

N E A R L Y

F A M O U S

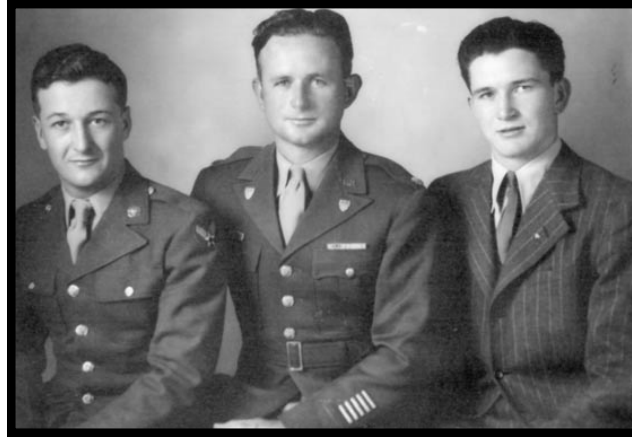


Milestones, Memories and some Miseries of a Pretty Good Life.

by Ben Blackstock



Boyd Lee
Blackstock



1944: Brothers Ben Blackstock, Loy Fowler and Bob Blackstock.



Pearl Cathrine
(Parks, Fowler) Blackstock



August 8, 1954. Bonnie Lou Michael Rookstool and Ben Blackstock and are wed.

FOREWORD

After much encouragement from my family, friends and others I have met along the way for more than three quarters of a century, I decided that it was time for me to record some of the memories, incidents and personal encounters I believe need to be preserved. This period has included growing up in the oil boomtown of Drumright, OK, serving my country during World War II, watching the Japanese surrender to General MacArthur, serving 44 years as a leader of the Oklahoma Press Association and helping it grow to a strong, healthy organization, and having the honor of meeting President John F. Kennedy on the day before his assassination in 1963.

I hope that some of my recollections of OPA days will have historical value, for during my 44 years as manager or Executive Vice President, I observed and was part of some of the greatest changes America has ever seen in newspaper production. Gone after more than a century is printing from metal, called letterpress, and with it the Linotype machine that one found in newspapers from small weeklies to metro dailies. Succeeding it was the process called photo-offset, or just offset. Gone also are the hand-fed presses of weeklies and even the web presses of some small dailies, having been replaced by central printing plants. Once Oklahoma had a law that newspapers had to be printed in their home counties. Through this change, use of color has become commonplace on many weeklies. And in later years, ownership by chains has brought about the disappearance of many old-time publishers. How exciting it has been to be a part of this new era.

My dilemma has been whether to serve up my views on what makes life both interesting and scary. I have decided it wouldn't be Ben Blackstock if I did not express some conclusions on publishers, politicians and even religion.

If, whoever you are, reading this don't like it, then skip that part. After 78-plus years of life I have, or should have, accumulated some viewpoints. The vapid life, it seems to me, is one which never takes sides in a discussion, dispute, debate or issue which should join people together into honest, candid expression and certainly examination of every conceivable viewpoint toward the goal or what goal to seek or outcome to pursue.

I am grateful to my parents, Boyd L. and Pearl C. Blackstock, my wife Bonnie, our children Mike Rookstool, Dan, Sam and Melissa Blackstock. Also scores of newspaper friends, and other personal friends (and even some enemies) for these "milestones, memories and some miseries" as I have made my way through a pretty good life ... which isn't over yet!

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THANKS

Three friends read my manuscript, marked errors and made suggestions which were of great help: Dr. Earl Newsom, Jerry Sokolosky and Mark Thomas. They are not to be blamed for the final product. I give special thanks to Jennifer Gilliland of OPA for pulling text and pictures together for the printer. Without their help and sometimes encouragement I would still be at it.

*Thanks and Maintain,
 Ben*

CHRONOLOGY

Boyd Lee Blackstock (88)

b. 17 May 1876

d. 19 February 1964

Pearl Cathrine (Parks, Fowler) Blackstock (91)

b. 9 August 1890

d. 9 December 1981

Emery Loy Fowler (57)

b. 22 June 1915

d. 12 November 1972

Benny Lee Blackstock

b. 4 September 1925

Robert William Blackstock (65)

b. 27 February 1927

d. 29 January 1993

Bonnie Lou (Michael, Rookstool) Blackstock

b. 21 December 1925

Michael Wayne Rookstool (17)

b. 22 May 1948

d. 20 August 1965

Daniel Dana Blackstock

b. 15 July 1955

son ~ Brian

b. 6 March 1987

Samuel Dean Blackstock

b. 14 July 1956

daughter ~ Jessica

b. 5 March 1983

son ~ Beau

b. 28 February 1985

Melissa Ann (Blackstock) Edwards

b. 2 July 1960

daughter ~ Tiffany

b. 21 July 1986

PART 1

Milestones, Memories and Some Miseries of a Pretty Good Life

It's time to put down some of the things which have happened in my life. I will be direct. I will use names and dates of events as I recall them and will correct as I can more accurately ascertain the facts. As I grope for a start I will have to smooth out the style and fill in the gaps.

I was born at home in Drumright, Creek County, Oklahoma, on 4 September 1925 to Pearl Cathrine (Parks, Fowler) Blackstock and Boyd Lee Blackstock. My father was a widower, his wife Ethel having died childless about 1922. He went back to Georgia in search of a wife. He found my mother at a rural Baptist church revival. She was a widowed school teacher with an eight year old boy. She desperately wanted to get him out of the bad influence of north Georgia moonshine that was claiming her brothers. By local standards the Parks family was well to do with a large two story farm house, a big barn, smoke house and even a spring house where they cooled milk, butter and cheese in the hills near Dahlenega.

Virgil Parks was respected as a good citizen, a helpful friend, a good provider and quiet neighbor. He and his boys made the best corn whiskey in the north Georgia hills which he hauled in a two mule wagon to market in Atlanta under a load of farm produce. His sons caved in to booze but never Grandpa Virgil Parks.

My father came from a large family of dry and poor sharecroppers near Resaca, Calhoun, in west central Georgia. Boyd Lee, or "B.L." as most people called him, may have gone to school only 3-4 years but he was an eager lifelong reader, had a quick mind and was sort of good at figures (numbers). He had stooped shoulders, a hunched back from very hard work and from carrying more than his share of a load. Boyd Lee was short, about 5' 5", but wiry. He was

energetic, ambitious and so he left the farm for a factory job where he learned the skills of the carpenter trade. He sent most of his pay to his father for the family was living on the edge of poverty. Finally, he packed what tools he had and headed for the Oklahoma Territory. He arrived at Ardmore, probably by train, in 1906; a year before statehood.

From 1906 to 1913 he worked mostly for the Rock Island Railroad building "passenger stations and Jim Crow rooms," Boyd told me. It was hard, lonesome work at low pay but he saved, lived frugally, attended the Baptist church three times a week, did not drink, and had little to do with women.

Boyd went to the oil boom town of Drumright in 1913. It was a tough place with drunks, gamblers, whores, fights and killings. He built a one-room house, sunk a water well, saved his money and went back to Georgia to find a wife. Ethel Bannister, his first wife, was a sickly woman who was unable to bear children. She was said by some to give B.L. hell. She died of "consumption" (something like influenza) about 1922. I never learned where she was buried. He returned to Georgia for Pearl.

My half-brother, Emory Loy Fowler, kept his birth name and we never thought anything about it. After all, he was his father's only memorial. Loy was 10 years older than me born 22 June 1915. His father was county school superintendent and a teacher as was our mother. That was probably a one-room school with one teacher who taught all grades up through eighth. That was as far as even the smartest went. Mr. Fowler died of tuberculosis as many did in the years around WW I when medical care was limited.

Loy was a good brother, a role model. He never picked on me or my brother Robert. My father was on Loy all the time and switched him badly for the

slightest infraction and sometimes without any reason at all. In fact my father had a very bad temper and a willingness to fight though he seldom had to. He swore loudly when angry but was a “clean cusser” by the standards of today’s TV vile language. My mother never spanked us but B.L. more than made up for it. She lived by The Golden Rule.

My brother, Robert William, was born 27 February 1927. We were both born at home, delivered by Dr. William O. Neal, MD. My father must not have had a middle name picked for Bob so Dr. Neal gave those babies one of his own names. Some times the good Doc forgot the names given by parents when he filled out the birth certificate. My wife Bonnie Lou Michael was surprised years later to find she was “Lou Lou” on her birth certificate. Mine was Benny Lee; after one of my father’s brothers and Lee for the famous Confederate General. That was the end of birthing for Pearl though she deserved a daughter.

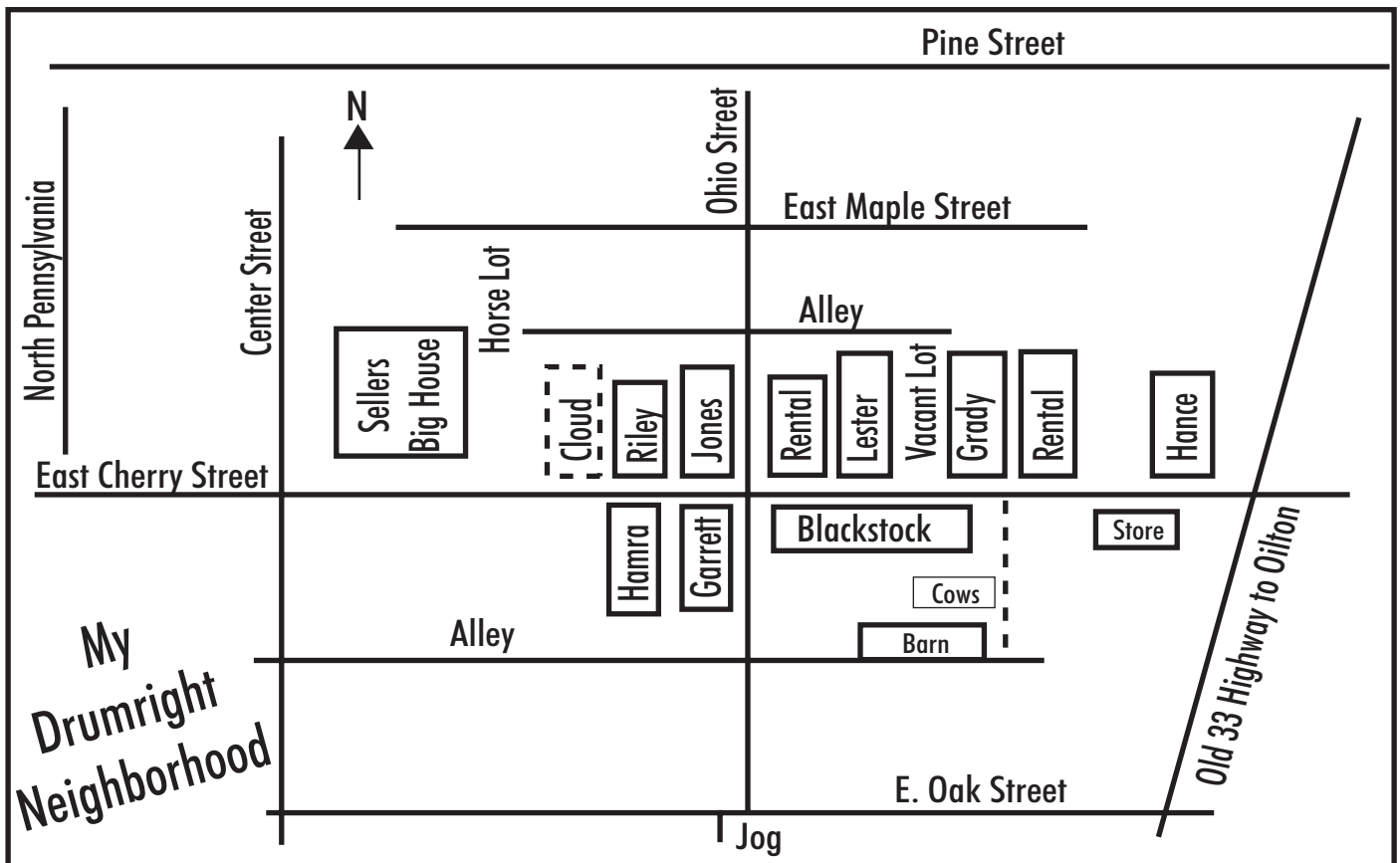
Kids in our neighborhood were mostly boys. Cherry street from Harley on the east (SH33 to

Oilton) west to Pennsylvania and Ohio street north and south from Maple to Oak held homes for 20-25 boys born in the 1920s.

A block west in the only two-story house in the north end of town lived the Sellers twins, James and Hugh, who were my age. I found James in my same 313th Bomb Wing out on the Pacific island of Tinian in 1945. They had two younger brothers, Jack and Bill, plus an older brother and two older sisters, seven in all.

The four Cloud boys lived next door east of the Sellers until their house burned in about 1932, then they moved south of Oak on Ohio street. They had four half-brothers named Kinneer. I knew Bill and Dermott Cloud but not the six others.

Next, east of the Clouds on Cherry was Charles “Egghead” Jones whose father Avery was the area’s Watkins Products dealer. “Egghead” earned his nickname because of his easily hurt head, or so he said. He had three or four half-brothers and two sisters. One of which, Willard “Boog” Bryson, was a close



chum of my older half-brother Loy. The five Riley kids lived between Clouds and Jones.

Next east on Cherry street from Ohio were the three Lester boys — Joe, Albert (“Bub”) and Tom — and their two sisters Dot and Mary. Mrs. Lester, Mary, was a devout Catholic, walking to mass every time the visiting priest rang the bell.

John Paul Grady lived just east of Lesters and two older Williams brothers on the northwest corner of Cherry and Harley.

People moved in and out of the rent houses along the south side of Cherry from Harley to our house on the southeast corner of Ohio. On the southwest corner of Ohio and Cherry lived the Ballingers followed there later by the Garretts. Next were the Hamras on Cherry who had some older children. They were Syrian, some of whom were later called Lebanese. Hamra was a shoe cobbler. She baked great Syrian food and brought samples around the neighborhood — like Kibbi, humus, cabbage rolls, etc. Delightful, thoughtful.

There were 20 or more Lebanese families in Drumright. Most were merchants: Saffa, Kraker, Deeba, Khoury, Shadid, DeBakey, Salem, Joseph, Elias — all good citizens but who mostly left for Oklahoma City or Tulsa after WW2. The Tidol (later called Tidewater) refinery closed in 1955; just obsolete and too expensive to modernize. It was a near death blow to Drumright.

There were two other families of Blackstocks living in Drumright as my father had sent money for Uncles Harvey and Austin to come to a better life in the oil patch. Harvey worked as a pumper for Sinclair Prairie Oil Co. and spent his entire life around Drumright. He never paid back any of several loans my father made to him. He and Mert had four boys and three girls, none of whom I liked because they picked on Bob and me. The same for those in Georgia.

Uncle Austin and wife Ethel lived in a dugout east of town (half tent and half in the ground) on the lease of another oil company until they moved to Shidler, Osage county, Oklahoma. He worked as a pumper for Phillips Petroleum. Good ole Uncle Austin died from heat exhaustion in the pump house a hot August day about 1938. He was a kind and jovial man, different from my dad and Uncle Harvey.

The tin pump house must have been 150 degrees. Austin was trying to start a huge engine that ran on natural gas. It turned a large bull wheel which, in turn, moved shackle rods on stilts across the prairie to lift the pumps on a dozen or so wells on the lease he watched. Frank Phillips himself made settlement with Aunt Ethel: free rent and natural gas (for both heat and lights) in the shotgun “company house” as long as she lived and \$40 a month; plus lifetime jobs for their four kids. Wow! That was unsurpassed generosity in that day as well as today.

Bob and I somehow managed to take the two-car “Doodlebug” train from Drumright to Cushing for 10 cents, and 50 cents on north to Apperson siding near Webb City west of Shidler. We would spend a week or so with the Austin Blackstocks before wearing out our welcome and exasperating our older cousins, Woodrow, LeRoy, Loraine and Herbert. They were classy folks, several cuts above the other Blackstocks, religious, smart learners in school and not too snooty.

We made maybe three car trips back to Georgia in their car with them to visit kinfolks. It was a hard, long trip sleeping out on the side of the road at night and took a week each way. I don’t remember who did the chores of milking twice daily but I guess Loy did.

Summers were made to work all day every day but Sunday in the big half-block garden Boyd invented to make sure we always had lots of work to do plus several cows to milk, feed and clean up after, and sometimes calves and a pig. Mom looked after a large pen of chickens.

When Bob and I had the Chicken Pox Dan Dawson came by on his horse and told our mother the Pox would not be so severe if we would lie down in front of the chicken pen gate and Mom shooed the chickens out of the pen over us. We laid down. Mom got a broom and had a noisy time getting the chickens to run or fly out over us. We got messed on by the excited chickens. Did it “cure” the Chicken Pox? Of course.

We had plenty to eat and sold the extra to stores or door to door. Our milk was abundant rich from purebred Jersey cows, never Holsteins. We delivered it on foot in glass bottles for 10 cents a quart. Clean,

very clean. It took three years at two quarts a day to pay off Mom's first Maytag washer to Mr. Ed Thomas.

I helped Mom milk our 4-5 cows so Bob could go out for football. Bob and me carried in the wood for our heating stove. About 5:30 a.m. our father would holler through the house for me then Bob to get up and make the fire.

We had a gas cook stove, one full bathroom, GE refrigerator, gas hot water heater in the full basement which also served as the laundry, storage for Mom's canned fruits and vegetables, a shower and toilet. B.L. sure put in a lot of work hand digging that basement, a cement drive alongside the house and a head high rock and concrete wall.

We lived pretty good, way above average for Drumright. My mother cooked and canned, washed, ironed and patched clothes and darned our socks. She made her every day dresses, and she looked after the 10-20 renters. Dad was always busy.

One of Mom's few outside functions was attending the Home Demonstration Club meetings put on by the County Agent. There they chatted and learned homemaking tips. What more could we want? We had lots of vegetables, milk, eggs and we ate the hens who wouldn't lay.

When my Dad couldn't find work he would buy an old house on borrowed money, fix it up and rent it. At one time we had 26 or so of these \$15-35 per month rent houses (Depression era prices) scattered all over north Drumright. The rent houses also gave us boys plenty of work to do. Bob learned to do the plumbing and me the electrical. We both helped our dad with the roof leaks, termites, etc. He excelled at cabinet making in a day of no power tools.

We felt we were the most over-worked and abused kids in the north end of Drumright. Many times our friends would come and help us finish some task B.L. had laid out so we could go down to play along Oily Creek (Tiger Creek on the map) and the Hobo Jungle along the Santa Fe tracks.

We thought life was okay. We wore patched overalls, went barefoot all summer, stubbed our toes and danced in tears when we ran into a bull needle weed patch. Ouch!!!!

GROWING UP IN DRUMRIGHT

Loy, Bob and I went through all 12 grades in Drumright. No kindergarten in those days. We went from 1-8 to Thomas A. Edison; then grades 9-12 at the "new" high school 11 blocks south across Broadway and up two blocks west.

Loy was a bright student and went on to Oklahoma A&M College at Stillwater. But times were hard, money hard to get and send to him. He had a night job but finally gave up and joined the Army in 1933.

While in the seventh grade I broke my leg when our horse slipped and fell on me during a nighttime race with the Sellers' twins. That kept me out of early football although I knew I wasn't any good at sports. After sitting game after game on the bench I decided to join the spectators. But, brother Bob went out and lettered every year.

They didn't have a printed football program at home games. I think Earl Newsom (who worked at *The Journal*) gave me the idea to sell some ads, phone the coach of the visiting team, get both lineups, have it printed at the *Drumright Journal*. I passed the programs out as people came in the ball park gate.

Boy did I make money! So much, in fact, Coach James (Buck) Weaver called me to his office and said the "D-Club" was taking over my program enterprise. He would let me sell ads for 10 percent. I said they had no program before I did it and I wouldn't do all the work for a fraction of what I was making. Fine, said the coach, he'd have the lettermen's club do the selling and passing out of the programs. Coach Weaver ordered me to stop. They sold a few ads the next week, not enough to pay the printer the second home game and there was no program after that.

Next, (about 1939 — I was a freshman) I delivered the *Daily Oklahoman* and *Oklahoma City Times*, morning and evening and Sunday papers owned by E.K. Gaylord. I arranged with Abe Goldsmith who owned the OTASCO store to buy a bicycle for 50 cents a week. It was not easy to get up at 4 a.m. to go to the Mistletoe Express office on Broadway and have Buddy Brooks or Herb McGhee count out my papers. Then back after school to deliver the *Times*. I had half the town and three rural oil camps. I learned to put a dry paper on the porch and behind the screen door for old ladies. Several tipped. Neither of my parents ever had

to take me around or help me. Besides the usual chores at home, it was my job and boy did I make money.

Next year I worked in a Deep Rock gasoline station for Pete Kimes. Those were the days when you washed a customer's windshield before asking what they needed. Then I offered to sweep the dirt out of their floorboards. Gas was once as low as 9-cents a gallon. Many who lived on oil leases "blew the drips" of casing head condensate getting free car gas (if they didn't get caught by an oil company cop). I topped off their tanks with the best anti-knock Ethyl (red gas) we had.

After a year fixing flats, washing and greasing cars after school for Pete Kimes, the bulk agent, P.T. Kidd, asked if I wanted to buy the inventory of a little tin building Deep Rock station with gravel driveways the company owned on the north edge of town, a mile or so out north on the Oilton highway. It was May 1939; I was 13 ending my sophomore year.

My dad wouldn't lend me the \$150 to buy the inventory and tools. He didn't have that kind of money. Neither would Coin Sellers, the local banker and our neighbor. So, I hitchhiked the 10 miles to Cushing and walked 10 blocks to the First National Bank and asked President Walter Bryant if he would make me the loan. To my surprise he did, even though I told him my dad and Mr. Sellers had turned me down. With the \$150 check in my pocket from a no-co-signer, no collateral loan I hitchhiked back to Drumright and bought the filling station inventory.

"Deep Rock #1" was at the edge of the company's warehouse, truck garage and area headquarters. It was a 10'x12' corrugated tin building with a driveway overhang, three hand pumps with 10 gallon glass bowls and gravel driveways. I was nearly 14 years old, did not have a drivers' license or car. I had a bike from my previous year on the paper route.

The alarm clock had to run down to wake me at five. Breakfast was cereal and toast. I put the previous day's receipts in my pocket, a clean flour sack on the handle bars and biked to the Badger Ice plant. They crushed 10# in my sack which I balanced on the handle bars and pedaled north about 1.5 miles on the Oilton highway as the sun rose. The ice man didn't come out my way.

I got a friend to buy me a case of beer which I put in the bottom of the pop box, covered with ice and topped off innocently with bottles of pop. Why the beer? Oil field workers would like a free cold beer after a hot day's work, away from wife and kids. I did not drink or smoke, neither did my folks. It was legal because I didn't "sell" beer; I gave it away.

I needed to fill the empty tanks of the company trucks and oil well clean out units instead of drivers going to Pete's new "Deep Rock #2" at the end of the work day. I quietly told each driver I wanted their business and there was a free treat in the bottom of my pop box. Soon I had all the big trucks and the guys looked forward to a free cool beer or pop as I pumped their trucks full of gas. Pop was free too; so was Tobacco since I couldn't afford and was too young to get a license. No law said you couldn't give it away. Business picked up so much I hired my brother Bob to help.

On our outside open air grease rack we washed and lubed workers' cars while they worked. I paid back the loan to Mr. Bryant in six weeks, had to contend with a cranky bulk agent, yet made money.

My gas station was open from dawn 'til dark until brother Bob came on. Then we took turns staying to 10 or so to service the people going to or from the Wayside Inn, one of Drumright's three notorious honky tonks. We were never robbed, never lost any money to bad credit. But we sold out when school was starting in September.

I went to work again for Pete Kimes' DR#2, around the corner on the same block where we lived. I bought a pretty good Model "A" Ford since I was 16 and could get a driver's license.

Back when I was 11 and in the seventh grade I bought a Ford Model "T" for \$8. Whoever I bought it from pulled it to the Cherry Street side of our house. The Lester boys helped get it running. It was a learning experience for all us boys and girls in the neighborhood. When we could get it to run, all the kids piled in and we headed for the back roads north of town. We often took Willard Tharrel Jr. who was crippled from polio but in my grade. Eugene Garrett, Tom Lester, the Sellers twins or Bob or me drove. When we went through a mud puddle the "T" would drown out. We had to back up some hills because reverse gear was stronger. Finally Gene's mother

turned us in to Chief of Police Jack Ary. (From then on we called her “Sheriff Garrett.”) He caught us as we rounded a corner and told us to park it, never move it again and to get rid of it. We did.

Jack Ary was a respected and effective chief of police. Like Jake Simms down at Seminole, he knew area lawbreakers, their ways and usually went straight to whoever he thought stole the lawn mower.

When I was say five, delivering milk one evening to our postman, J.T. MacDonald, a man approached me in the dark. He led me down an alley, gave me a nickel and tried to drop my overalls. I dropped the bottles and ran home. I told my mother. She phoned Chief Ary. Within an hour he was out front with a suspect in his car. I identified him. To jail he went and the next morning back to the state prison at McAlester. I was told he had a molesting record and was on probation.

School was mostly good to really good teachers. I did not define a really excellent teacher although there were several whom students and parents regarded as very good teachers. Ronald Gerard, the band director, was one. So was Lou Ann Pinkston who taught what was called Problems of Democracy. I made mostly Cs, several Bs and an occasional A. Both Bob and I were elected to the Student Council; he as president. That was repeated later at the University of Oklahoma.

Most kids listened to the late afternoon and early evening KVOO radio shows such as The Shadow, Little Orphan Annie, Jack Armstrong The All American Boy — mostly 15 minute daily installments each sponsored by some breakfast cereal. We read the funnies in the papers and some comic books. Some guys in high school ran for Hiram Stockman’s DeLuxe Pool Hall at lunch break and after school. We didn’t.

We went to the First Baptist Church every Sunday, occasionally Sunday evening but rarely on Wednesday evening. I must have been five when our popular preacher, Rev. “Mac” McCray who was also a chaplain in the National Guard, criticized the Klu Klux Klan.

There was a hooded chapter of the Klan at Oilton which met above the post office there and had a large lighted cross on the roof. They marched in the Oilton streets on Sunday nights. My Dad drove us and some

neighbors over one evening to park back from the street and we saw 25-30 with their sheets on, hooded and marching to cadence.

My father used the word “nigger” but was never rude to black people. My brothers and Mom considered him racist and urged him to stop his hatred. He said a time or two that he was going to join the Klan. It upset us so we together told him that if he did we would disown him. At times my dislike for my father bordered on hate. Our mother was the stabilizer who never wavered from the Golden Rule of “Do Unto Others As You Expect Them to Do Unto You.” She lived it. Her example, her quiet way of helping others, rarely saying a word of criticism, was honesty in every way. I never outgrew my wish to never do anything that would embarrass her.

Bob and I were “saved” when we were nine or ten years old. After Sunday School some of the older women would make their way through the pews seeking those who were not members of the church. They hung on you and prayed for your soul. We asked Clarence C. Cook, who was our age, why they did not “bother” him. “I got smart and joined,” C.C. said. We did and ran home to proudly tell Mom, who had left early to prepare Sunday Dinner. She said, “Fine, if that’s what you want to do. Now wash your hands, it’s time to eat.” We liked that honest, matter of factly way she had with small crisis. Pure Pearl.

It must have been the spring of 1939 that I decided to hitchhike to Georgia that summer. Two of my friends said they would go, but when it came time to leave they backed out. With a small cardboard suitcase and \$5, yes five dollars, I walked down to SH 33 to catch a ride. My mother went with me to see me off. She and my father had reluctantly agreed I could go since Loy hitchhiked all over the midwest states to work in the wheat harvest.

It was a great experience, very lonely at times. I even caught a freight train from Memphis to Birmingham. Until two railroad detectives ordered me off the freight in the Birmingham yards, chewed me out and turned me over to the YMCA.

In hindsight I realize that I was too young to be out alone, standing by the highway up through Missouri to Atlanta then two weeks later north through Tennessee. I didn’t get hurt but I sure got hungry and very lonesome at times.

My mother Pearl never drove a car; never wanted to. She walked everywhere: the six blocks to town, around to see the renters, wherever some “old lady” needed help, she walked there. She was very bright, always of good cheer. If her spirits were down Mom was just a little quieter. Two of my favorite stories about her are:

She never knew a Chevy from a Ford or any other. Cars were either black, brown, green, red or some other basic color. She had concluded that red cars were the worst because “they are working on them all the time.”

She liked dogs. We always had one, never two. All were mutts, dog pound dogs, Heinz 57 varieties. But to her there were only two kind of dogs: Hard tail dogs or soft tail dogs. The difference was that a hard tail dog will lay on the front porch and thump his tail at every passerby. The thumping woke one from an afternoon nap. She liked soft tail dogs better, those with lots of hair on their tail, because it muffled their wagging and thumping. She had the quiet grace and skill to simplify everything.

My mother answered the telephone with “Okay” and ended a call the same way. Her main written communication was the 2-cent postcard, later 3-cent postcard (now 23 cents). But to Loy, Bob and me she usually sent a letter. It was her calm style not to punctuate.

Our father was honest too. Neither did he lie. He paid his bills no matter what the struggle and at times we had very little money and always some mortgage to pay for buying or fixing up the rent houses. From B.L. and Loy, Bob and I also learned the basics of honesty and homespun version of ethics which haunted or comforted us the rest of our lives. We didn’t know it then but it counted as much or more than what we learned in school and our relationships

with friends and adults. You could tell the difference in families around us; after you looked back at the past from the future.

It was, overall, a happy childhood.

During my junior year I was chosen for a part in the school play “Lost Horizon.” I and some others were sitting in the DHS auditorium laughing at some of those who were trying out for parts. The teacher ordered us to the stage. I played the gambler in the plane crash and Bonnie Michael (whom I married in 1954) played the missionary. We never even dated each other in high school.

In May 1943 I was about to graduate from high school. Brother Loy was in the Army in the south Pacific, a captain by now who had been recalled from the reserves before the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. After eight years in the regular Army and earning a field commission he joined the Border Patrol but kept active in Army Reserves.

He advised me not to get drafted but to enlist in anything to avoid the infantry — where he was. So, just before finals in May 1943, I hitchhiked to Tulsa to enlist in the Army Air Corps. I wanted to fly fighters. I passed the physical, mental and psychological tests. It was one of my most happy days but it was raining heavily. The highway back through Sand Springs was flooded, the bridge over the Arkansas River was closed there. I had to hitch hike down US 66 thru Sapulpa to Stroud south of Drumright then north up a dirt state highway to get home. It took all night. I reported late for a final exam at school. They refused to let me take it late and that threatened my graduation. After a little hell-raising and reminders to teachers and the principal that a war was on and I was in Tulsa enlisting, a flood was on — common sense finally prevailed.

PART 2

The World War II Years

Each graduated DHS senior boy was offered a summer job by Superintendent L.M. Jagou at the Tidal refinery. I learned later this was a J. Paul Getty company. Several hundred local men and two women worked there. It was a generous gesture with a hook. In September all kids were terminated and could not be rehired for two years. That was to push us on off to college, not settle for life as a refinery worker. I was a welder's helper because I had taken a wartime welding course evenings after school.

In September I enrolled at Oklahoma A&M College in Stillwater, some 40 miles northwest of Drumright. I knew I would be called as soon as I was 18 on Sept. 4th. But I was superstitious that if I at least got started I would have the bug to go back to college when the war was over. It worked out that way. No GI Bill of Rights then.

It was my first prolonged experience away from home. It was my first time to live with other guys, live on a budget, mail my dirty laundry home for Mom to do and mail back or hitchhike it over on weekends.

Sure enough not long into September I received notice to report to the Army in Oklahoma City. A new life began without any admitted fear but a little being scared of the all new experience that lay ahead. It turned out that brother Loy had advised me well because in the fall of 1943 draftees went direct to 90 days infantry training then onto the war in Europe. I became proud that my Army serial number began with a "1" rather than a "3" meaning I had enlisted rather than been drafted. 18163569 — I had become a number. Well, I was already 448-14-4875 as my age 16 Social Security number.

We went by bus to Shepard Field Army Air Corps base at Wichita Falls, Texas, then after a month basic training, living barracks life and learning to

gripe about mess hall chow, a bus delivered us to the Heart of Texas, Texas A&M College. Lucky me.

Texas A&M is at College Station near Bryan in "The Heart of Texas." As a small town 18-year old I was struck with awe of the campus, the huge buildings and the huge mess hall. We were assigned four to a room in double-deck bunks in Hart Hall. We shared a bath with four from an adjoining room.

Everything I owned was in a barracks bag. That evening we made our beds and put away our stuff according to a sketch of where all stuff was to go even down to socks. A knock at our door and "Ah-tens-hut." In came a six-foot-plus captain in full uniform carrying his hat and wearing an Eisenhower grin. "Hi men! I'm Sam Hill and I'll be your Commandant. How are things?"

From that moment we all fell in love with him because of his genuine affability, appearance, bearing and obvious sincerity. Capt. Hill had been a Baptist preacher but did not want to be a chaplain. He wanted command duty and I never saw a better one. He had a fabled brother, acclaimed P-40 ace Tex Hill of Chenault's Flying Tigers in the China-Burma-India theater supporting Chiang Kai-Shek in China's defense against invading Japanese forces.

Expected duties and discipline was clear, crisp and quick. We marched everywhere from dawn to dark. We were told to NOT swing our arms the regulation six inches to the front, three inches to the rear. "Don't swing them at all, ever!" It was an impressive sight to see.

We formed into squadrons of an 8-man front three times a day to march with our band of 30 or so down the wide street right thru the huge double doors of Sabesa Hall. Several dogs always showed up to run along and bark at the base drummer. Into the mess hall they went but were shouted out. We sat 10

to a table and ate “square” meals from family style platters with two half-pints of milk for each. After a month we didn’t have to lift our forks straight up then straight into our mouths. From a wall booth a guy played the music hits of the day and always Glen Miller’s “Moonlight Serenade” as we marched in.

In the many entry tests we took, both mental and physical, they found out I could not swim. Embarrassed but not alone, I had a fear of water. My Dad believed by throwing a kid in the muddy Cimarron River up near Oilton that, like a dog, they would automatically learn to swim. The only pool was over in Cushing and cost a dime. I was put in a non-swimmers class taught by A&M’s former Olympic coach Art Adams. There were about 40 of us. We were to learn to swim and how to stay afloat for hours if ever shot down in the ocean. Adams was a firm, patient and successful teacher. The indoor pool was a multi-colored tile wonder.

Classes were in Science, Physics, History, English and lots of math. All morning and early afternoons, five days a week we went to class, marching in flights of groups of 10. In the afternoon we drilled, did physical training and other military games like obstacle courses. Break the rules and demerits were awarded which got you an extra hour of drill for points over 10. I liked it but became an accomplished bitcher.

Some weekends were “free” but Sundays we were expected to go to some church. On several weekends some of us caught the train on campus to go to Houston packing the maximum into a hotel room. We walked all over, always looking for girls. We outnumbered them 10 to 1. We didn’t have any “luck” but we drank 3.2 beer and made sure to catch the two o’clock train to be back by the five o’clock formation. AWOL (absent without leave) had a fate worse than death.

It was equal to about two semesters when we graduated to go to preflight at San Antonio. But there were too many cadets. To slow things down we were bussed to nearby Bryan Army Air Corps Base 10 miles away. It was a basic (second level) flight school with AT-6 advanced trainers. After preflight at San Antonio pilot students went to a primary flight school then basic, then to “Advanced Flying” school to get your wings and 2nd lieutenant commission.

If only it were to be. Bryan Army Air Base was six more weeks of marching, repeating military studies, survival training, etc. Finally, on to San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center (SAACC or “Sack”) up on a hill in gleaming white 2-story barracks where the discipline and schedule got considerably harder.

Now the goal became not to get “washed out,” dread of all dreads, a fate nearly as bad as death itself. But I liked it and took some kidding for being an Eager Beaver, one who tows the mark, has everything in place and studies hard. A little bitching was okay.

SAACC was an exciting place to be. I was learning basic navigation, aircraft identification by silhouette and by engine sound, Morse code by sound and by blinker. Blinker code was my downfall and a milestone in my character development. On the last tests I passed everything well above 85 percent but I flunked blinker code. Those who did got a recheck one evening.

Two of my buddies and bunk mates had rechecks too. On the way up after supper they told me the word was to put a \$5 bill folded in your test paper on which you had your name and the test message sent in blinker code.

I agonized. It was dishonest but more than that what if I had a life or death need for blinker? What if I were the pilot, the radio was out, the tower was telling me what to do by blinker. I could not understand and kill my crew, myself, even others. That was my thinking. I had a \$5 bill in my pocket. It was worth it to be a pilot, an officer. But...

But, I didn’t do it and I flunked. I was a washed out cadet. Next stop: GUNNERY SCHOOL.

This hit me, my dreams and ambitions hard, but I couldn’t crack up. I would try to talk the reclassification officer into sending me to radio operator school. The captain said not only “no, but hell no!” I begged and was put on latrine cleaning detail all day long for three weeks until I would accept being a crew gunner. Finally, he called me in and said, “Okay Blackstock, I’m sending you to radio school and I’m sure they will flunk you out.” Thanks, I saluted and even shook his hand. It was about November 1944. I was finally out of Texas and across the river from St. Louis at Scott Air Base near Belleville, Illinois. It

was an old, dingy, coal-burning base but the radio course was challenging.

I passed blinker code. It was the ordinary bulb they were using at SAACC, not my eyes at all. The after-glow of the ordinary light bulb confused me; a special C3A blinker light bulb did not. I became a “high speed” operator on the key, over 25 wpm, I think. I got assigned to a B-29 crew. What luck!

It was off to Lincoln, Nebraska, to “crew up” and it was a cold February 1945. Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt died in Warm Springs, GA. I went outside the tar paper barracks into the snow to cry. We loved that crippled old President. Harry Truman became President. We felt good about that because he was a straight talker and a WW1 hero.

About 400 soldiers who made up 40 new B-29 crews got an unforgettable troop train ride down across Kansas to Albuquerque, N.M. More luck. No Boloxi, Mississippi, or dreary Scott Field, Illinois, and we were not going to Texas. Also, I was a new corporal; never made Pfc.

Capt. Arthur Faunce from Albany, N.Y., was our crew commander. On the flight deck was Capt. Art Faunce on the left as airplane commander, on the right copilot Willard Johnson, bombardier in the nose, flight engineer (also a pilot, Garth Palmer), then the navigator Ed Miller (all officers) and me, tucked around behind the humps that concealed the upper and lower forward 50-cal. machine guns. I had an ANART-13 transmitter and a Collins receiver in my nook. I could make it sing. I could tune the trailing (wind out) wire antenna so perfectly I got both coasts and even Havana from over New Mexico.

We liked Albuquerque and the air base right next to the municipal airport. We liked our hot pilot base commander Col. Frank Kurtz and his attractive and co-commander wife, Margo. Once she stopped her driver because a GI failed to salute her staff car. She chewed his ass out, took his name and demanded he do KP. Bitch.

Remember my two buddies back at SAACC? I was walking down Central Ave. in Albuquerque one Saturday when I raised my right hand to salute a couple of 2nd Lieutenants approaching. “Blackie,” they both hollered. We went into a bar for beers. Flipping my corporal stripes and pointing to their new gold 2nd Lt. bars as bombardiers both said: “Only \$5

bucks, you cheap ass.” We laughed. I grimly laughed, with some envy and a little sorrow. That was a character testing decision at SAACC (San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center) but I did the right thing.

[MORAL: Never brood over a decision once it's made. You made it as good as you could at the time. It drags you down and hurts your morale to keep going over it.]

Crew training was fun. We flew missions for our gunners to practice, our bombardier to “bomb” this or that play target a thousand miles away, day and night. The Boeing B-29 was the first high-altitude, pressurized, longest range bomber in the world. It had the latest, the best and was the most costly. All turned over to a crew of 10 of 20-something year olds. We flew day and night all over the US

We were ready to go but first a leave. Back in Oklahoma, I married Zelma Jean Yocham, whom I dated some in high school and when on leave. She was 18; I was 19. She went to Los Angeles and I flew overseas. Our crew picked up a new B-29 at Herrington, Kan., AAB. Then to Oakland, on to Hawaii and an unusual visit from my father.

B.L. was too old for WW1 and WW2 but was determined to somehow get in on it. He packed his carpenter tools and went to California where he helped build wood boats for the Navy, maybe the super fast PT torpedo launching boats. Then he joined a civilian branch of the Navy Seabees (Construction Battalion) in the Yukon Territory, on to Alaska and Kiska Island. I saw him in an AP news picture standing erect with his hat off, wearing his white carpenter overalls as the US flag was raised over Kiska. Near B.L., six feet away, was Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner. He always got up front so he could hear.

He had gone on to Hawaii where he worked with Navy Seabees. He lied about his age saying he was 55 when he was 65. I tried to phone him after we landed at Hickam Field to refuel and overnight. There was heavy rain. I was asleep in a barracks when about 2 a.m. a Military Policeman shook me and said, “Your old man’s outside; get some clothes on.” There he was in a Jeep. We hugged. He demanded to see the plane. No amount of reasoning, or raining, or “it’s under guard” would deter B.L. The MP said he would take us. He told the B-29 guard it was

okay to let my Dad kiss one of the wheels. If there was ever a good or bad example of 100 percent determination, he was it.

I almost drowned when we stopped to refuel at Kwajalein Atoll, a speck of an island halfway to Guam in the Marinas. My crew stripped naked to swim in the Pacific, out to a raft tied a ways out. I gave out and panicked. I knew I was going to drown. I remembered what Coach Art Adams told us learning swimmers at Texas A&M: "Calm down, go into a jelly fish float on your back, breathe and snort through your nose, do the flutter stoke slowly with your hands. Calm down; you'll be okay. Look around for what direction to go and slowly kick and paddle that way." I prayed. He saved my life.

It happened again a month later up at Iwo Jima. Our plane had blown an engine on a mission to the Empire. We dropped our unarmed mines in the ocean and landed at Iwo. Again, swimming with my buddies the undertow got me, the volcanic ash shore swirled into my eyes, nose and mouth. I again panicked until Art Adams and God got me back to the beach.

When our crew got to Guam they took our new plane away and gave us an old one and sent us on to Tinian. North Field Tinian had four runways 8,500 feet long and several hundred asphalt "hard stands" on which to park our ship. Siapan was across a small strait, a larger island. We were assigned to the 20th Air Force, 313th Bomb Wing, 9th Bomb Group, 99th Bomb Squadron. This was it.

As the truck took us to our quonset hut we saw a long line of men outside a quonset hut at group headquarters. "What's that," we asked. "Oh," the driver replied, "those are flight crews lined up for the chaplain to help them make out their last will.

"Gen. Curtis LeMay has ordered bombing will be at or below 5,000 feet, not 30,000 anymore. Hardly anyone was hitting their targets. Those guys think it may be their last mission." Welcome to the war!

At 30,000 feet over Japan B-29 pilots ran head on into the jet stream, a new experience. A 200 m.p.h. head wind slowed speed to 150 m.p.h. making easier targets for Jap anti-aircraft guns.

We flew and flew and flew. Finally, we got to go. We were to drop mines in the bays, ports and in

Japanese shipping channels. Both bomb bays open, stringing the mines as Capt. Faunce flew down as close to "the deck" as he dared. The low-level bombing surprised the Japs who had their anti-aircraft shells fused to explode at 25-35,000 feet. Losses were less. Our undershorts were brown.

It was so hot we flew missions in cutoff khaki shorts, an unbuttoned shirt, socks and GI shoes and dog-tags. That is until a Brig. General saw us get out on landing, lined us up and chewed ass. The idea of a crash landing in the drink and being cooked in the Pacific sun hadn't occurred to us.

We flew missions. We trained. We hiked around the island. We played volley ball, cribbage and poker. We drank beer when our two bottles every two weeks ration came up. We read. Living in a quonset hut beat the hell out of tent and mudhole life in the infantry.

During a hillside outdoors movie in the rain on 6 August 1945 the projectionist stopped the film (black and white) and announced on the speakers, "The 509th (near us on the same field) has just dropped an atomic bomb, the biggest bomb ever made, on Hiroshima." Loud cheers. Jumping up and down. The Seabees were building a huge hospital along a ridge above us, getting ready for the invasion of the Japanese home islands.

Then three days later, 9 August 1945, the second A-bomb (and the last one we had ready) on Nagasaki. The war was over. These bombs killed 150,000 Japs but they saved thousands of American men from dying in the invasion. Maybe even me. The Seabees stopped work on the hospital.

God bless Harry Truman.

Having not gotten to the war until June my crew flew only five missions and one of them was aborted when an engine blew a cylinder near Iwo Jima where we landed after jettisoning our bomb load in the Pacific. We spent two days there, hiked up Suribachi. I hit it off with the the Seabees who hauled all the food, ate steaks, gave me some sheets to sleep on.

I've been very fortunate in my life to have had several unforgettable experiences. This is one.

All flyable B-29s were ordered to "fly cover" for the 2 September 1945 signing of surrender terms by the top Japanese admirals and generals with Gen. Douglas MacArthur and other allied 4 and 5 stars. The idea was to use those moments to impress the

Japs what a huge force we had ready to annihilate them.

I got goose bumps looking out through the B-29 nose windows down on the deck of the battleship USS Missouri. I was down on my knees holding onto the shoulders of our bombardier between the airplane commander (Faunce) and copilot Lt. Willard Johnson. We were told to get down close. I saw MacArthur himself at the table on the deck with the Jap brass.

After we passed over we were to fly on, way out to sea then turn and fly around again. It must have seemed to those on the surface that we had an endless sky full of these huge B-29 bombers.

Next we began “hauling groceries” as we called it. Dropping bundles of food, first aid supplies and clothing to our guys who were POWs in Jap camps on Empire islands. It was tricky flying and some crews crashed. But Faunce was a short, thin, wiry, quick and smart airplane commander. He got us down in the valleys to find the POW camp we were to drop to and with both bomb bays wide open our bombardier jettisoned both bays packed with bundles of supplies. Cargo chutes opened and POWs cheered below.

I remember one camp, I think it was Osaka Five, had “Pappy Boyington is here” written on the roof in white paint. Ever one for publicity, count on the Marines to never miss an opportunity. He was the top ace with 27 or so kills when he was shot down and ended up in Osaka 5 and us delivering him groceries.

After that a very big typhoon hit Okinawa, a group of islands south of the main Jap group of islands. It had been taken at big cost of casualties including beloved columnist Ernie Pyle. When the storm ended our grocery missions went there. We had some time on the ground so we hiked around. Ships were washed way upon the land. We explored family tombs made of concrete in the shape of a woman’s womb, with a door at the vagina. Inside were ashes in urns of that family’s dead. We left them alone.

Finally, it was time to be rotated out, to go home, if you had the points. Points were counted for how long you had been in combat, how many medals for heroism you had and I don’t remember what else. Mine were few. My brother Loy, now down on Leyte

in the Philippines (as a Lt. Col.), had over 200 go home points.

We flew over because we were important. We weren’t flying back. We were boated over to Saipan which had a harbor for large troop ships. We were assigned to 14-man tents. I was a S/Sgt by now. We were excited for the war to be over, to be going home. We never even noticed that, suddenly, the guy on the next cot was black, and so was the guy on the other side of me. It was to be a very important learning experience.

We got to talking. We found things in common. Race was never an issue because all of us had several things in common: It was over and we were eager to get out. We ate, hiked, played ball, cards, swam in the ocean together, even took baths together. I recall not one conflict or complaint. I did hear once some “reb” made a disturbance but the MPs hauled him away. On the troop ship back it was the same way. One friendly sailor advised me to get a top bunk to keep from getting vomited on from guys who got sea sick. Top bunks were six high, straight up. But no one crawled over me in the dark going to pee, or threw up on me.

Guys laying around the deck, on cargo hold covers, down to their shorts getting tanned for the big arrival home. The sea gulls would poop a liquid bomb right on your back. I heard some colorful cussing.

Ft. MacArthur, Calif., is where I picked for discharge. It was near Los Angeles, where my wife Zelma Jean was living with her parents Leonard and Eula Yocham. Jean was a long distance operator for the phone company. Leonard had sold cars in Drumright but now he worked in an electric motor manufacturing plant. I got a civilian haircut and phoned. I took the bus out Figaroa Ave. with all my belongings in a canvas barracks bag with a rope draw string. We lived there three weeks until Leonard got me a job at United Electric Motors tacking on ratings plates to each motor as it rolled down the assembly line. I was determined and had written Jean that I was just stopping to get her to move back to Oklahoma where I was going to enroll as a pre-law student at the University of Oklahoma. Instead, we moved into a small apartment about a block away.

The “sell” was on to keep me working in the motor plant. We were now on strike and I was on the picket line as a member of the United Electrical Workers Union-CIO. I said no, I was going to college and wanted her to go with me. She had saved every dollar I sent home from an almost total allotment and the poker winnings I sent were a couple of hundred bucks.

We agreed to split, to get a divorce, use some of the money to pay a lawyer, some to buy me a bus ticket to Drumright and just split the rest 50-50. It wasn't easy. It wasn't nasty. It was over a difference in goals and my ambition. Jean wanted me to work part time in Los Angeles and go to some area college part time. I was afraid to bend my resolve to be a full time student.

On return to Drumright I became a member of “The 52-20 Club.” That’s what we called the unemployed veterans in May 1946. We got unemployment pay of \$20 each week for 52 weeks as long as we showed up once a week willing to work. If they had a job which might fit us we went for an interview; if not, we signed the payroll for another week.

My dad was working as a carpenter, car pooling it to Stillwater building veteran housing for Oklahoma A&M students. It was a union job. He could get me on. I joined the Brotherhood of

Carpenters & Joiners Union-AF of L as a first year apprentice. It paid a little more than common laborer.

I applied and was accepted at the University of Oklahoma for the fall semester.

The need for carpenters was so great that one could take a skills test every 30 days and move up a notch in apprenticeship. Whoever the union certified the contractor accepted and my pay rose as my dad taught me during breaks, at lunch and after work. Besides, what I was doing didn't take a lot of skill. We were reassembling WW II all wood two-story apartments taken down in sections from some military base in Kansas. I was put to nailing down used hardwood flooring. You drove cut nails (like horseshoe nails) with a flooring hatchet into the tongue edge of pieces of oak flooring. It was a bend over job nailing all day, with some sawing to fit pieces.

My superintendent was a senior Indian carpenter named John Sixkiller. He chewed tobacco and often spit in my keg of nails after he had watched and coached me for awhile. Ever reach into keg for a hand full of nails to refill your apron and get tobacco spit? I cussed him from across the joists. He smiled.

It was get up at 5 a.m. Car pool an hour to Stillwater. Start work at 7:30 a.m. when it was cool. June through August it went on. Back home, eat supper, maybe walk to town. Tired. Go to bed by 10 p.m. then do it all over again. I was eager for school to begin at OU.

PART 3

Getting Educated at OU

I wanted to be a lawyer. Brother Bob and I decided we'd do prelaw and law school at OU. He had been in the Merchant Marine until his drunk ship captain ran the cargo boat onto a reef in the south Pacific.

Our brother Loy had also convinced Bob to enlist in anything to avoid the infantry. Bob got out after the shipwreck and enrolled at OU but now he was about to be drafted. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps and gave me detailed instructions on OU including moving in with his room mate, Bill Epperson.

We shared the same double bed at 729 S. Lahoma across from the Pi Phi sorority. Bill and I were the only roomers with a cranky old widow Tomlin who could barely get around, used 30-watt bulbs and was slow to get out of the one bathroom. I ate lunch and supper four doors up the street at Mrs. Tilley's.

Bill Epperson was a journalism major and editor of the student daily. He was from Tulsa, a very bright student who had missed the war because he had severe polio. It wasn't unusual for same sex students to share the same bed in those scarce sleeping room days of 1946. One old lady even rented out her own bedroom and slept on a cot behind her piano.

The GI Bill was one of the greatest programs ever to happen in America. It was more important to the advancement of our economy and the moving up the ladder of a generation with college degrees that exceeds even the good done by the FDR/Sen. George Norris' (R-Neb.) Tennessee Valley Authority, Truman's Marshall Plan and Ike's Interstate Highway system.

I soon found that a normal 16 credit hour load, used books and all paid by the GI bill, took some study. And, the \$65 per month room and board allowance left little for breakfast, clothes or a bus

ticket home now and then. Who needs beer or movies anyway? Most of us had the dry cleaner dye our Army wool olive drab shirts and pants maroon, dark green or black. GI shoes and long, heavy overcoats, or Navy P-coats were in fashion as it grew colder. I needed a part time job.

I went door to door on campus corner. Druggist Bill Cook, owner of the Liberty Drug, didn't have a job but he knew of a job. "For Phillip Morris, giving away samples," he said. But I don't smoke, I said. "Neither do I — but I think I could fake it if I had to have a job," he, a staunch Baptist, advised. He made a call. I began to watch people who smoked and practiced. I interviewed, got the job.

My major was general arts and science studies but mostly it was zero credit classes in Spanish, math and sciences to make up for a lot of high school deficiencies. No one told me at DHS that I'd better jump on the occasional foreign language class. I guess no one then but me and my parents knew that somehow I was going to college after the war. No GI bill was in sight. It was a humbling and transitional experience that I needed. My stated objective was law.

I became involved at the campus Y and met a bunch of liberals. Also at the Westminster Presbyterian youth rooms at Rickners Book Store. The American Legion and VFW campus groups were huge and loaded with super patriots — as if we all hadn't been in WW2. I helped form a new group, a national one founded by amputee Charles Bolte. It was only for WW2 types, open to new ideas and militant. By the second semester I was President because Billy Maurice Ogden was getting heat for allegedly being a communist. He read news on the OU station atop the student Union, WNAD. We became friends.

Maurice invited me to "discussion group" meetings. He led most of them. We talked about seg-

regation, abuses of capitalism and crookedness in government at all levels, particularly state and national. I liked the aggressive give and take of the discussions. We read pamphlets supplied by Maurice. It was exciting. But I came to realize this agenda was indeed “the party line” meaning, yes, Communist Party USA.

Meanwhile, after my freshman year, I got a half-day carpenter job with Harmon Construction Co. building the new Physics Building, catercorner from the main library. I went to classes in the morning, dashed to Tilley’s for lunch, changed into work clothes and drove nails all afternoon as a union carpenter building concrete forms.

Boy was I tired by the time I got to my room; so tired I sometimes laid down across the bed and slept through supper. After three months, it was too much, too exhausting trotting to class, nailing down concrete form “pans.” I quit though the money was good. My class work suffered, down to “Cs” when I could make “Bs” and an occasional “A.”

I signed up for advanced Air Force ROTC as a first three grade, S/Sgt., veteran. As a returned veteran in ROTC we were special; nobody “messed” with us. It paid about \$25/month to attend three class hours a week plus a 2-hour drill. I met more new friends. I became a 2nd Lt. in the Air Force Reserve after one summer with a big AFROTC class at Kelly Field, Texas, near San Antonio.

I become friends with government professor Dr. H. Vern Thornton. He became my academic and personal advisor on several matters. I went to Dr. Thornton with my worries over becoming a patsy and a front for Maurice Ogden and some others who I thought were likely members of the Communist Party, U.S.A. (CPUSA). He urged me to talk with Ted Baird, executive secretary of the OU Alumni Association, and a campus power. I did.

Baird said he had been trying for three years to get a line, an insider in on what he called “Commie cell meetings on campus.” He asked me to stay put as president of the OU American Veterans Committee. I told him how Maurice showed me — while he was on the air and I setting silently across the microphone at WNAD — how to slant the news by adlibbing his own twist.

“Will you, Ben, talk with the FBI?” Ted asked. It scared me. This was quickly getting deep. Why not quietly bail out and go on to other activities. “That’s what they have all done,” he groaned.

I said yes. The next day I got a call from an FBI agent. He wanted to see me. He came to my room at 529 Lahoma. His name was Jack Bales. It began a 5 year relationship. He took lots of notes. To jump past many intrigues and information gathering as an FBI mole (as Denny Garrison called me years later) made me nervous, distracted from my studies and increased my personal risk from some who were marginal psycho cases.

In a couple of months I had enough and resigned as president of AVC with much publicity that it was “controlled by a crippling uncompromising minority of extreme lefties and maybe commies, who used me and the AVC to picket, protest, raise hell for any number of real or imagined abuses.”

I was threatened a few times by unidentified phone callers, by anonymous letters. I got a lot of compliments for standing up for moderation versus extremism. Years later, I think it was 1960, I was one of the FBI’s star witnesses in a Communist conspiracy trial in the US District Court at Los Angeles.

Billy Maurice Ogden was found working in a missile plant near LA and had sworn and signed that he had never been a member of the Communist Party of the USA. In 1947 he had shown me his party card in the news room of WNAD. Seven had told the FBI they had seen it elsewhere on other occasions. But only one girl and me agreed to testify.

The US District Judge in Los Angeles gave me a hard time when I was on the witness stand. Nevertheless, the jury found Maurice guilty of lying on his security clearance to work in the missile factory. They gave him five years. The odd judge vacated that, voiding the case. The US District Attorney appealed and the US Circuit Court in San Francisco reinstated the jury verdict and sentence. I guess he served it.

Later his mother phoned me to say Maurice did not hold a grudge for my testimony. I told her that three times I had received threatening calls since the trial. I told her I wished him well and her, too.

THERE WAS ANOTHER EXHILARATING EXPERIENCE IN 1960

The US Department of Justice paid for my trip to Los Angeles to testify for the government against Billy Maurice Ogden. They paid me Rand McNally mileage and per diem expenses for lodging and meals. I flew cheap with the Oklahoma Democratic party delegates on a chartered “Connie,” an old four-engine airliner. What a trip with lots of happy, partying politicians. One delegate was C.R. Anthony himself, a legend with one of his 244 stores in my hometown.

When C.R. found out I was staying in Pasadena with Doug Mayberry, who sold ads for the *Los Angeles Times*, he insisted I room with him in the Oklahoma delegation’s hotel. Besides, he had tickets to the convention and I could have some of them when he went out to visit his stores in California. What a deal. I was there when John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson were nominated. The Commie trial paid my way. What memorable experiences.

Two years later, 21 Nov. 1963, was by far the most memorable experience of my life. I was at the White House the day before Pres. John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas on 22 Nov. 1963. I was standing on the porch just outside the Oval Office watching a helicopter land. I turned to realize where I was standing and just inside I could see the President and several other individuals.

Pres. Kennedy opened the door and walked out alone to where I stood. I said, “Hello, Mr. President. I’m Ben Blackstock from Oklahoma and I’ve been talking with Andy Hatcher (his assistant press secretary). I understand you are going to Texas.” “Yes,” he answered, and said it looked like a nice day for a flight.

Those inside the Oval Office came through the double French doors. The President introduced me to his secretary, Mrs. Evelyn Lincoln. We stood together chatting while he walked out to the helicopter.

I had been taken to the White House by Carter Bradley, then Sen. Mike Monroney’s chief of staff, to help Pierre Salinger’s assistant, Andrew Hatcher, make a list of Oklahoma editors to invite for a lunch with the President. When I heard the loud noise of a helicopter Andy said it was coming to get the

President, who was going to Texas. If I wanted to see that, I could go out a side door from his office and he’d see me after the President left. I did.

To shorten this story: The next day I had lunch with Sen. Monroney and Lyle Boren in the Senate Dining Room. Lyle, a former congressman and David’s father, whom my mother had supported, was then (1963) a lobbyist for the Association of American Railroads. As we started up an elevator the operator said there has just been a news bulletin that the President had been shot in Dallas. Lyle got off. Monroney took me up to the Senate Press Gallery and told me to go to the rail and watch the Senate below.

Sen. Ted Kennedy was presiding. I saw the chaplain walk to the podium, lean over and say something to Sen. Kennedy. He stiffened, stood and hurried away. The chaplain asked everyone to stand. Then he gave his “a mighty oak has fallen” prayer and recessed the Senate.

Sen. Monroney came to get me. We caught the subway tram where he told me he had to write his reaction for when the press would call. The president was reported to be dead at Parkland Hospital, others were wounded. Mike positioned me at one of his windows and told me to watch the flag atop the capitol dome. Two men, now standing at its pole, would soon lower it all the way then back up to half staff. With that, flag attendants atop the Supreme Court and all other buildings would do the same. I was all eyes. I did not speak as Monroney was pecking on his old Underwood typewriter, backing up, striking out, typing on.

My hotel was across the street from the White House. I watched on TV and then out my window at the scene of limousines coming and going at the White House main entry.

This experience of 21-23 November 1963 and the one in the nose of a B-29 over Tokyo 15 August 1945 seeing Gen. Douglas MacArthur below on the deck of the USS Missouri at a table signing the Japanese surrender have, so far, been the two history in the making highlights of my life.

Again I was at the White House with Jim Pate and NNA members in about 1984 to have drinks with Pres. Ronald Reagan. We met and had a long conversation with his Press Secretary Jim Brady. He was

later shot and paralyzed by John Hinkley in his attempt to kill Reagan. Jim and his wife Sarah later formed Handgun Control which is a potent force to enact laws limiting guns. The Brady Act is named for him. Much more needs done here.

But, back to my changing the course of my career from law to a major in history to teaching history at some college and, finally, my third academic goal change to some form of journalism; news at first.

At OU about 1947 in the Congress Literary and Debating Society, mostly populated by prelaw students, we agonized over rumored corruption on the Oklahoma Supreme Court. Six of the nine justices were for sale. That and a growing disenchantment with law as a career led me to change my major to History.

I had fallen in love with history largely through fascination from classes taught by Dr. Bill Livezey. He told history in his lectures as if he was an eye witness to events just yesterday. Literally, he awoke the dead as he paced, or sat cross-legged on the table at the front of the class. That's what I wanted to do. Livezey was by far the very best teacher I had in attending six different universities (Okla. A&M, Texas A&M, OU, Missouri, Michigan State and Syracuse).

In three more semesters I had learned about the stifling bureaucracy in academia, the demand to do useless, meaningless "research."

I wanted to teach, not dig out history; let others do research. For a third time I examined my career preferences.

I guess I will have to settle for journalism. That's it. I will own a very good weekly in a small town and help make things happen; be a big fish in a little pond. I majored in News Journalism. I wanted nothing to do with advertising.

I was elected to the Student Senate in a hotly contested election. I printed cards and had a platform of reform. My slogan was "Kick the Jackasses OUT of the Student Senate." On the Independent ticket I edged out James G. Caster. Getting up very early, I taped my campaign cards on doors of toilet stalls, above urinals and hung fence straddlers along main campus sidewalks.

I was about to be initiated as a member of Kappa Alpha fraternity. I joined because several friends were in it. I was allowed to keep my room on Lahoma street, two blocks away. I resigned over several embarrassing episodes, which I could no longer put up with. My "brothers" behavior didn't meet my standards so we parted friends.

One episode was several "brothers" making a public spectacle by waving Confederate flags and booing then Pres. Harry Truman when his reelection campaign train made a stop in Norman. Another was a lack of discipline in the house itself, in the daily living atmosphere.

The final straw was their blackballing a couple of sharp Lebanese boys I thought highly of. They were Sidney Kraker and Gene Eddy. Sidney was from Drumright where his father Sam owned a ladies clothing store. Sid was president of the student body at DHS. Eddy was his cousin from OKC. Sharp, smart, handsome guys with lots of personality. "They are Arabs," I was told and KA is a Southern fraternity of gentlemen. I told the officers I could not change them and they sure as hell weren't going to change me. I resigned.

In the Student Senate I was leader of the minority party of fraternity and sorority members. My brother Bob was leader of the majority party of Independents. We went at each other loudly on some issues much to the glee of the 45 or so other student senators. Oddly, by the end of my term I was an Independent again and brother Bob had joined Delta Tau Delta. It was fun to join in Student Senate debates on serious and un-serious campus issues. We attacked every windmill.

I dated probably 10 or 12 girls during these exciting 4-1/2 years of 1946-51. Only five somewhat seriously. It was a busy, learning period in my life, growing up from the small town perspective; carrying 16-18 hours a semester, working 2-3 part-time jobs, being a campus "radical," a joiner and always a doer.

By the time I graduated in January 1951 I had made time to do a lot of things. The yearbook staff picked me as one of 24 BMOCs (Big Men On Campus) or BWOCs, as the case may be. A Campus Personality quarter-page states in the 1951 *Sooner Yearbook*:

BENNY L. BLACKSTOCK: Kayser Memorial Award in Journalism 1950; Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities; Career Conference chairman 1950; advertising manager of Oklahoma Daily 1950; chairman of university Social Calendar committee 1948-49; Student Senate parliamentarian 1948-49; Alpha Delta Sigma secretary; Alpha Phi Omega; History Club; Student Masonic Group; League of Young Democrats; YMCA.

When the integration of black students into the OU student body came to a head I was in the middle of it. I marched in supporting demonstrations. I pamphleteered. I wrote lots of letters to the editor long before I was a Journalism major.

In 1948 I became acquainted with OKC *Black Dispatch* editor and publisher Roscoe Dungee. I made several trips up the Interurban trolley to OKC, and took the bus to East Second where Dungee's newspaper was located. Just to visit, to talk about the injustice and wrongness of segregation. We typed long 2-3 page single spaced letters back and forth to each other. Then it was a toll call to phone from OKC to Norman.

I was invited to make the keynote address to the state convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) at the negro high school auditorium in Chickasha. Rev. John Thompson, minister of the Norman Presbyterian church, loaned me his car to take a load of students to the meeting.

On the stage was Thurgood Marshall, then chief lawyer for NAACP, later appointed to the US Supreme Court. I got an 8-column front page lead story with a 4-column picture in the OKC *Black Dispatch* quoting my lambasting of the wrongness of racial discrimination and segregation. I was a hero to many and an asshole to some.

After my speech several persons came up to commend me on my fiery, animated talk. Then one man I knew introduced me to the secretary of the CPUSA for Oklahoma and Arkansas. I asked him if "the party" was having any luck recruiting members from the black race. "Not yet," he replied. He had just asked me when I was going to join CPUSA. I was surprised when he said only two blacks

were members in Oklahoma and Arkansas and they couldn't figure out why.

I was one of many students who welcomed Ada Lois Sipuel (later Fisher) to enroll as the first test case to break segregation at OU in 1948. We held rallies, speakings and I introduced Ada Lois at several of those meetings. She was a bright, refreshing, attractive young woman from Chickasha where her father was a preacher.

I needed a job where I could get paid and study at the same time. There was such a job in the old newspaper department of the main library, presided over by Mrs. James T. "Grace" McGuire. She was an historical figure on campus; everyone who knew her loved her. Grace was 80-plus; she refused to tell her age. She came to OU about 1892 to be the first music teacher at then new OU. Later Grace King married the chairman of the OU regents who was the owner of the main Norman hardware store, Mr. James D. McGuire. He was moderately wealthy. They lived in a big house west across the street from the campus.

There was a time when the state did not have enough money to cash teacher warrants (checks). Mr. McGuire cashed many faculty pay checks and held them until the state would pay him. He became chairman of the OU Regents. Both were very popular in Norman. In the depression of 1929 carrying too much credit caused McGuire to go bankrupt, his health failed, and he died. They had two grown daughters and a son.

He was Catholic so Grace became one too and played the piano or organ for mass. Having been a Lutheran she would sometimes forget and break into powerful renditions of "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" and other Protestant hymns. Bill Knowland told me the Monsignor would simply send an acolyte to the loft in the rear with a couple of requested hymns from the priest. She'd smile and switch tunes.

I want to tell more about Mrs. McGuire because she became a strong influence on my life after 2.5 years at OU and for a couple of years before I graduated in January 1951. She wrote a short historical column printed every Sunday down in the corner of the *Norman Transcript* editorial page. It was titled "Lights & Shadows." She needed something to do and some money to live on. I was told that OU presidents (and maybe even regents) assured her she

would always have a job at OU. She was in charge of the old newspaper files, on the top floor, off in the NW corner of the huge, beautiful reading room. Her desk was there. She was given a student assistant. Many wanted that job. She picked me. I made 35 cents an hour for about 20 hours a week. We closed daily at 5 and noon Saturdays. Not much to do; it became my office with back door, up through the stacks access as an employee.

Grace McGuire changed my name. Yep, the first of many sessions of talking with Grace she exclaimed: "So your name's Benny! We'll have to do something about that. It's too diminutive! (meaning small). From now on you'll be just Ben. Okay?" Sure, said I.

Her desk and my smaller desk next to it was often a visiting place for friends. She and we had animated and sometimes noisy visits. One day a pretty co-ed walked up and said we were too loud, she could not study right outside our door. "Thank you," she politely said, and left. In a moment Grace was in one of her rare "huffs." She got up saying she'd just tell her to move. I could see her through the 14 foot doors looking around out in the study room. She returned sheepishly, her head down and said, "there is not an empty chair out there." (Out of maybe 300, a great room with large stained glass windows, carved wood; it looked like a university library.)

They needed someone to go each morning to the campus post office and get the mail for the library. There were two to four sacks of it. Pay was two hours work credit on top of regular allowed hours. I got it and found I could usually do it in 30 minutes. The sacks were heavy so I asked the Head Librarian, Mr. Rader, if he would order a mail cart and a fold-up ramp down the back steps. I had drawn a design and specifications. He agreed. I could make the mail haul in one trip in 45 minutes on most days; got two hours work credit.

OU Pres. George Cross and I had crossed paths before. When I was a sophomore I had written a particularly emotional letter to the editor about the suicide of a former student ejected from OU because of political disruption, even "Un-American" acts such as pamphleteering, so said the American Legion.

"Feldman," I wrote, "finally struck out by swallowing strychnine in the back seat of a New York

City taxi. His first strike was being Jewish; the second being too smart and the third was being from New York down here irritating us Okies." Acting Pres. Roydan Dangerfield chucked him out. Dr. Cross was away on a trip. I wrote that we were all responsible for his death; we as fellow students, faculty, and administration for being intolerant, misunderstanding, rejecting him.

I was in an 8 a.m. Spanish class when the secretary opened the door and told Prof. Gladys Barnes that Blackstock was to report to the president's office "right now!" I did. Cross was livid. I was wrong and an extremist. He demanded a retraction and apology. I told him he wasn't president that day, Dr. Dangerfield was. Even so, he replied, my "editorial" in the Daily, "had poured that boy's blood on my desk." For a normally calm guy, a pipe smoker, Dr. Cross was really lit up. I told him I was sorry for his distress but that I believed my facts were correct and I stood by my conclusion.

Pres. Cross told me to think it over, not go to class and write a retraction and apology for the editor to run tomorrow morning. I went on to the next class, worried. I called his secretary and asked her to tell him I could not do it. Next morning in a 2-col. box was a denial and "correction" by Cross.

Months later I would see Pres. Cross out smoking his pipe as I was delivering the mail. We chatted. The Feldman episode never came up. In the fall of 1950 he said to me he understood I was about to graduate in January '51 and was considering a job as assistant manager at the Oklahoma Press Assn. And, he said, he hoped I would take it because we would like to have one of our graduates there. How nice of him to say that, I thought.

A year later after I had gone to the OPA job and resigned after seven months I was director of Public Relations at Central State College in Edmond. "Ben," the genial still president said, "let me 'suggest' to you that the job of a college P.R. person is to get the president's name favorably in the papers and keep his own out." Thank you Dr. Cross. That was good advice I needed; a deft way for saying I was a publicity hound.

He was a great president of OU. At the time he was selected he was a mild, some said even meek, professor of biology. Some of us derided him for

awhile but it became clear he was almost unflappable and that he never ran from controversy. He often relit his pipe but that's what pipes are for.

About 1948 the great author and poet Carl Sandburg came to read and sing at Holmberg Hall. Dr. Cross introduced him as an important American writer and philosopher. The audience was less than 50 and I was there and met him. So was Cleo Fitzgerald. Dr. Cross noted that two blocks away on Campus Corner the "World Premier" of "Mother was a Freshman" had a huge crowd at the Sooner Theater. Cross remarked he insisted they had to be represented at the film event so he insisted his wife Cleo go because he had to go to see and hear truly great Carl Sandburg.

There's a funny story I heard Dr. Cross tell years later. It's about his throwing an empty whiskey bottle out the front of the President's mansion on the front lawn one night. It doesn't belong here. His wife Cleo was a sweet person and a real asset to George and OU. He must have served for 30 years before retiring

in glory, living the good life for many more years. I'm lucky to have known him and to have him temporarily kick me out of OU.

Oh, the story? Pres. and Mrs. Cross were driving to a banquet. He said he had a speech to write when they got home. They could sit at a table near the back and excuse themselves early. As luck would have it, they were seated at the head table.

Arriving home late George said to Cleo, "I sure could use a drink before I write out my notes for tomorrow. Do we have any bourbon?" She said yes, it was under the sink but there is only enough for one drink. It was prohibition days.

When he came upstairs she asked if surely he didn't put the empty bottle in the trash because the garbage men will talk. "No," he said. "I started to but then thought of that so I just opened the front door and tossed it out on the lawn."

He told a group of us that. Nearly every night students would toss empty beer and whiskey bottles on the president's front lawn.

PART 4

It's Time To Go To Work

As January 1951 and degree time came I had a few feelings of fear about the outside world. OU was a nice place, I mused. I was making nearly \$400 a month, driving a yellow 2-year old Studebaker convertible and life was pretty good. How much do I have left on the GI Bill? Maybe enough for another semester. But by January 1951 I had about 145 credit hours and you only needed 124. I had, loosely, two majors and 2-3 minors. I would take the BA in Journalism as an Advertising/News graduate.

I had accepted a job in October 1950 on Long Island, N.Y., from Capt. John T. Tuthill who owned three very large weeklies that were national prize winners. He hired me after a speech I made to OPA. It was on a bundle of great ideas I picked up while visiting eight excellent weeklies in six mid-western states.

I had returned from an all-summer course in printing and Linotype operating at the University of Missouri. It was key to my now desired career as a newspaper publisher; to know something about the back shop.

While at MU Dean Mott let me be absent some Fridays and Mondays to travel on the scholarship I had been awarded at OU. It was the J.W. Kayser Memorial Scholarship for Weekly Newspaper Studies, \$250. (The family owned the weekly Chickasha *Star*. Mr. Kayser was president of OPA in 1919.)

Prof. John Casey got it for me and advised me how best to use it. Casey issued a list each year of the best weeklies in America. It was called "Casey's All-American Eleven Weekly Newspapers." He was nationally known for that. I would visit a half-dozen of the best weekly newspapers in America.

They were in Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota. I would get ideas to pass

on and use in my career as a community weekly publisher. I would make a speech or two.

I would let the Kayser family know I had used their money well. Four previous recipients barely said thanks and showed nothing in the way of extra learning. Even though I was different, the family had soured on giving to journalism students and switched it to the Boy Scouts.

It was at one of my presentations that Capt. John Tuthill heard me. He was traveling across the nation looking for a special assistant to help him in his publishing duties. I took his job offer with glee. Then it began to get to me that maybe I didn't want to live in New York. Here was another fork in the road of my life. I asked and he graciously released me from my obligation. Then, of all things, he offered the job to me again. Had I done the right thing to stay here and take the OPA assistant manager job?

There I was in January 1951 in room 800 of the Biltmore Hotel in downtown OKC. I was assistant manager at \$240 per month, living in a rented room with Marion Tomlin (son of my OU landlady) west of Classen on NW 19th. Tom Rucker was the Secretary-Manager and boss. The staff was Rucker, a \$200 secretary, a \$220 bookkeeper and me. OPA was made up of all 52 dailies and close to 225 weeklies. About 10 eligible papers were not members. It ran on dues, convention income and what advertising walked in the door; and then only want ads.

I was an all-purpose flunky. Tommy, as Rucker was mostly known, was gone nearly all the time. He had been a reporter for the *Daily Oklahoman* then a P.R. guy for WKY in OKC and later KCMO in Kansas City. He was jovial, a pretty good writer but no businessman. Tommy was a large man, he told funny and fascinating stories and played Sen. Bob

Kerr in the OKC annual Gridiron Club funny political show.

I replaced Frank Heaston who had replaced Charley Ward (later Carl Albert's chief of staff). Frank had brought in the flamboyant Louisiana State Senator Dudley J. LeBlanc, who owned a patent medicine remedy, a cure for everything, called Hadacol. It was a bottled syrup with 12 percent alcohol that oldsters got a kick from.

It was at that OPA Ad Clinic I had made my speech. Frank got a Dixieland band to meet Sen. LeBlanc at the curb in front of the Biltmore. It marched into the ballroom with him at his prancing best leading the way. What a speech he made on how to make and sell patent medicine. Hadacol: "In the beginning we made it in a barrel, stirred it with a canoe paddle and used little funnels to bottle it," he gleefully regaled the audience, pulling up his coat sleeves to show his huge diamond cuff links.

Frank Heaston became his advertising and public relations manager two months later. So, I followed Heaston.

I wrote the twice-monthly bulletin for members, the girls cut the stencils, I ran the mimeograph, we three assembled it and I carried the bags to the post office.

I also wrote the monthly magazine, well most of it. I helped put meetings together and see that they went off well. It was a variety of jobs but not much money, less than my part time OU jobs and \$65/month GI Bill. I was broke.

After six months I asked Rucker for a \$10 raise; it galled me to have to ask for a raise. I decided then when I was boss that would not be the way employee relations went. I had job offers from WKY-TV, Tom Gordon Advertising Agency and Central State College. Tom "had to ask the Board" for my \$10/mo. raise. That irked me. Waiting around one Saturday afternoon for the Board to adjourn, he finally came to the office and I had to ask.

"The best I could do Ben was get you \$5 more a month." I was floored. He gave me his notes of the board meeting to type. The bastard had asked and gotten a \$50/month raise for himself! I phoned Central State Pres. Max Chambers and told him I would take their \$300/month job: Teach all journalism courses (I was the only journalism professor), be

Director of Public Relations for the college, be responsible for the print shop and yearbook sponsor. I stoked up my enthusiasm for my new job.

I was one of five on a committee to advise President Dr. Max Chambers on anything of concern. I soon found they did not like my ideas on "be kind to the students because that's what we're here for and our income is mostly because of them." The committee began hiding from me when they met. I became secretary of the CSC Alumni Assn. and got \$40 more monthly for it. But, I went there just for a year in order to make up my mind about my future. I had an important choice to make.

Would I get a job on a weekly so I could own one some day?

Would I switch my career to an advertising agency? Or, to television?

What about running the Oklahoma Press Assn.? It was only a matter of time until they fired Rucker. That's what I decided to do. Then about March 1952 Tommy phoned me to meet him at the Royce Cafe for breakfast one Sunday. He had an offer from Sen. Bob Kerr to be his campaign manager in Kerr's race for the Democratic nomination for President of the US. But, he had to have an acceptable part-time replacement. That was me.

Pres. Chambers would let me off afternoons if I met my classes in the mornings and did my other duties as best I could. I don't remember the 2-months pay arrangements. Tom went to Nebraska to run Kerr's first presidential primary. It was the spring of 1952. Sen. Kerr lost badly. I scouted for an advertising job on a newspaper with a smart, lotsa new ideas ad manager.

I picked out five and wrote each the same letter: "I have come to the conclusion you are one of the five best advertising idea men in Oklahoma. I want to work for you."

Such a job would be a building block to my qualifying as Rucker's successor. I got three offers from the five. I took the one from J. Leland Gourley, publisher of the Henryetta (OK) *Free-Lance*. He was cooky to some, cocky to most. He was brash, but he was a great idea man and there are not many of those. I was his new advertising manager at \$100/week; a welcome raise. Francis Langdon had already left to buy the *Tonkawa News* (with Nance and McBride)

when I showed up in Henryetta at the end of the spring semester, June 1952.

I learned a lot from Gourley. He was a quick and imaginative writer. He promoted his paper and community many crazy ways. As a boss he was swell. He would help me any way I asked. I could sell ad layouts faster than I could make them even after staying at the office until 11 p.m. to get ahead.

Leland would write some wild editorial and part of the town would come unhinged. He purported to be a Democrat but he banged away at the party and its heroes. It was not easy selling ads to some merchants with the publisher sometimes jumping on the unions who were strong there. Still, he was a good boss and I liked him even with his excesses, showboating and his incessant brown nosing the right wing Republicans. It's mostly showmanship. Still is.

I had told him I would stay his ad manager for two years without taking another job UNLESS they fired Rucker. Okay. I liked selling ads, parting people with their money to try an idea I had down on paper to attract new customers. I was glad I had changed my major from just news to Advertising/News Journalism.

I dated a couple of girls there, much to the ribbing by Gourley and some of the staff. I traded in my yellow Studebaker convertible for my first new car; a blue Studebaker snazzy coupe with wrap around glass in the back designed by Raymond Lowey, bought from Jimmy Ruth "Tells the Truth" Motors in Henryetta.

Then the OPA board fired Rucker the first of November.

I was one of 15 to apply. I was one of three the full board interviewed. Some wanted to put the decision off a month. Leland showed up, learned that and demanded the board hear him. "If you're going to hire my ad manager I demand a month's notice," he told them. They went back into session and voted 9-1 to hire me; all but the President, Gerald T. "Cowboy" Curtin.

The OPA Board wanted me to start in two weeks. I said it was now November, it was almost Christmas, the most important ad selling month of the year; I wouldn't do that to Gourley and they shouldn't either. So, they agreed I was to report 1 January 1953 at \$5,200 a year — the same as I was making at Henryetta. Age 27 and 4 months!

PART 5

I Begin My 44 Years at OPA

I didn't know it and the board didn't mention it but OPA was nearly broke. When I got there I found they had enough money to meet a month and half payroll. Herb Johnson, Rucker's assistant, then would continue as acting manager but not getting the top job he left in two months to become a Republican party staff member.

The one vote against hiring me (9-1) had been cast by the President Gerald T. "Cowboy" Curtin, who wanted Chan Guffey. Cowboy would later nearly fire me.

Back when I was Tom's assistant manager he started a newspaper clipping bureau. The OPA and OPS desperately needed income. Good ole Tom set out to sell firms on taking our clipping service instead of the long time one owned by Pruyn Sarber and his wife. Rucker just quoted complete coverage of anything and everything in the papers for a flat rate.

He tied us up to a year or so at flat monthly rates. The top was \$25/month for all the clips each account wanted. A newsman, Tom had no idea of costs. The labor and time pressure is intensive in a clipping bureau. It soon began to sink us even further financially. What's more, Tom located it two blocks down the street in the dilapidated old Herskowitz building. Getting the vaunted clipping operation in the black became my first priority as the new Secretary-Manager.

But I was single, lived in a cheap hotel and had all the time in the day and night to figure how to make things work.

Joe McBride Sr. became my first mentor. We had gotten well acquainted when I was acting manager and he was OPA President while Tom ran Kerr's run for US President. Joe had me report to him in his apartment on Culbertson Drive on my way to the OPA office at noon most days of the week.

Cowboy Curtin had succeeded him but Joe was still on the OPA board. He looked after me in many ways.

He insisted I join the Downtown Rotary club, that I enroll in the Dale Carnegie course taught by C.I. Blackwood, that I take dance lessons, which I did from Kotche. Still later he and Clella got Bonnie and me into the Joie de Vie Dance Club. Joe often came around to see how I was doing and to give me needed advice.

After signing up for the Dale Carnegie Course I asked Joe if the company was going to pay the \$300 cost. "No Ben, that's for your own personal development, not a company expense," he said. Same for the dance club.

Once he came to the Capitol where I was lobbying some of the 14 new bills our Legislative committee hurriedly belched out shortly after I came. Until then I had never ever been in Oklahoma's state capitol building. All of a sudden, I was a lobbyist with 14 bills to get introduced, passed by both bodies and signed by the governor.

Anyway, Joe Sr. finds me. He was a real slow talker. He was the main brains behind the Nance-McBride newspaper chain (they insisted they were not a chain).

"Ben, Cowboy's trying to round up enough votes on the board to fire you," Joe quietly tells me next to a window on one of the stair landings (where we can't be heard). Why Joe? "He says he tries to talk to you about what he wants OPA to do. But, it ends up with you telling him."

Well, Joe, you know how slow Cowboy talks. *Imagine me saying that to Joe, one of the champion slow talkers of all time!!*

What should I do?

“My advice is to get right out to Watonga and talk it out with him,” my friend Joe said. Right then I went.

[Like the old Vince Lombardi story: “How was discipline on the Packers? Well, when Coach said sit down — I never looked for a chair.”]

This was another learning thing: When faced with disagreeable news, move immediately to do something about it. In ad sales at Henryetta I called first on merchants whose ad had been screwed up in the afternoon before’s edition. Doing the most disagreeable first works far better than waiting and stewing about it.

Gerald Timothy “Cowboy” Curtin came from Wyoming to play football at Oklahoma A&M. He was an All-American tackle under then Coach Lynn Waldorff. Cowboy majored in Geology. When he graduated in the early ’30s he couldn’t find a job. Raymond Fields hired him as a reporter on the Guthrie *Daily Leader*. There he learned the newspaper business and married Virginia, an MD. He bought the *Watonga Republican*, and made it a first-class community weekly.

“And Ben,” Joe McBride emphatically said, “LISTEN, no matter how long it takes.”

Cowboy was waiting for me when I got to his newspaper office. We went out to his house. I said I understood he wanted to fire me, that I apologized for not listening to him. I told him I was new at managing a newspaper association; that I had much to learn. We drank nearly a fifth of bourbon, ate, he talked and I really listened, taking notes. About midnight Cowboy said we’d give it another try and I went home.

It wasn’t the last conflict I would have but I learned from it. Another memorable one was when US Sen. Bob Kerr phoned to chew my ass for a Bulletin item about him. I wrote it. It was an animated castigation for my printing that he (Kerr) was blocking passage in the US Senate of what became the federal Freedom of Information Act. I had quoted a column by Drew Pearson, an often reckless nationally syndicated political columnist. I told Kerr, when I could manage to get in a word edgewise, that I got it out of the Chickasha *Daily Express*, published by Dave Vandiver.

It said that in a closed caucus of Senate Democrats the subject was how much the newspapers wanted FOI passed. Kerr had said, according to Pearson, “I don’t give a damn how much the newspapers want it they’re not going to get it; I can get along without the damn newspapers.”

Kerr said he didn’t say it. He was so steamed he told me he would get me fired. Finally, realizing I was in hot water, I said, “Okay Senator, you can do it your way or you can try my way.” “What is your way?” he challenged.

“I will send out an apology, saying that you deny it, that it’s just another Drew Pearson lie.” Long pause. “Okay, I’ll try it your way, first,” said the powerful senior senator. Well, I wrote it and I laid it on. I was careful to not appear cute, but contrite. I sent him a copy. Later I was told that Dee Little, publisher of the *Ada Evening News*, and a big Kerr booster, had sent him a copy of my offensive Bulletin.

Not long after that the FOI Act passed with Kerr’s vote. We became somewhat closer friends. He brought Lyndon Johnston to speak at an OPA meeting in the Biltmore. I got some heat over not inviting Gov. J. Howard Edmondson when the President of the US Senate was in town. Kerr told me to take the heat; say that it was my idea, that we didn’t have time to give the governor a proper courtesy response. Fact is Edmondson was strong for Jack Kennedy for President of the US and Johnson was here to get some publicity for his own race and to sew up the Oklahoma delegation to the Demo convention that summer in Los Angeles.

I told AP writer Dayton Blair “it was protocol not to be rude to Gov. Edmondson by not inviting him. There wasn’t time on our program for the governor to make a speech so we omitted him rather than be rude and not let him respond to LBJ.” Kerr had Johnson send me a certificate naming me his “chief of protocol” in Oklahoma.

I was learning. I was also learning how to be a lobbyist for the newspapers. That is not a bed of roses without thorns. Some legislators hated one or more or even all of their district editors. Even getting some of my members to talk with their legislators was hard. It is an instinct with the craft (as Jim Nance called it) to believe elected officials should humbly

come to their desk, call them and ask what they could do for them.

I found that I won some friends by honestly agreeing that their editor was an asshole at times. But I also had some success at getting my princes to speak to and even write a kind word for their legislator.

I myself alone wrote the Bulletin cover letter. Also, I myself wrote every special LegisGram Bulletin. I developed a direct, even humorous style. I complimented, I raised hell; it was colorful and provocative to action. I made members want to read it.

These communications was where I got to talk to ALL my members; I had their eyes and minds, if they read it at all, and nearly all did. It always took two rewrites to tune it. And that was back in the old days with a manual typewriter, before rewrites became so easy with computers. I always used my byline or initials on *Publisher* editorials. I was told by many that I didn't need to since what I wrote had my style, my fingerprints all over everything I write. It was fun and challenging.

I moved the Clipping Bureau and all OPA/OPS offices to the 23rd floor of the Biltmore where I could keep an eye on everything, walk through and tell the ladies what an important job they did, how important its income was to our overall mission. We grew to 12 in number of staff. We occupied nearly all of the 23rd floor, shared with the Variety Club (a drinking, gambling place for mostly movie theater managers).

We were humming right along. I made it thru Cowboy's year and next got Milt Phillips as president. He owned the *Seminole Producer* with his brother Tom of the Holdenville *Daily News*. I needed Milt because he was one tough hombre. He was widely known for his pungent editorials and his extensive involvement in state and Seminole politics. He had been a Chief Electrician in the Navy in WW2, state executive director of veterans employment after the war, then Adjutant (chief administrator) for the state American Legion.

It was a hard year for me. Phillips insisted I talk to him face to face every day or, rarely, by phone. He would chew my ass out in front of members until Clancy Frost stood in a district meeting at Hobart and told him to stop it.

Milt Phillips became my second mentor and a tough one. Several times I considered resigning but I decided I could tough it out. After his term as president, he stayed on the board as treasurer. He became one of my dependable defenders. I just knew that after passing the tests of Joe McBride Sr. and Milt Phillips and later Ed Livermore Sr. that I had three strong friends. They still took time to often drop by, call and write "friendly advice." I learned I could differ with them and remain friends.

I heard about Newspaper Association Managers. It met each August someplace in the US. It had a monthly Roundtable (newsletter) for the exchange of ideas. I went to my first summer NAM meeting in 1953 at the State Game Lodge way out in northwest South Dakota.

There were about 40 of the the most outgoing, aggressive, opinionated, cantankerous, sometimes vulgar, whiskey drinking and poker-playing men in their 50s and 60s. I was fascinated. One could learn a lot from them. I took lots of notes. I stole their good ideas and went back home charged up. I have been attracted to flamboyant leaders, those who weren't fake.

The playwright Oscar Wilde in perhaps a confession wrote: "Talents imitate; geniuses steal." Do both.

Those old boys were colorful idealists. I sat fascinated at their acid remarks and unbridled attacks on one another. The best in many ways was Vernon T. Sanford of Texas. He is the only one who got a BA from OU and then an MA from Missouri with the specific purpose of becoming a newspaper association manager. After MU he was hired by Nebraska but he was brought back home to Oklahoma in two years. Tommy Rucker referred to Vern as "a one-man band." He was that and more. After about 14 years as Oklahoma manager the Texas Press Association hired Vern as their first paid manager.

Back in the 1953 there was John B. Long of California, Larry Miller of Kansas, Bruce McCoy of Louisiana, Cub Zielkie of Wisconsin weeklies ("daily newspapers are only a fad"), Ted Serrill of Pennsylvania and later the National Editorial Assn. (weeklies), Don Eck of NEA whom most of these guys picked on, Ed Meyer of Virginia, Don McNeil

of Tennessee, Vick Portman of Kentucky and later Vern Scofield of Nebraska, a real pain in the ass.

Bill Bray of Missouri became my longtime friend. We both started as newspaper association managers in January 1953. Bill and I made a formidable team when we agreed, which was most of the time. We were selected to do a management efficiency study of American Newspapers Representatives (ANR) offices from New York to San Francisco. Bonnie and I, Bill and Joann Bray, Bill and Gwen Lindsey and Ben and Carmela Martin have vacationed in one another's home every year since we retired.

There were other excellent state press association managers but one I learned a lot from was Don Reid of Iowa.

We were discussing how to get good members on our boards. I opined piously that I did not tinker with the selection of who was elected to my board.

Reid, in a low voice getting louder as he walked around the big "O" shaped table, stopped at me and shouted, "IF YOU AS MANAGER DON'T CARE MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE IN THE WHOLE WORLD WHO'S ON YOUR BOARD — then who does?" I realized he was right.

I began to very carefully try to influence the choices to those who had earned the right to elevation to the board, by serving on committees, being chairman, and not put on the board just because they were somebody's friend. Or, worse, somebody the nominator wanted to brown nose. Believe me, that happens if board selections are left to some willy-nilly committee of "good ole boys." More later dealing with an association's board of directors — and past presidents.

It was 8 August 1954 that I married Bonnie Lou Michael Rookstool. She was a widow with a five-year-old son, Mike. The same Bonnie I had played opposite of in the Drumright High School senior play in 1943. We were married during the NAM convention at the del Coronado Hotel across the bay from San Diego. My brother Loy and his wife Millie lived nearby in San Ysidro. He was back in the US Border Patrol.

Bonnie and I rented a house in SW OKC then in the fall of 1954 bought a bungalow with a full basement in Crown Heights at 524 NW 39th.

It was a wonderful neighborhood with many our age (29) buying these 20-year old houses. 39th was 3-blocks long, no cross streets, between Walker and Shartel.

We set out to have kids. In moments of insanity I said I wanted five. We quit at three: Dan in 1955, Sam in 1956 and Melissa in 1960. And Mike, a tall, handsome, friendly, good student who was a credit to his father. Bob Rookstool was killed by a carelessly tossed piece of angle iron through his aluminum hat at the Tidal refinery (where I had worked the summer of '43).

At times we talked about Mike changing his name to Blackstock. I told him it was fine with me but he was the last male Rookstool. At times he felt different in a family of five Blackstocks. Names don't determine who you are anyway. It was a very odd feeling for me; Mike was an equal member of the family. I was complimented he at times wanted to change his last name. Yet, I didn't think he should, out of respect for and in memory of his father. My half-brother Loy Fowler did it that way.

PART 6

Living with Family Tragedy *Heartbreak, Anger, Mystery of Suicide* *We Move to Edmond for a New Life*

We lived at 524 N.W. 39th in Crown Heights 10 years, until Mike killed himself. It was August 1965. Dan, Sam and Melissa were in Cushing with Bonnie's parents while we went to Las Vegas to the annual NAM meeting. Mike did not want to go that year. He wanted to try to make the football team at Harding High School. He was staying with a friend, Don Wynn. We had gone on to Salt Lake City with Gordon and Carol Owens. Since their house was full of family we stayed at a motel. About 2:00 a.m. Gordon woke us to call my brother Bob. Bob said that evening Mike had come home and shot himself.

Suicide is never understood by survivors, family, friends and not even by the one who takes their own life. It is justified only — in my long and painful thinking — only because of the pain of a terminal disease. I believe that no matter how horrid an embarrassment, death is forever; you don't get to play the game of life anymore.

I pass no judgment on those who kill themselves; let God do that if, indeed, God does pass judgment. Mike's death almost drove Bonnie and me crazy. We sought help from preachers and psychiatrists. Almost none was forthcoming. Faced with suicide for the first time, one is forced to form some kind of answer as to "why."

I believe Mike had an emotional pit within him that no one knew about but him. I believe he was so disappointed at failing to make the football team that in a depressed state he decided to end it all. We never know, especially when there is no note left. There was none; nor were there any messages he gave to friends.

Twenty years later my brother Bob would likewise put a gun in his mouth. None of us, his family nor friends saw that coming. Bob's law practice had suffered, so had his income. Absences from his prac-

tice because of two runs for congress had shrunk his clients. He and I talked about these things. I urged that he write everyone he had ever represented and ask for their law business. He refused, saying it offended him. Likewise, he would not advertise when most lawyers do.

He had big payments to make on too much land he had bought with our cousin, Lawrence Deal. A partnership without a signed contract is trouble waiting to happen, or by heirs. Without going into it further, I have concluded that Bob got on amitriptyline (Elavil, an antidepressant) excessively, quietly suffered the several side effects, denied he had any problem and blew himself away in the middle of breakfast one morning. Very sad. I loved him, his bright mind, vibrant outgoing personality, his many achievements and his great humor. Bob was a past president of the Oklahoma Bar Association, Creek County Bar, OU Alumni Association and an all around outstanding citizen. It was a huge heartbreak for his family and his many friends.

Both Mike and Bob were fun to be with. We miss them.

After Mike's death we sold the home on NW 39th Street, bought 20 acres on a hillside in southeast Edmond. Bonnie sketched out house plans and had a plan maker put them together with specifications. We chose Neil McCaleb to build it on the top of the hill next to a nearly one acre pond. It was a beautiful location overlooking Edmond to the northwest.

The first thing when we moved in was to buy a horse, then two more. Bonnie's father, Bill Michael, was retired and offered to help me build a barn. I got plans from Sutherland Lumber Co. and all the lumber, creosote poles and corrugated galvanized sheet metal. It was an experience, a one of happy accom-

plishment and sore fingers when I missed the nail with my big hammer.

Bill Michael and I staked out where each upright pole was to go and a hole to be dug, each pole plumbed and concrete poured. It was a daunting task. Then, surprise: A neighbor phoned that he heard it was my 41st birthday and he was going to give me 41 holes for our barn and corral. We were elated.

The barn had four covered mangers for horses, a concrete pad on which to stack hay, a tack and feed room, two sliding door garage for my pickup and old Ferguson-Ford 9D tractor.

The first horse we bought was a Welsh pony whom the kids named "Buddy" when we found him one Sunday afternoon off a want ad. Gentle, the three crawled all over and under "Buddy." We had to buy him now. The horse trader said if we did he would take him out to our house right then. He did. It was ecstasy until dark. They fed and watered their new pony and went to bed. Up at dawn before school they went down to feed their new horse. Then to school on the bus.

About four o'clock that afternoon I got a call at work. "'Buddy' won't let us catch him." I came home. We extended a bucket of oats, we cornered, he jumped and ran. Our neighbor who knew horses came over with his three sons. The chase was on. They were sure this horse "had been needled," in other words was wild and had been doped by the slick horse trader who had disappeared.

We bought two gentle quarter horses and gave "Buddy" to the Baptist orphans ranch. It took all of a dozen Ranch Town boys and men to get a rope on him.

Next, the kids and Bonnie saw a huge camper and truck in a used car lot and convinced me to buy it. That began our weekend trips to every state park in Oklahoma. We piled into the 2-seat, 4-door Dodge truck, a Honda Mini-Trail cycle in the back seat, three kids and our dog "Snoopy" back in the camper and off we'd go. We camped in every state and national park in Oklahoma.

One summer we camped at parks across Arkansas, Tennessee, Virginia and into Washington, D.C. This was beginning to be enough. The kids groaned when I'd announce another trip; the last one to the Rio Grande National Park, west to Ft. Sumner,

N.M., then to the University of Texas, two huge telescopes at Davis and finally down into Carlsbad Caverns.

All three kids cheered and Snoopy barked that, at last, we were going to sell the camper and they would be left to happily ride their horses and their Honda motor bikes. Life was great in the country; well, in the southeast edge of Edmond. Yes, there was a lot to do feeding horses, dogs and cats. Practicing the piano every morning as taught by Prof. Harold Fletcher. He came out from Oklahoma Christian College to the house to give lessons to all three. My mother had given a new piano to them as a birthday present. I tried to learn to play when I was in grade school but I soon gave up.

I mowed the yard grass, brush-hogged several trails through the woods for the bikes and horses and kept the house in repair.

We didn't push our kids into sports. I wasn't any good at ball handling. They went out when they wanted to. Bonnie usually took them or they stayed after school. She saw the boys through Cub Scouts. I became an assistant scout master in Troop 1 at the Mennonite Church assisting Quimby Enterline and slept out for a week at Camp Sasakwa down near Seminole three times.

Dan, Sam and Melissa walked down the hill to catch the school bus. Rarely did we take them. Is that a normal life or what?

In May 1983 we had a house fire. A pan of dog scraps warming on the range wasn't turned off. It caught on fire. All kids were gone; we were at Randy and Jimmy Fellers for dinner. Lyn Barton, our alert college kid renter, heard our alarm, went to investigate and saved the house. All windows were closed. The cleanup took six months while we lived in an apartment with our dog Rueben. It cost State Farm insurance company \$164,000 and us and our friends lots of work.

About 1970 I was asked by Edmond Mayor-elect Jim Harrod to accept appointment to the Edmond Municipal Hospital board. I decided civic clubs were a waste of time and quickly became boring. How could I better invest my public service time?

Become a lay medical volunteer, that's how. The medical delivery system interested me. What I

learned resonated with many of my publisher members who often had concerns about the medical delivery system in their town.

I accepted Mayor Harrod's appointment. In Oklahoma City there was growing concern over how emergency ambulance service was being handled. Funeral homes had quit picking up accident victims because of law suits and a growing public outcry that they did not aid the injured. Dr. Jon Blaschke of McBride Bone & Joint Hospital formed a group of citizens to set up an all new ambulance service with competent emergency medical technicians (EMT) on each ambulance. I met with them.

The Oklahoma City Council formed a Trust Authority to get it going. I asked OKC Mayor Patience Latting to appoint me to the new AMCARE board. The Edmond City Council supported my offer. Edmond was having ambulance problems too. I was then on the Edmond Hospital board.

While AMCARE was forming OPA gave them free use of our conference room and office space.

The OPA building was their headquarters for several months.

I was named to other medical related studies such as a joint legislative study of emergency room use of OKC hospitals, and setting up of a protocol (ethical procedures) for organ transplantation. I served seven years on the AMCARE board and 10 years on the Edmond Hospital board. I was chairman when the board recommended to the city council they sell the hospital to a private management company. They did, to the Hospital Corporation of America.

I got a good feeling out of helping in those important areas rather than rushing every Tuesday to either the Rotary, Lions or Kiwanis. That's not to criticize those who do. I just itch in a different place. I was a Rotarian in Edmond in 1951, Henryetta in 1952 and 10 years in the Downtown Club in OKC. Then Lions and Kiwanis when OPA first moved to North Lincoln. It got old so I became a medical volunteer.

PART 7

Learning to Run an Association

Back at work the challenge of managing OPA and its related activities was all I wanted to make of it. Lobbying was mostly a joy. I soon gained a reputation among OPA members for tenacity, and a willingness to cross the room and start a friendly conversation with opponents. And, we picked up some friends by this gregariousness or rather smoked them out from hidden sniping.

We had passed 8 of the 14 bills we sought during the session of 1953. In those years the legislature met on odd numbered years, ran for re-election in even years. Later the legislature sought and got a successful vote to hold sessions every year plus an occasional special session.

Lou Allard was very helpful to me. He owned my hometown weekly *The Derrick*. He was a state representative, one of three from Creek county. Lou introduced me around and invited me to their evening drinks and dinner sessions at the Wells Roberts Hotel.

When I showed up at the capitol in January of 1953 as new OPA manager and green lobbyist I had 14 bills or legislative measures. I went to Reps. Lou Allard and Jim Nance, both publishers and savvy in the ways of legislating. Both let me know they did not appreciate the OPA board and OPA Legislative committee just meeting and dishing up a raft of 14 new bills and telling me to find authors for each. They made it plain that they thought they had veto power over any such ambitions.

Gosh! This was something to work out and we did. I decided it wasn't a good idea to have one of our own members "carry" or sponsor our legislation. Simply, it's an outright conflict of interest and it is unlawful for them to even vote on such measures. They are supposed to stand and announce for the

record they wish to be excused by the chair. We so said, and they did.

I kept wanting to bring up changing the definition of a legal newspaper so that it did not have to be printed in the county where it claimed status or had its main office. I set up discussions, well, real hot debates, between OPA members on whether to ease off on the must be printed in the county requirement. They were hot, sometimes angry debates. After one Jim Nance came up to me, shook his finger close in my face and said, "I'll get your job if you let this issue come up again."

James C. Nance was a real powerhouse. He had long lived at Purcell, owned the Purcell *Register* and with Joe McBride Sr. controlling interest in 8-10 other dailies and weeklies; he wrote lengthy and widely quoted editorials. He owned 40 or so rent houses in Purcell. So many that he had a full time crew of repair guys and his own used furniture store from which you could pick to make the house you rented "furnished." A small empire on the day I went down to make peace with Jim and he showed me around.

In addition to being an OPA past president, Jim Nance is the only person who has served both as President of the State Senate and Speaker of the state House of Representatives.

So when Jim shook his finger under my nose and growled, "I will get your job," I just knew I was in for a tough time.

A few members — past presidents and even board members — began to complain about all the airing of disagreement. I began using the term "therapy of controversy" meaning it is good for an organization to have open discussion of ideas they disagree on. After an executive session once I was told to stop using that phrase.

Nevertheless, I still wanted to free small papers from being enslaved to their back shop, shackled to cranky printers and creaky machines. The controversy raged on until opponents of change became the minority, we had a court test that threatened to throw out the entire law which so narrowly defined several requirements to qualify as a “legal newspaper.”

On more than one occasion I was sent out at night to spy on whether a newspaper in one county was printing papers in another county. I could have been killed there at Cheyenne and another time at Purcell all alone at night.

But Jim liked a hard nosed player and I guess I was one. He grew to like me and me him. So much so that a year or so after that several members and me were locked into an animated discussion of some issue. An agreement was reached. Nance said, loudly, “Well, we agree. Ben can fix it up. He will do a good job and do the right thing.” Finally being accepted by Jim is what Joe McBride Sr. told me several times he was working on. “His bark is worse than his bite, Ben,” Joe said. What an unusual pair those two were.

“Give it to me in the ear, Ben,” Rep. Nance said once as our group waited to testify before a House committee. I had sent everyone briefing papers of points to raise if they spoke. Jim wouldn’t read such background material. I whispered to him I didn’t have time, I had to line up our witnesses. Joe McBride read it to him. Gave it to him “in the ear.”

A major purpose for existence of a trade association or professional society is to protect and advance the interests of its trade or craft. One has to watch it so not to be at risk legally for restraint of trade. In other words make it as easy as possible for your members yet qualifying hard as hell for newcomers. I made great effort to learn the law and court decisions in this area. It is the job of the association manager to keep his board, organization and members out of the land mines. The several requirements to qualify to print legal notices were put into state law by early day legislators who were publishers helping to erect a wall.

Ponder the above as you think about every kind of such business leagues. They never taught that to me at OU. It was gingerly touched upon in the sum-

mer courses I took at Michigan State and Syracuse Universities.

A real bruising experience came in 1961 with Gov. J. Howard Edmondson deciding to force the legislature to submit to the people a vote on repeal of prohibition. Repeal of prohibition had always been by initiative petition, never submitted by the legislature. Howard held their feet to the fire: Vote to submit or be tagged as defender of bootleggers and corrupt.

Bootlegging and bribes had corrupted every sheriff in all the 77 Oklahoma counties, most local police departments and the then county attorneys. Payoffs were rife. Murder was the ultimate price of crossing the bootlegger bosses. Edmondson’s campaign theme was “Stop Bootleg Control.”

As the legislative referendum was going through the state Senate, where J. Howard had started it, it was amended in every way possible. The trick was to put enough “junk” into the measure so that the House would amend it, forcing it back to the Senate for further consideration. It would die there. Some artful amendments were put forth including no brand franchising of wholesalers but with every liquor wholesaler carrying whatever brands he wanted. The big one was a surprise to us. Forbid all liquor advertising! The state senate inserted:

“There shall be no advertising of alcoholic liquor in the state of Oklahoma except one sign at the retail alcoholic (sic) liquor store bearing only the words ‘Retail Alcoholic Liquor Store’ in letters not to exceed four inches in height.”

Quietly newspapers and billboard companies had salivated over the coming bonanza of booze advertising. Now there would be none. Could we amend the bill in the House? Broadcasters didn’t care as their “code” would let radio and TV only carry beer advertising.

We mounted an all-out lobby on House members. We wrote an amendment. The bill bounced in and out of a House committee in one day without a single amendment. Gov. Edmondson sat in the Speaker’s office making deals with House members. The word was NO AMENDMENTS. It was not going back to death in the Senate. An outrageous number of amendments, 88, were on the clerk’s desk

as the full house began going through the bill. One after the other they failed.

The Governor sent word he was mad as hell at OPA over our efforts to get our liquor advertising amendment. He sent Leland Gourley, then his chief of staff, and others to talk to members and the OPA board. He got some publishers to heat us up.

Rep. Jim Nance (publisher of the *Purcell Register*) is a former Speaker and former Senate President Pro-tem. Nance was trying to win Edmondson's favor so he tried to win the governor's friendship by opposing us on the House liquor ad vote. Nance was the vote that beat us but he was never welcome into the Edmondson "Crew Cuts" inner-circle.

I got Rep. J.D. McCarty of OKC, who was the strong leader of a sizable faction of Democrats, to help. He was to attack Nance for "betraying your profession, your craft to win favor with the governor." J.D. was a powerful, articulate and loud debater. He flailed his arms and pounded the podium. Nance hung his head. This was the strongest effort to amend the bill. We lost it by two votes. Amazingly, all 88 amendments had been beaten back.

Voters repealed prohibition for the sale of package store whisky. Amazingly, at the same special election, they turned down county option which kept the state from having little pools of bootleg corruption in "dry" counties. It took another 10 years before bars could legally sell liquor by the drink. So, we preserved some hypocrisy and continued to corrupt Oklahoma law enforcement for another decade. Old ways die hard.

I had pissed off Gov. Edmondson for good. It wasn't the last time. We differed later on another matter involving county commissioners. Somehow I ended up on the side of the damn county commissioners on some issue and they won. During the media exchanges in his press conference, Gov. Edmondson denounced me as "the mouthpiece of the county commissioners."

That hurt. I was cooked editorially by several of my own members who were close with Edmondson. But my board was solid, even after my old friend and former boss Leland Gourley appeared before it to denounce me. With some that was a plus. Controversy was not a new experience but being in it

this deep and in hot water some of the time was, well, a spiritual experience.

About 1962 I had a memorable experience with a very powerful state senator. It was my first brush with a payoff to kill a bill. This senator sent word to come to his office. There was a bill before the senate to extend the sales tax to newspaper advertising. It was an old skunk that several senators who hated their local paper trotted out for years, usually to take a swipe at Gaylord.

This awesome state senator told me to follow him halfway up the hall steps to a landing where we couldn't be heard. It struck me as odd that he didn't want to talk in his private office.

"Ben, you know about the Ad Tax Bill. Well, 'they' have the votes to pass it. But some of those guys need to pay off their old campaign debts. I can stop it dead for \$7,500. Now, the money isn't for me, none of it; all will go to several senators for campaign debt."

You could have knocked me down the steps with a feather. I stammered, "We don't do that." "Never mind," he said, "go tell your Board. They can get the money."

"If they do Senator, I'll never work for them any more," said I. He shrugged. We parted. When I got back to my office he had already called and left a two word message: "Forget it." That was the last I heard of it. I told my Board. We expected a steamroller. Maybe this senator believed we might go public with this story. The bill died in committee.

In more than 44 years as the chief lobbyist for Oklahoma newspapers — only about 10 percent of my overall job — I was the key man in killing the ad tax eight times.

To me the lesson was that even amid the wheeling and dealing, implied threats, some name-calling by both sides, there is still an ethical line. You don't cross it. If you do it's less painful the second time and lesser after that. You lose your self-respect. It would have hurt my mother.

There's an old Indian saying: "Conscience is a sharp stone somewhere in my gut. When I do wrong it turns and hurts. If I keep doing it the stone finally wears smooth and doing wrong doesn't hurt any more."

A similar story to the above is worth telling. It astonished me because I wasn't even shaken down. It was the billboard firms. I got a call to be in Sen. Joe's (omit his other names) office at 8:00 a.m. the next morning. I'm there a few minutes early. So is Ed McCarthy, who sells for one of the big billboard companies and does the lobbying for all the outdoor firms.

"What does he want Ben?" Ed asks. "I don't know," sez I. We soon found out because the big senator hollered from inside his office: "You guys come on in. Just the three of us here."

SENATOR: "We've got an ad tax bill out here; in fact, it's my bill. It only puts the sales tax on billboards, not on newspapers. Ed, I've got some campaign debt that needs paid and I've run up a bill at the feed store that's gotta be paid. That totals \$10,000 and I expect you billboard guys to dig it up. We've been good to you. We're not going after the newspapers."

BLACKSTOCK: "I need to get outa here, Joe. You said you're not messing with us."

SENATOR: "Stay seated. I wanted you to hear this so you can appreciate how lucky you are."

MCCARTHY: (*stammering*) "Golly. I don't know how to take this. The president of the association, George Knapp, is outa the country — he's in Spain. Besides, we don't have that kind of money."

SENATOR: "I don't care where George is. You can find him. Give him the message. I'll give you a week."

That's almost verbatim exactly as it happened. The senator stood, and we said so-long and went into the hall and round the corner. Ed's normal ruddy complexion was nearly white.

"I can't believe we heard that," he stammered. Sez I, "Well, I can. I just don't understand why he invited me as a witness. Sounds like you better find Knapp (a big statewide billboard owner operating out of Tulsa)." I don't know what became of it. If I had been subpoenaed I would have told that story.

Maybe the reason newspapers were not the target is that Sen. Joe had seen me in action a few years, knew I got his country papers to talk and sometimes raise hell with him. Also, I had traveled a couple of hundred miles to one of his picnics. I went to see him

in action on his home turf. The barbecue was good. It was worth the trip.

From early childhood — age 6,7 — I had a fascination with politics. My mother was always helping some Democrat in a campaign. She got this Democrat activism, I suppose, from Oma Tharel, who lived a block north of us. Pearl served on our precinct election committee. She was an early booster for Lyle Boren when he ran for Congress, OK4, and he served three terms. She was for FDR as was my dad. She didn't like it when Lyle split with Roosevelt. He was defeated by an early returning WW2 amputee, Glenn Johnson of Okemah. She was for Glenn. After one term Johnson was beaten by Tom Steed, a Shawnee newsman turned car dealer. Both Oma Tharel and Pearl worked door to door for Cong. Tom Steed and phoned our end of town. All of these went out of their way to stop and say hello.

From then on to OU I became involved as a Young Democrat. Going to district and state meetings to debate our opponents was fun, part of being a good citizen. One met a lot of people, saw how money bought memberships to vote to elect our guy or gal to some meaningless office. It was fun to win, beat the forces of darkness, and get to know how people behaved in political organizations. When we weren't berating opponents in our own Democrat party we turned our invective on the soulless Republicans.

Once I was sitting near the front at the State Convention of the League of Young Democrats. The keynote speaker was wound up: "It is well that we meet today on the birthday of George Washington. He was First in war, First in peace, First in the hearts of his countrymen."

Several of us groaned loudly at the worn out words. He bellowed:

"But he wasn't first in everything. He married a widow woman." Ha!

I believe I may be the only newspaper association manager who actually liked lobbying. Well, except Johnny Long out in California, who worked at it full time in Sacramento. To me it was a game, a serious game. As a lobbyist I played with a different deck of cards than the other lobbyists. I represented the newspapers. I learned how to pass bills, how to get them amended, how to sabotage bills with killer

amendments and that it is easier to kill a bill than get one passed.

I learned by asking how to do it. Both legislators and most other lobbyists were eager to give lessons to a kid who wanted to learn. You learn a few dirty tricks too, because you may need to know how. I learned how to twist their tails. How to get members busy making contacts, reporting back, even coming to the capitol to “work the halls.”

Importantly, I never meddled in other scraps, only newspaper issues. Most legislators seemed to really appreciate that.

My “white hats” were Open Meetings, Open Records, a Shield Law for reporters. (They could not be forced to reveal their source unless a court specifically ruled that the information could not be obtained elsewhere.)

My “black hats” were the business side of newspaper journalism: kill all taxes on advertising, raise legal ad rates periodically, strengthen the Independent Contractor exemption for newspaper carriers and freelance correspondents. We called them “stringers.” I opposed postal rate increases. I opposed any reduction in public notice, required publication of “legals.” I sought more. Oklahoma statutes are rather full of such newspaper income producing laws from probate notices, even stud service on a jack mule and county commissioner proceedings.

Because lobbying was a fun game, I nearly always “brought home the bacon.” Several publishers liked to brag that I was the most effective lobbyist at the capitol. Maybe. I lost a few fights. I picked a few fights. Such as with the optometrists over the right to advertise the price of a pair of eye glasses. They are fewer but tough. It was a delight to march my troops into a committee demanding the right of the people to know the cost of eye glasses.

I went out and found old folks who would testify they could not afford to see to tell the difference between cat food and tuna in a grocery. I had one woman who told of eating cat food until her nephew took her to Texas for a pair of cheap spectacles. They beat me by outmaneuvering. But I never gave up. I got US Sen. Charles Percy (R-Illinois) to get the Federal Trade Commission on the optometrists and it worked.

Another happy battle was with the funeral directors. Undertakers, as they don’t like to be called, enforced a no price in any advertising rule. Inspectors for the embalmers licensing board would harass those firms who advertised a price for services and caskets. If that didn’t shut down the newcomer the brotherhood put the heat on suppliers of caskets and embalming fluids to NOT do business with the offending funeral home. There were other ways. It was a Holy War in The Public Interest.

Some publishers were too docile to put their editorial shoulder to the wheel. I had learned how to use news columns, supply editorials and paragraphs to tuck into the personal columns that passed for “editorial expression” with a lot of weeklies. In other words, I gradually grew to use all of the tools and influence that I knew that newspapers had and which would provoke opponents, educate the public and, of course, the reading legislator. Some of it was awesome. I didn’t play with the same deck of cards other lobbyists did.

The Capitol Press Corps didn’t know how to take me. I wrote a weekly column on politics which over 125 weeklies paid to run. I copied that from a long-dormant idea Vern Sanford used when he was OPA manager for 14 years before going to run Texas Press. It was “Capitol Spotlight” and ran two-thirds of a column, about 750 words. We mailed it typeset, ready to drop in unless they wanted to reset it in their own body type. I made it something of a test of loyalty to the organization to run it.

I wrote it (“Potlight” as Pres. Beachy Musselman called it) every Thursday night for mailing every Friday to run the following week issue. Dailies had the AP or UP wire services, so had plenty of capitol copy. Weeklies were bereft of any stories on legislative actions. It was actually embarrassing that the legislature could meet for six months and nothing about it would be in most weeklies. I set out to remedy that, and to have a subtle and sometimes not so subtle place to report the capitol news as I saw it.

I thought I deserved to sit at the press table on the floor of the Senate and House. Snide remarks from the big-shot, big-city daily reporters — Otis Sullivant and Ray Parr — made me quickly aware they didn’t

like a lobbyist posing as a reporter. So I went to the gallery.

In a way they needed and liked me. But what was I? Not one of them. A lobbyist, yes. His stuff runs in a lot of papers, sure, but some of those dopes are afraid not to run it. He's not one of us working stiffs; Blackstock represents the damned owners.

It didn't bother me except when one or two got irked and dropped an insult in front of legislative ears I cared about. It rarely came to that but when it did I would pick up the phone and call their boss with a request they be urged to lay off. If they got sullen so what; they had found I could use the knife too. Overall and over the long haul I was regarded even by the most cynical and powerful turf protectors as an able operator and a friend of the craft.

I must add that these same paragons of editorial virtue had their own pets and ways of lobbying everyone from governors down to intimidating the newest freshman.

A funny thing took place on a standup roll call in the House. Before the electronic roll call tote boards they now have up front, the counting was manual. Most amendments of sections of long bills were voted up or down by voice. If the chair was in doubt it called for a standing vote. The House Clerk stood and counted as he pointed down each row of desks. It was a way to kill an amendment without a name on the record.

I think it was on the liquor ad vote that I hired two photographers with flash bulbs to be in position up in the gallery right in front. I sat in the middle above the Speaker to instruct the photographers when to shoot each row as they stood to be counted.

The first row stood. The bulb flashed. The second row stood, another flash. The mice were running to the opposite wall or out the door to avoid being captured on film. On it went. Rep. Shockley T. Shoemaker from Osage county stood, pointed to me and hollered, "You bastard, make sure my eyebrows are on straight." I smiled and waved. I had a photo record of how they voted, or didn't vote. After that the rules were changed to forbid cameras in the gallery.

That didn't hurt my reputation. It did establish that I would play tough if that's what it took. Being a legislator is something of an ego trip and that's fine.

Like nearly all of my members they had a high regard for what I did and how I went about it. I didn't wine and dine and entertain much as most other lobbyists had to do to get their ear. Oh, I made the watering holes many, many evenings and got to know all the players.

Frequently I talked to legislators in the context of what kind of paper they had back home. Most had good relations with their hometown and district papers. Some had sullen, sorry, non-communicative publishers, and to those I talked about how we could thaw them out or neutralize them. That is if they showed signs of being helpful to me. If not, I told my member to get rid of them at the next election.

I have liked politics all of my life. It's a fun game but does get serious. I tried to keep a kidding relationship with it. While I'm a Democrat, I cannot tolerate some Demos. The same goes for Republicans, who are mostly the part of wealthy, inherited money and the corporations and cartels which have plundered the country more than even the several crooked Democrats.

SELLING ADVERTISING

So much for lobbying or "governmental engineering" as I liked to call it. It was at most 10 percent of my jobs, more like 5 percent. When the legislature was in session it took up more time.

I learned my members had a lot at stake with many departments and agencies of both the state and federal government. I sought out the heads or top operators in the Tax Commission, Attorney General's office, Auditor and Inspector's office, office of the courts, Highway Patrol, Health and a few more. The same for area offices of the federal government. When something comes up it helps if you are already acquainted.

To run a wide-ranging, industry serving organization it takes more money than what came in as dues from 90 percent of the newspapers in the state. By the early 1980s I had a 100 percent membership of papers eligible to belong. Trade associations and professional societies exist to help their trade or craft. That includes keeping qualifications high enough to limit competition and make more money for the old, established firms and practitioners. I kept those defenses up but I was instrumental in lowering the

requirements to let the little guy, the startup in. But, we needed more money to pay me more, hire more and better staff and outfit the office. Where to get it?

Sell advertising and get the commission. In 1953 when I became manager political advertising was our only product since the time of Vern Sanford. Rucker had begun to place a few want ads for a vending machine salesman named J.F. Gautier. He was quick pay, honest but had pretty well sold all he was going to sell in gum and peanut machines to those who thought they could make money that way. (Back when I was in high school I bought eight peanut machines by mail order — I was the “Drumright Vending Co.” — placing them around town. What with damage, peanuts gone rancid and a slice for the shop owner, I got more experience than profit.)

I learned to like to sell advertising. I was forced to take a course in beginning advertising at OU from Prof. Tom Ladwig. I did not like it; news was where the action was. At mid-term Ladwig gave me an “F” and I was furious. I went to see him and he laughed that since I was such a BMOC, into many organizations selling some idea or other, that advertising should appeal to me.

I never thought of it that way. I really pitched in and came out with a “B.” I was so fascinated that people would give you their money to try out YOUR ideas that I changed my major from News Journalism to Adverting/News Journalism. It was the right move to become a newspaper publisher.

Selling political advertising to candidates for congress, governor, statewide offices and referendum ballot questions appealed to me. I sought who had the money, the treasurer and real campaign manager. I got to know each very well. One unforgettable campaign manager was H.W. “Coach” McNeil who was somewhat wealthy from oil investments, ran Roy Turner’s campaign for governor and several others, all successful. Money was ‘frog hair’ in “Coach” language. I was accepted into the inside.

Putting “the union bug” on political advertising material was important. I had an ad type set by a union shop, engravings made by a union shop and stereotype mats made by a union shop. The union label, “the bug” was all over everything unless the customer said leave it off.

Once I said to “Coach” McNeil that no one paid that much attention to the bug and asked if he would like to try a spoof. I drew an oval, put three wiggly legs on each side, dots for eyes and the word “BUG” inside the oval. All reduced to almost unreadable without a magnifying glass. We did it and not one person noticed. I had the artist put the “bug” on the artwork, told the engraver “no bug” and no one knew. Good client relations made a dumb joke like that doable.

I kept that up with Lawton banker J.C. Kennedy who had a frequent involvement as the money raiser in several campaigns. He gave me the name “C.O.D. Blackstock,” for my rigid cash with final copy approval. Well, I never lost a penny on any, selling millions of dollars in political ads. My staff checked that papers ran ads as ordered and if not, no pay. At the end of a campaign I usually had refund checks to deliver. That astonished everybody.

Cong. John Jarman was a Democrat who voted mostly Republican to keep E.K. Gaylord happy. A dapper dresser, a sharp mind and a savvy political manipulator in the state senate then for 20-plus years, he became congressman from OK5.

He was tight with money so when he asked if I wanted to collect some pledged campaign contributions, I saw it as a way to hold the money bag and get him to spend some of it in newspaper ads. I agreed to send bills to persons he received verbal offers of help from. It mounted up. Campaign money laws in the ’50s and ’60s were intentionally vague, as now.

One day Jarman came to tell me about a smart scheme he thought up to pick his opponent as Republican nominee. He had a good headline name, Hobart Hobbs, a widower, retired and who ran once before with near success. I was to approach Hobbs that secret friends of his had contacted me wanting to buy ads for his nomination as Repub for Congress. He agreed to let them buy ads but they (Jarman) insisted the copy not be changed. Jarman brought me the simple 4 col. by 6 inch all type ads with type samples clipped from *The Oklahoman*.

I took them out to Hobbs’ kitchen and he initialed them. They ran and he won the nomination. Repubs were stunned how a stuttering, simple, old retired government civil engineer had the money or smarts to do that but Hobart never told. We did it twice. At

that time ethics laws in politics didn't exist; only if you got caught.

It was about the only commissions we earned on Jarman's \$25-35,000 campaign slush fund. He began to want me to give him refunds in cash, not by check, with no receipts. I balked and told John he'd have to take down all the deposits paid in and get it by check. John always won big but was a loner. His wife died, he later retired from Congress and married Fred Jones' daughter. That didn't last long. He died a recluse, hiding out in remote motels, wearing dark glasses and other disguises.

I always liked selling political advertising and all sides, both parties, trusted me. In 1982 I assigned myself as account manager to the two top candidates for the US Senate race: Don Nickles for the Repubs and Andy Coates for the Demos. I told each of them I was handling the other, that their confidential ad plans were safe with me and each accepted that.

I began trying to find some nonpolitical firms that would advertise in community papers rather than thinking that putting an ad in the big city papers was enough. Gradually that begin to pit me against the *Daily Oklahoman*, which wanted it all. I found that the *Tulsa World* did not share that same greed or resentment at our growing ad placement business.

Most daily newspapers had what were called "reps" (contract advertising sales representatives who got a commission on ALL advertising from outside the town or county of publication) who were supposed to sell ads for them in faraway cities. What a sick joke. What these "reps" did was entertain the publisher to keep their contracts signed, which brought these rep firms a cut on all advertising from outside their town. They sold at what was called the "national rate" which is the local rate jacked up about 50 percent to cover the deduction for advertising agency commissions, the rep commission and slow pay and no pay.

National Rates are jacked up to cover ad agency, sales rep commissions, delayed pay, etc. The low local "real" rate may be as little as one-third of the National Rate. One has to know those averages to play this game. Actually, National Advertising was "found" money to most papers. It's even less income today and inflated to be sure.

"Never print a rate card that an advertiser can understand."

That piece of wisdom from the smart and funny and little bit wacko James T. Jackson, who once owned the Seminole *Producer* when Leland Gourley worked there before WW2. Jackson's wife, Sadie, was Seminole Chief of Police Jake Sims' jailer for females. They detained scores of whores in those wild oil patch boomtown days.

I began by putting out an annual directory listing ad rates, days published, deadlines, address, phone numbers, etc. We printed a few thousand and built our reputation for accurate data. We sought ads from ad agencies and firms which did not have an advertising agency.

Weeklies loved it. Daily publishers welcomed our new sales aggressiveness. The daily reps did not. Burke, Kuipers & Mahoney as well as Sam Papert's Southwest Dailies slowly became my enemies even though they were Sustaining (dues paying) members of OPA. They sowed the seeds of discontent over the contract they had with nearly all dailies. Larger city dailies, Tulsa and Oklahoma City, had other national advertising sales reps. They didn't bother with gnats like OPS.

To get a commission I had to get the publisher to stand for it when I took it out of the check I sent paying for ads we had sold and serviced. It was a hot, long, running fight with the small daily reps. Otherwise, I was well-liked by paper, ink and other suppliers, and I promoted them accordingly.

The commission racket is all wrong. A sales rep taking 8-10 percent of the gross of an ad has been around since about 1800 in NYC. The 15 percent commission clipped off the gross by advertising agencies and the 10 percent taken out by sales reps is built into the inflated "national ad rate."

Local merchants pay, at most, 65 percent of that top rate. Big local advertisers like grocery and other large retail stores may pay only a third of the so-called national rate.

Far fairer is a fee for service. I began to do that with placing C.R. Anthony department stores advertising in papers in several states. It was \$8 per ad for all services from placement through payment. We — OPS — made a profit in the 1980s at \$8 because we were efficient. In time we were so trusted by the

client we negotiated with newspapers their lowest local ad rate for the then owners of Anthony's.

We ordered and paid at the contracted rate, adding \$8 for each newspaper on the ad list for all of our services. Along with this was an agreement that Anthony's would pay us within 10 days of our delivering a complete billing; even when they were in federal bankruptcy. The court approved our insistence that to hold the contract rate concessions we had to pay promptly. And we did.

The fee method also solved the problem of "knife you in the back" chiseling publishers — there were a few — who would call the advertiser and offer a cut rate if they placed their ads direct, around the rep and me. I delighted in knifing them right off the schedule and letting them know it. Give the ad to another paper! Some pretty self-righteous publishers and ad managers would try to pull that stunt but not if the advertiser and ad agency were warned. You ought to hear the sneaky scream and lie when you caught them at it

There is even a "church rate," supposedly the lowest.

Back in the 1920s an electric utility tycoon, Samuel Insul, dreamed up the "utility rate." It was the ultimate bribe, an inflated ad rate that the local utility manager explained they *wanted to pay* "because your paper does so much for this town; we want to say thank you."

When I learned that and explained it to my board of directors, most were aghast that their "friendliness" for the local gas or electric company had been purchased by urging them to charge the company an inflated bribery rate.

Sam Insul went to the penitentiary for rigging utility rates with other executives to screw the public. You can find Sam's name on the cornerstone of the Public Service Company of Oklahoma building in Tulsa, unless they wised up and removed it.

These are some of the reasons all utilities must be closely regulated to halfway protect the consumer. After all, state regulated utilities get a guaranteed profit. What other enterprise has that? We the public and rate-payer have waded through and paid for a lot of corruption before finally becoming aware the government had better regulate some businesses.

Cliff Bryson of SW Dailies was a drinking buddy of Ray Dyer who owned the El Reno *Tribune*. Also with Ned Shepler, who owned the Lawton dailies. Bill Linthecum and later Keith Caldwell and Forrest Boaz headed an ever merging firm of the secondary market dailies. Bryson had mostly the small, third market dailies. The metro dailies had even more snooty New York rep firms. We outsold them and we out-serviced to both the papers and the advertisers. The reps went around telling the ad agencies "they had a contract" and to "not do business with OPS and Blackstock because he will stab you in the back." I asked what they meant and were told I would worm my way into their account and get the ads direct. Only a dummy would buy that ploy.

I gradually began to publicize this. I came to learn that publishers like a bird in the hand better than a rep's many claims they were on to something big or sold this or that when they didn't even know a schedule was about to happen. It tickled publishers to hear these guys cutting me up and hear me doing the same to them. Then I got onto a hot idea: Quick Pay.

Some press associations (those who sold advertising) began to accumulate reserves. It would make our bookkeeping easier if we paid all advertising ran in a calendar month, by the 25th of the following month. That way the newspaper would clean our account before the end of the second month and we would not be going back 3-4 months to pay for ads which were slow to pay us.

We had to sometimes borrow money to do it. But, we could borrow from our nonprofit and pay it interest. It took good management of accounts receivables, careful attention to whom you let have credit in the first place. All of which took great discipline to perfect one's management skills — or go broke.

Some were Cash with Copy, as was all political advertising. I was the salesman in the beginning, the only one we had. I ran the office administration, lobbied, ran the meetings, sold the ads and got the money in. Slowly it began to grow and as profits grew I demanded more pay and fringes.

I began at \$5,200 a year in 1953 and was making nearly \$200,000 a year with bonus and commission when I retired at the end of 1995. At the end my base pay was \$150,000 plus 10 percent of consoli-

dated profits (all pretax profits of all entities). I got the top pay in the nation until ANPA hired Kathy Black from USA TODAY as president for \$650,000.

Ed Livermore Sr. thought up giving me 10 percent of the the pretax profits when he became president in 1959. His object was not to enrich me but to create an incentive package which encouraged me to watch expenses as well as bring in more money for member newspapers. I never let it deter me from starting new services, which cut the bottom line as an expense. I didn't think much of it at the time. But, it began to dawn on me there was some real money to be made here.

I began receiving offers of jobs from other associations and even American Airlines. I turned down the National Editorial Association top job twice. It would have meant moving to Washington D.C. and not having the close contact I had with my members.

Here in Oklahoma I could do an innovative or stupid thing (read that new service) and quickly see the results in a few days. At NEA, later National Newspaper Assn., you might never know. A national association was like shooting ducks at night and not knowing whether you hit one or not. Since the money here was good and my board relations were excellent, I stayed 44 years without ever having a contract. Fire at will.

Over all of the 44 years I ran the OPA I never dreaded to go to work. Each day was different. Some days were bummers. There were ads to sell, staff to hire, train, monitor, evaluate and sometimes fire. I learned how to do it before I delegated it. My fault was in being reluctant to let go, to hand off detail to others and only check occasionally.

I developed some new advertising accounts newspapers never had. The rural electric co-ops started with a legislative friend, Sen. Roy Boecher, whom I liked. He was a rough and tumble politician, a hard drinker at times, a blusterer at times and a savvy manager. He asked me to prepare some ads for Cimarron Rural Electric Co-op at Kingfisher so they could tell townfolk in their area what a good firm they were and how their members were important in the area economy. Then came Don Dage at Walters, manager of Cotton Electric Co-op, Duke Cooper at Central Rural in Stillwater and 24 others.

In a short time I built the co-ops to over \$100,000 annual billing — of which OPS got 25 percent since they did not have an ad agency. I was their ad agency. I liked to write their ads.

I never took a kickback or under-the-table money or gifts. Neither did I pay any. A few thought I might but I brought it up that I wanted mine on TOP of the table; not even stolen stamps for my personal mail. What a smart decision way back yonder.

When you're on the make, when you do a little cheat here and there you can count on some unhappy employee you've fired to pass the word. If I were going to get a high salary I had to convince members I was honest by any measure. You can become pretty demanding when you don't have any fear of being found out.

When I would find a likely ad customer I did what any ad salesperson should do; I thought up ideas, made several ad layouts and wrote the copy. Nothing fancy, but each presented in a folder. That usually impressed the prospective customer that you had done some thinking about their problem. With each was a list of newspapers where they should run it. That took some care in picking papers which could reach audiences it seemed to me were important to them.

Then an appointment for a presentation. I would lay the ads over their desk, a table or even the floor and begin.

Objections could turn into amendments to an ad, the illustration, to the list of papers. It began to work and our ad business was not dependent on advertising agencies. That's largely because the reps had pretty well poisoned agencies against using OPA and me. The biggest ad agency, Lowe Runkle, had the *Oklahoman* as a client. They were doing national mag ads for them saying, "You only need one to do the job in Oklahoma." So, it was a waste of time to try to sell Runkleites on non-metro papers. But we tried.

Sometimes I would go to the big agencies' clients and make my sales pitch. The agency didn't like that but I had no business from them so I had nothing to lose. It did generate ads sometimes.

I kept a soft drumbeat in the background of our bulletins to members that whoever actually sold an ad should get paid for it. It wasn't easy. Sometimes I

had to be nasty when I had actual control of a list. To those papers which balked at granting OPS a commission I would phone and ask if they wanted this new schedule. To some I would say “no commission, no ads.”

To that I was challenged a few times as by Dick Hefton, then of McAlester *News-Capital*. He had bought the Boaz anti-OPS line “BKM has a contract with you for commission on ALL out of town ads, and you should honor it,” Boaz endlessly repeated.

Fine, said I, you’re off the list. That sounds pretty tough but we were not playing patty cake. I urged the client to be ready when he received such calls and they were.

One day a tall, bony, Jewish guy came to our offices. He said he was Arnold Davis, sales vice-president for Barton Distilling Co. of Chicago and Bardstown, Ky. Larry Miller of Kansas Press had sent him. He pushed several brands, all Barton. He wanted “to move boxes” in Oklahoma and I could have \$50,000 a year to run ads any way and anywhere I chose. I almost fell over.

Then Arnold added, “you can put your doggy friends on the ad list but never try to screw me out of more than five percent or we’re through.” His sidekick was Nat Weinkoff or something like that. Arnold Davis looked like death warmed over but he was a man of his word, even agreed to no tearsheets. He was my dream client. When I told some snotty ad manager or publisher his paper was off the Barton list, I just wanted them to go over my head. I believe in frequent small ads, like driving a nail. It worked for the Barton brands. We enjoyed total confidence in each other. Yes, we moved boxes.

Having warned the client that some of these reps or even publishers might call, they got a chilly response from my client. After a few such exclusions such conflicts reduced. But Boaz and Cliff Bryson kept up the attack. I kept selling.

Our staff had to be very efficient, rigidly follow a near perfect system and no errors or missed deadlines. I paid above market wages. I was demanding. I myself did the hiring and I myself did the firing. We could be depended on to deliver a perfectly placed advertising order in any number of newspapers in and outside Oklahoma before deadline, get tearsheets as proof of publication and an accurate bill

hand-delivered within 10 days after date of publication. No rep could or would do that. I copied good systems from all over the nation, anyplace I could find it.

When computers came along we were the first to get into the faster, more accurate electronic placement and billing. As better systems came along we got the machine and a workable system, ran it parallel for six months or until it was accurate then switched and dumped the old methods.

None of this zeal for accuracy and doing more than we promised was lost on my board of directors. Partly because I saw to it they were told of our problems and invited ideas and what we were doing to make things better.

All of which paid off personally in steady raises, gradually increasing budgets and a readiness to fund any new idea. I took it as a high compliment when word often came back to me that the only trouble the board had with me was holding me back, never in kicking my ass to get me moving.

One has to have willingness to be in command. After all, every organization is alike in many respects: You either run it or the inmates will run it or, worse, no one is running it. It certainly is not the duty of the board to run it. The board exists to set policy, to monitor performance. I gradually made a distinction between what was “board policy” and what was “management policy.” We had some animated discussions over that.

So, I went back over all the board minutes for 30 years or so and distilled with citation what was a board policy. Then I gathered from my memos, letters and notes what was “management policies.” The two booklets were printed, mailed to the board for study and reviewed item by item for amendment or deletion. It was an impressive exercise.

Personnel policies are seldom formalized by most employers. I began writing them out and then hired a personal consultant to review them, talk with employees and give me a proposed booklet. I got laughs out of my “Inclement Weather Policy.” Hey; it worked.

Wow! What an experience for the 10 employers sitting on our board. None, none of them had anything like it. So, I had our expert to draft a model set of personnel policies for a typical newspaper that we

gave to members. They were told how to go through the process of adoption. And, importantly, what things NOT to have any written policy on. Many of the things we did had that dual opportunity lurking somewhere within.

The big advertising agencies like Runkle, Ackerman and lesser ones took 20 years to crack. They finally came to placing ads with us because we persevered, we were persistent, we were dependably accurate and honest. The daily reps never sold, never provided efficient placement/billing/payment services to agencies or newspapers, so they gradually merged, folded and died.

You make some friends with this sort of aggressiveness and you make a few enemies. It's like anything else in the business world. You'd better be willing to stand the heat if you're going to be in the kitchen. I wanted in the kitchen where the meal was being cooked and dished up. We built an excellent sales and service system. We elbowed our way to a place at the table.

No doubt I have several personality flaws but dishonesty and lying were not among them. Nor did I tolerate ethics slips by my employees. It takes more than that. One has to be able to do something needed and unique and efficient for others.

That meant driving or flying to talk with the boards of directors of all 26 rural electric cooperatives. I told them they should advertise and why, what the risks were if they did not and discussed their choice of costs.

I hired several "star" salesmen but most would return empty handed saying "they want to talk to Jesus." That from Art Hoag back in the '70s. "If that's the best you can do as a disciple then I don't need you." He had been ad manager of the *Norman Transcript*, a good, affable man but couldn't deliver our kind of sales. We stayed friends.

After the repeal of prohibition we made a hell of a fight in the legislature to define the words "it shall be unlawful to advertise the sale of alcoholic liquor..." It took some artful wordsmithing to write an interpretation and get both houses to pass that language, which meant retail stores could not advertise BUT distillers could (and should, we told them) advertise by brand names, products, as long as the ads did not tell where it could be purchased. That was

a stretch, but stretch is what a lot of legislation is about.

With that passed I convinced the board we should pick three of our best sales personalities to quickly go on the road calling on distillers and advertising agencies back east with this latest information on the new Oklahoma market. So we put our materials together, lined up who we wanted to see at the major and even secondary spirits producers. We made three major trips to Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, St. Louis, Louisville and maybe another one or two.

Besides me there were Leland Gourley, Bob Lee Kidd, Chub Bellatti and Charley Rhoades. We flew commercial to Chicago and northeast but we chartered a Bonanza to St. Louis and Kentucky. It was fun. We received great welcomes from agencies and advertisers. In several cases their conference rooms were filled waiting for the news we so enthusiastically delivered. It did produce a few hundred thousand of new dollars for a few years.

But, as all things change, it petered out, gravitated to the larger papers, ignored the weeklies and dailies which lobbied it through and all liquor ads ended up on the billboards, which had not lifted a finger to get the liquor ad restriction revised. If one dwells on that sort of ingratitude one becomes cynical. All business is fleeting. The *Tulsa World* and *Tribune* urged distillers to put their ads in the smaller even if it meant taking them out of theirs.

These actions met the scorn of the United Drys, an organization of prohibitionists who kept bootleg control and corruption profitable in Oklahoma for over a half a century. I knew them, went out of my way to speak to them hoping to blunt their personal attacks on me and the OPA.

It was some kind of feeling to have Methodist Preacher Joe Shackelford stop right in front of me in a crowded legislative hall and say loudly, "You're doing the work of the devil."

I replied, at the same loudness, "May the Lord Bless you Joe, but you're taking money from the bootleggers to come out here and interfere with our American right to be heard."

It made my members chuckle to see and hear me as the target of the drys. One can not back away from nuts like that; they are avid, they are trying to embar-

rass you, hoping you'll slink off down to the parking lot. That would be cowardly.

Some legislators seemed to enjoy my discomfort. I guess it took some of the heat off of them and it showed them how they might respond to these holier than thou extremists.

I hope these experiences show a connectedness between the many facets of my job as a newspaper association manager. I have saved my observations on being an administrator to next. Lobbying and politics were intertwined as was selling advertising to bring in income other than dues. It was a grand mix, great experiences.

LEARNING HOW TO BE AN ADMINISTRATOR

I never had any courses in how to be an administrator. I just watched how others did it. Surely, I had a desire to learn both the science and art of managing people, money, customers, members, the public, goal setting and attainment and communicating effectively for the desired results. I read a lot. I talked to those who seemed to know what they were doing, and were effective at it. You pick up a few ideas here and there.

Ideas are like rabbits; get a couple and learn how to handle them and the next thing you know you've got lots of rabbits.

I copied many ideas from other newspaper association managers but they began to run dry. So I started going to the American Society of Association Executives national meetings to meet association managers in other fields.

I got a plum appointment to the US Chamber's Association committee, 15 really smart guys. I took courses three successive summers at their Institutes at Michigan State and Syracuse Universities. Because I had more than five years top management experience I started with the advanced course work.

It was stimulating to gather ideas from huge associations like the California truckers (staff of 400 then), Texas Restaurant Assn. and others. My counterparts in Newspaper Association Managers never did that, never got outside their own core group.

Writing the history of Oklahoma newspapers is an idea that was discussed during the late 1960s and

more so in the 1970s. The snag was that an OU faction among our members wanted an OU history professor to write it. I found that he was very slow to get things done so I shelved the history idea to cool off. About 1980 we had ample money so I quickly trotted out the "History of Oklahoma Newspapers" project with the name Ed Carter to write it. He had an OU J-degree, had worked several years at the Lawton *Constitution* and *Morning Press* as reporter and editor and had gone to OSU to get his PhD in history. Ed's supervisor for the project would be Dr. Odie Faulk, head of the OSU Department of History and himself author of 20-plus books.

We paid Ed \$5,000 when he finished it in 1983, big money then. We engaged the Oklahoma Heritage Assn.'s Kenny Franks to edit Ed's manuscript which was complicated because Ed wrote 300,000 words when he was supposed to stop at 150,000 words. Good job, a well done book with lots of pictures and another monkey off my back.

A cartoon series on Oklahoma history was one of my favorite and money-makingest ideas. I originally thought that a "Believe It Or Not by Ripley" style Oklahoma history cartoon would sell and bring in money in several ways. First, by licensing a newspaper to develop a weekly sig ad page centered around the 52-weeks of cartoons. I urged newspaper ad salespersons to go after local business firms which said they "didn't have anything to advertise" and it worked. I urged they get a local bank to sponsor a scrapbook contest of these historical cartoons among grade school kids and award US Savings Bonds for the best.

The first artist was Lyle Griffin, who needed work. He did several but I stopped him when I saw he had a heavy ink style instead of finer line drawings. Then Mike Parks (no relation to my mother) walked into my office, sent by Jenk Jones Sr. of the *Tulsa Tribune*. He had done something like this in Nebraska, he was an itinerant artist. I wrote a contract that Mike would be paid \$100 for each of 52 panels; he would bring a letter from George Shirk, president of the Oklahoma Historical Society, that the cartoons were correct and when we broke even on our own production expense he would get half of all profits. When that time arrived about three years later I could

not find Mike Parks and I tried all over the US for many years.

A Legislative Directory was an idea I stole from a firm in Topeka. I tried to get LeRoy Ritter and his Business News Co. to publish it and I would buy 200 copies to give one to each legislator and my board and OPA Legislative committee. LeRoy said it would not make a profit and it did not for four years. But it was a prestige item and we sold several thousand dollars worth of these every other year directories, loose leaf including interim update service. Alas, it has died.

After we had mined all papers which would pay to try it we hit on printing the historical cartoon booklets and getting tourist shops to sell them. We printed thousands this way and it still sells as named "Oklahoma Legends."

I never got the Chartered Association Executive, CAE, designation because of Vance Lockhart of ASAE. I missed the application deadline by one day and he rejected my application. But, as my brother Bob told me about his bird dog pup when I asked if the dog had a pedigree. "Nope, he don't need one." I decided I didn't need one either.

All my boards of directors were more than willing to pay my expenses to attend anything educational that would further my effectiveness and that of the association. I learned a lot from managers of other newspaper associations, at annual meetings of Newspaper Association Managers, or calling an experienced manager when I needed advice.

An important resource for advice were my own publishers. My three main mentors — Joe McBride Sr., Milt Phillips and Ed Livermore Sr. — were always unstinting in their willingness to advise me. I was told and I adopted a rigid understanding of doing the necessary research then making up my own mind, doing it, correcting as necessary and NEVER blaming anyone else for failure.

After five or so years a few people were openly expressive that I was an outstanding manager. I never thought that I was excellent; way above average for sure but maybe that was because so many managers in other states were just mediocre. I could have been better. I tried hard not to be a procrastinator, yet not act too quickly. Some do and many of those lack the

self-confidence to back up, make corrections, apologize then get going again.

And I tried to remember to pass some praise around. Other people need appreciation and motivating too. Though some publishers on my boards down through the years didn't believe in much praise or else the recipient might ask for a raise. Right!

My second mentor, Joe McBride Sr. (Grace King McGuire at the OU library was the first adult to take me under her wing), may have talked slowly but he had a fast mind and knew the business. Joe insisted I make a "Daily To Do" list on 3x5 pocket cards. Each day one jots down what needs attention, a person to call, a letter to write, activities to check on, everything. At the close of each day the last thing is to make out the "To Do" card for tomorrow. First thing next morning was to review the list and number each item by priority, sequence, etc. No getting stuck then wondering what to do next.

I once fired an Assistant Manager because he would not keep a "To Do" list. He had two degrees, including an MBA, but he would not get into the discipline of managing his time through the "Do" card. I'd ask to see it. He tapped his head and told me it was all up there and on some odd slips of paper neatly arranged on his desk. The third time I asked, I terminated him.

I had 14 or more first assistants, second or third in command, over the 44 years. A few, maybe three, had to be fired. All came to work for me because of the good reputation we had for being a live wire outfit. They each knew I was demanding, paid well and they could learn a lot. They went on to manage 10 other associations. I am really proud of that.

Here they are in order of appearance and moving on: **David Tarpenning** went on to run his own advertising agency. **Jim Swain** — Florida Press Assn.

Bill Boykin, whom I hired from a weekly Capitol Hill *Beacon* editorship, stayed less than two years then went on to briefly run four other newspaper associations: Allied (northwest states dailies), Florida, Texas and finally Inland in Chicago, an association for dailies north of the Mason-Dixon Line where the South and North divide across the top of Tennessee.

Lyndell Williams I hired from the Holdenville *Daily News* and was with me the longest until Texas hired him. Did a great job and retired there after 26 years.

Ted Hecht was a product of Father Flanagan's Boys' Town (Neb.). Bill Bray and I hired him as an ad salesman for American Newspaper Representatives Inc. Then Bill Lindsey, manager of the Colorado Press Assn., stole Ted to sell ads there. After about two years Ted went to manage New Mexico from which I hired Ted to manage one of our new idea departments called Oklahoma Newspaper Advertising Bureau (a new marketing department for dailies and weeklies for which they paid extra dues).

Jim Langdon did a great job running ONAB and was hired away to be president of American Newspaper Representatives Inc. in NYC. Jim owns an upscale city magazine in Tulsa and is out-Fridaying Gourley's *Friday*.

Dale Talkington came from Lowe Runkle who hired Dale from client OG&E. He had an MBA from OKC University but he didn't work out with me. Dale became a very good commercial building photographer.

I hired three guys from the Edmond *Sun*, and Ed Livermore Jr. thought I recruited them. Not so. (Not that Ed wouldn't and did.) Each came on their own and each did good jobs. First **Bob Stacy**, who worked for me 15 years and was an excellent salesman but not as an administrator. Bob wanted my job when I retired. He thought the board should hand it to him without interviewing any others. I told him no, that would irritate members. I wanted them to advertise and work to an open choice. They did.

So, rather than go through the process Bob took a \$110,000/yr. job as president with Pro-Graphic Images and ran it into bankruptcy in about 2 years. Bob was an excellent salesman when he wanted to be and when I kept on him. He had an engaging personality, several other good points including being a first rate golfer, bowler, ping pong player and pool shooter.

For a guy who had polio as a child, whose parents died when he was very young, who was raised by relatives in poor Benton Harbor, Mich., who was a par golfer, bowled over 200, an ace at tennis and cleaned the pool table four straight racks against Ole

Hustler, Aggie sharpie Rex Brown. I won \$500 on Bob that night at Tom Fausett's pool table.

I think it is exceedingly odd that I have never heard nor seen Bob Stacy after he said goodbye the end of February 1995. I treated him very well, paid him up in the \$90,000 range with pay and bonus, supported his growth, sent him to association management institutes, allowed him to do lavish sales entertainment, etc. I miss Bob and wish him well.

I hired **Tom Bradley** from the Edmond *Sun* also. He did a good job running ONAB so was hired by TG&Y. When they were bought he went on to be advertising manager of two other large chain retailers in Green Bay, Wis., and York, Pa. He landed as ad manager at Enid from which I hired him back to ONAB a year before I retired.

I hired **Ray Hibbard** from Leland Gourley's *Friday* to run ONAB. He left after I retired to become general manager of Ed Jr.'s Edmond *Sun*. Ray became publisher there after Ed Jr. sold it to the Community Newspaper Holdings (CNHI). Now Ray owns a free weekly in Edmond.

(If you get the idea that I was sometimes "at odds" with some of my members, you're right. It was a very competitive era. Some guys would cut your throat; well, maybe kneecap you.

Mark Thomas replaced me on 1 July 1995. In an odd twist he applied to work at OPA after graduating in journalism from the Church of Christ Oklahoma Christian College. I told him I wouldn't hire anyone without newspaper experience so we got him a job at the Edmond *Sun* selling ads. After two years I hired him. Mark stayed with me nearly seven years until he went to manage the Colorado Press Assn. After six years there he was one of 33 who applied to replace me. Mark was hired by the OPA/S board in April 1995. An extensive advertising and publicity campaign was conducted nationally. One applicant was a Catholic priest.

Mark was the right choice.

He reported July 1st. I decided to move out of my glassed in office overhanging Lincoln Blvd., down the hall and give him my title and full support. I worked the year out, retiring 31 December 1995 after 44 years as secretary/manager, EVP etc.

I am proud that I never had a contract even though I got a new boss (president) every year.

I had several excellent women who worked in management positions and did excellent jobs.

Foremost was **Barbara Chastain Walter** whom I hired right after her graduation from Harding High School in OKC as receptionist, a very important job. She was eager to learn, she wrote, she welcomed customers, she figured ad proposals and made visitors feel welcome. Barbara now publishes the Hennessey *Clipper* with her husband Bill. She was OPA president in 2002-03.

I hired **Michelle McCullough Clark** sight unseen from Lakeway at Austin. She was first my secretary, grew into becoming an outstanding administrative assistant, then conventions manager. She went on to manage the nurses association.

Jill Denning graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, worked for a Kansas weekly and wrote saying she wanted to be a newspaper association manager. She was recommended by the great Charley Mouser, sales motivator and newspaper advertising marketeer. I hired her to work on special projects, an important new and luxurious addition the board let me have. Jill went on to manage the North Dakota Press Assn.

Most were a rousing success but a few failed because of some personality quirk or lack of adaptiveness. It made me feel good that so many wanted to work for me.

Milt Phillips, OPA president in 1953-54, forced me into developing a budget and sticking to it. I had to learn to analyze financial statements when I did not know debits from credits. But I learned.

The interlocking three sets of books for OPA, a 501(c)3 nonprofit, income tax exempt trade association and our taxable entity Oklahoma Press Service and Oklahoma Newspaper Foundation, a 501(c)6 tax exempt was tough to understand. OPA was far different from the fully taxable Oklahoma Press Service Inc., where we did most of our business. We created the Oklahoma Newspaper Foundation, an IRS 501(c)6 in 1958. It was my job to know the difference between these three main entities with several departments in each and not get crosswise with the IRS. I never did; audited many times but never received a negative order.

The same directors made up two of those boards, OPA and OPS. OPA directors chose who is to be on

the ONF board. I was originally Secretary/Manager then in the late '70s became Executive Vice-President and Secretary of both OPA and OPS as well as EVP of ONF.

There are advantages of having such a set up, but you have to know what you are doing or the IRS will sink your boats.

I strongly felt that it was my job, not the CPA's job, to know the difference and keep each clean with the IRS. I did considerable study to sort all this out in my mind and in actual practice. Knowing what UBI is — Unrelated Business Income — and being honest about it kept me and our boards out of trouble. I didn't hand that responsibility off to our CPA firms; I knew more about UBI than they did

After many seminars, much reading and discussion, I have a simple explanation of UBI: *If any income producing activity competes in any way with any other commercial firm, then it produces Unrelated Business Income and must be so identified and tax paid on the profits.*

I was appreciated for it, well paid and well treated. Still, it was something of a juggling act. It was not easy to train a new bookkeeper to understand the relationships and keep them straight. Tax avoidance is a virtue and profits possible if the music is played just right by all the instruments.

It took some art and skill and diplomacy to gradually teach new board members to read the financial statements. Their newspapers' accounting reports were nothing like ours and most were reluctant to admit they couldn't figure them out. Some joked that I changed the form of financial reports if too many understood them. Ha!

Executive sessions will save an association manager's job — if done right. It took me a year of hell before I learned the best way to do them.

My second president, Milt Phillips, was inclined to chew me out in front of others until Clancy Frost told him in front of a district meeting audience to stop it. I grew to love Milt, and "preached" part of his funeral at the family's request.

Milt would hold executive sessions at the end of every board meeting then, after all had left, take me into a corner and chew my ass out reading a list of complaints. I thought some were his own since none

of the complaints against me were ever attributed by name. Then I hit on a great change to request.

As a condition of my continued employment — ha, that’s pretty cocky — there HAD to be an executive session at the end of every board meeting. I would be excused. The president would take notes then call me back into the room to read the complaints and criticisms. No board member could participate, be present at the executive session unless they stayed through it all and heard my response. The president read and I responded not knowing who my accusers were.

I strongly urge anyone responsible to a board of directors to install such a procedure. After those changes it worked well. We had an executive session at the close of each Board meeting. Board members only; no spectators. Not doing so is sure to eventually cause board members to fester, to erupt and fire you. I’ve seen that happen several times.

Some association managers tell me they never have executive sessions unless there is a request. Fooy! Those same guys cried in anger when they were suddenly broadsided by unvented, pent-up criticism. Board members of several such associations have told me “there never was an opportunity to bring up little complaints so they grew, accumulated, then just blew out.”

THE WEEKLY BOARD LETTER

D. Jo Ferguson of the Pawnee *Chief* was a difficult president. He would make snide remarks about my pay and veiled hints my work hours never were what he and others had to put in. Poor D. Jo. I suspect his ole daddy, Joe O. Ferguson, was on Jo’s ass all the time, treated him like he was forever 13. The son became a pain for me, House Speaker Rex Privett, Gov. Bellmon and others to tolerate. They told me so.

When D. Jo became OPA president he ordered the manager (me) to write a weekly report of what we did. Clearly, it was to show that we didn’t do much. It made me mad as hell at first but I did it.

After I got into the swing of it by making notes as the week progressed I became good at it. Gradually I realized what a powerful tool it is: You had the eyes and minds of your readers (Board) and they could not interrupt or talk back.

My every Friday Board Letter became very popular with board members. When their 7-9 years on the board came to an end several pled to keep getting the Letter. No, it was for the board only; it was an often very blunt comment on events and persons. I didn’t want it copied around. But several Board members did.

Most people have no idea what an association or professional society does. Some never heard of such a thing. Neither had I when OU J-school director Dr. Fayette Copeland and even OU Pres. George Cross urged me to take the OPA assistant manager’s job in December 1950.

JUST WHAT DOES AN ASSOCIATION DO?

The job is to make the industry you represent important and respected — that by providing services for members, being a resource for solving problems and questions members have.

Over the years I came to believe that a good association manager had to become a diagnostician for and of the industry he or she represents. You must become so familiar with what members face in their business and what needs fixing.

Along with getting really good at diagnosing, one must adopt and adapt a wide range of useful services and good ideas from other associations and be willing to experiment, do something different. You must like change or find a another career. I can truly say I like change, trying something new, but not insanely so just for the sake of taking a different path every time you do a repetitive task — like putting out another member Bulletin or the monthly *Publisher*.

My members admired, maybe some tolerated this trait in me and it paid off in better ways of doing many new services. Here are some we did for the first or nearly first time in the newspaper association management business:

From a monthly multi-paged member bulletin to a weekly, one-sheet 8.5x14”, front and back, addressed on one panel so no envelope covered it. A quick read but it was a killer to tight write news items, with attention compelling headlines, illustrations, and graphics. It was read almost immediately because it gave quick information, was shirt pocket portable, even to the potty.

Switched from a slick-paper monthly member magazine to a newsprint tabloid. Why not? Are we in the magazine business or in the newspaper biz? Its newspaper format gave us a place and vehicle with which to experiment with different paper, photo screens, photo cropping, type style, heads.

Since I retired *The Publisher* has gotten even better with attention compelling layouts and graphics. It shows newspaper staffs what they can do with varied layout. When I returned to OPA as manager on 1 Jan. 1953 the *Publisher* was a magazine, three months behind issue, skinny, dull and arrived in a brown paper envelope. I put it in a plastic bag to show off its cover. As I went around member newspapers, I spotted it, still in its sack amid the pile of mail on the editor's desk. Man, we gotta get that thing read.

Legisgrams, quick special bulletins on moving legislation, calling for contacts, held to one sheet, front and back. A quick read with rocket style (lead in) heads. If a few words would convey the message then do it. It was used only as moving legislation demanded immediate help from members. We also frequently used postcards, a very powerful medium.

Pats on the back, recognition for signing up, for making your contact, for chipping in AND working. The "where are you list" when needed to let members know we haven't heard from them. Such as bold facing those who have replied, light face for the non responders. If the association is to grow, be strong, it must recognize who does and doesn't do the work. It's mild intimidation.

Roy E. "Friday" Fitzgerald was one of my good friends for 30-plus years. When I moved our accounts from Liberty Bank to Fidelity Bank, about 1970, I met him. Born in Tonkawa, he became the greatest statewide organizer of Demolay (Masonic Lodge) clubs for young high school boys. Next, in the 1930s, he headed up the National Youth Administration (NYA) for Roosevelt's New Deal in Oklahoma.

Friday moved fast, talked fast, oozed energy and was trustworthy. When Tulsa Ford dealer Bill Dungees and others actually elected Johnston Murray as governor (following Roy Turner) in 1950 they got Friday Fitz to be Chief of Staff to keep Gov. Murray out of trouble.

Never one to ever allow any personal publicity, he was an amazing person to help others get things done. Friday seemingly knew everybody, including the FBI, and his introduction made one instantly trusted. What's more Friday knew the inside political gossip which he would share only if he trusted and liked you. He certainly helped me many times and was a fireball up until his last months at age 88. He asked me to write his obituary, provided that his daughter-in-law Sorelle edited it, and I was flattered.

My last drink of hard liquor was the evening of 16 August 1986 while Bonnie and I were having dinner with Ally Mae and Friday Fitzgerald. In the middle of a gin and tonic I decided to quit right then.

WHO, ME AN ALCOHOLIC?

Recent events had finally convinced me, as we say in AA, "that I am powerless over alcohol."

An arrest for DUI 17 days earlier had caused me to do an honest evaluation of my drinking. I went about it in my usual methodical way; I shopped around for an alcohol treatment program that I could go through and still work days. Nearly all were to go off to say Valley Hope at Cushing for a month to six weeks. I found the long established St. Johns program of Salina, Kan., had a branch way out on west Reno in OKC.

I enrolled without being ordered to do so by anyone. Class was five nights a week, Monday through Friday, at 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. It ran for three months. Everyone was required to attend at least one AA meeting over each weekend. There were about 20 of us substance abuse addicts in the class seeking control of our lives from booze, beer, pot, crack, cocaine and who knows what else in the dope world.

Mean, nasty, insulting and hard on you is what the counselors were. All were recovered, or recovering as they tell you since you never fully recover, drunks or dope heads. The nastiest of all our instructors was a 40-plus year old woman who let everyone know she was an ACA. That's the Adult Child of an Alcoholic, scarred for life, is damned bitter about it and is determined to get even.

We had literature to read at home, daily papers to write, group discussions to take part in and many, many films to watch every day. Anyone who dozed

off would be kicked out on the third offense and your \$2,000 kept, no refund.

What a sad sack group of misfits, failures and just screwed up people from their early 20s on up to a few like me in their 60s. I could feel the hatred radiating in the room; both for themselves and certainly for their spouse who might have accompanied them on this rehabilitation attempt. Yes, some of these poor souls make several stabs at rehab or recovery and some never make it stick. I did.

This was truly a spiritual experience for me. I entered into it to honestly seek the truth on the extent of my use of alcohol. I gradually and reluctantly came to the honest conclusion that I am an alcoholic. That means I don't want to stop after the second drink of hard liquor. Beer and wine were never my sedation of choice; one or two was always all I wanted. But we had three guys who had to put away 12 beers every weekday after work and maybe more on Friday or they could never get home.

Like in AA, we went around the room with each victim introducing themselves as "My name is Ben and I am an alcoholic." At first it was humiliating and it was meant to be because it was good for you. Everyone had several stories to tell about their experiences. Some of them were real wild, hair raisers and it made me glad that hadn't happened to me. Some were funny. In fact, some of the funniest stories I have ever heard were in AA meetings. These were men and women from judges and doctors to preachers (yes, I have met a couple who sneak drank until hooked) whose life had become unmanageable. Then just plain Joes, black, white, a few attractive kids born rich and also Hispanic but, oddly, no Jews. I wondered why.

After three months of 5-day a week treatment and a weekend meeting at one of the dozens of Alcoholics Anonymous "Clubs" in OKC (they are all over the state and world) a whole new life was on my horizon. To my surprise I gradually discovered I could have fun without alcohol.

There are three kind of drunks: the mean drunk who wants to fight and be disagreeable; a happy drunk of which I was one. It was an enjoyable recreation with good friends. Then there is the third kind of drunk who is in the middle of these extremes, sort of babbles, but is not dangerous except to drive.

I have shortened this saga and great learning experience. I am deeply indebted to The Higher Power (as we refer to God in AA) that I never maimed or killed anyone while I was driving. After 16 years of dry sobriety I gradually let myself have a glass of red wine with supper and occasionally a very good beer. No more than that; no scotch, gin, vodka or what I call hard stuff. Even so, a single glass of wine or beer is not acceptable to AA. I felt uncomfortable under their glare so I quit going after 16 years.

I have been very much blessed by these rehab and AA experiences. I met people I didn't like and found that I could like them. After all, we can only change ourself ... if we really and honestly want to. Going off on a toot to get even with someone never works.

Wall signs and bumper strips at AA meetings have great, pithy, short messages: "Easy Does it" ... "One Day at a Time" ... "Let Go, and Let God" ... "Attitude is Everything."

Finally, the "bible" of Alcoholics Anonymous is a two inch thick gem written by the founders in 1939 and reprinted 45 times without substantial change. It is called "The Big Book" and everyone knows what you mean.

That is amazing compared to The Christian Bible which has many versions and has been changed extensively through the years. The 12 Steps substance abuse recovery program and AA have saved many lives, made them better.

BLACKSTOCK'S THEORY OF THIRDS

In any organization — associations, churches, chambers of commerce, etc. — one third do all the work. Of them the leaders move up to higher position. This grand bunch would come to a meeting by your merely announcing it and even if you didn't say what was on the program. I experimented to prove it. Yes, 50 or more could be depended upon to show up even if the program was only a dog fight.

The Middle Third are sometimes helpers; they will do what you want with a little twist of their tail. From the Middle Third you go see, phone and recruit them to enter the Top Third by committee work.

Then there's the **Final or Bottom Third**. Don't abuse 'em. Some people have no wish to take part.

They will pay dues, even give you extra money if you go see them. Give 'em a pat. But learn who they are and respect their important role in the group.

It needs to be said that **some people can get too involved** for the overall good of the association and of the executive. First on their totem pole should be their family. Next their newspaper. Next their town. When they move up to President of OPA I let them know, deftly I hope, that OPA should now be number three in their life for the next year, after their family and newspaper.

Not #1 or #2 or we and they are headed for big trouble. I've had that happen and had to try to get the President back on workable priorities. And, not get too much in my hair. Some, when they became president, wanted to roost in the central office, as association headquarters were once called.

HAVE A FLASHY HEADQUARTERS?

Public identity has some importance if you are wooing the public, trying to influence legislators and public officials. It's not to be confused with the ego of the CEO. It is why we moved out of a downtown building with no identity or visibility to North Lincoln Blvd. and built a classy, "conservative modern" story and half glass and marble aggregate building unlike any other.

We looked around for a used building and I really thought that was the way to go to get needed space for growth services. A crackerjack committee was appointed that everyone trusted: Ed Livermore Sr., Wallace Kidd, Clancy Frost and Charley Engleman.

We agreed on Harold Brand as our realtor. He was a "One Man Band," loved by all, infectiously enthusiastic, known by almost everybody, honest and a joy to be around. He drove us around town, one hand on the steering wheel, driving down the street while looking and talking over the back seat to the rest of the committee. We finally hired a van and driver or we'd be dead.

Well it came to "to hell with buying an old building." That because we did plunk down \$5,000 on an old empty Buick dealership building next door to *The Daily Oklahoman*, then at Fourth and Broadway in OKC. Harold even had Architect Dow Gummerson draw up how the 2-story (with parking off the alley

into a third floor basement) would look. An exterior bubble elevator right in front on Broadway.

Mrs. Swatec, wife of Judge Luther Bohannon, had it on the market 10-plus years. We were too enthused so they raised the price 50 percent (\$60,000 to \$90,000). To hell with them our committee said. We're going out a ways and build an all new OPA building.

Every lot Harold Brand showed us "looked right down the throat of Oklahoma City." It became his second name. What a great guy, generous; we loved him.

Bob Roloff of Bailey, Bozalis, Dickinson and Roloff was brought in by Leland Gourley as our FREE architect. It took some selling to get across to the Board that you can't fire people who work FREE. So we had a competition and selected Roloff's firm anyway, and at the then regular six percent fee. How lucky.

But we had to hold Roloff back. He had wild, Frank Lloyd Wright ideas. We settled for what I call "conservative modern." To see what Bob would have done, look up Lincoln north at The Flying Saucer Bank, where Leland Gourley let him have his way.

We had saved about \$150,000 from profits. Imagine! OPA was broke six years before. We built a 10,000 sq. ft. building for \$250,000 taking \$125,000 from reserves, borrowing \$150,000 from our group insurance carrier, American Fidelity Assurance Co. (That's an intriguing story around that ole buccaneer, its Chair/Pres. C.W. Cameron, who came up from Frederick and showed the city slickers a few quaint tricks.)

We went to members for pledges. We got Ned Shepler, publisher of the *Lawton Constitution and Press*, drunk enough at Lake Murray Lodge during our Summer Convention. Ned arose after the presentation, made a little speech and signed his pledge form for \$7,500. We secretly told him if he would be "the slaughter house goat," set an example, he could look at the pledges at the end and cut his back if he wanted to. Deal. He didn't cut.

We asked \$1,000 per paper, payable \$200/year. We asked more of larger papers; \$25,000 each of *The Daily Oklahoman* and the *Tulsa World and Tribune* (both great papers and strong supporters of OPA).

Gaylord sent a check for only \$5,000; we were crushed. The Tulsa dailies quickly sent a pledge for \$25,000 and said they'd double it if we would move OPA to Tulsa. God, how I'd have liked to. We never acknowledged E.K. Gaylord's stingy \$5-k. Well, it was probably the early doings of Eddie who had fallen out with me over "telling him to get a legislator's commitment **and to report back.**" Another story I may tell.

The building of "Blackstock's Taj Majahl" (a half-kidding reference by some) forced me on the road and even into the air. I chartered a Beech Bonanza (flown by Frank Mize out of Downtown Airpark) to barnstorm the outer corners of the state, sometimes landing in cow pastures (really) in search of pledges. A committee of 20 past presidents in as many districts had failed miserably "to bring in the sheaves" (as the Baptist hymn puts it). Livermore told me, "if you want that damn building, you better go out and get the money."

We accepted pledges and money only from newspapers. The Building Committee conceived an inspired thought to NOT hit on our suppliers and the usual victims of grandiose plans, the utility and oil companies. They were stunned to be left out of a press shakedown. We grew proud to have done it by ourselves.

And we got \$147,000 in pledges; only \$2,500 in shrinkage, defaults, deaths or wives raising hell. When anyone whined that they had signed while drunk or euphoric I just tore up their pledge, mailed the pieces with a nice note that we understood.

Bill Wingo, owner of the little *Granite Enterprise*, asked his kids to sleep on the floor so I could have their bed. (I often stayed with members in their homes; saved money, got better acquainted.) I drove down to see him. He said he couldn't afford to give us \$1,000 but I could take \$25/month out of his OPS ad checks until the mortgage was paid off. But he wouldn't sign anything. I took his verbal pledge with tears in my eyes. Wingo was from an old family of printers and small town print shop owners. He was definitely in The Third Third of members as I explained earlier, loyal and appreciative but never attended a meeting 'til he died.

Each donor of \$1,000 got to designate a person to be honored with a beautiful bronze and walnut

plaque. They submitted pictures for the artist to mold a clay likeness which they got to come in to see before it was cast. That and 25 words in bonze was, as Ed Livermore Sr. so aptly put it, "better than being on a tombstone out in the marble orchard." Over the years many came to see their relatives on the plaques on the walls of the OPA building. An inspired idea and I don't know whose it was.

Put the OPA building down, with a personality of its own, as a unique activity. Its crisp attractive black and white appearance became a source of pride, a place to meet friends. More members came by than ever came up to the 23rd floor of the Biltmore Hotel. OPA had been moved from the OU J-School to one room in the new Biltmore by Ray Dyer when he became the first full-time "Field Manger" as my job was known of in those dire depression days of the 1930s.

OPA officed in the Biltmore from shortly after it opened in 1933 until we moved out in March 1961. It was a grand old place. The Biltmore was the scene of a lot of political action including headquarters for the Democratic Party.

OPA started with one room and borrowed furniture. When we moved to 3601 N. Lincoln into our beautiful glass and white building we left 19 rooms there. I boasted we had more toilets than any press association in the world. They would never let an office remove a bathroom for fear they would have to put it back.

We paid our new building off in 4-1/2 years from pledges and continuing profits. I was tickled and so was my Board and our entire membership.

A blank white wall behind our receptionist was where I intended to put a montage of hands making a newspaper. George Murphy, publisher of the weekly *Manteca (Calif.) Bulletin* gave me a set of 40 black and white pix of hands he took of a reporter holding a pencil, an adman laying out an ad, hands of printers at work and finally hands holding a newspaper being read. It was a great picture story but some wise persons raised the question of its growing monotony. I agreed and sought something else.

One Sunday morning I was reading *Orbit*, the Sunday *Oklahoman's* rotogravure inserted magazine. In it was a story about Oklahoma artist Charles Banks Wilson of Miami, Okla. There were several

color pictures he had painted. One was of Will Rogers reading a newspaper next to his typewriter titled "All I know I read in the newspaper." I grabbed the phone and phoned the writer, Bill Harmon, who lived in Stillwater. He told me that painting was back in Wilson's studio in Miami. He gave me his home phone number.

I called and told him who I was and that I was interested in that painting. He said he had painted it for the Gerlach-Barklow Calendar company 20 years ago. Millions of calendars had been printed off of it. NBC owned it for awhile to promote their TV spectacular on Rogers. It went back to the calendar company, which declared several pieces of art as surplus and prepared to sell it. As artist he got first chance to buy it back at the \$3,500 they paid him to paint it. He sold it to us for the same price.

I told Charles Banks Wilson about the new OPA building, the association, its location and what a great showpiece this painting of Rogers would be for both us and him. How much? We had already spent all our money but maybe I could get the wealthy owner of the *Tulsa World*, Maude Lorton Meyers, to buy it and give it to us. Would he sell it to us and could I come and borrow it to take and show Mrs. Meyers? Yes.

I stopped at Claremore and picked up Ed Livermore Sr., chairman of our building committee. We went to Charles' studio late in the day, loaded it in my station wagon. I was so excited I ran out of gas on the new Will Rogers Turnpike. Ed stayed and guarded the prize while I walked to get gas.

Back in OKC I now had to get an appointment with Maude. I looked in the paper the next morning and she had unexpectedly died of a heart attack. She was a great lady who was a loss to the *Tulsa World* and Tulsa.

Livermore said to call an emergency meeting of the OPA board. They came and looked at the beautiful painting. We had spent all we dared. In a flash of inspiration Ed said, "well if we all agree we want it then Ben can call ole Charley and ask if we can pay it out on a time payment plan. How much interest is he making on his savings now?"

I phoned. CBW, who said he had never sold any art this way, was getting three percent at the Savings & Loan; could we pay it off in three years at four per-

cent? I said yes, we sure as hell could. Good, says he, sign and send your note.

I told the board. They and I were elated, proud to have this great egg tempera oil painting of Will Rogers hung just a little off center on our entry wall.

One sourpuss of a publisher looked at it and grumbled, "in 10 years no one will know who Will Rogers was." That was 1961. That publisher is dead and hardly anyone knows of him.

The painting was appraised in 1991 for \$65,000. We loaned it to the state to go in the Oklahoma exhibit at the NYC World Fair, also to the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa and to a few other exhibits. It's a perfect fit.

Charles Banks Wilson (he uses all three) later painted the four Oklahoma heroes in alcoves around the state capitol's fourth floor rotunda: Will Rogers, Sequoyah, Bob Kerr and Jim Thorpe. The high up murals curved into the uppermost ceiling there are Wilson's work too. All eight are masterpieces by Oklahoma's greatest artist.

Beginning about six months after we bought the Will Rogers we began to get a steady stream of artists wanting to show what they had. One day I walked in to see a heavily laden old Mercury sitting near the OPA front door.

Inside was Woody Big Bow, a somewhat widely known Indian artist. He had several of his paintings sitting around the lobby. We talked. I courteously explained we were out of money, not buying art. He said he was out of gas. I bought a plaster bust he said was of Geronimo, an Apache raider, who spent his last years as a Ft. Sill prisoner.

CBW saw it and said it wasn't Geronimo because he didn't wear bear claw beads. I said he was Geronimo to Woody Big Bow and to me. So, he sat in my office 20 years wearing a rabbi's cap and a strand of check-signing slugs representing bookkeepers I had fired.

I drew the line at buying any more art. I wanted Willard Stone to carve a Sequoyah I could use to cast winner awards for our newspaper contest. I offered him \$1,500 as all I had. He said I paid CBW \$3,500 for the Will Rogers and he wanted \$3,500. He said I was a chiseler and a cheapskate. I said I was broke or badly bent. I regret not having a piece of Willard Stone's art, Oklahoma's best wood carver.

Freedom to do innovations; try new ideas, break away from the pack is what enthused me about my job. Here are some:

The **Oklahoma Newspaper Foundation** was a 1958 innovation, only the second such among state press associations. It was needed to have a place to put profits, to raise money from the wealthy and the loyal ... and for memorials. Also, should tax-exempt laws change, it was an entity to own the building and maybe even operate other activities.

I regret that I never made the time or found the person to do ONF right. We received money, as much as \$250,000 from Raymond and Mildred Fields' entire estate, as sole beneficiaries. They named me executor. I did look after Ray extensively and solely during the final trying years of his life.

Raymond Fields was a great guy with many experiences: he served in both WW1 and WW2, was big nationally in the American Legion. Ray helped dig the grave in France in 1918 to bury Joyce Kilmer, the poet who wrote — "I think that I shall never see... a poem lovely as a tree... a tree that looks at God all day... and lifts its leafy arms to pray."

But, I failed to devise a systematic recognition of the givers, such as Don Frensley, Ken Reid, Milt Garber and many others, though some asked not to be identified. I feel bad about that shortcoming. No one complained but I know I failed an important obligation and responsibility. Hopefully, Mark Thomas will quickly remedy this shortcoming.

JOURNALISM SCHOOLS

Degrees were granted by two departments of journalism, one at OU, the other at OSU. Journalism courses were also offered by most of the 25 other state financed higher education colleges. Anyone the administration could get to teach journalism in the smaller colleges is how it worked. I learned that when I was hired at Central State College, Edmond, to teach all the journalism in the catalog — three courses. (While being Director of Public Relations, in charge of the print shop, the student newspaper, the yearbook and also alumni secretary for \$340/month!)

We found years later that many, most of these junior college and college J-course credits would not transfer, say to OU or OSU, which said they were inferior. That's lying to students who want to get

started on a higher degree then transfer to a larger university for better instruction, or so they hoped.

I could write at length about the OU and OSU J-schools. And, how we supported Central State College to get approval from State Regents for Higher Education to strengthen the then CSC journalism offering. We did it to harass the larger universities' J-departments to improve; but they didn't. Well, there's also a lot of demand from students in the OKC area.

OPA had two J-school committees, one for each OU and OSU. On each were graduates, friends. The idea was to improve the kind of student they turned out to work on news or sell advertising. We got involved in selecting who was to replace the head of the J-department and ran interference for the director on any conflict with the university administration: money, staffing, etc.

Faculty at both J-schools acted like we were welcome, doing the Lord's Work. But, they did not respond to our urging to help us train newspaper employees already out there. Generally, the OPA J-school committees did good work for each university, OU, OSU and what is now UCO.

Dr. Charley Allen came down from Northwestern University, Chicago, to become director of the department of Journalism at Oklahoma State University. Chub Bellatti, Charley Rhoades and I interviewed him in a bar in Chicago and decided OSU needed him.

To shorten the story, Charley became very abrasive but cleaned out some deadwood in the J-faculty at then A&M. Charley charged one J-faculty, Lem Groom, with being incompetent. In the hearing Lem admitted that, indeed, he was incompetent but he was the only one they could get during WW2 when no one else could be found to teach journalism. He insisted they were now stuck with him 20 years or so later. The faculty court agreed with Lem and Charley had to keep him.

I got right in the middle of removing Dr. Elizabeth Yamashita as director of the OU J-school. OU President Bill Banowsky hired her because some women faculty members, mainly Prof. Junetta Davis, demanded it was time for a woman to be J-director. I checked Yamashita out at Michigan State where she was then teaching and at Northwestern University,

Chicago. She was a disaster, I was told. A native of Australia who got into the US via Great Britain, married a Nisi-American Japanese gaining further immigration leverage.

At OPA committee and board meetings more and more conversation was about Elizabeth's abrasive ways. Without asking, I wrote an OPA Bulletin item that it was time for Liz to go. I gave several reasons, one of which was that several of her own faculty had turned on her including the female professor advocates of but four years before. I said if she was a football coach she would have been gone long ago.

A confrontation was called for so I wrote out four single spaced pages and met with her, some of her supporters and me with my committee in the Norman *Transcript* conference room. I handed Elizabeth my four pages of charges. We sat down and talked about them and she about my interference in an academic matter. But common sense prevailed and she was persuaded to leave even though she had negotiated tenure when she came. I'll stop there. I was not hailed as a hero, but there was a new respect to be felt in the air. Accreditation was lost. I aggressively helped get OU-J on probation and reinstated.

I have noticed that incompetent managers hire incompetent underlings. So, the damage done goes on for years after they are finally removed.

Up at OSU they had a great J-director in Dr. Harry Heath. He taught well, picked his new hires well and, most importantly, would make time to help us train those employees who wanted to improve their news skills. But, there were flies in the kitchen even up in Aggieland. The Arts & Science dean was after Harry to resign. Our committee talked it over and sent me, the OPA president, and local publisher Jim Bellatti to Stillwater to see OSU Pres. Bob Kamm.

We discussed the harassment by Arts & Sciences Dean Greis of their good J-Director Harry Heath. We asked Pres. Kamm to fire the dean. What the hell, that's the way the oil men, the lawyers and many others do it so why can't we play the same game? The dean went away before long and Heath continued helping us with the news writing short courses and doing a good job with his own campus responsibilities.

About 1980 Central State College was renamed by the legislature as a University. They wanted a stronger journalism program. We were asked to support their effort before the State Regents for Higher Education. We did and it was approved with requirements. Central State University's name was again changed by the legislature to the present University of Central Oklahoma. Dr. Terry Clark was named director of the UCO School of Journalism in 1992. He enthusiastically joined OSU J-Director Dr. Harry Heath in conducting OPA 3-day, 1-day and 5-day news writing short courses. Prof. Michael Bugeja, an excellent and enthusiastic news teacher, also greatly helped us when he was at OSU. He is now director of the Greenlee School of Journalism at Iowa State University. It was hard to get any help from the OU professors, even with pay. I never figured it out. None of their directors could get their faculty to help us with news and advertising courses. Well yes, Gerald Grotta and Ernie Larkin did and they did a lot, both from the advertising side helping us with ONAB and Larkin a long time with our advertising short course. The others were lazy. I don't mean work free, we paid.

OPA had paid off all debt, had some money and the board wanted to help J-schools. We provided \$5,000 a year to J-professors who would get out and visit community newspapers in one of four quadrants of the state. Only Terry Clark did it.

We gave each of the three J-school directors a checkbook and a \$2,000 bank account to help J-majors in distress without getting approval from anyone. We replenished the funds as drawn without forms, lengthy explanation or red tape. It worked and saved some students from dropping out.

Continued training of local persons hired to work on the local newspaper is important because the editor never gets around to training. We heard that many times. We, through Clark, Heath and others knew how and were very successful. It is a wonderful feeling to see the gleam in the eyes of our short course students and to hear back from their bosses what a big difference our training meant to them. We gave our graduates their diploma late Friday afternoons. It was impressively signed, a gold seal affixed. They hurried home to frame it.

The week-long short courses were a “Great Idea” I adapted from attending the US Chamber of Commerce’s Association Management Short Courses at Michigan State and Syracuse Universities. Dr. D. Earl Newsom taught the first ones.

The object was to train the local persons most newspapers hired to write news or sell ads. From interviewing applicants to our free employment service we often found the person went to work at the newspaper hoping to learn but editors or ad managers were too tired or too busy to train. Also, they did not know where to begin or where to go from there. We did.

Dr. Durwood Earl Newsom, whom my brother Bob and I had nicknamed “Dagwood” (because he resembled Dagwood Bumstead of the comic strip) kindled my interest in journalism as a career. “Dag,” or Earl, was on sabbatical from the University of Maryland where he was professor of journalism. He came by, asked for some part time projects. We had money to do it and board support to invent more services.

Among the five projects I gave Dr. Earl was to design and implement two 5-day short courses; one for Advertising Selling and another for News Writing. He did and got leave to come back and direct the first such courses, complete with a few J-school PhDs, star reporters, editors and some civic leaders. For the Ad Course we got ad managers, merchants, star salesmen in other fields, etc. We paid each a \$50 honorarium to lecture an hour and a half and answer questions for an hour. They had to turn in an outline of what they were going to say three days before their appearance. Why? It made them prepare.

It’s hard to fire someone who works free. That’s one reason why we paid them a modest \$50, which a third endorsed to our foundation without me asking.

Graduates got a nice diploma, maybe the only one some of them ever got. Students rated each instructor giving us clues on whether to ask them back. Great idea! The students flunked the teachers.

It was a slow success but both courses took off with a max of 17 students each on a tight, disciplined Sunday evening through Friday afternoon and every evening in between. (Keep ’em out of the bars because they are so tired.) If they were late to class, I’d go to their motel room and roust them out. If they

didn’t seriously work in the class I would send them home and phone their boss. I only had to do that with one of the several hundred whom we trained.

Many who had been to college said the OPA courses were worth more than a year in journalism at a university. Each subject was presented with a lot of enthusiasm, even how to dress skills tossed in eagerly and intentionally.

Above I mentioned our free employment service. Anyone wanting a newspaper job was told to come to OPA. For many years I interviewed them all. They filled out an application, the receptionist brought it to me and I stopped what I was doing to read it. I called them into my office. I asked about their work experience. I found out a lot about our member employers that way. I found that some of them made promises they didn’t keep. Then I tried to pick which of the openings we had listed they might fit. I phoned the publisher and talked, then put the applicant on the line.

Why? When someone is out of work they need a friend. There was no better way to make two friends — the prospective employee and the publisher who needed help. I finally had to train someone to do that but I missed doing it.

Sometimes I ran across a real trouble maker looking for another job. I noticed that Borger, Texas, and Montrose, Colo., were always advertising for help. I found that they were lousy places to work. So, when an applicant looked like a trouble maker I picked up the phone and called Borger or Montrose. That got them out of the state.

Oklahoma Newspaper Advertising Bureau was created in 1975 after 11 months of ad hoc committee interviews with executives of all of the big chain retailers which advertised in newspapers. It came about because Ed Livermore Jr. came in alarmed that Safeway was cutting from a weekly double truck (two full pages side by side) to a scotch double (less three inches across the top and less one column down one side). Dick Hefton was president and he pounced on it, saw the possibilities.

Fear that these and other big advertisers would shrink to a single full page sent shivers down the spines of complacent family publishers. Ed wanted OPA to create a film to reSELL these big chain guys. The Board heard his plea, created a 7-person

super committee of the smartest non-metropolitan publishers and ad managers, 4 daily and 3 weekly, to see what was going wrong. I take some credit for changing the direction of what would have been a short lived promotional film, a waste of money and effort, into a genuine readership research and marketing program. Another innovative first among the nation's newspaper associations.

We invited the top advertising executives of retail chains into our board room for a sandwich working lunch. Amazingly, all accepted for a 1.5 hour interview with our secretary taking shorthand notes and quotes.

These top ad managers of the biggest five chains (Safeway, Humpty Dumpty, IGA, TG&Y, Anthony's and maybe J.C. Penney) were stunned to finally hear from newspapers, that we even cared about our number one customers. What shocking information we heard, quotes:

We are never called on a by a newspaper.

In rare instances a newspaper ad manager has dropped in our office but they had NO information to offer; maybe their rate card, and a sample copy of their paper but nothing more.

NO, Never have we been offered any market information, penetration or useful data we as an advertiser could use.

Shocking. As the then popular comic strip possum Pogo said: "We have met the enemy and he is us." I could go further but, suffice to say, we formed Oklahoma Newspaper Advertising Bureau funded by 1-cent per subscriber per month as dues. That dues formula was a big mistake on my part because it was one cent per subscriber per month. As circulation shrank so did income. If it had been based on the advertising rate, as was the later Legal Services Plan, it would have grown.

We hired the Tom Gordon ad agency media buyer, Susan Niles Hallman, as our first Executive Director of Oklahoma Newspaper Advertising Bureau. About 90 dailies and larger weeklies signed up pledging to pay and play their part for a minimum of three years as we sought to put together market data and make sales calls where we would not take an order.

Since we did not have enough money to pay a commercial firm for surveys (also called "studies")

we copied their system and hired a PhD at OU/JMC to set standards, methods and monitor our own trained telephone surveyors. We lauded the legitimacy of the information we gathered but it was honest and OU's Dr. Gerald Grotta attested to that. After a couple years experience with ONAB he took a big paying marketing job in the east and we hired Dr. Ernie Larkin.

Research into readership and market penetration is offensive to some old time newspapermen. The cartoon strip *Shoe* features talking birds acting like humans, often up in a tree. The foil is a blackbird who is a reporter for an old, graying eagle, clearly the editor in chief.

Reporter bird: "Let's get a survey of readers on what they want in the paper."

Old eagle editor: "Bah! What do readers know about putting out a newspaper?"

So, we found from interviews with big chain advertisers that none of us had any genuine marketing information to help them make media choices. Newspapers all across the land had nothing to offer about what age groups read what news or even looked at what ads.

Demographics is the science of what kind of people make up the population by age, sex, economic level, education and many other factors. We didn't know who read us and some of us didn't care. So, we had to tread gingerly but positively.

We needed many surveys; they were expensive and we couldn't afford it. So, we invent our own survey system blessed by an academic PhD certifying the rules we played by and his testing of our compliance. A big order. We hired OU's Dr. Grotta right after Susan Hallman. They determined the time to call was evenings, 5:30 to 10:00.

Fine, we would train a crew and supervisors and have them come in our offices beginning at 5:30 p.m. and make in-state long distance from a random sample pulled from telephone directories until 10 p.m. plus all day Saturdays. We literally went to say page 11, counted down to say the 11th name and recorded that sample. It was tedious and it had to be pure honesty fearing any former employee could tattle that we cheated.

We began on dues from the 90 or so loyal newspaper publishers who would try anything we asked.

Once we got our survey methods down pat we said, “Hey, we’ve invented a new wheel, a new mousetrap. Couldn’t we do surveys for newspapers in other states at say \$3-5,000 each?” We could and we did. Then, what about other business firms who need to better understand their market. We did several regional hospitals such as Norman, Lawton, Deaconess in OKC. All of a sudden we formed another new branch of Oklahoma Press Service: Consumer Data Service, which did money making surveys from New England to California. That’s how we were able to afford what we needed in surveys and studies of our own Oklahoma newspapers.

ONAB didn’t sell ads, take orders, get in front of daily rep firms. We promoted the idea of community newspaper advertising with honest, believable studies. To pay for the expensive polling structure we built, we branched out into doing surveys for others all over the US It became a profit center.

Good idea. ONAB lasted 15 years but in hindsight it was too little too late. Consumer Data Services was a spin-off and it still operated until 2002.

Daily reps heaved a sigh of relief that OPA hadn’t created another monster that would be eating their lunch. It helped them.

OPA’s Legal Services Plan was the brainchild of Jerry Sokolosky. Actually, it was a voluntary group of papers which for pre-paid dues got to phone our lawyer free 9 ’til 4 daily and us to defend them in any of eight lawsuits. Jerry and I drank our way through imagining it, during a couple of “Five O’Clock Seminars.”

We didn’t copy LSP from anywhere. There was not and is not anything like it anywhere, even today, in any newspaper association or even any other association. Legal Service Plan stemmed out of a search for more services for our newspaper members, especially small community non-metropolitan newspapers. They paid their own way.

Members often called me with legal problems since I was free, a major qualification. I was a pretty good “guard house lawyer” who knows quite a bit about the law, has drafted bills, lots of off-the-cuff hallway amendments and a number of proposed regulations for several state agencies

Publishers don’t trust local lawyers to know about the newspaper business and they certainly don’t want them to know their personal concerns. Jerry had been OPA, OPS, ONF and our self-insured medical coverage plan lawyer since he stopped being a legislator. (Wayne Quinlan was our first lawyer.) Our plan was original, cost effective and made it almost unnecessary for small papers to buy libel insurance. Most didn’t.

For the cost of a full page ad as annual dues OPA/LSP hired a smart media lawyer. (Sokolosky for the first 12 or so years).

Each dues-paying LSP newspaper could talk direct to our attorney between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. five days a week. That took some load and risk off me. We would defend your newspaper without additional fees except for court costs. Our defense was limited to libel, defamation, invasion of privacy, slander, restraint of trade, antitrust and price fixing.

LSP dues floated upward with the paper’s ad rate; tab size papers paid a broadsheet rate or about 8x21=168 inches times NATIONAL rate (the one they filed with us). That was smart. The mistake I made when we formed Oklahoma Newspaper Advertising Bureau (ONAB) was basing dues on circulation which is elastic downward. Ad rates go up.

OPA/LSP is now in its 25th year, has 121 (of 207) supporting members, is going well, has its own separate board of users, has \$240,000 in reserves to fund lawsuits, has been involved in many suits and has never lost one.

Jerry Sokolosky decided to semi-retire from the full time practice of law and resigned as our general counsel. There were many lawyers who sought to replace him. The money was good, not lush but the prestige was great. I talked to six lawyers. I pretty well knew most. I recommended Mike Minnis and the Board and LSP committee agreed. He was and is the smartest media lawyer in the state.

When OPA/LSP lawyers show up in Seminole, Sapulpa or elsewhere, the damage suit bar knows the fun is over. We don’t shake down or settle, unless the newspaper has libel coverage and their insurance firm decides to throw in the towel — over our objection.

ANOTHER WHIZ-BANG IDEA

Putting two smart, young computer whizzes on the road, into each newspaper plant which gave space to our want ad program may have been the best new idea of all.

We had been running a want ad program in which members were asked to run about an eighth of a page free each week. We sold the ads. It generated about \$300,000 annual income. Some state press associations gave some of the profit back. Not me; I gave donors a free service they needed and wouldn't pay for.

We paid half their OPA dues and offered them free tutoring **in their plant** on their own computer operation. The two "road warriors" as they were called, traveled every corner of the state spending from 2 to 4 hours showing newspaper staffers how to run their computers on news or ads and do minor maintenance.

What a hit. We paid their roughly \$22,000 salary, 35 cents a mile, lodging and food. Cost a little over \$100,000 per year. But it took good scheduling and management which sometimes my staff failed at.

PART 8

Viewpoints

It may come as a great disappointment to some that I'm not going to comment on each of the 44 OPA presidents during my years as Secretary-Manager, Executive Vice President or CEO and sometimes Janitor. There are interesting stories about each. As this is written 22 of them are still living; seven are still active in the newspaper business.

I learned something from each new president. He was my boss and when in 1990 Margaret Taylor became our first woman president, she was my boss; the same as the men.

I never had a contract; I was a fire at will employee. If six of the 10 members of the board wanted me gone, I would have been out. I can say with honesty I was treated fairly and well paid. The main ingredient I wanted was support to try new ideas, make changes and I had that encouragement. That is the main reason I turned down four offers to move to national organizations.

Somewhere in the 1970s it dawned on me we were also training leaders not only for our association but for each community as well. I found able lecturers, teachers and trainers from across the country and locally and paid them to come do a Leadership Day. One subject was how to chair a meeting by the American Institute of Discussion. Another on how to talk with a legislator, congressman or city council person. We invited only the board and chair and vice-chair of our 12 committees. Free registration, free lunch. (*Free!* Some said I had gone mad.) We told members it was by invitation only, that they had earned a course in how to be a better citizen, a leader. It was enthusiastically received as another free bonus. A few said they didn't want to be a leader but came to watch.

I have mentioned three past presidents who were closer to me as mentors: Joe McBride Sr., Milt Phillips and Ed Livermore Sr. We tried to have a major project to accomplish during the term of each and every president. In most we succeeded but in

some it was not meant to be. Such as John Lokey wanting OPA to pull locally written editorials or columns and mail them monthly to encourage such writing.

Too few wrote editorials or interpretative columns so that we could not get enough copy. But, year after year we set new goals and stimulated both interest and change.

I have laid off writing on this tome for several months now. I have been on a "mental plateau" as my friend Sam Campbell told me once at OU when he was aimlessly wandering around the library.

I have been most fortunate in having employers at the OPA — newspaper publishers no less — who allowed, yes I say allowed, me to argue the issues because, after all, they owned the business. I wanted the freedom to express my views on matters before the board of directors; to bring before it unconsidered, stifled opinions of the minority. You don't do that all at once when you can be fired by a 6-4 vote and I never had a contract.

I won their confidence first by hard work, integrity and honesty. Never even use the company's stamps for personal mail unless you publicly pay the bookkeeper.

I freely wrote my views in the membership Bulletin and monthly tab newspaper. I signed everything I wrote.

One of my four major mentors, this one Joe McBride Sr., taught me to list a topic on the board of directors agenda followed by several solutions and finally my recommendation. Joe thought that would move the agenda along and save time. He was right. Maybe he sensed I wanted to get my two cents in. But, if I did not have a clear recommendation, he told me then, I should say so and ask for guidance from the board.

The agenda along with supporting information was mailed out in advance so board members would

have 2-3 days to study and phone around or even phone me to ask for more information. It was fun. It was a learning experience. I became unafraid to stand up for what I thought was right. I gradually realized that it was all right to change my mind and to shift my position.

I embraced Wayne Quinlan's "foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds." (actually Emerson)

Over the years I adopted a sometimes kidding way of nudging a conversation along. At Michigan State University one summer in an association management class, the brilliant instructor was Dr. Darib Unwalla from India. Among several wise sayings from him was when he did one of his many consulting jobs he listened to the level of kidding among employees and from that he could usually predict the level of morale, employee's real attitudes towards the company, each other and life in general. I've tried that and agree.

Of course the kidding level can rise or fall to absurd and hurtful levels. Snide, critical personal digs must be avoided. I often used humorous questions to elicit a raised eyebrow or ice-thawing response which began to get the conversation to flow. If that is Machiavellian then I understand the Prince of Deceit far differently.

"The therapy of controversy" is a term I used for awhile when a board member would say we seemed too often to deal in conflicts. My response was that in an association of sometimes competitors it keeps us healthy if we did not bury, ignore issues which only a minority want considered. I tried to explain that open discussion is a way to keep factions from growing. I would smile and say "it's the therapy of controversy. It makes you feel better."

One day at the close of a board meeting and the mandatory executive session I was welcomed back to the meeting to hear any grievances. The president said, "It will be appreciated if you stop using that term, but we're not telling you to not bring issues before the board."

I found a new way to do it. Some people are said to create controversy, as I think Czar Langston did at the electric co-ops. Hell, you don't have to create controversy; there's always plenty of unresolved issues laying around which need attention and fixing.

My view of work is to decide opportunities, resources, time demand and priorities, then get on with it so that we can use our energies to attain goals.

Somehow this approach gradually permeated members of my board of directors over the years. They tolerated, heard out my views and became aware that whatever the decision I could be counted on to carry out the course of action decided, no matter how much it disagreed with my own viewpoint.

Past Pres. (1990) Margaret Taylor (Davis News) has said, "Ben will actively present his views but when the decision is made you never have to worry that he will sabotage instructions to do something a different way than the board preferred." I liked that. I could be trusted.

Jim Bellatti was president in 1981 and started the OPA/OPS employee Retirement Program. It was a small start of \$7,500 that year split in accounts of persons who had worked there more than three years. It has not grown very much but it allows each person to add to their account portion of tax deferred mutual fund investment plan. The formula was the number of years worked and annual pay level.

That meant I would gobble up over half of the amount the board appropriated each year. So, I understated my salary; an unselfish act that few knew about. I learned to save about 1980 so I opted to max my savings. I am so glad that I learned to save strongly the last 15 years I worked. Thanks Jim.

As I think back to those 44 years from 1953 thru 1995, from the perspective of February 2004, I was lucky. But I believe we create some of our own luck by ability, attitude, aggressiveness, honesty and all the other spices that go into the pot of making one's personality and character.

So, let's explore my views on life, what's important and not, how to control the beehive between our ears (our mind); is there a higher power?; keeping healthy both physically and mentally and anything else.

MY VIEWS ON RELIGION

Every Sunday my mother, father, brother and me walked seven blocks south on Ohio, across Main street, to Sunday school and main services at the First Baptist Church in Drumright. We seldom went Sunday or Wednesday evening. Bob and I were in the Boy Scout troop there.

When I went into the Army I went to the chaplain's Sunday non-denominational service. After all, I like all others were aware we were in a war and might get killed. I occasionally read the Bible and about the beliefs of other religions.

I have a curiosity about religion, why and what people believe, so I went often to nearby community churches. After the war as a student at OU I continued shopping around. I remember getting up early on Sundays in Norman, riding the Interurban trolley to OKC then taking a city bus to 13th and N. Dewey to the Unitarian Church to hear their “radical” liberal pastor Rev. A.E. von Stilley. It was a mind-stretching experience.

After graduation I moved to OKC, then to Edmond where I taught and was director of public relations at then Central State College. Next to Henryetta. At each of these stops I went to different churches, different denominations. I read a lot about religious beliefs and came to several conclusions.

Bonnie and I were married on 8 August 1954 near San Diego by a Unitarian minister. Back in Oklahoma City we shopped for a church. She didn’t know what she wanted but did not like the “believe whatever you want to believe” (or, “Bring Your Own God”) credo of the Unitarians.

Okay, so we tried the Methodists, joined the First Christian and next joined the Westminster Presbyterian church about 1958 or ’60. She would lose interest but we believed our three kids needed to go to Sunday school and church to help their moral and ethical beliefs. We didn’t drop them off, we went too.

After Mike’s suicide — we were First Christians then — we sought but got no help from our pastor.

We moved to Edmond and joined the Presbyterian church there. We attended nearly every Sunday and participated in several church activities. I was elected a deacon.

SO, WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

I believe there is a God or a “Higher Power” as those of us in Alcoholics Anonymous refer to the deity. I am convinced by the solar system, the exact and precise measurement of time and space that some Higher Power created. All we have discovered of the laws of nature including the body’s inner workings. It is awesome. In 1870 Thos. Huxley concluded that the human mind cannot know whether there is a God. For me I believe there is. Each of us must decide.

What about heaven and hell?

No, not as I understand many religions as to an after life. I believe when we are dead, we are dead. Our soul is the memory of us by our friends and fam-

ily. It seems absurd to me to get ready to die to go to some place with a mob of people I probably wouldn’t like to associate with.

There are many persons who are absolutely sure they are going to heaven. With many of them, I hope I don’t go where they are.

“If there are no dogs in heaven, then when I die I want to go where the dogs went.” Will Rogers

Mainly, each of us must live with this beehive between our ears. It is our accumulated experiences, what we have found to be true or even the vacuum we have created by refusing to think about life, of an after life, ethics and our secret standards of, or for, behavior by ourselves and others. It is fascinating to think about, to discuss; is always a work in progress subject to revision or strengthening. But, nearly everyone is fearful of discussing their true feelings about life, their real religion, their political convictions or confusions and certainly their sex life.

Ideals, beliefs accumulate with experiences. We must make time to sort them out; reject some conclusions; remodel and revise and pursue though reading, discussion and thinking: What is the meaning of life? I find happiness amid all of the sordid crap which I must know is there but much is of no value.

One spring Sunday morning I got an urgent call from two local friends. One was an Indian and a developer and the other a Jew and the local editor. They came to ask me to write some copy for an advertisement inviting people to move to Edmond to escape school integration bussing in Oklahoma City and that Edmond was a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) community. I listened with dropped jaw.

“I am stunned beyond words that you two minorities, a Jew and an Indian, would even think this way,” I exclaimed on our patio.

They looked at each other and said in unison, “I never thought of it that way.”

We gradually develop our own set of ethics, rules we try to live by. In other words, our conscience. An old Indian preacher named Jasper Zonke told us at an AA meeting:

“My conscience is a sharp stone down inside me. When I do something wrong the stone turns and the sharp edges hurt. But, if I keep doing it the sharp edges wear down smooth and doing the wrong things don’t hurt anymore.”

THE FUNERAL RITUAL

I've attended hundreds of funerals all over Oklahoma. Most were newspaper people and many were like family reunions. I phoned and offered to give a ride to those on my route of travel, offered to be of help to the bereaved family, assist as a pall bearer if asked, etc. At most there is an after the service snack and drinks. It is an opportunity to tell funny stories in remembrance of the deceased.

We developed a "Death Notice" postcard, edged in black with enough space for a brief bio, time and place of the service. Many wanted us to mail one out for a family member or employee. Some wanted advice on arrangements. I asked whether they wanted to designate Oklahoma Newspaper Foundation to receive memorial donations. You have to do that quick and it can be touchy but it is also appreciated at those times of confusion.

There was occasional humor.

One Friday morning a woman phoned to tell me her publisher husband Bill died last night. Yes, she would appreciate our mailing a Death Notice card. I wrote down the details then asked when the service was to be. She paused. "Will it be next Tuesday or Wednesday?" I asked. "No, it will be next Friday," she replied. "Oh," said I, "you have kinfolks who live a ways off?" "No, they're all here but we have a paper to get out and he ain't going anywhere."

Early one Saturday morning I got a call from Louise Fischer, co-publisher of the Woods County Enterprise at Waynoka. She was in the Jung Hotel in New Orleans and tearfully told me her husband Aaron was in the bed next to her and she was sure he was dead. What to do, Louise asked.

No, she hadn't phoned anyone else but me because she said I would know what to do. I told her to phone the hotel clerk, and what to do about getting on home. They had driven there on their way back from a vacation in Florida. I phoned her kids, gave them her phone numbers and made suggestions.

I often took Bill Martineau, a longtime ago past-president and publisher of the OKC *Stockyards News*, with me to funerals. We were sitting near the back of a church in Waurika at Charley Storms' funeral. As it hymned to an end and people filed out past the open casket, Bill held me back; he wanted to be the last to pass the casket.

Bill gripped the edge of Charley's open casket and began, "Well Charley, you were a good son of a bitch. We remember all the whisky we drank and the

craps we shot together over many years." It went on for maybe three minutes to the chagrin of undertakers standing nearby. Touching, I thought.

Another time Bill and me were sitting at Ned Shepler's funeral in the Lawton Presbyterian Church right behind Fred Tarman and Harold Belknap of the *Norman Transcript*.

Fred leaned over and semi-loudly says to Harold: "Remember, don't do it this way when I die, Harold. It's ten o'clock in the morning. They still have a paper to put out. Have mine about 3 in the afternoon and give the employees the rest of the day off." It was touching but funny.

Milt Phillips' family asked me to deliver the eulogy at his funeral in Seminole. Milt was one of four mentors I had in my life. He was tough but he helped me become a man and then he became one of my most effective advisors and defenders.

I wrote out what Milt meant to me and others, the many good services Milt performed so well for Seminole, the entire state of Oklahoma and nation as a Navy Chief in WW2. Not too much, just ten minutes. I was flattered to be asked when Milt had many friends who were more eloquent than me. I got several requests for a copy so I was glad that I had worked over writing it just right.

Maybe 10 years before I had written a tribute to his brother Tom that had a high response. These were two great men who served their families, their towns and the state on many boards and commissions with distinction and quality results. And, both published excellent newspapers at Holdenville and Seminole, were active in the OPA.

I don't look at the deceased in an open casket. The memory erases the mind pictures I have of the person. Way too much is spent on funerals. Cremation and a heartfelt memorial service spoken by a few friends is the way it should be. A reflection, a remembrance, an appreciation of the life she or he lived. Sadly, some did not have any known good points as witness the frequent "no service" graveside committal rites.

The saddest thing about funerals is that a third are so poorly done. The preacher doesn't take the time to find out anything about the deceased and it shows. At least get someone to say a good word.

Or, as the late WKY radio newsman, Ed Hardy, related his father's comment on the passing of an acquaintance: "When he was alive he was a prick; now he's a dead prick." Someone had to say it.

Although it doesn't have to do with a funeral, the story of Sam Field, publisher of the weekly *Shidler Review*, is funny and sad.

His brother, Louis Field, owned and ran the weekly *Hominy News* though he was paralyzed from the neck down. Louis typed on an electric typewriter gripping a pencil in his teeth. Lots of determination.

Louis financed Sam at Shidler. Times were tough, there were few ads so he mostly put out four pages, did some job printing and eked out a living. It dawned on Sam that his back shop shared a brick wall with the vault of the local Shidler bank. He hung an Army blanket to shield off the light as he worked nights chipping his way through the wall into the bank vault. Such insanity! Or desperation? Both.

He finally made it through the wall but was discovered before he could loot the vault. I forget how it played out but I think he did do time.

Very small weeklies deserved some extra concern and help. Once Larry Hammer (*Cherokee Republican*) told me about the *Wakita Herald*, published by Mardis Draper and his wife in an unpainted 30'x30' shop located in the front yard of their Wakita home. Larry said they had fallen three months behind in getting their paper out every week. I ought to go up in northern Grant county, near the Kansas line, and see if I could help them.

It was a long drive in late September. Stubble was left in wheat fields from the harvest. I found *The Herald* even though it had no sign. Most small town papers don't have signs. They believe in advertising but not for themselves.

There were the Drapers, she setting type on an old Linotype powered from a long belt to the ceiling looped over a drive shaft which ran from front to the back of the shop. The sheet-fed Cottrel newspaper press and a couple of job presses were also belted to the overhead drive shaft. I had never seen anything like it since the oilfield machine shops in Drumright belted to metal lathes and saws. One big electric motor at the back turned the drive shaft to power everything from typesetter to press.

I assured them I was there as a friend, not to take away their legality for failing to get out at least one issue per week. "How did it happen," I asked apologetically.

"It was just before last Thanksgiving," she said. "Mardis had locked up two pages of the four page press run for that week's paper. He lifted it to move it three steps to the bed of the Cottrell. All the type in

one page fell to the floor, then the other." Pied type, printers call it. A heart-breaking experience.

They stood there stunned and each began to cry. Their kids and grandkids were coming for Thanksgiving dinner and now the paper would not be out. What to do?

"To hell with it," they agreed. They turned off the drive shaft motor, pulled the shop door closed and went to the house. After Thanksgiving dinner their kids helped pick up the type but didn't get the pages back together. They lost two weeks before finally getting enough to print. They fell further behind until they were two months behind.

In a flash of inspiration I asked for a sheet of one of the earlier issues. I folded its four pages and showed them how they could print two weeks' issues to catch up. Then, really getting with it, I folded it again to show how they could put out four weeks with one press run on each side. Just make sure the dates are on each part (about the size of a magazine) to please the post office and to make a file copy to show you have gotten out a paper dated for every week. Be sure to prepare separate postal entry forms for each separate issue. The post office was cooperative.

Big smiles spread across their faces. I told them that Larry Hammer and their other neighbors and OPA wanted them to make it, to catch up so *Wakita* would continue to have a legal weekly newspaper.

They were far happier when I left than when I got there. And, they did catch up.

VIEWPOINTS

I'm a media watcher. Radio, TV and newspapers are somewhat competitive for audiences and advertisers' dollars and they ought to be. Broadcasters have a completely subsidized place of doing business in the free use of very valuable TV channels, AM and FM radio frequencies. They paid nothing for them. They are a free franchise to make money without paying any rent as do electric, gas, telephone and other utilities.

Newspapers were originally subsidized by the first Postmaster Ben Franklin with free mailing privileges. That was gradually whittled down to only free in the county of origin but that is no longer free.

It disturbs me that broadcasters got the Ronald Reagan administration to repeal what was known as "The Fairness Doctrine." It required broadcasters to give equal time to opposing political viewpoints. And

well they should since they enjoy a free frequency franchise, which they can sell at ever higher prices because the number of broadcast frequencies is limited.

Not so with newspapers. Anyone can start one without getting permission from anyone. Figure out how to print it, how to distribute it and you are in the newspaper business. The most potentially potent is the free circulation paper left to be picked up at locations. It drives the paid circulation competitors crazy making both put out a better product. Mail delivery is sometimes undependable and expensive.

Finding carriers to deliver a daily is extremely difficult so most have had to turn to adults who carry papers as a second job way early in the mornings. Tough to get them; tough to keep them. The discipline of delivering a newspaper used to be an assurance of success in life like being an Eagle Scout. Since the '60s parents don't want to be bothered with their kid delivering a paper.

We witness the daily attack by talk radio mad men. They try to out-do each other on how venal, mean and nasty they can be towards Democrats. They have made "liberal" a dirty word and synonymous with traitor or "commie" to a majority of the public. That pleases the extreme right elements of Republicans, some Libertarians and some mindless so-called Independents.

These Attack Shows are fueled, funded by advertisers who share the same viewpoints or don't care that some listeners are offended.

The Fairness Doctrine should be re-enacted into law by a new congress and a new president.

Do some newspapers slant the news? A few do but mostly by just not covering certain events. A sign on a newsroom wall: "If wasn't in the paper it doesn't matter!" I asked if it was in jest.

Opinions have a place in the editorial parts or column parts of a newspaper. The rest is news and ethically should be free, pure of bias and slant. That includes what is left out as much as what is put into a news story. I noticed over the years that some of the slant is done by persons on the editing desk to kiss the ass of the publisher. Sick!

Chains, newspaper and broadcast, only care about the margin of profit in the bottom line. A Canadian barber named Thomson who bought very small radio stations until he owned an international chain said "a radio station is a license to print your own money." He branched off into newspapers,

owned the London *Times* and was even made a British Lord by the Queen of England.

When he bought a popular Toronto radio station a sarcastic reporter asked him what was his favorite music. Thomson said, "The ring of the cash register at \$10 a spot." A wry sense of humor.

Family owned newspapers long thought they did a super management job if they made 15 percent profit on gross annual income. That is all income from advertising and circulation. Let's say the average newspaper has a value, purchase price, of twice its annual gross. A 15 percent annual profit would be a 7.5 percent return on an investment to own it.

That was before sharp pencil chain newspaper management came along and bought up family newspapers by the dozens, even paying far more than brokers and owners believed they were worth. Then the chains like Hollister (Canadian), American (part of Hollister), Roy Park (Ithica, N.Y.) and later Community Newspaper Holdings out of Birmingham, Ala., showed families and even the Don Reynolds chain what real profits were: **45 percent on the annual gross!**

How do they do it? They don't care how you do it but you'd better do it or find another job. Sure they skimmed on the "news hole" and everything except advertising. Did they put out lousy newspapers? Some sure did but some local chain managers did not, like Dave Story, publisher of the Claremore (OK) *Daily Progress*, who chinned the chain's profit demands and still put out excellent newspapers. He has the skill and dedication to do it.

Ed Livermore Sr. was a champion newspaper publisher and profit maker but the chain boys showed him that, indeed, you can get blood out of a turnip.

Usually the result is circulation slumps without great and aggressive news content and advertising enterprise. When circulation goes down you have a harder time raising advertising rates. Readers begin to learn not to give a damn, that they can do without the newspaper. So much so that in towns like Edmond today homes reached, penetration is like 38 percent of dwelling units. The *Sun's* general manager so told me and that *The Oklahoman* had 48 percent in his town in 2003. Excellent weeklies like the *Madill Record* and *Sallisaw Sequoyah County Times* had penetration in town and surrounding market up in the high 90 percents.

It takes constant effort to get people to pay for a paper when TV and radio is free. Well, not exactly

free, you do have to listen and watch a lot of crap to get a little of what you want in entertainment, news, the weather.

Smaller papers have to work hard to sell enough ads in towns where WalMart has put many small merchants out of business. They go to neighboring towns for ads and local merchants are angry “their” local paper takes out of town ads. But those same merchants don’t hesitate to sell to anyone.

When a local paper digs into questionable activities of the city council or school board, the bruised may organize an advertiser boycott. It’s a tough business. That’s why I admire those who put out an excellent newspaper. It’s hard work.

EMBEZZLEMENT

Our advertising sales and placement business was increasing at OPA in the ’60s. But, manual hand accounting got more difficult and accuracy risky. The first computers for small businesses were reaching market but were very expensive. Service firms offered to pick up data, punch cards to drive what was then IBM hardware.

I wanted to try it. Our head accountant did not.

He was a good man but it seemed to me he had too much pocket money; always several \$100 bills.

I asked the board for \$1,500 to have CPA Ken Lingle back up six months and do an all new input comparison of our order handling. I also wanted these outside accountants to track each billing, adjustments, payments and deposits. The object was to compare our manual system to doing it with punched IBM cards and computers.

They did and began to discover some payments had been adjusted off as if never paid, or in error, but newspapers were paid for all advertising the month after ads ran. The accountants came to me with a list of billings written off. They were all some of the electric co-op monthly ad billings.

I went to a pay phone and called the co-op managers asking that they mail front and back copies of certain checks to my home address.

To shorten the story our staff accountant had taken some checks, endorsed them with our mail rubber stamp, signed his name and cashed them as he handed the bank teller a large deposit. He got cash; \$250-\$300 for each forged check, maybe as much as \$25,000, according to IRS Special Agent LeRoy Shelton.

We could only document \$15,000 of which the thief made full restitution. Liberty Bank was at fault for cashing checks for cash with only one signature endorsement. The OPS board was fully informed and met secretly with me, our attorney Wayne Quinlan and CPA Ken Lingle to approve confrontation strategy. Lyndell Williams got his confession on tape. We did not prosecute, nor did the bank nor our fidelity bond carrier. Very sad for this very efficient bookkeeper, his family and us.

I include this only to illustrate that one must be ever diligent. A manager had better not even use the company’s stamps for personal mail or someone else feels entitled to do so too.

Stealing from the company is huge. Larry Hammer, Cherokee publisher who owned 25 or so convenience stores, told me of his experience. “If they are chewing gum, it’s your gum. If they are smoking, it’s your cigarettes,” he said. Inventories never reveal what happened to “short” items of merchandise.

Kickbacks and bribes are widespread within wholesalers, retail chains, large and small corporations. Don’t blame only a few crooked employees. Some accept bribes or kickbacks because they believe the boss does it. Most rationalize that they are not paid enough and “are just making up for being shorted on salary.” A lack of moral fiber, never learned honesty as a kid, is present too.

A printer told me how he paid \$100 cash weekly in a plain envelope to a Humpty Dumpty chain advertising manager and was angry that “the bastard took the insert printing business away from me because my competitor would give him \$200.” I recorded that on tape and took and played it (in my car) for David Muir, then president of Humpty Dumpty Super Markets. He fired the ad manager but he had it too from buyers as did TG&Y. Theft, top to bottom, caused both to fail.

My philosophy is it is like building what you think is an absolutely rat proof corn crib; walls two feet thick concrete, lined with stainless steel. The hungry rats never give up until they find a way through. There is no fool-proof bookkeeping system any more than there is anonymity on the internet.

Who has been Oklahoma’s Best Governor?

I’ve been fortunate in my job with the press to have known them all since Johnston Murray (1951), son of “Alfalfa Bill,” maybe our worst governor.

J. Howard Edmondson is one of the two best in my view, although he and I were crosswise at times. He must be admired for breaking the grip of bootleggers and payoffs from the governor's office all the way down to county sheriffs and chiefs of police. Howard did it and that was a major historical change to move Oklahoma forward with far less graft and corruption.

Howard also broke the grip of old style Democrat politicians on how things are done at the capitol. In one important sense he so divided the Democrat party as to let Republicans elect their first governor in Henry Bellmon in 1963. I view that as an important plus.

A perhaps interesting aside is my experience in "buying" *The Black Dispatch* for J. Howard in his three 1958 campaigns (primary, runoff, general). In September there was a runoff primary between J. Howard Edmondson and Wm. P. "Bill" Atkinson.

Bill was worth a few million as the developer of Midwest City. Edmondson, county attorney of Tulsa county and before that Muskogee county, had his "crew cuts" (WW2 vets) and a theme of "Prairie Fire" reform of "old guard politics."

It was a helluva good fight. It was the greatest changing point of Oklahoma politics in state history. People, ordinary citizens, were fed up with graft and corruption. "TATBO" was the bumper sticker of the day: "Throw All The Bastards Out."

Cong. Ed Edmondson was really running his brother's campaign. He sent for me. They were in a bidding war to buy the support of the state's leading negro newspaper, owned by my old friend Roscoe Dungee of OU integration days. Ed gave me free reign to outbid and outmaneuver the Atkinson forces.

I agreed to be their sole negotiator because I was stunned that any newspaper would put itself on the block like a slave to be sold to the highest bidder. I wanted to see firsthand how it happened.

Well, I alone "bought" *The Dispatch's* support through the runoff for \$5,000, "lock, stock and barrel," as the cliché goes. Edmondson was to get a main story on page one each week, an editorial inside each of two weeks, a page one editorial endorsement on the eve of the election, a slanted page one story just before the runoff and 25,000 free copies for distribution in the black sections of Tulsa, Muskogee and Lawton.

I could not believe it. I decided to tie my own knot in it by holding onto the money and paying for

it only after I had a copy of each issue, examined it for double cross, then I paid. The Edmondsons thought I was pretty gutsy.

The Black Dispatch ad manager came to my office Thursday mornings with a few copies as soon as they came off the press still wet. I spread them out and went through every column and page for stories, editorials or ads for Atkinson. Seeing none I paid the agreed upon installment by check. Had the blacks not trusted me they would not have agreed to such a humiliating installment payoff. They seemed like old hands at it.

It taught me as an idealist that maybe everyone and everything is for sale. It was a good feeling to be trusted by both sides. I didn't do anything illegal but ethically it stank.

OUR BEST GOVERNOR

Henry Bellmon, an Oklahoma A&M graduate, a wheat farmer and maybe two term house member from Billings up north in Noble county, is one of my heroes. As a US Marine tank commander Henry wrested Iwo Jima from the Japs in WW2 thereby making possible a runway long enough for B-29s to land on. Our B-29 crew landed on Iwo twice with "blown jug" engines. Thanks to Henry and others who captured that barren volcanic island halfway to Tokyo from Tinian/Saipan in the Marianas.

He was Oklahoma's first Republican governor and paved the way by doing a great job getting along with legislative Democrats. Then a governor could not have a second successive term. Republican State Sen. Dewey Bartlett of Tulsa, another honest and mild Repub, succeeded Bellmon and did a great job. Dewey was next elected to the US Senate from Oklahoma (after Bellmon was).

Henry laid out two years, ran the state welfare department very well, then beat Fred Harris for the US Senate.

Henry was an independent thinker, supported turning the Panama Canal over to Panama (averting a war with several South American nations). I remember California's US Sen. S.I. Hayakawa opposing turning the Panama Canal over to Panama: "It's ours! We stole it fair and square!"

Bellmon refused to help throw a federal wrench into the school bussing (racial integration) controversy then raging. I agreed with him on both issues. It took political courage to do the right thing on those two key issues and others. Henry Bellmon had the

intelligence and strength of character the state and nation needed, though his party did not. Well, neither did the Demos.

After a second term as US Senator, Bellmon ran for a second term as governor (voters had changed the constitution) and, in my view, was Oklahoma's best ever governor. That from me, a Democrat.

Mainly because of his strong bipartisan leadership for extensive public school reform through HB 1017 Oklahoma is a better state today. He strongly supported HB 1017 over the almost unanimous opposition from most of his own Republican party legislators.

Today the Repubs would rather have at will transfers with school vouchers and tax money flowing to private and parochial schools thereby ruining public primary and secondary schools. Private and church schools do not comply with public school student testing requirements or teacher certification. Current US Pres. George Bush's "No Child Left Behind" is nothing more than a crafty slogan with no follow through. In the poor grade school where I tutor every Monday they test far too much. They get no NCLB money. It's a fake.

Bellmon was not for criminalizing abortion nor tax cuts to please rich folks and starve needed governmental services.

For those reasons I believe Henry Bellmon was both a great US Senator and Oklahoma's best governor. He was honest and intelligent but not a powerful orator. His late wife Shirley was an extra credit to the state. I am proud both were Oklahomans, unlike the performance of later governors Frank Keating, David Walters and David Hall.

George Nigh was an exceptionally good governor though he lacked the killer instinct often required for a political leader to deal effectively with some of the bastards one encounters in both the House and Senate in both political parties.

George was master of ceremonies at my February 1996 retirement dinner roast in Tulsa. He did a great job with some good jibes and made me pleased that he would do it. George is smart and funny, diplomatic, someone everyone likes. He's been my longtime friend since 1953. There was never a whiff of dishonesty or embarrassment to the state during his 4 terms as Lt. Gov. and his two terms as Governor.

My friend, State Sen. Gene Stipe, D-McAlester, also spoke at my retirement dinner. I've

known him since OU days when he, D. Jo Ferguson and Lonnie Brown were students and the three owned a Conoco gas station just four blocks north of the campus. All three were State Representatives while students back in the late '40s.

Gene just took too many chances to control eastern Oklahoma politics. He secretly gave \$250,000 to Walt Roberts, lied to the feds about it, to beat Cong. Wes Watkins, once a Demo, then a Ross Perot independent and now a Republican.

That was dumb of Gene. Walt Roberts is a fairly good fiddle player, an auctioneer but dumb. Besides, Wes Watkins would do whatever Gene Stipe asked, I think. Now Gene at 77 is broken in health, disgraced at having had to resign his seat in the state senate and finally surrender his license to practice law.

I feel sorry for him and I so wrote him that he is still my friend.

I battled Gene Stipe on several anti-newspaper matters before the legislature. All he either introduced or inspired his friends to file. Several were efforts to remove the sales tax exemption on newspaper advertising as punishment for news coverage about him. With a lot of effort by my members we defeated the tax advertising effort nine times.

Then he and his brother Francis bought several dailies and weeklies in eastern Oklahoma. I was asked by Francis to do appraisals of their values on several occasions for bank loans. I even did Bonham, Texas.

I had begun to appraise the value of newspapers by studying what newspaper brokers Marion Krehbiel and Bob Bolitho did. I also talked with Bill Berger, a Texas broker, and others to get their methods of arriving at a fair market value for a newspaper.

There is a loose formula with allowance to estimate the potential of a town. I have done close to 100 evaluations. An early one was the 5-day daily Pawhuska *Journal Capital*. When one partner died both families asked me alone to set the value. Nice compliment.

Both Glen VanDyke's family and his partner Sam Love asked me to appraise the 5-day daily for Sam to buy. I got Dick Hefton to help me plus a phone call to Krehbiel in Kansas.

Well, there are some honest and ethical persons. Sam Love was one. He bought the VanDyke interests at our appraised value then DonRey promptly offered him \$100,000 more so he sold the *Journal Capital*

and print shop to DonRey then gave half the extra money to Glen's family!

Appraising slowly grew.

Some went to the IRS for estate tax settlement. IRS agents have come to see me and go over my appraisal but none were ever changed. I charged a modest fee depending on how close a friend and supporter the requester was.

I helped negotiate sales of properties. I asked for a flat fee, never a commission. The most I was ever paid was \$15,000 from Ed Burchfiel and Ken Reid in October 1967 for helping sell their Pauls Valley, Wewoka and Frederick dailies for \$1 million to DonRey Newspapers. Big money in 1967.

All such income went on my tax returns. I had advance approval of my president that I was not doing something wrong. I did management advising free but finally started charging modestly for appraisals. I still do some. I don't do divorce appraisals any more. I did three appraisals for Francis Stipe plus Cherokee and Fairview in 2002 for the Larry Hammer estate. I did the *Clinton Daily News* for the Engleman estate in 2003.

I use the annual gross, not the cash flow method, +/- adjustments. That does not include real estate, bank accounts, accounts receivable or accounts payable.

A newspaper property should pay itself out of debt in 8-10 years while providing reasonable salaries for the new owners.

Recently Lovan Thomas, who owns several weeklies and dailies in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas, told me "no general manager is worth more than \$75,000." I do not agree with that view though I like and respect Lovan.

Francis Stipe bought and sold papers, also operated them, and he made profits all the way.

Of course in this phase of his life Gene Stipe never introduced any more anti-newspaper legislation.

Francis once asked me to appear with him and his CPA daughter before an Oklahoma Tax Commission referee on a dispute over claimed expense. I said, "just get your brother, he has more influence with the OTC than I do." "No, he said to get you." I went and we convinced the OTC referee on the merits of our argument. I never charged members for this kind of service of going to a state or federal agency in their behalf.

Chain ownership of newspapers has squeezed big profits out of these money cows. The same applies to TV and radio chains.

The federal government should limit how many media outlets any firm or individual can own. I believe limits are constitutional and in the public interest. It won't happen because broadcasters are far more effective lobbyists than newspapers with the FCC, Congress and the White House.

Whether the media content is good or bad for the community depends a lot on the idealism and intelligence, initiative and integrity of the local operator. I can show you lots of sorry newspapers that are not owned by a chain.

Sadly, many publishers do not have guts enough, courage, talent to do the job of reporting on local government; well, all government. Turning economic pressure on to a media — such as an advertising boycott — is the way political manipulators work. Having the courage and ability to write and to report about those efforts is often the best, or only way to survive. Don't go down alone, let readers know what happened to you.

There are times when big papers need to help smaller ones mash up a hot potato. The big ones are on their own. There is only one rock at the top of a pyramid.

THE LAST WORD.

This has got to stop.

I began writing this tome at the beginning of 1998 on my then new Bondi Blue iMac, a first edition of that dandy, compact little Apple Computer. Here it is the last day of February 2004 and I need to get this yoke off my neck and go on to other things.

I finish these nearly 100 pages spaced, 2 columns to the page on a new, sleek, all white with plasma screen iMac G4 having transferred my previous writing (or is it writhing?) to here.

In an inspiration, I had Bennie McElhaney's son, John, at PROMac Computers, triple the memory of my 5-year old First Edition iMac Bondi Blue. I then asked Wilma Melot, the sole OPA traveling missionary in-shop computer trainer, to pick it up and install it in the *Cyril News*. All for free.

I looked over several small, struggling weeklies and picked Cyril. I have a moving, heartfelt letter from Publisher Scott Rains that my renewed, stronger Blue has given them a new lease on life, is a swell tool to go forward with. I paid for tripling its

memory, a check up. I feel very good about helping a small town weekly do a better job.

In closing out these wandering memories I have some regret. I could go on and on with a memory of this or that person, an event. But so could anyone.

It has worried me a little that I have tread on some toes. So, I cut back a little but then decided "what the hell." I wrote this to keep my mind, my wits, my keyboarding skills, etc., somewhat sharp at age 78, and to fend of Alzheimer's Disease by keeping my mind active.

Who I shall let read it is a brook I will cross in the weeks ahead. I believe a limited edition of 100 copies tightly circulated will suffice. There are some persons I really wanted to take a shot at and I have done so. There are a few other bastards who are not worth the powder or shell. I mostly ignored the gnats, which are a part of all our lives.

I am very lucky and blessed by The Higher Power (as we say in Alcoholics Anonymous) to have very good health, a very good wife and three fairly smart and gainfully employed kids. They have provided Bonnie and me with four healthy, and mostly normal grandchildren; two boys, two girls. I want them to have fun, take life seriously, stay off dope, outa jail, get a college degree and have fun in what they choose to do in life. Raising a little hell about injustices they see would please me.

Awards. I have received my share, then some. Some awards are given to stroke one's ego and get advertising on your wall. That's okay but several have meant a lot to me. Being named the outstanding state press association manager by the National Newspaper Assn. three times did impress me and several OPAers. Being president of Newspaper Association Managers way back in 1957 when I'd been a manager only three years was a high mark.

The highest award the Oklahoma Press Association gives is the annual H. Milt Phillips Award. Just before he died the OPA board asked me to design a suitable award to be given annually to Phillips' kind of citizen. He was dying of cancer. I had no intention of it ever going to other than a publisher, editor or GM.

I wrote that it should be for exceptional dedication to one's own family, community, newspaper and, perhaps, also some to the press association. A life size bust of Milt would be done by famed Oklahoma sculptor Leonard McMurray. Milt's wife Ruby had died. Someone drove Milt weekly up to OPA from Seminole and I drove him out to McMurray's garage studio. I remember Leonard putting huge calipers across Milt's ears, a prominent feature of his.

That award is given by the OPA board almost every year. In June 1987 it was presented to me. I was overwhelmed to the point of tears. The miniature bust I treasurer reads:

"in recognition of his services to newspaper journalism and as an outstanding citizen in his community, state and nation, and his dedication to his family."

The OU J-School plaqued me three times as an outstanding, even distinguished graduate. Maybe it was for me sticking my nose in how they do. Then there was the Silver Beaver Award from the Boy Scouts, one from my peers in the Oklahoma Society of Assn. Executives as president number two in 1964. Their top award for service and citizenship from the OKC Advertising Club, 1985. I have had my share, maybe a little more than my share, of honors.

Special was the first issued Freedom of Information/OK's First Amendment Justice Marion Opala Award in November 2002.

See, if you believe in something strongly enough and keep raising hell someone will eventually give you a plaque.

Another plaque on my home office wall proclaims I was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame in 1973:

"for his influence on and dedication to community newspapers in Oklahoma during the past 20 years. He has comforted the afflicted and done his best to afflict the comfortable."

I hope I have done so and that I continue to live up to those motto words of William Allen White in his Emporia (KS) *Gazette*.



July 1964:
Bill Michael, Bonnie's
father, left, with his
grandchildren:
Melissa, Sam, Dan,
Mike Rookstool, and
dog "Sarge."

Children and
grandchildren:
Back:
Brian, Jessica,
Melissa, Beau and
Tiffany.

Front:
Dan and Sam



