

## Wavel Ashbaugh

Her advice for living to 105 is to “put one foot in the front of the other and keep going.”

### Chapter 01 - Introduction

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**Announcer:** Wavel Ashbaugh was 105 when she was inducted into the Centenarian Club of Oklahoma.

Wavel’s mother was a Perryman, a Creek family that came to Indian Territory in the 1820s, and took part in the founding of “Tulsey Town.”

She was eleven years old and living on Oil Road, now 11th Street, when the Tulsa race riot erupted May 31, 1921. She remembers her mother protecting black families on the family land near what is now 11th and Delaware.

Wavel was part of the *first* graduating class from Tulsa’s Monte Cassino Catholic School, a class with a grand total of two students.

In the 1940s, she moved to California with her husband, a well-known jazz composer and pianist, who went by the name of Marvin Ash. He played for Walt Disney Studios, including the original *Mouseketeers Show*.

While in her sixties, Wavel began ballroom dancing and earned a trophy case full of championships.

Her advice for living to 105 is to “put one foot in the front of the other...keep going.”

And now you can listen to this spirited centenarian take you back 105 years. Wavel Ashbaugh on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).

### Chapter 02 - 7:30 Wavel is 105

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**John Erling:** My name is John Erling. And today’s date is December 1, 2015. Wavel, will you give us your full name, please?

**Wavel Ashbaugh:** Wavel Teresa Davis Ashbaugh.

**JE:** What is the date of your birth?

**WA:** July 8, 1910.

**JE:** So how old are you today?

**WA:** A hundred and five.

**JE:** And we're recording this interview here in your apartment at Forest Hills Assisted Living in Broken Arrow. Did anyone in your family live to be a hundred or ninety?

**WA:** My mother lived to be ninety-six.

**JE:** And how about your father?

**WA:** Late sixties.

**JE:** Everyone wants to know, did you ever think you'd live to be 105?

**WA:** No. No I didn't think I'd live to be 105.

**JE:** Why do you think you lived to be 105?

**WA:** Because I live a healthy life. I don't drink or smoke ever and I eat good food and I'm a dancer, that's for exercise. When I say a dancer, I've always moved around dancing. I think that is an exercise.

**JE:** What advice do you give to people who want to live to be 105? What would be your advice to them?

**WA:** Just put one foot in front of the other, keep going, keep moving.

**JE:** Yeah. How about in your long life, did you have any health problems that you had to overcome? I had all child illnesses. I was very ill as a child. Whatever came along, I had it.

**JE:** And where were you born?

**WA:** Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**JE:** Were you born in a hospital or in a house?

**WA:** In a house, 11th Street.

**JE:** And we should say, your great niece is with us.

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** And what is her name?

**WA:** Teresa Rodriguez.

**JE:** Teresa Rodriguez.

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** So she's helping you?

**WA:** She's my pal.

**JE:** That's wonderful, I know that makes her feel real good. So your mother's name?

**WA:** Addie Emma Perryman.

**JE:** Was she of Creek descent?

**WA:** Creek, yes.

- JE:** And then your father's name?
- WA:** Oliver Edgar Davis Sr., and he's also Creek.
- JE:** What do you remember most about your mother? What kind of a personality was she?
- WA:** My mother was very strong, was a very good mother, and a very strict mother, very strict.
- JE:** Did you have brothers and sisters?
- WA:** Yes, I had two-and-a-half-year younger sister, and my brother was born on my fifth birthday.
- JE:** What did your father do for a living in Tulsa?
- WA:** The way it's written in history is he was a landowner. That's what they have him down as a landowner. Because I'm full-bred Indian and both he and my mother had their allotment, about 160 acres, I think.
- JE:** A hundred and sixty acres?
- WA:** A hundred and sixty acres.
- JE:** Some of the white settlers took advantage of the Indians and they traded food or junk cars—
- WA:** Yes.
- JE:** Can you tell me about that?
- WA:** Yeah. They would buy land from the Indians and pay the Indians very little money because they didn't know to ask for more. They just got some money, that's okay.
- JE:** Yeah.
- WA:** So the white people bought a lot of good land that way.
- JE:** You're half Creek?
- WA:** I'm mostly Creek, I have a little bit of Cherokee, but I'm really mostly Creek. The Perryman family are Creek.
- JE:** Did you get any allotment?
- WA:** No I was born, I forget how many years too late, but not a long time. If I'd of been born just a little bit earlier I would have gotten 160 acres, but I didn't make it.
- JE:** So then where did you go to school?
- WA:** I went to grade school at Kindle, and I guess it's still there.
- JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).
- WA:** And I stayed at Kindle till the third grade. Then I went to a Catholic academy, Sacred Heart. And I was in the third grade and I stayed there through the eighth grade.
- JE:** And that was a boarding school, wasn't it? Sacred Heart Academy.
- WA:** Well, yes. It was a boarding school, but a day school too. But I lived in the boarding school. I lived there.
- JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).
- WA:** Okay.
- JE:** Did you like living there? Or did you—

**WA:** Oh yes. It was a Benedictine nuns, I've been with them always.

**JE:** Were they nice to you?

**WA:** Yes, oh yes, yes.

**JE:** Were they strict?

**WA:** Very strict. Sacred Heart Academy, the high school is Monte Cassino.

**JE:** So then you graduated from Monte Cassino?

**WA:** Yes, uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** And how many were in your graduating class?

**WA:** Two. I wish I could remember her name, sometimes I can, today I can't, but her father was a judge in Tulsa.

**JE:** Okay.

**WA:** So there was two. It was the first graduating class.

**JE:** Let's talk about some of your remembrances of Tulsa. Did you go downtown with your mother and father? Did you remember any of the stores that were downtown Tulsa?

**WA:** Yes. Yes we'd go downtown to the movie and then have ice cream at the parlor later. I think the movie was called the Majestic.

**JE:** The theater?

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** Majestic Theater?

**WA:** Yeah. And then after that, we'd go, I don't know the name of it but it was a place we had ice cream. We'd have ice cream afterward.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative). What would they do before the movie when you came there? Did they put on a show, did they?

**WA:** Yeah. They gave a stage show. I don't know if every theater, but one main theater had a stage show, dancing, playing, singing, whatever, before the movie.

**JE:** Do you remember Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys?

**WA:** Yes. My mother is a fan of country music, particularly Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. My mother could square dance.

**JE:** Did you learn to square dance?

**WA:** No. I never did learn to.

**JE:** You said you danced, earlier. What kind of dancing did you do?

**WA:** Ballroom. Championship ballroom.

**JE:** Championship? So did you win trophies?

**WA:** Yes. Yes.

**JE:** Well, there I see, on the wall up there.

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** These trophies that you won. And you were dancing with your husband then?

**WA:** No.

**JE:** He didn't dance?

**WA:** No I was dancing with different partners. Those are different things.

**JE:** You were in California, when you danced for championships?

**WA:** Yes.

**JE:** Do you remember Cain's Ballroom?

**WA:** Yes. My mother went there. There was square dancing and my mother went to Cain's.

**JE:** Did you go with her?

**WA:** No. I was too young.

**JE:** Cain's Ballroom is still there today.

**WA:** Is it?

**JE:** Yeah.

**WA:** It had country music.

**JE:** And now they have all sorts of music there.

**WA:** Yeah, I guess.

**JE:** Country and everything else.

**WA:** Yeah, yeah. My mother would go there.

**JE:** Cain's Ballroom was built in 1924, served as a garage for W. Tate Brady's Automobiles. And that's why that building was built.

## Chapter 03 - 2:35

### 1921 Tulsa Race Riot

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**John Erling:** In 1921, you were eleven years old. And May 31 the Tulsa race riot broke out.

**Wavel Ashbaugh:** Uh-huh (affirmative). I remember it. I remember trucks would come and there was a lot of men standing up in them. Men coming to Tulsa, I don't know why because they needed more white men or a white man?

**JE:** I suppose that was the National Guard troops that came in.

**WA:** I guess, yeah, because they were all standing. It'd be a truck and a bunch of men standing. Where we lived was on a highway, so everything went by there. And I was eleven? Yes.

**JE:** You were eleven, and I think that Oil Road is now 11th Street.

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** So you were fairly close to the Greenwood area.

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** Do you remember seeing smoke and fire?

**WA:** I remember...yes, a little bit. But I do know that there was trouble because we had a black man and his wife that worked for us. And my mother took them over back roads and get them to safety. I don't know where she took them but they said, "Mama's gone to take them to safety." And she took them away someplace to be safe.

**JE:** How did this make you feel? Were you afraid or nervous about what was going on?

**WA:** I was never frightened as a child because of my mother is a very strong person. And besides that, that's my personality. I didn't want to change anything, afraid, I knew I was being taken care of right then.

**JE:** Yeah. Well, I'm sure you were a strong person too.

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** You inherited that from your mother.

**WA:** Yeah, I took care of my brother and sister.

**JE:** Okay. Your mother was hiding the blacks because they were rounding the blacks up.

**WA:** Yes. She took them away.

**JE:** Did that make you feel proud to know that your mother—

**WA:** I'm very proud. I loved it and I was very proud. And I knew it's something that we had to be alone because Mama had to take them to safety.

**JE:** Yeah, they were rounding them up. They were also shooting at blacks.

**WA:** Yes. But I don't remember hearing guns. I remember a little bit of smoke where a house was. It was away from us but smoke and fire were coming up. It probably was a lot of them but I only recall one instance. I knew there was trouble but I didn't know enough to know how bad it was of it.

## Chapter 04 - 1:30

### Depression

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**John Erling:** You lived at 11th and Delaware, that's where now the University of Tulsa is.

**Wavel Ashbaugh:** Is it?

**JE:** And Bama Pie is right there at that corner.

**WA:** That's where I was born.

**JE:** Nineteen twenty-nine was a depression, Wall Street crashed. Do you remember the days of the Depression when people didn't have anything?

**WA:** Let me tell you something. I didn't know there was a depression because we already had a depression. I didn't know anybody else was poor, but I know that we were very bad off. So I didn't know the word depression, but we were poor.

**JE:** So when the depression came along—

**WA:** I didn't know.

**JE:** You—nothing changed—

**WA:** I found out later we went through a depression. I thought, "Oh, we did too, I thought we were the only ones."

**JE:** Yeah.

**WA:** We were very poor. Okay? But I didn't know the word depression though.

**JE:** Well, then, if you were poor what did you do for food?

**WA:** Well, my mother worked sometimes and we did have a garden. But my mother worked.

**JE:** Do you know where she worked and what she did?

**WA:** She's a cook.

**JE:** And so she was able to earn enough money to buy food for you?

**WA:** Yeah. Not a lot of money but some. We were hungry sometimes. But then we also had a lot sometimes. I don't remember being hungry too many times.

**JE:** You probably sometimes went to bed hungry.

**WA:** Yes.

## Chapter 05 - 5:05

### Walt Disney

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**John Erling:** What was your husband's name?

**Wavel Ashbaugh:** Marvin E. Ashbaugh.

**JE:** Where did you meet him?

**WA:** I met him at church, Holy Family Catholic Church. I saw him going to mass, hurrying and rushing up the steps to get to the late mass and I'd be going up to the late mass. Time after time, another girl and I. And I think he had a friend, we'd go up the long steps to get mass some times. And so one time he said, "Why don't we all have coffee together?"

**JE:** How old would you have been then?

**WA:** I don't know.

**JE:** And was he your age or much older than you?

**WA:** No. Everybody that I've ever known is younger than me. In my lifetime, most of my friends or thirty and forty years younger than me. Because they're the ones that I talk to and the ones that I understand.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative). When did you get married?

**WA:** Nineteen thirty-four.

- JE:** So you were married in 1934—
- WA:** Yeah.
- JE:** And you were twenty-four years old?
- WA:** Uh-huh (affirmative).
- JE:** So you married a younger man?
- WA:** Always. I have younger friends.
- JE:** But your husband was four years younger than you.
- WA:** Yes sir.
- JE:** Your husband went into the military, into the service?
- WA:** Yes.
- JE:** He was a musician.
- WA:** Yes, uh-huh (affirmative).
- JE:** What type of musician?
- WA:** Piano. Piano and a composer and orchestra leader. If you're a piano man you have bands. He was excellent piano, and excellent as a composer.
- JE:** Who did he work for when he was in California?
- WA:** Walt Disney, not always, otherwise, you just worked around in different clubs. You worked wherever they needed a piano around.
- JE:** Right. So then he was a staff pianist for Walt Disney?
- WA:** Yes.
- JE:** Did he ever meet Walt Disney?
- WA:** Did I ever meet Walt Disney? Yes.
- JE:** What was he like?
- WA:** I just met him, that's all. He was very nice.
- JE:** But your husband worked for him.
- WA:** Yes, uh-huh (affirmative).
- JE:** And would have known him.
- WA:** Yeah, yeah.
- JE:** And those two got along fine then?
- WA:** Yeah.
- JE:** There was a *Mouseketeers Show*, did he play for the Mouseketeers?
- WA:** Yes, he traveled with them and played for them.
- JE:** Did you travel with him when he would—
- WA:** No. I worked, I worked all my life.
- JE:** What kind of work?
- WA:** Secretary. Executive secretary work, always.
- JE:** All right. And who would you work for? What kind of companies?

**WA:** Well, most of the time it was Chestnut and Smith.

**JE:** And then you worked for a musician's union in California?

**WA:** Yes.

**JE:** How old were you when you retired?

**WA:** Ninety-six.

**JE:** You worked until you were ninety-six years old?

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** And that was full time, wasn't it?

**WA:** Well, because I was probably working with people forty years younger. I was moved with people forty years younger than me. Okay?

**JE:** And maybe that's what kept you so young is—

**WA:** I think so. Yeah.

**JE:** ...those younger people.

**WA:** Yes.

**JE:** But you worked till you were ninety-six. Did you work just because you liked to be around people?

**WA:** No, I need the money.

**JE:** At ninety-six you needed the money?

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** Well, that's great.

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** Do you know how fortunate you were to go to work at ninety-three, ninety-four? Nobody could believe, I'm sure, that you were ninety-six years old.

**WA:** Well, I'm sure they didn't know. I'd be thirty or forty years younger, or as young as I could get by with. Do I look like 105?

**JE:** You do not at all.

**WA:** Okay.

**JE:** You look like you're eighty-five.

**WA:** Okay.

**JE:** Nobody believed when you were working that you were ninety-five, I'm sure they didn't know that.

**WA:** They didn't know I was. No. I wouldn't tell that.

**JE:** No, you wouldn't. How many years were you married to Marvin?

**WA:** Thirty-four years.

**JE:** Thirty-four years. And you never remarried?

**WA:** No.

**JE:** Is that him?

**WA:** I have a boyfriend.

**JE:** Now you have a boyfriend?

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** Here at Forest Hills? Oh, you have a boyfriend in California.

**WA:** Yes.

**JE:** And how old is he, 114?

**WA:** No he's—

**Teresa Rodriguez:** He's nineteen—

**JE:** Teresa says he's nineteen years young than you.

**WA:** Yeah, okay.

**JE:** How long were you boyfriend and girlfriend? Many years?

**WA:** A lot.

**TR:** ??

**JE:** Thirty years?

**WA:** A long time.

**JE:** And why didn't you get married?

**WA:** 'Cause I don't want to get married again. I guess he didn't either, so...

**JE:** Right. You recently moved back from California here—

**WA:** Yes.

**JE:** ...to Oklahoma.

**WA:** Uh-huh (affirmative), yes.

**JE:** And so you left him back there?

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** Was he pretty sad about that?

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** Are you able to talk to him now?

**WA:** Oh yeah. I talk every day, yes.

**JE:** Would he like to come here and see you and visit with you here?

**WA:** I don't think he can travel like that. He lives with his son. And I took him every day.

**JE:** So you're 105 and you have a boyfriend.

**WA:** Yes!

**JE:** That's pretty good.

**WA:** Yeah.

**Chapter 06 - 1:50****Reading Contracts**

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**John Erling:** We were talking about the white settlers taking advantage of the Indians.

**Wavel Ashbaugh:** Yeah?

**JE:** Trading money and old cars.

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** Did they try to do that with your mother?

**WA:** Yes. Because they bought land from her. She had 160 acres and they got some of the land. They didn't pay very much for it. My mother couldn't read or write, she did not have an education. When she went to school, the whole family went to school.

One of the brothers, Uncle Nathan, he was a good fighter and he always got in a fight, and so they all got expelled and went to another school. And then he'd fight and they'd go to another school.

So she didn't get the education that she might have because of him fighting.

**JE:** There were contracts of land, did you help your mother read?

**WA:** Yes.

**JE:** Tell me about that.

**WA:** I remember when I was twelve years old, she got some papers. This I remember because I see myself walking in the kitchen. And I read that to her and I told her, "If you can just wait a little longer, Mama, till I'm grown, I can take care of you. I'll know how to take care of you." 'Cause she couldn't read and I read all of it. Of course, I didn't know what it meant, but I could read.

**JE:** You read it to her?

**WA:** Yes.

**JE:** And so she then understood what you were reading.

**WA:** Yes, yes. Yeah. From then on I took care of my family.

**JE:** Was your father around?

**WA:** No, my father was gone. My father and mother divorced when I was eight years old.

**JE:** So then you were the strong...?

**WA:** Yeah. My mother would work. I took care of my brother and sister. My sister was two and a half years younger, and my brother five years younger.

**Chapter 07 - 2:55****1924 Mayo Hotel**

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**John Erling:** In Tulsa, 1924, Mayo Hotel, does that ring a bell?

**Wavel Ashbaugh:** I know about the hotel. Yeah, it's a beautiful, it was number one building in Tulsa, it was beautiful, yes.

**JE:** And you were able to go there once in a while?

**WA:** Yes, uh-huh (affirmative). For dinner or something, yes. When I was little, Sand Springs was a picnic place. If you said, "We're going to go to Sand Springs," that meant you were going to a picnic, and that's all it was. "If you're really good we'll go to Sand Springs." So that meant you're going there to picnic. So I thought for years Sand Springs was a park.

**JE:** It was a big, open field and so it probably was a park of some sort.

**WA:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** You're very slender now. We're you always slender? And you've never been heavy?

**WA:** No, sometimes I felt my stomach was too big and I would try not to eat so much.

**JE:** But—

**WA:** But I don't have a big appetite. I don't eat a lot, do I? I eat very little.

**JE:** And maybe that's another reason why you've been able to live so long. You didn't eat much. We're told it's all in portions.

**WA:** Yeah. I get full. Two bites and I get full.

**JE:** Yeah? Okay, here's a picture. This picture, you're all dressed up.

**WA:** I've worked all my life.

**JE:** Did you work downtown Tulsa?

**WA:** Yes, uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** Is this a friend of yours that's with you in this picture?

**WA:** Yeah, that's Sybil, she's a friend.

**JE:** And here you are, downtown Tulsa, and you're all dressed up because you were working.

**WA:** That's the way I worked. Yeah.

**JE:** But when people were going downtown to shop they would get dressed up anyway.

**WA:** Yes. Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** I see this is a postcard, this picture. So did photographers just come and take your picture downtown?

**WA:** Yeah, they'd just take pictures and then they'd show it to you, I guess.

**JE:** So your mother was a racecar driver?

**WA:** Yes.

**JE:** And she raced out here in Tulsa?

**WA:** Yeah. My mother raced with her brothers on, it was called the “paved road” then, which was the only paved road. And at night she’d race with her brothers against her brothers.

**JE:** So did you watch her race?

**WA:** No! They did at night, late, after midnight when the highway was not busy. No I was scared. I cried. Sometimes I cried a lot but she did it anyway.

**JE:** So it wasn’t a racetrack, it was this road?

**WA:** Just a road. But—

**JE:** And when the cops weren’t around they—

**WA:** After midnight, yeah.

**JE:** And she’d go out and drive fast.

**WA:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** Do you know how wonderful it is at 105 and you can remember all these things from way back when in Tulsa?

**WA:** Oh I remember a lot of the things. Some important things I may not remember the date of them, but I remember them happening.

## Chapter 08 - 1:35

### Competitive Dancing

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**John Erling:** So you started competitive dancing when you were sixty-nine years old?

**Wavel Ashbaugh:** Yes.

**JE:** That’s pretty amazing. But did you dance? I mean, somebody had to teach you this.

**WA:** No.

**JE:** You didn’t have a teacher?

**WA:** No.

**Teresa Rodriguez:** You had a partner, a professional partner.

**WA:** Huh? Professional partner, yeah.

**JE:** And so he taught you then?

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** This was after your husband died and you just wanted to get out and be social.

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** When do you think was the best time of your life?

**WA:** When was the best time of my life?

**JE:** Yeah.

**WA:** When I was dancing, yeah.

**JE:** So the best time was back—

**WA:** We danced every day, went to dance every night.

**JE:** What have you noticed that's changed in the world? In Oklahoma and all since you were growing up? What is different?

**WA:** People are not as close to each other. They don't visit and talk as much because everybody's in a hurry and they don't have the time for it. They're not as close as they used to be.

I said that to somebody else and they told me, "The world's moving so fast you have to move with it."

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative). When you hear all the crime and the terrorism that's going on and people are shooting, do you think the world is worse off today than it was back when you were young?

**WA:** I don't really think about it that way. That's life. I don't think, "Oh I was so safe then." I don't think about it. I don't think it's that bad or that good it's just that's how it is.

**JE:** Yeah.

## Chapter 09 - 1:10

110?

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**John Erling:** So are you looking forward to being 110?

**Wavel Ashbaugh:** No. I really wasn't looking forward to being 105. I had nothing to do with it. I just keep putting one foot in front of the other and the next thing I know they say, "Oh she's 105."

**JE:** Well, I want to thank you for visiting with us today. You're a very sweet lady.

**WA:** Thank you.

**JE:** Your family is lucky to have you. And Teresa, I know, draws a lot strength from you.

**WA:** She's with me, she takes care of me.

**JE:** Yeah. And she's taking care of you, right.

**WA:** Yeah.

**JE:** It's a wonderful pleasure to meet you.

**WA:** Pleasure to meet you.

**JE:** So—

**WA:** And you've been very pleasant. As a matter of fact, I didn't know I was being interviewed.

**JE:** Right.

**WA:** I just talked to you.

**JE:** That's right, and that's what a good interview is all about.

**WA:** Okay. You talk and I talk.

**JE:** That's right, it's the way it is.

**WA:** Right?

**JE:** Well, anything else you want to say?

**WA:** See you later, alligator. Not too soon, baboon.

**JE:** All right. Well, that was wonderful. Thank you very much. That was good. You did a good job.

**WA:** Thank you.

**JE:** Yeah.

## **Chapter 10 - 0:33**

### **Conclusion**

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**Announcer:** This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time, on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).