But you must have been playing baseball.

ST: Played a little baseball. At Hale, I didn't play at Hale because that team was so good I wound up sitting on the bench, so I didn't play there. But I played later for the same coach, Wally Knapp.

JE: All right. Well, that's kind of surprising when our listeners hear what happened to you later on.

Chapter 03 – 12:42
TU Baseball

John Erling (JE): So we're talking in the 60s and the Tulsa Oilers were here playing. And didn't you help them out a little bit?

Steve Turnbo (ST): Well, I was the clubhouse boy for the Visitors team, which basically was a great job. My job was to clean up the clubhouse, shine the shoes, hang up the uniforms for the players. And it was a great job.

JE: Just to be around those players.

ST: Yeah, I think I made \$15 a week.

JE: Yeah, and you would have done it for nothing.

ST: Absolutely. Absolutely.

JE: Right. Oh, and then I heard that you kicked some very important person out of the clubhouse.

ST: Well, I did. I had a strict boss with the Albuquerque Dodgers Triple-A team. And he said, "Nobody's ever allowed in that clubhouse during the games." So I went back to check on the clubhouse one evening. And there was some guy there in a coat and tie. And I ran him out of the clubhouse.

So I went out and told the team trainer, who was my boss, and said, "I just ran some guy out of the clubhouse." So he goes back. Five minutes later, he comes back and says, "You idiot, that's Buzzy Bavese," who was the general manager of the Dodgers. And he was there to call up a player named Don Sutton. And fly back to meet the team. And Don Sutton went from there to the major leagues and became an all-star.

JE: Wow. Wow. Wow. Wow. I thought he was even an owner, wasn't he?

ST: Yes, he was.

JE: An owner. Yeah. Buzzy Bavese. Here's a man that was probably told not to do too much. Do you remember encountering him? Did he glare at you? Did he argue with you?

ST: Actually, he was very, very courteous. Very courteous. He could have glared at me.

JE: Right. Who was the manager of the Tulsa Oilers at that time?

ST: Probably Vern Benson, I believe, was the manager at that time. Of course, I was on the visitor side, which was a better job because you made more money.

JE: Oh.

ST: Because every three days, the team would leave and the players would tip you. If it's a home team, they're there for two weeks and you get the same tip for two weeks' work versus three days.

JE: You had to figure it out, huh? Warren Spahn became manager.

ST: He did.

JE: Was that later then?

ST: Yes. He was basically, and then the TU baseball team always started the season with an exhibition game against the Oilers. And when we played them that year, Spahn pitched and I was lucky enough to get a hit off Warren Spahn.

JE: Wow. Can I touch your hand? Oh, that had to be fun for you, huh?

ST: Yes, it was. Baseball was a lot of fun.

JE: Yeah. And Warren's son. Greg told Warren's story here for VoicesOfOklahoma.com and did a great job of it, so we're proud to have that story with us. Who had a ranch down in Texas, Warren did, and lived in Broken Arrow.

ST: Yes.

JE: I think he passed away, as a matter of fact, in Broken Arrow. In the 60s, let's bring up a historic note here, because it was November of '63. Here we are the 18th of November, because on the 22nd of November, we'll honor that anniversary in 1963 when John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated. You certainly remember that. Tell us what your day was like when that happened.

ST: Well, I was a freshman at Northwestern. I went to Northeastern A&M Junior College and had a 1 o'clock class. And I walked into the class, and the teacher came in with tears running down his cheeks, and he said, "Our president is dead. You are dismissed." And they canceled school for the next few days. And I came back to Tulsa and was literally watching national television, along with millions of other Americans, when Jack Ruby shot and killed Lee Harvey Oswald.

JE: And I remember radio stations didn't make any difference what their format was, whether it was talk or rock and roll or whatever. They just played, I'm going to call it dirge music, slow classical music, because nobody knew what to do.

ST: That's correct. And I'll always remember Walter Cronkite taking those glasses off and looking at that screen saying, "Our president is dead."

JE: And I think a tear or two in his eye when he did that. Out of Nathan Hale, you went to Northeastern Oklahoma A&M in Miami, home of the Golden Norsemen. I've always liked that because I'm Norwegian, and it's nice to have that Norseman. And why did you go to NEO?

ST: Because that's the only school that offered me a baseball scholarship. A guy named Homer Thomas came and saw one of my American Legion games. And why don't you come up to NEO and play baseball? And Homer had a twin brother named Okla. And Homer always said he was glad he wasn't born in Texas.

JE: Did you ever meet Okla?

ST: I never met Okla, but I did go to his funeral.

JE: Oh, really?

ST: Yes.

JE: Well, here's Homer, who recruited you, because, which was kind of taking a gamble, you really didn't play much in high school. I mean, how did he even...?

ST: He saw me play a Legion game. He'd come down and scout American Legion baseball, which was a big deal in those days. And after a game one night, he came up and said, I want you to come up and visit NEO A&M and take a look at it. I did, liked it, and the rest is history.

JE: And you enjoyed your two years in, wasn't that?

ST: Yes, enjoyed it very much.

JE: And while you played there, you were selected to the Junior College All-American Baseball team.

ST: Correct.

JE: So something had to kick in from high school to here.

ST: The month of April of 1965, for some reason, I went on a hitting tear. Everything that was thrown my way, I hit, looked like a softball. And I went on a hitting tear, and then all of a sudden, I had several coaches talking to me about coming to their school.

JE: Well, luck or not, something did kick in. And the psychology of all athletics, and particularly baseball, because I'm a big baseball fan, happened to be a Yankee fan, and this year they went into this month-long slump. How a whole team can go into a slump? Maybe you can wax eloquently on that. Tell us why.

ST: Well, it's hard to figure when the entire team does. I know that I was talking to one of the coaches for the Oilers. I can't remember his name right now. I will. And he was talking about that Ted Williams was probably the greatest hitter that ever lived, because he could pick up the spin on the baseball about 10 to 12 feet after it left the pitcher's hand.

And if you have that advantage, you know whether it's a slider, a curve, or a fastball, and you get that extra split second to prepare to hit the ball.

JE: The pitchers there at NEO in your competition, what kind of pitches were they throwing? Fastball? Did they have a variety?

ST: You didn't see many sliders.

JE: No.

ST: Sliders are hard to throw, but you saw basically fastballs and curves.

JE: And you hit them both?

ST: Sometimes I did.

JE: Well, you went on a hitting streak. So good that Gene Schell at TU, famous now to all of us, he recruited you. Tell us how he made that contact.

ST: Well, he called one day and he said, I want you to come out to the university and look around. And I did. And he said, I'd like you to come to TU and play baseball. And I talked to my mom and dad. And my mom said, well, if you go to TU, you might have a better chance of getting a job when you graduate. So why don't you go to TU? And I did exactly that.

JE: So we could talk about your academics, but it's more fun to talk about baseball here, okay? How did you do then, playing for TU?

ST: Well, I did okay.

JE: Did you continue your hitting streak?

ST: I did. And I made the all-conference team in the All-Missouri Valley Conference.

JE: Yes, you did.

ST: So I continued hitting.

JE: Yeah, All-American, the All-Missouri Valley Conference selection team. Yeah, pretty amazing. And so then you played your full two years there.

ST: Right.

JE: Do you have any stories of competition? Did you get into any kind of finals?

ST: We made it to the finals of the Missouri Valley Conference. And then lost to Wichita State for the conference championship. Yeah. But we had a good team and had a lot of fun. And no regrets.

JE: Yeah. Any names from the team that anybody might remember?

ST: Well, one of our freshmen pitchers when I was a senior was a guy named Steve Rogers, who later started two All-Star games, won the Cy Young Award. And he had been recruited to TU from Springfield, Missouri. And when I saw him pitch as a freshman, I thought, this is a wasted scholarship. And then each year, he just got better and better and better.

JE: And who did he play for?

ST: Montreal Expos.

JE: Oh, I guess I should have known that.

ST: And he started at least one All-Star game.

Chapter 04 – 6:18**Ad Inc**

John Erling (JE): But while you were there, you were a writer. And I think you became a TU sports editor for the Collegian.

Steve Turnbo (ST): Correct.

JE: And what were you doing? Do you remember the issues that the Collegian was covering then?

ST: Well, I basically wrote a lot about the various athletic teams and sports teams and then anything else of note, you know, who was the class president and vice president. General news type stuff for the Collegian.

JE: Some names that you worked with. You got a guy by the name of Bill Hinkle.

ST: Absolutely.

JE: Tell us about him then, back then.

ST: Well, he was a character, a very good writer and a humorist. And always kept us in stitches. Smart guy.

JE: And Michelle Beale?

ST: Michelle Beale was, I think she made straight A's, as I recall it to you. I don't think she ever made a B. And I always looked up to her. And then at that particular time, the Vietnam War was a big, big issue. And Michelle wanted me to sort of help protest against the war.

And I said, "Michelle, I'm on baseball scholarship. I can't take that risk." And I didn't. And she understood. But the Vietnam War and protesting the war was a big deal in those years.

JE: Were they protesting on campus?

ST: Yes.

JE: Students came out in force.

ST: Correct. To protest the war.

JE: But always peaceful, I guess?

ST: Yeah. By TU standards, very peaceful.

JE: Unfortunately, a lot of campuses didn't have a peaceful one, but the Vietnam War. And you probably, in your own mind, you were against it yourself.

ST: I was. I actually was.

JE: And could have written eloquently about it, but chose not to.

ST: Exactly.

JE: But, you know, your writing, actually, started back there at Nathan Hale. And tell us about Tulsa School Life at Nathan.

ST: They had a newspaper that was basically all non-schools. And I was asked to write, to represent what went on at Nathan Hale and submit articles for the School Life. So I'd write articles and they'd print them. And that's when I became fond of the idea of having a byline.

JE: Oh, yes. Fun to see that byline.

ST: Yes, it is.

JE: But didn't, there were like nine Tulsa high schools who contributed.

ST: Correct.

JE: Tell us how that worked.

ST: Well, it was, the whole School Life was run by one of my English teachers named Paul Dykes. And he helped put the newspaper together. And each school was asked to submit their articles. So that was, to me, I thought I'd die and go into heaven writing articles and then to see my name in print was a big deal.

JE: Yeah. And probably having students talking to you about it too.

ST: Exactly. It was fun.

JE: And then it was delivered a certain day of the week.

ST: Right. To all the schools.

JE: Yeah. But it was actually published, I think, in the service center.

ST: Correct. That's correct.

JE: You kind of, I don't know if they do that anymore. But then you became known as the fearless forecaster. What was that?

ST: Well, we were going to, we would start a column where we would predict who was going to win what games. And John Hamill and I succeeded each other as the fearless forecaster predicting who would win the games. And so it was fun to do. You know, I look back, they probably had no idea what I was predicting, but it was fun.

JE: Caused some talk, I'm sure.

ST: Yes.

JE: Protected you from the football players if you picked against them. So then your major and minor at TU, what were they?

ST: Well, I majored in English and minored in journalism. And the way that the degrees worked those days because I enjoyed words and reading and writing. And then it just all worked out for me.

JE: You weren't beginning to think about what you'd like to do in life? Here you are at TU thinking you'd like to be a writer for a newspaper. Did any of that start to form?

ST: No, I was still in the era that I was going to be a professional baseball player.

JE: Gotcha.

ST: And then finally one day it dawned on me that this isn't going to work. You need to go out and get a real job. And wound up going to work actually for the University of Tulsa in sports information.

JE: All right. Did you play semi-pro?

ST: I did. I played for a semi-pro team. Actually, Quick Trip was the name of the team. And Chester Cadjo would come out and watch us play the games.

JE: Oh, really?

ST: Yeah. It was fun.

JE: So he really liked baseball then, didn't he?

ST: He did. I think we didn't make much money, but we had a lot of fun.

JE: Right. And we have Chester Cadieux's interview here on VoicesOfOklahoma.com.

So then you get a job offer from TU. And as you said, the sports information director. So then who was your boss?

ST: Well, actually, technically my boss was still Glenn Dobbs, the athletic director.

JE: Okay. And what was he like to work for? He was tough. He was stern. He required I wear a coat and tie every day to work. And he said, you know, I'm going to be sending you out to make speeches at noon. I want you in a coat and tie to represent the university well. And very stern, but he taught me a lot. He was very good to me.

JE: Okay. So you graduated from TU in '68. So then like in 69, and how long were you sports information director?

ST: Three years.

JE: Three years. Do you recall sports for TU at that time? Were they excelling in football or baseball?

ST: Well, they were just becoming very good in baseball. They weren't excelling in football. We went down to Houston and got beat 100 to 6. So that was a long plane ride home after that. But the other programs were solid. Basketball was solid. But the football was not a good era.

JE: You know, this is an opportunity to talk a little bit more about Glenn Dobbs because he was such a famous athlete. You know, I know he became your boss and became an administrator. But I was reading about him. And he was a pass-throwing halfback. He was the hero of the seventh annual Sun Bowl game played in New Year's Day in 1942, completing 20 of his 30 short passes for 201 yards. And he was a great punter.

In the game, he had a 60-yard drive in the fourth quarter for a 6-0 Tulsa victory over Tulsa Tech.

And he has records of punting 87, 79, 78, and 77 yards.

ST: Which is astounding when you read that. I mean, nothing like that happens today.

JE: I interviewed the son of Jim Thorpe. And he said his father would stand at the 50-yard line and he could kick it either way, way beyond the goalposts. And so he was a punter as well. But Glenn Dobbs, and I think there's a statue to him. Is there?

ST: Yes, on campus. Right outside the stadium gate.

JE: Right. And he joined pro football in Canada. And so he brought a lot of good attention to that. And then he became an administrator and was a tough boss to you.

ST: Yes, he was. But he was good to me.

JE: But then, you know, when he told you to go out and speak, that was good for you, your own personal experience.

ST: Great experience. And, you know, it's not easy just to be sent to Cushing, Oklahoma, walk into a room full of people and stand up there and give a 20-minute talk. I learned how to think on my feet.

JE: And I suppose you talked about sports and all at TU, what was going on.

ST: Yes.

JE: And you just learned that if I just stand here and talk to people like I would talk one-on-one, that's my speech.

ST: That's right. And I learned a lot through that exercise and did a lot of speeches.

JE: We don't always know these things, but they're actually preparing us for further things down the road. That we don't, at that time, necessarily anticipate.

ST: Right.

JE: And it bore well for you, as we'll get into. All right. So you graduate. Okay. Then sports information director for three years. Then what happens?

ST: Well, I'm going along happy as a clam. And I get a luncheon invitation from Tom Tripp, president of a local ad agency. And he took me to lunch and said, "We want you to go to work for us because on June 5th of 71, the

president's coming to town. To dedicate the McClellan Kerr Arkansas River navigation system at the Port of Catoosa. And we need somebody to coordinate all of that. And we'd like for you to do that. And we're going to double your salary" which they did.

So I left TU and my parents thought I was shiftless and thankless that I would leave my alma mater. But I took the job and I worked for a lady named Montez Jayden, who was a retired Naval commander. And she was my boss. And it was the right move. But a lot of people questioned it.

JE: Yeah. But what an assignment, though. And you had a whole year to work on that.

ST: Yes.

JE: And what a compliment it was for you. Tom Tripp had to be spotting you at TU and following that. And that was at Inc., wasn't it?

ST: It was. And I had met Tom through the Alumni Association.

JE: Okay.

ST: Because he was a TU grad.

JE: Right. So let's talk a little bit more about Montez Jayden. Where she was from. What can you tell us about her?

ST: Well, she was a retired Naval commander. She had worked at one time for Senator Bob Kerr. She was from Lindsborg, Kansas, up north of Wichita, a Swedish community. And when I went to work for her, she was very stern but taught me a lot. She was national president of the American Women in Radio and Television. She was nationally known. She and a lady named Sadie Adwan were dear friends.

JE: Right. Right. But she helped Senator Kerr, I think, put radio and television on the air. And since KRMG is a station that brought me to town, let's talk about KRMG. She helped him put KRMG on. And here I have a picture of her.

ST: That's her.

JE: And a hard hat, it looks like. And it says KRMG across the top of it.

ST: That's her.

JE: And so the story of Senator Kerr wanting a radio station, they said, "You can't have a 50,000-watt station, but we'll beam it at Oklahoma City." And then we were 50,000-day and 20,000-day. And then we were 25,000 at night. But we always hear about Senator Kerr.

And it was Montez Jaden is part of the history of that radio station.

ST: That's correct.

JE: Right. And then she helped him put on Channel 9, KWTW, in Oklahoma City as well.

ST: That is right.

JE: So she was his right-hand woman in all those endeavors. And everybody would have loved you. What did you learn from her, do you think, Montez?

ST: Well, I learned to be prompt. Basically, she was a stern taskmaster. And she'd give me assignments. And I wouldn't hear anything for a few days. She'd come in about three days later and say, all right, where are we on these assignments? And she pretty much left me alone. But I had to do the assignments and do them to her satisfaction. But she taught me an awful lot. And I admired and respected her.

Chapter 05 – 5:27

January 21, 1971

John Erling (JE): The reason all you were working on is the Kerr-McClellan waterway

Steve Turnbo (ST): Correct.

JE: Tell us, what is that?

ST: Well, it was the McClellan-Kerr navigation system. It was a 440-mile navigation system that goes down the Vertigas River to Arkansas and then all the way down to New Orleans. And the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had decided to build this waterway. And our firm was hired to help promote the opening of the waterway and get things prepared because the Tulsa port of Catoosa was going to be the headwaters port for the navigation system.

I'll always remember January 21st of 1971, the first barge arrived with 650 tons of newsprint from Calhoun, Tennessee. And that newsprint was used to print next day's Tribune and Tulsa World Newspapers.

JE: Isn't that great?

ST: Yeah. Right.

JE: But then to dedicate that, you bring the President of the United States. And his name was Richard Nixon.

ST: Yes. And Nixon came. He was actually, I'm told, did that as a favor, came to speak as a favor to...

JE: Senator Kerr.

ST: Right. And he came and made the speech. And after he made his speech, there were 30,000 people at the time. And I was at the port that day to hear Nixon speak. And one of Nixon's aides came up to me afterwards and said, "Would you like to fly back to the airport in a helicopter with the President?" And I said, "I can't do that. I'm still working." And I'll always remember having to turn that down because that would have been a chance of a lifetime.

JE: Do you regret not doing that?

ST: Well, I do. But I mean, I was still working. I couldn't just very well...

JE: Steve.

ST: I know.

JE: That work ethic got in the way.

ST: But it was a great project to work on.

JE: Well, they knew that you were instrumental in making all those details, so they were going to reward you for that. Well, I met the advance team a week in advance downtown Tulsa.

And the guy said, "Come on, let's go." And we walked up to three or four just citizens. And the guy said, what's going on in Tulsa next week? Most of the people said, "I have no idea what you're talking about."

And this guy says, "We got to fix this." So we met with both the Jones family and the Lorton family. I said, "We need front page articles for the next week so people know what's going on." And they did. They ran front page articles and people turned out. And that's how that worked.

JE: Yeah. Well, it was a very, very big deal. But before that waterway happened, that had to be sold to the community as well.

ST: Yes, it did.

JE: And they had several public meetings. Senator Kerr would come.

ST: Right. And he came to Claremore one time to speak. Montez told me this story. And he walked up to the podium. And he opened up a hymnal and said, let's sing, shall we gather at the river?

JE: Charming guy. I don't know. I would imagine to this day Oklahoma's never had as powerful a senator as Senator Robert Kerr.

ST: I agree.

JE: Because he ran with the big boys. He ran with JFK. And all those exerted a lot of power.

ST: Yes, he did.

JE: And yeah, we're still proud of the name. We're proud of the name Kerr in our state. Ad Inc, it was a lady by the name of Joyce Gideon, I think, who worked there.

ST: Yes. And Joyce and I worked together in the PR department for many years.

JE: I'll just throw in, I worked with Joyce. We were purchasing grain for Ethiopia, I think it was. And people would contribute to that. And I raised money to help make that happen. And I remember I have a gunny sack at home. It says Ethiopia grain or so forth.

And so then the day came when the grain was going to be actually shipped. And Joyce, of course, was coordinating all that. And so we saw the barge leave. But we just did that as a stunt because she had it stopped way down around the bend because they really weren't ready for the barge to go completely down. And then the barge came back and picked up other materials.

But it was a great emotional send-off that this grain that Tolson had purchased was going down the waterway.

ST: Down the waterway.

JE: And I'll always remember her for that, Joyce Gideon. So how long are you with Ad Inc?

ST: I was there 10 years.

JE: 10 years?

ST: Mm-hmm.

JE: So you thought you were going to be there for the rest of your life.

ST: I was pretty much prone to make that my career.

JE: So then you and Joyce were kind of the face, I think, of Ad Inc, weren't you?

ST: Well, of the PR department.

Chapter 06 – 7:00 Turnbo and Associates

John Erling (JE): But then 10 years and you did leave that, Ad Inc. Tell us about that.

Steve Turnbo (ST): Well, I had a client, Savings and Loan Association, and represented them. And that was back in the era when there were savings and loan associations. And they were a client and the CEO offered me a job. And I got an incredible salary increase to go to work there as the vice president of marketing. So I went to the SNL and worked there.

JE: All right. And then the SNLs were deregulated. And so there was a lot of turmoil because of all that.

ST: Correct. They allowed the SNLs to get into the development business. And the SNLs did not know anything about developing buildings and projects. And it was to their demise.

JE: They invested their money in those projects.

ST: That they knew nothing about.

JE: And they knew nothing about them. But while you were there, then there was an issue, I think, in your office that maybe was very uncomfortable for you.

ST: Well, yes. The things were being said to me by the CEO of the organization. And I said, "How in the world does he know about these conversations?" And so it troubled me a great deal. And I went to the deputy chief of police here in Tulsa, Herb Hartz.

And I said, "Can you find me an investigator or somebody that can sort of check out my office?"

And I cleared it with legal because the guy said, "You're an officer. You're an officer of SNL. So you can go into your office any time, day or night." No problem. And it took him about two hours to find this listening device that was buried in a chair in the office to record my conversations.

JE: How stunning.

ST: High drama. High drama.

ST: Yes. That's when I went home and told my wife, Norma. I said, I've had it. I'm going to start my own firm.

JE: Okay. Tell us about the fallout.

ST: The CEO, was his name Don Engle? It was. And they actually asked me to stay there even after this had happened. And I said, I can't stay here given what's gone on. And the guy from the Federal Home Loan Bank Board came to town.

And he said, "Look, you all need to depart the firm. You probably all should get a lawyer just in case." So I did all of those things. And it turned out it was the best thing that ever happened to me. Because I wound up starting my own firm.

JE: So after that device, how long did you stay? A few days or a week and then you left?

ST: A few weeks.

JE: Yeah. Right. Right.

ST: I knew I had to get out of there.

JE: And did you talk to Don about it or did you?

ST: No. No. Did not. Right.

JE: Nor did he approach you about it.

ST: No. He did not.

JE: Right. Okay. So we follow your journey to your own PR firm. And where was the office?

ST: Well, actually, the original office was in my house for a while. And then I wound up renting an office across the hall from the Tulsa Press Club in the old Adams Building. And I was there one day and I thought, "Man, if I had that office there, all these journalists are going to be getting off that elevator to go to the press club. And they're going to see my door. And this could be an opportunity." So that was the rationale behind it.

JE: And it worked. It worked. Did you get some business because of it?

ST: I got some business.

JE: Starting your own PR firm and it was what?

ST: At the time it was just Turnbull and Associates. Turnbo and Associates.

JE: Right. Do you remember some of your first clients?

ST: I'm going to have to think about that.

JE: Did Tulsa Community College become one of them?

ST: Yes, they did.

JE: Tulsa Community College was one of your first clients?

ST: Right, yes.

JE: And maybe Explorer Pipeline?

ST: Explorer Pipeline, yeah. Yes, correct.

JE: At that time, Tulsa Community College, was it fairly new on the scene?

ST: It was. And it wasn't even called Tulsa Community College. It was Tulsa Junior College.

JE: Right.

ST: And they were a great client. And Dean Vantrese and all of them, they were very good to me.

JE: Al Phillips?

ST: Al Phillips. And that was Chuck who worked on that account. He worked on that account and then I later took it over.

JE: Okay. We'll get to Chuck here in a minute. But it's interesting to note that we just glibly say Tulsa Community College and we accept it as that. But you remember how Al Phillips and Dean Vantrese had to sell the idea of a junior college in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

ST: That is correct.

JE: That was not an accepted entity when they first came. Because I interviewed Dean Vantrese and he said Oral Roberts was actually very helpful to them in selling it because he believed there should be a junior college.

ST: I had not heard that, but that makes sense.

JE: Right. And so we have these great pioneers who we live because of their work and now we drive downtown and many of the campuses for Tulsa Community College and see what came out of all of that. Pretty amazing.

ST: Yes. Somebody told me they have 25,000 students.

JE: Is that right?

ST: Yeah. Hard to believe.

JE: It is. It is. So, and then Explorer Pipeline. Do you remember what their work was for them? What you did for them?

ST: Well, building a pipeline requires an awful lot of regulatory approvals and a lot of people don't want a pipeline in their neighborhood, so to speak. And so there's a lot of public sentiment that you had to deal with. The pipeline ran down from New Orleans all the way up to Illinois. So it was a big deal.

JE: Then somehow you became close to the newspapers and you earned this reputation that if you wanted to talk to the editorial board, you had to go through Steve Turnbo. Isn't that right?

ST: Well, that was sort of a misnomer that, of course, it didn't bother me that people thought that. Little did they know that they could just pick up the phone and call down like anybody, but yeah.

JE: I love that. It's done with smoke and mirrors, isn't it?

ST: A lot of that.

Chapter 07 – 9:00

Schnake Turnbo

John Erling (JE): How long were you by yourself before Mr. Chuck Schnake contacted you?

Steve Turnbo (ST): A little over a year. And he called me one day and said, let's go to lunch.

And we went to lunch and he said, "You're the only one I run into when we're doing pitches. And would you give any consideration to us merging?" Well, that didn't take long for me to say yes, because I knew Chuck knew more about PR than I did. And I knew I could learn from him, which is the way it worked out exactly that way.

JE: Yeah. Well, the two of you were strong because he did annual reports, I think, didn't he?

ST: Yes. And that was a big part of our revenue.

JE: Right. And for such entities as Reading and Bates and Parker Drilling, Energy Reserves out of Wichita. So he preferred to actually be in the office, but then you would rather be out there.

ST: That's right.

JE: So that was a marriage made in heaven, wasn't it? It worked out well.

ST: It was.

JE: And he loved the fact that you were out speaking and doing all those kind of things, because I don't think he enjoyed.

ST: No, he didn't. Crowds or going to big social events or any of that kind of thing. No, he liked being in that office doing the work.

JE: And where did he come from?

ST: Well, he was from Centralia, Illinois. And then he had gone to the University of Missouri. Then he wound up coming to Tulsa to work for actually Benton Ferguson for a while, who had his own PR firm. And then Chuck got a job with Sunray DX and was offered the opportunity to go back to the home office in Pennsylvania. And he said, no, thank you. And that's when he hung out at Shingle.

JE: Let's talk about some things that you ran, like school bond campaigns. And how did that get started? Because that wasn't a Chuck thing, was it?

ST: No, no. I'm trying to remember the first school bond issue we did. I had worked with Margaret Erling on, well, we were on a committee together with the school board. That's what it was. We'd sit in these meetings and then they said, we're going to have this school bond issue. And then I got hired and they said, we want somebody that's nonpolitical to run this. Because this school bond issue is a nonpolitical deal. It's neither Republican nor Democrat. And so that's how I got engaged and involved in that and thoroughly enjoyed it.

JE: Yeah. And you probably didn't lose a school bond issue, did you?

ST: I don't recall that we lost one. There's a possibility we did, but we did several bond issues over the years.

JE: Yeah. And then you refused to do candidates.

ST: We never did a candidate. Chuck said, no matter who you represent, you're going to make another client mad. So we'll just stay out of the politicians.

JE: Stay away from politics because it will taint you.

ST: Right, right, right.

JE: It will taint you. How about in the city then, there's a third penny sales tax I know that started way back when. And let's talk about that a little bit. I think, doesn't that start like about the first time in 1980?

ST: Right.

JE: And why did we need the sales tax, the third penny?

ST: Well, to do some infrastructure work that we, we really could not afford to do without that third penny sales tax. And Jim Inhofe, I remember that we were going to make it a temporary tax. So the first tax that passed was a

temporary five-year tax. And then each five years would come up and we, and the voters renewed that because they saw that the money was being well invested.

JE: And so Jim Inhofe was the mayor.

ST: Correct.

JE: Then you worked with Jim, I suppose, set up meetings and all that kind of thing?

ST: Yes. And then we'd, I remember he'd walk into the room two minutes before we were supposed to start. And he'd say, tell me why we're here. And I'd say, well, we're here because, and here are the three message points we need to get across during this news conference.

Inhofe had this gift to walk into that room. And you would have thought he had been practicing these comments for three weeks. I mean, it's a gift and he was very good at it.

JE: Wow. We should say that then he went on, became a senator, and he just gave his farewell speech.

ST: Yes, he did.

JE: Two days ago, thanking many, many people. And he was trying to let everybody know that people don't realize that I had friends with the Kennedys and the Democrats and all that. But then I think he said, but that's not newsy. Right. But he had good friends. He even liked Hillary Clinton. I remember him telling me.

ST: That's what I heard, yes.

JE: Right, right, right. So former Mayor Bill LaFortune held public town hall meetings, received feedback from taxpayers. A list was made and submitted to the city council for approval. And this was, the third penny

went to Tulsa Parks, Gilcrease Museum, River Parks, flood control, economic development.

ST: And the citizens, the citizens supported all of that. They bought into that. Now, it helps when you've got your two newspapers that are supportive. And both editorial pages of those newspapers supported those initiatives.

JE: That third penny, that kind of is an issue because when it ran out, then you came back. And renewed it.

ST: And renewed it. And a lot of people accused us of lying. But we told them, if you want to renew it, you can. If you don't want to renew it, you just vote. And they voted to renew because they were happy with the investments that had been made.

JE: I can't remember. There was a certain handle I thought you guys used.

ST: Well, it was called, it's the same penny.

JE: There it is. That's it. Right. That's probably your line. May have been. I don't recall.

ST: It's the same penny.

JE: That was it. And it sold it. And so to this day, we have a 3% sales tax in our community.

Back to Chuck Schnake again. As I said earlier, he was known as Mr. Chuck. A little bit more about him and what he meant to you, obviously in the firm, but things you learned from him.

ST: Well, he was the smartest PR person I ever worked with. By far. He knew the PR business in and out. He'd gone to the University of Missouri, which is a great journalism school.

And he operated strictly by the code of ethics and never violated the code of ethics. He was a hard worker.

We'd have a staff meeting every morning at 7.30. He'd come into my office, put his feet up on my desk. He'd light up a cigarette. And we'd talk about the day's work. That's the way the firm was ran.

JE: He was a big idea man, I think, wasn't he?

ST: He was the idea guy.

JE: He'd have a yellow legal pad and da-da-da-da-da-da, all these ideas.

ST: Absolutely. Smartest PR guy I ever worked with.

JE: I'm sure his brain was working all the time.

ST: It was.

JE: When he wasn't rooting for the St. Louis Cardinals.

ST: That's correct.

JE: He was a big fan, and the two of you were big Cardinal fans. And then he died in June of 2009, and he was 78 years old.

ST: Right.

JE: Contributed a lot. Then we have Schnake Turnbo, but today you have Schnake Turnbo Frank. Right. How does Frank come about?

ST: Well, I had been on the search committee for the United Way. Was actually chairing the search. We interviewed several people, one of whom was Becky Frank. And she interviewed well, and so offered her the job. She said yes. That's how I came to know Becky.

JE: And so you've talked about what you brought and what Chuck Schnake brought. What did Becky bring to the firm?

ST: Well, organizational skills, great work ethic, and thinking outside the box.

JE: Well, the firm is obviously operating today. And she's the CEO?

ST: Correct.

JE: Of Schnake Turnbo.

ST: Yep.

Chapter 08 – 4:30

Norma Turnbo

John Erling (JE): I want to talk about Norma. When did you and Norma get married?

Steve Turnbo (ST): We got married on September 29th of 1979.

JE: All right. And how did you meet?

ST: Well, my next door neighbor worked at Ad Inc, where I worked. And he came in one day and said, I want you to take my next door neighbor out on a date. She's single. And I put him off and put him off. And finally, after the third time, I said, all right, one date. And that's it. If you leave me alone. So Norma and I went downtown to the inner urban and had a three, three and a half hour dinner. And a year later, we were married.

JE: Wow. She was – her personality. You'll describe it more, but she was very outgoing, wasn't she?

ST: She was. And she was an extrovert. And she told it like it was.

JE: And then she died in January of this year.

ST: Correct.

JE: Tell us what took her.

ST: Well, she had dementia. Yeah. Vascular dementia. And she was out at St. Simeon's where I was actually with her at three in the morning when she passed.

JE: It's a horrible disease.

ST: It is.

JE: Isn't it? And how long did she have to suffer with that?

ST: About two years. Yeah. Lengthy ordeal.

JE: But, you know, she contributed in her way. She could have started her own PR firm, couldn't she?

ST: Yes, she could have. She was very active.

JE: Like Iron Gate. What was that about?

ST: Iron Gate was a ministry at our church, Trinity Episcopal, that fed the homeless. And so she was very active in that. She took great pride in going. Going down and helping make the sandwiches and the food for the residents or the people who would come in to get a meal.

JE: And also was in the Tulsa Board of Adjustment.

ST: She was.

JE: What are they adjusting when you're there?

ST: Well, it's a zoning issue. And I know that the mayor at the time said, we're going to we need you to keep after, you know, take a look at these, make sure these neighborhoods are not infiltrated by commercial to separate the two properly, because otherwise, we're going to have chaos and fights and all that. So she took that job seriously and did it. I was very proud of her.

JE: I'm sure she faced a lot of pressure, too, because maybe there were developers and so forth who wanted to rezone an area.

ST: Oh, yeah. She called me one day and she said, "Are you representing XYZ company?" And I said, "Absolutely. Actually, I am." And then one client called me one time, said, are you any relation to a Norma Turnbo? And I said, well, it's a distant cousin. I haven't seen her in years. And then I corrected myself. Actually, she's my wife. And so we had a lot of fun with it. But she took the job seriously. And I know Susan Savage was very pleased with the job she did.

JE: She appointed her to that board. Right. The Tulsa Preservation Commission?

ST: She was. Yes. She spent a lot of time on that, preserving the old buildings downtown for years. We were tearing down these historic buildings with no oversight or any of that. And she took great interest in preserving those historic buildings.

JE: Yeah. And the Assistance League. What was that?

ST: The Assistance League collects clothes and then they sell the clothes and then buy brand new clothes for children who are needy. That was probably her favorite project.

JE: But then when she was busy in the community at home, she was doing other things. She had several crafts that she became expert at.

ST: She was a knitter. She liked to knit. Yeah. We spent many an hour sitting there talking to each other while she would knit away.

JE: She didn't have to think about the knitting, did they? Once they get into that, they don't have to think about it.

ST: Yeah.

JE: Jewelry making, even needlepoint.

ST: Needlepoint. She did needlepoint.

JE: Yeah. Yeah. She never met a stranger. Norma. Yeah. I know you miss her to this very day.

Chapter 09 – 11:16

Remembering Names

John Erling (JE): I'm going to throw some names at you and see if you have any stories that would be attached to them.

Steve Turnbo (ST): Okay.

JE: And if you don't, you don't. But we'll try. Alex Adwan at the Tulsa World.

ST: Well, Alex was, of course, on the editorial board. And so in those days, or today, actually, if you're in a PR business and there's someone who's on the editorial board of the Tulsa World or the Tulsa Tribune, then they're on a different pedestal and you look up to them because getting into an editorial board meeting and taking a client in there was a big deal.

JE: Now, these are names that I have interviewed for VoicesofOklahoma.com, and then we need to throw Ken Neal in on that, too.

ST: Absolutely. And Ken, I would talk to him basically two to three days a week. And he'd be working on editorials, and we became very good friends. Over the years. We had the same birthday.

JE: Oh, okay. And Alex and Ken, to this very day, are very, very close.

ST: Correct.

JE: And I think they're together on a weekly basis. They didn't always see eye to eye with you, I suppose, on certain issues.

ST: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I'd represent clients that were not exactly in high favor with the public. And, yeah, there were, I'm trying to think of, one or two, well, the poultry industry was one of them.

JE: Tell us about it.

ST: Well, I was hired by people in northwest Arkansas who were raising chickens.

JE: Tyson?

ST: Tyson and that group. And the chicken poop was not very popular, particularly when it leaked into the streams. Yes. So I took some grief over that.

JE: And they were not going to support you on this issue, the paper? Is that true?

ST: That is correct. Right.

JE: Jim Goodwin, who is the owner of the Eagle black newspaper.

ST: Yes.

JE: How about him?

ST: I liked him. I worked with him on some projects, and he was fun to work with, a lot of fun.

In fact, one day I was in his office, and I had this brand-new briefcase that had been given to me. I don't remember how I got it, but anyway, I was sitting down there, and Jim Goodwin had this dog. And we're in the middle of the meeting, and I looked down, and the dog has taken a leak on my brand-new briefcase. And Goodwin looked down at the dog and went, "Rover, stop that." That was it. But I liked Jim Goodwin a lot.

JE: We just posted his interview on VoicesofOklahoma.com. Ken Greenwood, who was with KRMG for many years, did you have any?

ST: Oh, yeah. I really looked up to him. And when he did those editorials, I thought that was a hallmark for that station. And he did them so well.

JE: Ken Greenwood, KRMG, the manager, yes, he wrote his editorials and delivered them, and then invited opposing editorials as well.

ST: Right.

JE: And I don't think radio stations have done that ever since, as a matter of fact. Congressman James R. Jones. Would he have come into your?

ST: Yes. I knew Jim Jones and actually went to his house in Washington, D.C. with a group of Tulsans that went up for some event and thought very highly of him. I actually played Jim Jones in the annual Tulsa Press Club gridiron. And so on one of the Saturday night shows, they snuck Jones out on the stage behind me, and he was—and I was doing—I was doing a little dance, and Jones was behind me dancing as well. So I thought the world of Jim Jones.

JE: Yeah. What a great guy. That's for sure. Let's talk a little bit more about Bob LaFortune.

I consider him as the father of Tulsa.

ST: He's the quintessential mayor of this city. Yeah. And highly respected and smart as a whip and a man of few words.

JE: Yeah. And John Williams, of course, of the Williams Company. He's—did you have any relationship—any business relationship?

ST: Not really.

JE: Okay. But the two of them worked together, and then John wanted to close off Boston and then create the building there, and the two of them worked together on all those things.

ST: To get that done.

JE: Right. So the two of them have left their mark, literally.

ST: Yes, they have.

JE: Streets closed and open and all that kind of thing. Urban renewal. That was a whole urban renewal area. Where were you on April 19, 1995, the Oklahoma City bombing? You certainly remember. And where were you?

ST: I was sitting in my office, and I got a call from Pat Snockey, who was in Oklahoma City.

JE: We should say he's the son of Chuck.

ST: He's Chuck's son. And he said, something's going on down here. And he called me a few minutes later and said, well, there's been a bombing. And at that time— At that particular day, we were planning to feed the Oklahoma Education Association and provide them with lunch.

Well, obviously, that was going to be canceled.

So I remember calling the caterer, and I said, we're obviously not going to have this, and I'm sure on some of this food, you haven't paid for it yet, and would you cut me some slack here? And he said, no. And so I said, well, here's what you're going to do then. I want you to prepare that food and take it all down to the site where the people are and feed them, which he did. But it's interesting how people think and operate during a time of crisis.

JE: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. So did you go then to the site that day or the next day?

ST: I went that day.

JE: What did you see?

ST: Oh, I just— Well, just the horrific— First of all, looking at that building in and by itself is staggering, and it was a horrible time for this state.

JE: But we didn't mention the fact that as much as TU was important in your life, you were there, you got a scholarship, sports information director. You came back and taught at TU.

ST: I did. I taught for 12 years as an adjunct on Monday nights and thoroughly loved it. And what did you teach? Public relations case studies.

JE: Right. Case studies.

ST: Well, you would take a situation and talk to the students about what was the strategy here? How would you handle this? How should this have been handled? And in order to do that, these youngsters, youngsters, these students needed to know what was going on. Well, it didn't take me long to discover that. Well, it didn't take me long to discover that.

These students don't read newspapers anymore. So they're not reading a newspaper, and I would hammer that home, that it's important to read the newspaper from cover to cover every day. You're not going to get all of it from that phone that's sitting in front of you.

They'd look at me and stare at me. I don't know how much it resonated or didn't resonate, but I really hammered. And I'd bring the newspapers. I'd go through the classroom and pass them around so they at least get a little ink on their fingers.

JE: And so you saw 12 years you did that.

ST: Did it for 12 years.

JE: Have students changed over that period of time?

ST: Yeah, they have changed. They seem to be more interested in how they were going to earn an A grade than in learning. I shouldn't be too derogatory. But yeah. They seem to have other things on their mind. And maybe it was my inability to teach, but it was a Monday night class, 6 to 9 p.m.

And I'd put things on the chalkboard. Well, it's not a chalkboard anymore,

the whiteboard. And ask them to tell me about what does this mean. And they'd be major current events. And they just, they have no idea what's going on. And I'd say, you need to know this stuff. You need. You need to know this stuff.

JE: You had many civic involvements. I'm going to take you through some of them, and maybe you can comment on that. You're a trustee emeritus at the University of Tulsa.

ST: Correct.

JE: On their board of trustees. Mm-hmm. Many, many years. And you faced many problems there, didn't you?

ST: We've had our challenges over the years, but I think things are going well for the university now. Of course, most colleges are going through this. There are fewer students in America.

JE: Right.

ST: And there's a lot more competition for students. And that's caused universities to have to adjust their curriculum.

JE: Let's bring up some names of presidents when you were there on the board of trustees.

ST: Well, the ones I worked for, Gene Swearingen.

JE: Okay.

ST: Pascal Twyman. Bob Donaldson. Brad Carson.

JE: Right. Pascal Twyman had quite the image in the town, I think he hung out at Grand Lake, didn't he?

ST: He did. He liked to hang out at Grand Lake.

JE: Did he have a ranch, too, maybe?

ST: Well, he had a big spread there. I remember he had a coffee group that met in Langley on Saturday mornings and solved the world's problems.

JE: Yeah. You were chairman of the Oklahoma Academy. What is the Oklahoma Academy?

ST: Well, we set, we determined policies that we think will make the state a better place. And we... And we developed those and make recommendations and then give them to the legislature to see if they can implement them during the legislative sessions.

JE: And you're chairman of the State Chamber of Commerce?

ST: I was, yes.

JE: That's pretty amazing.

ST: Well, I looked at that one day and said, well, they called and asked me to go on the board. And I said, you know, I'm a Democrat. And they said, I don't think you have any Democrats. And I said, yeah, I know. That's why we want to put you on the board. So we can have a little more balance.

JE: All right. And you were chairman of the Metropolitan Tulsa Chamber of Commerce.

ST: I was.

JE: See, this community involvement. And, of course, that was good because it brings the name of your firm along with it.

ST: Correct.

JE: I mean, there's a method to your madness, isn't there?

ST: There is. There is a method.

Chapter 10 – 8:49
Will Rogers Quotes

John Erling (JE): You were vice chairman of the Will Rogers Memorial Commission.

Steve Turnbo (ST): Right. Right. And we had an executive director who had written all these books. And had all these quotes by Will. I was reading one day that Eugene Lorton attended Will's funeral. And so I went down to see Bobby Lorton. And I said, "Are you aware that your grandfather attended Will's funeral?":

And he said, "Well, no, I was not aware." And I said, "Would you consider if we gave you some quotes of maybe running Will Rogers quotes in the newspaper from time to time?" And he said, "Well, let me think about it." And he called me a couple of days later and he said, "Okay, we're going to do this, but you have to get me these quotes." They started running those. And then later, Bobby Lorton told me that that was the most well-read part of the newspaper.

JE: Yes. And now that you told me that, because I read the quote this morning. And yesterday and yesterday, I always read that quote that you, Steve, it was your idea. I think that's a great, great feather in your cap.

ST: Well, thank you.

JE: Yeah. Yeah. That is great. And he's, and Will Rogers back in the thirties, he was right on target for 2022.

ST: A lot of those quotes are so germane today. It's unbelievable.

JE: He could have said them yesterday.

ST: That's right.

JE: What an amazing man. You've met many other things. Vice president, Tulsa Public Schools Foundation. And the involvement in our community goes on and on and on.

ST: Well, I've always wanted to give back and I like giving back.

JE: Let's talk about just a little bit about a PR firm. Often people come to you in time of crisis.

ST: Right.

JE: And you're there to put the fire out. Talk to us about that and how people come and what they may tell you.

ST: Well, you don't normally get phone calls from clients who say, things are going great.

We want to hire you to help us tell you how great it is. They come to you when there's a problem, when something's not going right and there's a crisis.

And that's when the phone rings.

That's the nature of the business. Right. And there's been a lot of crises that we've worked on that never saw the light of day publicly. And if you can keep them. A lot of companies don't want to face up to the fact that something can go wrong in a company. CEOs are obviously very concerned about their image. And we're in the image business.

JE: Right. And do sometimes people come to you, we need your help. And it took you a long time to get them to admit why they needed your help.

ST: Correct. Yeah. They – they don't even want to fess up to me on what's going on. And then. But you have to. You have to finally address this. Hey. First of all, we need to tell this story.

Whether it's good or bad, we need to tell this story. It's a responsibility we have. Most times they'll come around.

JE: And CEOs, you probably had to look them in the eye and tell them either change or get out.

ST: Right. And that's. That's the hard part because CEOs are basically not used to – they're used to delivering orders to everybody that's underneath them. They don't – they're not accustomed to taking orders. So you have to. Your job is to tell them what they need to hear, not what they want to hear.

JE: Did you ever tell a CEO he needs to resign?

ST: I did. I have.

JE: Wow. And did that happen?

ST: It did. It did.

JE: That takes guts, doesn't it?

ST: Well, it does. But that's what we're paid for.

JE: Right. Exactly. So the PR business has changed down through the years. It has. And I'm going to point to social media right now. That had to enormously change it.

ST: Oh, dramatically. It's just a whole different world now. I mean, it used to be that the whole idea of how are we going to. Get this announced and deal with this boil down to maybe the Tulsa World or the Tulsa Tribune. So we literally would have a deal where we. Well, let's give this to the Tribune tomorrow morning and the other to the World tomorrow afternoon.

And we'll be covered with both newspapers. And when the Tribune went away, it. First of all, it was not good for the PR business to have one of your newspapers go away. And it put a lot more pressure on selling a story to the local newspaper because clients will tell you, I want this to be on the section page of the newspaper tomorrow. I mean, they would get that specific.

JE: We should bring up the other two that have been talking here. And what are their names and who are they?

ST: Well, my two dogs are Doodle Girl and she's. Eighteen years old, excuse me, 17 years old, and she's a golden doodle. And then Motley is a rescue dog and he's 14 years old.

JE: Okay. All right. Well, they're talking and they're telling us to quit, which we will pretty soon.

Students listening to this, what kind of advice – they want to be a PR person? What does it take to be a good PR person?

ST: Well, first and foremost, you have to be a good listener. And a lot of times that's hard to explain. Yeah. And when I was teaching my class, I said, you have to be a good listener.

You can go in and talk to a client and be in there an hour and a half and it'll boil down to maybe five to seven minutes of talk that really is germane to the issue at hand. So you really must be a good listener.

JE: And they must be good writers too.

ST: They should be good writers. Unfortunately, writing is not stressed, in my opinion, enough in schools today. It's just not.

JE: Yeah. And you have to be a good communicator as well.

ST: You do. You do. And you know, you got to be able to go in and boil down a complicated topic to a few words so that it comes across clearly.

JE: Yeah. See, all of these things that came naturally to you or you learned them. I mean, you were a writer. That seemed to be natural. Maybe not a good public or natural public speaker. You were a public speaker, but you got that when Glenn Dobbs told you to go make speeches. Go to Adair and make a speech. At the Satoma Club.

So you learned all that away, all those things that you're just talking about.

Then I think intuition must be a big thing too. I mean, some people have it and some people don't. And just in their gut, they know what's right and what's wrong. Right?

ST: You walk into these rooms and sometimes you gotta know, "Do I really want to get into this? Go this way with this topic or let's avoid that." Yeah, it's just intuition.

JE: Right. Some of these things can be taught. So those students who listen, and many of them do, to voicesofoklahoma.com, you take it from a pro here who's telling you how to do it. So we just compliment you for your involvement in our community.

You left a mark, contributed a lot. And to all those who know you, I get to be the one to tell you, thank you for what you did for Tulsa.

ST: Well, thank you for saying that very much, John.

JE: Because you left a mark on many, many lives. So how would you like to be remembered?

ST: Well, hopefully I'll be remembered as an honest PR person.

JE: I guess there are some who aren't.

ST: Well, I wouldn't say that.

JE: No, I know you wouldn't.

ST: So that would be it.

JE: That would be it, an honest PR person. And you know what? That you were. Thank you. So thank you for this journey down memory lane. It was fun to be with you and talk about it. And I appreciate it. Thank you very much, Steve.

ST: Oh, you're welcome, John. Thank you. You bet.