

## Ann Bartlett

Ann served the state of Oklahoma alongside her husband, former Governor/Senator Dewey Bartlett.

### Chapter 1 – 1:33

#### Introduction

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**Announcer:** Ann Bartlett, former Oklahoma First Lady and widow of the late Oklahoma U.S. Senator and Governor Dewey Bartlett was born in Seattle, Washington. Ann Smith met Dewey Bartlett while visiting her grandmother in southern California, where Bartlett, an Ohio native was training as a Marine Corps dive-bomber. Soon after marriage in 1945 the couple moved to Tulsa where Dewey joined his brother Dave Bartlett at Keener Oil Company, which their late father had founded. As Dewey moved from oilman to politician, Ann played a supportive and advisory role and campaigned at his side. After representing Tulsa County at the State Senate, Dewey Bartlett served as Oklahoma's 19th governor from 1967 to 1971, becoming only the second Republican to hold the post. He was selected to the U.S. Senate for a six-year term in 1972. Dewey Bartlett died of cancer March 1st, 1979, shortly after leaving the U.S. Senate. After her husband's death, Ann continued her interest in politics, supporting various campaigns. In Tulsa, she was active in a number of civic groups and nonprofits. She was 92 when she died January 26, 2013. Her survivors included three children: Dewey F. Bartlett, Jr., Mayor of Tulsa; Joan C. Atkinson; and Michael H. Bartlett. Ann was joined by her daughter, Joan when this interview was conducted on June 5th, 2010. We thank our founding sponsors and listeners who donate to our mission, preserving Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com)

### Chapter 2 – 3:48

#### Early Life

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**John Erling:** My name is John Erling. Today's date is June 5, 2010. Ann if you will state your full name please?

**Ann Bartlett Burke:** My name is Ann Bartlett Burke.

**JE:** Your date of birth and your present age?

**AB:** My date of birth is November 9, 1920. I'm 89.

**JE:** And where are we recording this?

**AB:** In my living room at Montereau at Warren Woods.

**JE:** Joining us is your daughter Joanie. Joanie if you could state your full name please?

**Joan Bartlett Atkinson:** My name is Joan Bartlett Atkinson. I was born in Tulsa.

**JE:** And I believe you have two other children?

**AB:** Yes, I have two boys, Dewey and Mike. Dewey is the older.

**JE:** And what's his job right now?

**AB:** He is the Mayor! (Laughter)

**JE:** Where were you born?

**AB:** Seattle, Washington

**JE:** What was your mother's name?

**AB:** My mother's name was Joan Coleman Smith.

**JE:** Did she come from the Washington area?

**AB:** Yes.

**JE:** Your father's name?

**AB:** Edgar Edward Smith

**JE:** Did he come from Washington too?

**AB:** He came from Greensboro, North Carolina.

**JE:** What did your father do for a living?

**JBA:** He was a captain of a boat. He would go up to the Alucian Islands and he would survey the islands.

**AB:** That's right. He was in the Coast Guard.

**JE:** Tell us about your education. What was your first elementary school?

**AB:** Madrona in Seattle, Washington—it was a public school.

**JE:** Did you go on to junior high school there?

**AB:** Yes, then high school and college.

**JBA:** She went to the University of Seattle and the University of Washington.

**JE:** Did you have brothers and sisters?

**AB:** I had one of each. My brother was Brent and my sister was Constance.

**JE:** Do you have memories of the first house you lived in?

**JBA:** Mom, tell them the stories of Bainbridge Island with your cousins. Bainbridge Island is an island right across from Seattle. It's kind of a bedroom community of Seattle. Mom's aunt and uncle lived there—her mother's sister lived there with her family and their families were all very close. All of the cousins grew up together.

**AB:** My grandmother also lived there most of the time. She traveled a lot but she lived there mostly.

**JBA:** Your cousins had that boat that they lived on for awhile.

**AB:** That was my cousin's father's boat.

**JBA:** It was Mickey's boat, yes.

**JBA:** Actually that boat they anchored on the Seattle side. Their best friends were their cousins. They took day trips together and had picnics. Didn't you dig for clams?

**AB:** We would dig for clams, yes, that's what we did mostly.

**JE:** You're reminding me of an island, because at Grand Lake you had what they called Governor's Island?

**AB:** That was Dewey's brother David's island.

**JE:** So it wasn't Dewey's?

**AB:** No, it was his brother's.

**JBA:** They called it Governor's Island because there was that governor's conference when dad was governor they had it at the old Camelot Inn. They were going to take a couple of bus loads up to Uncle Dave's island and there was a huge storm and they didn't go, but for some reason his island, Star Island I think is the name of it, became Governor's Island. I don't know if it was because of that governor's conference or what.

**AB:** I think it was.

**JBA:** Mom and dad had a place down from there up in Woodward Hollow that they called the farm. They had cattle and it's been sold since then but they had about 1,200 acres.

**JE:** I know right where that is.

**JBA:** Uncle Dave had that island with an A frame house.

**JE:** That A frame house is still there.

**JBA:** Is it really?

**JE:** Yes. But you've clarified something here because everyone thought it was Governor Bartlett's island and it turns out it was his brother's.

### Chapter 3 – 6:12

#### Ann Meets Dewey

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**John Erling:** So then in 1941, you are 21 years old. Do you remember December 7, 1941 and the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

**Ann Bartlett:** Yes.

**JE:** Do you remember how you found out about it?

**AB:** Somebody told me.

**JE:** Do you recall that when the United States went to war that there was rationing?

**AB:** Oh yes, I remember the rationing.

**Joan Bartlett Atkinson:** Your mother was such a great cook. Do you remember you couldn't get butter?

**AB:** Oh yes. There were all sorts of things we couldn't get.

**JBA:** She made everything from scratch. She was a great cook.

**AB:** Yes, she made root beer.

**JE:** As the 1940s move along...

**JBA:** You met dad later on kind of near Laguna Beach in California.

**AB:** Yes, at the Victor Hugo Inn.

**JBA:** Which was just outside of Laguna Beach. Your grandmother lived somewhere near there on a bluff before it was all developed in a little house.

**AB:** Yes.

**JBA:** There was some sort of party and dad was there on leave for two weeks maybe at one of those USO dances.

**AB:** Yes it was one of those dances.

**JBA:** You were taking care of your grandmother but she took you to the party I guess?

**AB:** Yes.

**JE:** Do you remember distinctly the first time you laid eyes on him?

**AB:** Yes. I do. It was at that dance. I was dancing with a friend of his and he came and cut in (Laughter) and that's when I met him.

**JE:** Were you taken with him right away?

**AB:** Yes. He was wonderful looking and very attractive, but I didn't think much more of it than that. It was just a dance. Then he came to see me I guess.

**JBA:** Your grandmother lived out sort of far away from there.

**AB:** Yes.

**JBA:** He got a friend to lend him his Jeep and he drove out to your grandmother's. You and dad would walk along the beach.

**AB:** Right.

**JBA:** Then somehow, were you back at the Victor Hugo Inn again?

**AB:** Yes and they went into the bathroom and were talking. When they came out they realized I was right there and thought I had heard what they were talking about, but I didn't. But I acted like I did and they were very embarrassed because they were talking about me. He said something about how he thought he was in love with me, and things like that. (Chuckle)

**JE:** So it sounds like for Dewey it was love at first sight here?

**AB:** it was pretty much.

**JE:** But it took you a little longer to come around?

**AB:** Yes, I just didn't think that...I don't know. I just didn't think he was going to be around. I thought he was just there for the day and then gone.

**JBA:** He was there for just two weeks, but you decided after just two weeks because didn't he ask you to marry him?

**AB:** Yes he did.

**JBA:** He asked her the day before he was going back to the war. He was a dive bomber in the Marines.

**AB:** Yes.

**JE:** So within that two-week period then when you were about to leave, where were you?

**AB:** We were on the beach walking along.

**JE:** Did that come as a shock?

**AB:** It came as a surprise. I hadn't really thought of it because I didn't really think he was going to be around. The next day he was leaving so...

**JE:** Right.

**AB:** It was a nice surprise.

**JE:** What was your response?

**AB:** Yes! (Laughter)

**JE:** You were married April 2, 1945 and you were 25.

**AB:** Yes.

**JE:** Let's state his full name right now.

**AB:** Dewey Follett Bartlett.

**JE:** He was born March 28, 1919 in Marietta, Ohio

**AB:** Yes.

**JE:** He was a year older than you so he would have been 26 and you would have been 25 when he asked you to marry him?

**AB:** Yes.

**JE:** Had you dated a lot before then?

**AB:** Not a lot but some.

**JE:** But when this guy comes along...

**AB:** Well, it was different. (Laughter) It was different definitely.

**JE:** What was it about him that you liked?

**AB:** I don't know. I liked his looks very much. I liked everything about him. I liked the way he talked and what he said.

**JE:** He graduated from Princeton with a degree in geological engineering in 1942.

**AB:** Yes.

**JE:** Then he served in the Marine Corps in 1942 and was trained by the Navy and he was a dive bomber pilot for the Marines?

**AB:** Yes.

**JE:** Did he talk about any experiences in the war? Did he tell you some stories?

**AB:** He didn't talk much about it.

**JB:** He did not talk about it very much at all to me, but there was a story where he was bombing a particular target. He missed the target and he realized he hit a railroad track so he felt pretty good about that.

**JE:** You were married in 1945 when the war was about to wrap up? You were married on April 2, 1945 and the war was over with in June. He was still on duty for those months until the war was over?

**AB:** Yes.

**JBA:** They got married in San Juan Capistrano at the mission.

**JE:** Why there?

**AB:** That was where we went to church near my grandmother's house. So we went to church there and that's why we were married there.

**JE:** Do the swallows really return every year?

**AB:** Yes. They did. The swallows came back every year.

**JBA:** Then you went on a honeymoon with dad, but his mother and his mother's sister kind of came along with you?

**AB:** (Laughter) yeah, they did! (Laughter)

## Chapter 4 – 6:02

### Keener Oil

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**John Erling:** After you were married, what happened then? The war was over and he was out of the service...

**Joan Bartlett Atkinson:** They came to Tulsa. His brother David Bartlett was in the Navy and he and dad both came to Tulsa to take over their family company, Keener Oil Company that had been started by their father who was a banker in Marietta, Ohio. He was David A. Bartlett and then his sons were David and Dewey.

**JE:** So David A. Bartlett was a banker in Ohio and he came to Oklahoma because of oil discoveries that were going on?

**JBA:** He was given as I understand it, some oil leases in Titusville, Pennsylvania where the oil was first discovered as payment on a loan that couldn't be paid. Then through that he

eventually started drilling wells in Oklahoma. He died when my dad was four or five years old. His wife was still living, but there was sort of a trustee that continued with the oil company. My uncle and dad used to come to Oklahoma as roustabouts working on wells. After the war they came and sort of reclaimed Keener Oil Company.

**JE:** How did the name Keener come about?

**JBA:** It was named after a formation, not in Oklahoma, but I think it was back East somewhere maybe in Pennsylvania. I'm not sure.

**JE:** So that is then how the family starts laying roots here in Oklahoma?

**JBA:** Yes.

**JE:** Dewey was involved in farming and ranching and the oil business, isn't that true?

**JBA:** I think ranching was more of a hobby wouldn't you say mom?

**Ann Bartlett:** Yes.

**JBA:** That was never a profitable business for him, but the oil business—he and his brother ran the Keener Oil Company really until dad became a senator and he thought it might be a conflict. So he sold his portion of the company to his brother.

**JE:** They were like you said earlier roustabouts and they were right there being tool pushers and everything?

**JBA:** I think so in the summers because their father died when they were very young and I think their mother would send them back here and they would work the oil fields as I understand it.

**JE:** Okay so that was in their growing years and teen years?

**JBA:** Yes, teen and college summer years.

**JE:** Okay so that's how he got interested in the oil business was through his summertime jobs?

**JBA:** Yes and then he majored in geological engineering and then his brother graduated with some sort of engineering degree from MIT.

**JE:** So he began raising a family then as Dewey gets involved in the oil business. Your three children are born. tell us the years of their births.

**AB:** Dewey was born in 1946, Joan in 1948 and Mike in 1950.

**JE:** In the 1950s do you have memories of shopping in downtown Tulsa and the Vandever's department store and Clark's Good Clothes?

**AB:** Yes and Froug's and Brown-Duncan was a big one. They all seemed to be pretty much in one place.

**JBA:** They were all downtown. Do you remember Sam Brenner where dad used to get his clothes?

**AB:** Yes.

**JBA:** He is still around.

**JE:** People used to dress up when they went shopping downtown.

**AB:** Oh yes. We wore hats and gloves sometimes.

**JE:** Where did you first live in Tulsa in those days?

**JBA:** They first lived in Tulsa near Peoria kind of close to where the old Dunwell Cleaners is, which is In The Raw Sushi now. It was a couple of blocks from there. Dad drilled a water well in the back yard and then he put in a chain link fence. Then when I was about two you moved to 30th Street and about Lewis. That's where you lived until you moved into the governor's house and then you bought a condominium at Sooner Plaza downtown.

**AB:** Thank you Joanie. (Laughter)

**JBA:** You're welcome.

**AB:** I'm glad you are here.

**JE:** As I understand it, somewhere in 1959 or 1960 Dewey contracted hepatitis?

**AB:** Yes he did he was terribly sick.

**JE:** Do you have any idea how he got it?

**JBA:** You were in Europe.

**AB:** That's right.

**JBA:** It was from bad water.

**AB:** He was very sick and in the hospital.

**JBA:** And he was home for a long time and not working which was really unusual. He was kind of grumpy, too. Do you remember that part mom?

**AB:** I don't remember that part. (Laughter)

**JBA:** Because he was never grumpy, but that's the only time I remember him being grumpy.

**JE:** How long did he battle it?

**JBA:** I think about six months. He started going back to work part of the day because I remember he would talk about how he got tired and he would go to sleep on the couch in his office.

**AB:** Oh, that's right. He did.

**JBA:** But remember he started reading a lot. He read a lot of history and Oklahoma history and politics and then he took a Dale Carnegie speaking course with Eloise Worley and they had so much fun.

**JE:** Who was she?

**JBA:** She was friend and very funny and for some reason she and dad ended up in this class together. Sometimes they would say that you had 10 seconds and you had to pick a subject out of a hat and say it was "what's your most embarrassing moment?" and then you would have to talk about that. Dad just loved it. One time he came home with a pin because he won the best speech of the day. And she (Eloise) was hilariously funny.

**AB:** They had a good time.

**JBA:** Yes and didn't that give dad all the reading he did and speaking he did. I think he enjoyed that and I think it got him interested in politics.

**AB:** Oh yes.

**JE:** It was laying the groundwork wasn't it for what he was about to do?

**AB:** Right.

## Chapter 5 – 3:27

### State Senate

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**John Erling:** He became interested in Republican politics and then he served in some volunteer positions back in 1960.

**Ann Bartlett:** Yes.

**JE:** Was he a naturally outgoing person?

**AB:** Yes he was. Didn't you think so Joan? I did.

**Joan Bartlett Atkinson:** Yes. Do you remember after church how we would all want to get back in the car and go home and have breakfast and dad would be up there talking to everybody (laughter) and everybody seemed to want to be talking to him. They loved talking to him.

**AB:** They did.

**JE:** So then he decides to run for state senate?

**JBA:** He was out precinct chairman in our little precinct for Eisenhower and supposedly, I don't know if this is really true, but our precinct had more votes for Eisenhower percentage wise than anyone in the state or something. Family lore says it was all precincts all over the U.S., but it was probably Oklahoma. Then he was in charge of finding somebody to run for our state senate and he couldn't get anybody to run. So somebody said to him, "Well, since you want everybody to run so much why don't you just run?"

**AB:** So he did.

**JE:** That would have been in 1961 when he was 42 or 43. Were you interested in any of this at all when he got interested in politics? When you knew he was going to run for office, did you encourage him or discourage him?

**AB:** I didn't discourage, I encouraged if anything. It was something that he should have done. He was good at it and he needed to do it.

**JE:** He ran against Yates Land who was the incumbent.

**AB:** Yes.

**JBA:** I think he died right before the election.

**JE:** Did you help him any at all? Did you get out and campaign for him?

**AB:** Yes, I did.

**JE:** Did you take the children with you?

**JBA:** We went a lot. We went to the shopping centers and we handed out literature door to door.

**AB:** I had forgotten that.

**JBA:** That's okay!

**JE:** But you remember doing that Joan?

**JBA:** Oh yes! A lot and my brothers did it too. Then as dad moved on to other things we did it more and more extensively. We would go to all those little towns to chicken fried dinners. We went to parades and Fourth of July Celebrations and sometimes you and dad would ride in the parade. We would pass out buttons and nail files and we had that recipe for Dewey's Chewies that we would pass out.

**JE:** What were Dewey's Chewies?

**JBA:** Dewey's Chewies were bars with nuts in them?

**AB:** Yes, I think so.

**JBA:** They was good.

**JE:** You didn't make them I don't suppose?

**JBA:** Well, it was just a recipe from mom.

**JE:** Oh! So it was your recipe?

**AB:** Yes, I was the cook. (Laughter)

**JBA:** Someone would set up a band to play and then people would gather on the Main Street and then dad would make a little speech.

**JE:** You enjoyed it I would imagine Ann?

**AB:** I did.

**JE:** He was pretty active then as a freshman senator? It was kind of unusual that he introduced 23 bills as a freshman senator, so that shows you how he got involved immediately.

**AB:** That's the kind of person he was.

**JE:** He was re-elected in 1964.

## Chapter 6 – 5:40

### Okie

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**John Erling:** Then do you remember the lead up to deciding to run for governor in 1966? Somebody had to tab him or did he decide to run on his own?

**Ann Bartlett:** Somebody tabbed him.

**Joan Bartlett Atkinson:** Was it Henry Bellmon?

**AB:** Or it could have been because of Henry Bellmon was more like it.

**JE:** And Henry then was the first Republican governor. I suppose with Dewey's active work in the Republican Party, it makes sense then—but it could have been Henry?

**AB:** Yes.

**JBA:** Another person was Denny Garrison who was from Bartlesville. He was a Republican as well and I think he influenced dad.

**AB:** Yes.

**JE:** At that time, Dewey would have been 47 years old and he was the first Catholic to run for governor?

**AB:** Yes.

**JE:** Do you remember anything about the campaign and the fact that he was the first Catholic to run?

**AB:** Nothing special except that people did understand that that would be a problem.

**JE:** So he thought it was going to be a problem?

**AB:** Yes, he thought it would be a problem and that people wouldn't vote for him because he was a Catholic.

**JE:** I think there were the same kinds of feelings as when John Kennedy ran—your husband faced the same thing in 1966.

**JBA:** The other thing that they thought might be a factor was that he was educated at Princeton and wasn't from Oklahoma. Mainly daddy was educated on the East Coast and that had some kind of a stigma.

**JE:** So there was stigma that was felt?

**AB:** Yes, everyone felt it would be better had he gone to school in Oklahoma—that he would have had a better chance.

**JE:** He ran against John N. Happy Camp? Do you remember him?

**AB:** Yes. He was a happy camp. (Laughter)

**JE:** Was it a rough campaign I suppose because his faith was against him?

**AB:** I think it was a rough campaign.

**JBA:** He just worked so hard and he was gone a lot and you were gone with him a lot.

**AB:** He worked hard on everything he did, including running.

**JE:** When he won, The Washington Post wrote, "It was the end of religious bigotry."

**AB:** (Chuckle) Yes—that was a real problem.

**JE:** While he was governor he traveled a lot to attract real business to Oklahoma?

**AB:** Yes, that was one of his big points when he ran for governor.

**JE:** When he was governor, to instill pride in the state, he revived the term "Okie". Can you talk about that?

- AB:** Yes. Lots of people didn't like that at all because they thought it was sort of degrading to Oklahoma.
- JE:** The term actually goes back to the Dust Bowl Days. Californians used it in contempt for those who came from Arkansas Texas and Oklahoma and moved to California and they called them "Okies". It was a put-down term.
- AB:** That's right.
- JE:** So when Dewey comes along and wanted to revive that, there was some pushback about using that term, isn't that true?
- AB:** Yes, it is.
- JBA:** He spoke a lot about it and he could have had several different meanings for Okie. OKIE stood for Oklahoma Key to Industrial Enterprise, Oklahoma Key to Individual Enthusiasm—there were several. As he spoke to different groups he would sort of expand on that theme—that an Okie was a good thing and it was about jobs and individuality. I was in high school when dad ran for governor.
- JE:** He had Okie pins?
- JBA:** And rings and certificates that he would give to anyone that wanted one. He would give them a signed Okie certificate.
- JE:** What was it like living in the mansion? Did you enjoy it?
- AB:** I did. It was okay. It wasn't what you'd think of—it was really more like a home. I enjoyed living there. It was a nice place to be.
- JBA:** You brought some of your furniture over.
- AB:** That's right I did.
- JBA:** You worked with the library at The Capital to put books in that one room, which was the library, but it didn't have books in it. It just had glass shelves, so she worked to make that library, really a library. There were great books in there. Mom's sister was a librarian at the state library in Olympia, Washington, and mom was a big reader, so it was a big interest.
- JE:** Were there any issues that you worked on as the First Lady?
- JBA:** One thing she did was go with Ann Love to Guatemala where there was no hospital and you raised money to build a hospital. There was a beautiful picture of her from then. She worked on a lot of things and she worked on some issues that had to do with Indians.
- JE:** I suppose you threw parties there at the mansion and maybe had celebrities come around?
- JBA:** I know Robert Kennedy came and spent the night.
- JE:** But those days in the mansion, you enjoyed those?
- AB:** Yes I did.
- JBA:** There was big yard to the side and do you remember—dad would jog every morning and kind of made a little track. We had the dogs there.
- AB:** It was a good place to live I thought. It wasn't too big.

**JE:** It was cozy wasn't it?

**AB:** Yes.

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## Chapter 7 – 9:23

### Senate–Watergate

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**John Erling:** In 1970 he ran for re-election and was defeated by David Hall who was an attorney from Tulsa. It was the closest gubernatorial election in the state, separated by just a few thousand votes. I think Dewey called for a recount and it came up to about the same.

**Ann Bartlett:** Yes.

**JE:** Do you have any recollection about that election night and how close it was? Do you remember being in the mansion and thinking if you don't win you were going to have to move?

**AB:** I wasn't thinking that so much but I was thinking about the election certainly and I was disappointed.

**JE:** The lead must have gone back and forth through the evening and it was close all the time I suppose.

**Joan Bartlett Atkinson:** It was very close all night long. We were in Tulsa and it was too close to call. Then we flew to OKC and there were enough votes in and dad realized that he didn't have enough votes. I burst into tears and was sobbing. Mom was not sobbing. We went on to OKC and mom and dad were so gracious. There were no excuses. But afterward he kind of talked about why he felt like he didn't win and some of the reasons. One was that he didn't campaign that much. He felt like it was a conflict. He was governor and he didn't feel right about leaving a lot and campaigning. There was some strike and then there was a treasurer Leo Winters and there was something there about money. The strike and dad not campaigning and the issue with Leo Winters I think seemed to be the main things. And, I mean Oklahoma at that time was pretty much Democratic anyway—now it's a different story.

**JE:** Right. That must have been hard on you to be that close and then lose?

**AB:** Well, yes, it was hard on us for sure. Not as hard on me because if he were elected it meant he would be around more and be available more and I thought that would be nice.

**JE:** So when you left the mansion, then you were back here in Tulsa?

**AB:** Yes.

**JBA:** You had sold your house and you moved to Center Plaza near downtown. I think pretty soon dad had decided to run for the Senate. He went back to working for the family oil

company, but he started running for the Senate early and I think he had two years before the election.

**JE:** David Hall was sworn in in January of 1972, so it was the end of that year then that Dewey began to campaign for the U.S. Senate.

**AB:** Yes.

**JE:** Did you think, “ugh” I’ve had enough of this?

**AB:** No, I just thought that was the way life was. (Chuckle) If you were married to a man like Dewey I knew that we had to do that.

**JE:** So you obviously encouraged him to run and he did run and he defeated Ed Edmondson, a Democrat and then you moved to Washington. Was that kind of a fearful thing?

**AB:** No, it wasn’t fearful. I was looking forward to it really. Washington is a wonderful place to be, especially if you’ve been elected.

**JBA:** And you already knew people there that had been governor when dad was governor that were now senators, so you knew people there.

**AB:** That’s right, I did.

**JE:** Joanie, did you live there then?

**JBA:** I did. I had graduated from college and worked for a couple of years in Denver teaching school. I then decided that I needed to get my master’s degree. I was interested in learning disabilities in kids and there was a great program at American University. So I got a fellowship at American University and came and lived with my parents for a while and then I got a house with some friends. So I spent a lot of time with mom and dad and with dad in the Senate. There was a family gallery, so you could go up in the family gallery and dad would say “Ted Kennedy is going to speak about this and then I am going to do the rebuttal on this side of it.” So that would happen and then he’d come up back up sometime to the gallery and say, “What did you think? How did I do?” And he would tell us what was going to happen next. It was such a stimulating place to be.

**AB:** It was really fun.

**JBA:** Yes.

**JE:** What were some of the names of people that you may recollect that you saw because of Dewey?

**JBA:** Henry Kissinger, Harry Bird, Pete Domenici, Sam Nunn, Ted Kennedy, Joe Biden, Richard Nixon, Spiro Agnew...

**JE:** Did you meet Richard Nixon?

**AB:** Yes, I’ve met Richard Nixon.

**JBA:** You had met him here before when he had come for fundraisers.

**AB:** Yes. I thought he was an attractive man and I thought he was an interesting man. I didn’t necessarily agree with him all of the time and neither did Dewey of course.

**JBA:** You also met Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford.

**AB:** Yes.

**JBA:** Do you remember how warm Jimmy Carter was? He was so personable, probably more so than Richard Nixon.

**AB:** Yes, he was.

**JE:** Did you go to parties at the White House?

**JBA:** I guess Dewey and I had gone to a party at the White House really it was before dad was up there, when dad was still governor. It was with the Nixon girls and with Prince Charles and that was kind of interesting.

**JE:** So you met Prince Charles?

**JBA:** Yes and he noticed Dewey's Okie pin and talked about it. That was really fun. He asked what it meant. So dad sent him an Okie pin I guess. There were huge fireworks afterward at the party. And it was kind of spooky around the White House with all the smoke from the fireworks. Probably today they would never do something like that. But I just remember President Carter being so personable and you felt like he was really going to remember who you were because he was so kind.

**AB:** Yes, he was.

**JBA:** I thought you felt like Pat Nixon was sort of just stiff or something?

**AB:** Yes. She wasn't overly friendly at all.

**JBA:** But you had a lot of good friends. Remember Gretchen Bird that you just really enjoyed?

**AB:** Yes, I just loved her.

**JBA:** Dad and I would play tennis with Howard Baker and his daughter. Dad said he enjoyed the people that were around him in Washington. He had this prayer group with Sam Nunn and Pete Domenici and he talked about that when he got sick.

**AB:** He really liked that.

**JBA:** I think they gave him a lot. They were very close.

Most of them were Democrats, but they were more moderate Democrats. He loved being on the Armed Services Committee with Henry Kissinger.

**AB:** You are really good Joanie, I am so glad you are here.

**JBA:** I was there and I just loved it.

**JE:** Well, for you Joanie it had to be a thrill going to school there and having access to all of this?

**JBA:** It was fabulous. I would go down to the Capitol with dad. He had this little green and white Ford Pinto, which he thought was kind of like a racecar. (Laughter) It was the worst car! (Laughter) We would drive down to the Senate and I would spend time in that family gallery listening to him talk. The Watergate Hearings were going on and we would go to those.

**AB:** It was interesting.

**JBA:** It was an interesting time and I think a hurtful time for dad during the Watergate Hearings because he had no idea and he had asked Spiro Agnew if that was true and Spiro Agnew said, “No.” I think dad was very hurt. He had tried to get in to see Nixon and Haldeman and Ehrlichman wouldn’t let him meet with President Nixon. I mean, maybe once, but it was difficult to get with him.

**JE:** Watergate, of course, was the break-in to the Democratic National Headquarters starting with that in the Watergate Hotel. Dewey tried to get some answers and couldn’t get any—is that right?

**JBA:** Right. I think he felt...I don’t know if betrayed is the right word, but certainly that he wasn’t informed about after it started to unravel—what really did happen. I think that was kind of a hard time for dad.

**AB:** It was.

**JE:** Would he be considered a moderate Republican then?

**JBA:** Yes.

**JE:** And Richard Nixon was considered that as well. Barry Goldwater was obviously a conservative.

**JBA:** Yes. Mom, wasn’t dad very proud of the fact that he represented Oklahoma’s oil interests and the other interests of Oklahoma, but he passed that stripper well amendment, which at the time, and probably still there were very few people in Washington that really cared to understand the oil business.

**AB:** Absolutely.

**JBA:** He had an energy person on his staff as he really worked hard to educate other senators about the oil business and the benefits of certain tax breaks and depletion and depreciation and things that benefit drillers, people that drill for oil. So I think he felt like that was an accomplishment when he passed that stripper well amendment.

## Chapter 8 – 5:53

### Dewey’s Health

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**John Erling:** He does not run again because of health issues and I believe it was in 1977 that he was diagnosed with lung cancer. Do you remember the circumstances around beginning to realize that something was wrong?

**Ann Bartlett:** Yes, we both did.

**Joan Bartlett Atkinson:** Do you remember he had a physical right there at the capitol?

**AB:** He did. He had kind of avoided his appointment for about two years. He kept putting

it off and rescheduling it. That went on for two years. Then we had his physical they discovered a mass around his lungs. He called mom and said he was coming home for lunch, which he never did. He never came home for lunch—he just worked all the time.

**JE:** So this was unusual for him to come home for lunch?

**AB:** Oh yes, absolutely.

**JE:** So then it was at that time that he told you about the mass in his lungs?

**AB:** Yes. It was a terrible, terrible feeling. It just wouldn't sink in. I couldn't believe it really. I just didn't want to believe it, but it was true. So many people of our generation, especially the men, had the same problem.

**JE:** Did Dewey smoke?

**AB:** Yes.

**JE:** Most of his life I suppose?

**AB:** Yes, he smoked most of his life and I smoked. I don't know if I smoked then, but I smoked.

**JBA:** He had given it up about eight years before. Then he went to Sloan Kettering in New York and he had two surgeries. One then and one a little bit later. They came back to Washington and dad kept going to the Senate. I was teaching then so I would sometimes take him and mom would take him too to his radiation appointments at Howard University. Then I would drive him downtown and he would go to work. Then I started going to some of those meetings with him when he would meet with Kissinger, because he was kind of sleeping more, so I thought I would take him to some of those meetings.

**JE:** Did you sit in on it?

**JBA:** I sat in on a meeting with Kissinger and it was just so amazing because he would report out to the senators about what was going on all around the world and I understood exactly what he was saying. He was such a brilliant man but he could break it down just like a good professor so that you could really retain it and it was really fabulous. He talked then at this meeting about how dad had been such a great support, because I think they probably knew that he wasn't doing very well.

**JE:** Dewey showed no signs or symptoms prior to that doctor's exam so he had no idea he was sick?

**JBA:** That's right, but once he got the diagnosis...he had been jogging and playing tennis but he said that he had noticed that he had been feeling out of breath more. He just thought it was age or par for the course. I think he had no idea. He was shocked.

**AB:** We were all shocked.

**JBA:** They tried all kinds of things, chemo and radiation and blood transfusion. I have the same kind of blood so I gave him a blood transfusion. He tried a faith healer in Chicago. Do you remember that mom? We stopped at the airport? He really didn't believe so much in faith healers although he was really a very religious person. He did

say he kind of felt something warm—I remember him talking about it. (Chuckle) He was very open to other solutions. He did not want to die.

**AB:** No he didn't.

**JBA:** He went to California and he found some program there where they used visualization therapy and they taught you to...dad pictured dive-bombers attacking his cancer. He would visualize it and draw pictures of it.

**JE:** He would have been 57 when he was diagnosed and he fought it for two years. I am sure he figured he certainly was in the prime of his life and doing what he loved and he was very effective—so for him to have to face death had to be devastating.

**JBA:** It was hard.

**JE:** How did he handle that prospect? Did he go into a depression?

**AB:** No, he didn't exactly. Well, maybe it was a form of depression...I think he took to his bed.

**JBA:** At the end, he was in bed most of the time. Do you remember when your and dad's old friend Betty Strong gave that dad that Harpo Marx wig?

**AB:** Oh yes.

**JBA:** He was bald and he went to the floor of the Senate and he wore his wig. Usually on the floor of the Senate when something was going on there were just a few people but I think they must have known because a lot of people were there.

**AB:** Yes. He didn't wear it in there, but I think he put it on in there.

**JBA:** That's' right. He got up to the podium and then he put it on. Do you remember when he would take birdseed and put it in his Ford Pinto? His office building had a courtyard and he would park and open up the hatch and get out the birdseed and the pigeons would all fly over and he would feed the pigeons and he was so cute.

**AB:** Yes, I know.

**JBA:** He had raised homing pigeons when he and his brother were little. He would tell us stories about it. There was one pigeon named Blackie that he loved so much. One time Blackie was coming back from a flight somewhere and was all injured. Dad's mother killed Blackie and cooked Blackie and a couple other pigeons that night for dinner and as dad was forking into his pigeon, Uncle Dave, his brother, said to him, "do you think that's Blackie?" Dad put down his fork and went up to his room. (Chuckle)

**AB:** That's a brother for you! (Laughter)

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**Chapter 9 – 1:39****Dewey Bartlett's Death**

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**John Erling:** It was March 1, 1979, when he was 59 years old that he died. Where were you at the time?

**Joan Bartlett Atkinson:** Mom and dad had moved back to Tulsa. He had finished his term at the end of 1978 and you and dad had bought a house on 33rd Street. He died at home late at night. You and I and Dewey were there with dad when he died.

**Ann Bartlett:** Yes, that was a terrible day wasn't it?

**JBA:** Yes, that was a terrible day.

**AB:** It was an awful day.

**JBA:** A few days later there was a funeral. A lot of senators came on a plane together. I think John Stennis might have been head of the Armed Services—I might be wrong, but they sent a plane. They attended the funeral, which was at Christ The King Church, where mom and dad had been members since they moved to Tulsa. We went to the burial and all of the senators attended the burial. Then they all came to our house. I remember the two buses they were in clearing the top of Calvary Cemetery. It looked like the tops of the buses were going to hit the gate as they came in. It was just a great reunion of senators and people from Tulsa and dad's childhood friends from Marietta, Ohio. It was really just a great gathering of interesting people.

**AB:** Yes it was.

**JBA:** David Boren was there. He had just won dad's Senate seat. And Howard Baker and Sam Nunn.

**AB:** Howard Baker was a good friend.

**JBA:** A lot of his friends in the Senate were there and it was fabulous. Interesting people.

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**Chapter 10 – 3:19****Dewey Jr. – Politics**

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**John Erling:** Some where along the line Dewey Jr. decides he wants to be in politics too doesn't he?

**Ann Bartlett:** Yes.

**JE:** Did you encourage him to do that?

**AB:** No. (Chuckle)

**JE:** Why not?

**AB:** Because I think it's a tough life. There were easier things for him to do. I didn't encourage him, but I didn't discourage him either really.

**JE:** But he wouldn't listen to his mother.

**AB:** No. (Chuckle)

**Joan Bartlett Atkinson:** That wasn't the first time, mom? (Chuckle)

**AB:** Or the last. (Laughter)

**JE:** Did you find the life of politics to be tough? I mean you always seemed to encourage your husband Dewey to run and to be part of that because you felt that he should be doing it—but still you felt it was rough?

**AB:** Well, it was kind of rough, but in another way it was nice. You met a lot of people and enjoyed it very much really.

**JE:** But when the criticisms came of your husband and so forth—I mean, you felt that yourself?

**AB:** Oh yes, I didn't like that at all.

**JE:** So then those with the feelings that you had when Dewey Jr. came along and says that he wants to run. You knew what it was like to be in the ring.

**AB:** Yes.

**JE:** I'm putting words in your mouth but—

**AB:** I did not discourage him, did not, but I don't think I encouraged him either.

**JBA:** But I think you certainly supported him to run because you knew he would do a good job.

**AB:** Oh sure.

**JE:** He runs for City Council and he's defeated for mayor and then he runs for state Senate and he's defeated...so when he's going to run for mayor again I'm sure you must have said—I don't know—you probably didn't ask, but he must have thought—

**AB:** I might have thought, as I did many other times too, when people run for office... it's hard. If you lose you'll be very disappointed and I hate that part. So that's what I thought.

**JE:** Yes.

**JBA:** So then if you win...

**AB:** Yes, if you win there's a lot of stuff to do.

**JE:** Joanie, how would you describe your father?

**JBA:** I think he woke up every day and the cup was half-full—always, always.

**AB:** That's true.

**JBA:** Even when he lost when he ran for governor again and I think we all really felt like we wanted him to win so much because he had started some things—but the legislature was so hard to work with and we were all hoping for 4 more years. He woke up the next day and it was just another day and he reset his goals. He was never discouraged. He was always positive. He was really funny.

**AB:** Yes.

**JBA:** He and mom together were really funny. He would just sometimes wear you out. When my friends would come around he kind of sharpened his points of view on family and friends and so he would kind of debate. I would have to say, “dad, that’s enough.”

Because he got so excited about whatever it was that he wanted to promote or wanting to learn about.

**AB:** Yes, he did! A lot of it was boring. (Chuckle)

**JBA:** He was a very, kind of simple man in a lot of ways. He wasn’t really particularly materialistic.

**AB:** No, he certainly wasn’t.

**JBA:** And he was just honest—so honest.

**AB:** Yes.

## Chapter 11 – 2:28

### Advice to Students

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**Joan Bartlett Atkinson:** Mom and dad went to Egypt on a trip with the State Department. Dad, of course, paid mom’s way and paid her half of the hotel room and his secretary later on after dad died had a job with a Congressman and she said, “you know, this guy is really a lot more fun than your dad was. I would always have to write checks to the U.S. Treasury. I thought everybody did that.” But he would reimburse for all these things. And at one point King Faisal’s servant people brought by gifts. Mom got this beautiful watch with the King’s insignia on it.

**Ann Bartlett:** Where is that watch now?

**JBA:** Well, because of dad, it’s at the Oklahoma historical Society.

**AB:** Oh.

**JBA:** Mom wanted it so badly. She said, “out of everything can I just have this one watch?”

**AB:** (Laughter)

**JBA:** I remember Malvina Stevenson in the *Washington Post* wrote an article about gifts. Dad was one of the ones she talked about who was so honest and ethical and that was him. He just was so honest about everything.

**AB:** Yes he was—much more so than I would have been. (Chuckle)

**John Erling:** Students who are listening to this and wondering about politics, do either one of you have advice for students who may want to get involved in the political process or government issues or public service? Do either one of you have any encouragement or do you think they should stay out of politics because it’s tough?

**AB:** No, I wouldn't say that. I would say get in it because it's interesting—you don't always win—but it's interesting always.

**JE:** Would you encourage them?

**JBA:** I would say people can make such a difference. I remember dad started the Vo-Tech system years ago in this state. At the time it was dad and an educator and two other guys. They started small and now it's all over the state. To this day it's one of the best systems in the U.S. I think you never know what mustard seed you are going to plant when you do something that you really believe in, so I would encourage people to follow their beliefs and get involved in politics or in volunteer work or in ways that don't have to be big where they can make a difference.

**JE:** Thank you Ann and Joanie for taking us on this journey with the two of you. That was fun.

**JBA:** Thank you very much John. That was fun going down memory lane.

**AB:** It was, yes!

## Chapter 12 – 0:29

### 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 as they 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).