

## Dr. Ben G. Henneke

Under his outstanding leadership, The University of Tulsa accomplished a long list of milestones.

### Chapter 1 - 1:06

#### Introduction

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**Announcer:** Ben Henneke was a freshman in 1931 at The University of Tulsa, which was the beginning of a long-standing relationship. As an undergraduate, his accomplishments were many—including writing the Hurricane Fight Song and the founding of radio station KWGS. Dr. Henneke became president of the University of Tulsa in 1958. Under his leadership there were many milestones including full accreditation, the construction of several buildings and the founding of TU's petroleum abstract service and the building of TU's north campus. After serving nearly a decade, he returned to the classroom in 1967. In 1982 he was named president emeritus and continued to be productive after his retirement. President Henneke died November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009. This interview was conducted September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009. It begins with Ed Dumit, who was Professor of Communications at TU. The generous donations of our founding sponsors have made Dr. Henneke's story possible on this Oklahoma oral history website, [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).

### Chapter 2 - 2:00

#### Ed Dumit

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**John Erling:** Ed, would you please state your name, your date of birth and your age on this date?

**Edward Dumit:** My name is actually Edward Dumit. My date of birth is August 14, 1929. I am 80 years old.

**JE:** So how did you come to know and work with Dr. Henneke?

**ED:** I met Dr. Henneke 60 years ago in December of 1949. I had enrolled the year before at OU. I was just completing my third semester at OU and hearing so much about TU and this wonderful broadcast curriculum that Ben Henneke had originated. So during Christmas

vacation I asked for a tour of the facilities. Ben was the only person there. He was there all through Christmas vacation, just to grab people like me. He showed me around. I saw KWGS, which was barely completed and he convinced me without really pushing me into it that I would probably be better off at TU. I went back to OU just to get my clothes and I moved to Tulsa to my own home and I seemed to have been at TU ever since.

**JE:** In 1955 you became station manager of KWGS. You taught broadcasting, served as program director and have been there ever since.

**ED:** Well a lot of those jobs were done by students...I became the manager of a student-operated station. The program director, news director, music director and all of the announcers—the engineers were not students, but everyone else was. It was a marvelous opportunity for many years for students to get practical experience on the air.

**JE:** That's why Ed Dumit comes along on this interview.

### Chapter 3 - 3:36

#### Ben Kicked Out

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**John Erling:** Ben would you please state your name, your date of birth and your age on this date?

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** I am Ben Henneke. I just passed my 95th birthday. I was born on May 20, 1914.

**JE:** Where were you born?

**BH:** Saint Louis, Missouri

**JE:** What are your parents' names?

**BH:** Frank and Ruby Henneke. Both of them had wonderful genes and I am the victim of them.  
(Laughter)

**JE:** Where did you go to elementary school?

**BH:** Horace Mann Elementary School. Horace Mann eventually became the only junior high school in Tulsa and had the only swimming pool. It was a matter of honor that I went to Horace Mann.

**JE:** Where did you go to middle school and high school?

**BH:** Well, I was kicked out of Pershing. From Pershing I went to Holy Family High School.

**JE:** Did you say you were kicked out?

**BH:** Yes, I was kicked out. I had difficulties with the curriculum let's say. (Laughter) They told me that I could not return until my mother came with me. I knew that she had been through the third grade, so there was no point in that. So, I didn't go back again and then they eventually found out about it. My mother found out about it and we didn't want to

go through that. It's painful, both physically and emotionally. So, I went to another school, Holy Family and then I was kicked out of there. So I wound up in the third grade in Lincoln School (laughter) and Lincoln held on to me. One of my dearest memories is the principal of the school calling me up after I was elected president and saying to me how proud he was of me that I had been elected president of the University of Tulsa. It brought fame to the school because they had only had one other person who had ever achieved any celebrity, and was a young man who had escaped the great prison that nobody could escape from. Help me out with the name.

**ED:** Alcatraz.

**BH:** Yes, Alcatraz, so I brought fame to the school.

**JE:** Where did you go to high school?

**BH:** Tulsa Central.

**JE:** Then what university did you go on to?

**BH:** I went to the University of Tulsa—one of the luckiest things that could have happened to a person. It was 1931. It was an exceedingly good school because of the Depression. The teachers there who were good couldn't move on to another school because of the Depression. There was no place paying salaries either. I didn't say "better" I'm saying "either." No school was paying salaries, so you stayed where you were. These very good teachers had a crop of students who also could go nowhere else. Those good teachers had these good students and if you look at the TU graduating class of 1935, of which I was a member, you'll find very important members of the community. People like Dick Albert who had his own company and developed fracking. Fracking is the ability to bring oil out of a structure that wasn't willing to give it up—so you blasted it and it gave it up. The lawyer for Standard Oil Company of New Jersey was a graduate of that class. We had an unusually bright group.

## Chapter 4 - 6:34

### TU Fight Song

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**John Erling:** I must point out that while you were a student at TU they were looking for a fight song.

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** In the days when I was a student, civic clubs all had noontime meetings because there were all kinds of places downtown and they were all working downtown. But all of these people downtown went together someplace at noontime and so there

were civic clubs to which they went. Every civic club they went to there was a man named Clarke, of Clarke's Good Clothiers.

**JE:** It was Harry Clarke?

**BH:** Yes, Harry. He directed the singing and he would get up and they would sing *Oklahoma*, only it had not yet been written, but that sort of thing. They would sing a repertoire of numbers, all of whom we in college sneered at. But they were very happy singing them and then they would end up with the fight songs of the schools that were having football games. So they would sing OU's Boomer Sooner, which they had gotten (the tune) from Yale. They would sing the OSU song, which was a song from a musical comedy on Broadway back in the 1920s to which they had written fight words. For TU they sang the Tee-Pee song. It wasn't much of a song but at least it was original and it was strictly Tulsa's song. But the men didn't know it and they didn't like singing it and it didn't get a rousing response at the end of the singing that a fight song should get when you are in a public group and you are all singing together. Harry Clarke thought something out to be done about it and so he offered a prize if someone would write a fight song for the University of Tulsa. He offered \$25. (Laughter)

**Edward Dumit:** Big money.

**BH:** I want you to know that I who had never written a song, was a sophomore who didn't know the university, wrote a song because I had a mother who said, "Somebody is going to win and it might as well be you. Sit down to the piano." So I sat down to the piano and nothing happened. She kept asking, "How is the fight song coming?" Eventually one Saturday as I pushed the vacuum cleaner back and forth, the rhythm of the fight song came to me. So, if today you listen to it carefully you will hear the music of a very famous vacuum cleaner and I wrote words to it. I wrote the music by singing that song and lifting up my finger when I found the note on the piano and then writing that down. Then when I needed a chord I wrote down one note and then wrote down the other two until I had a triad. The music school had been ashamed that anybody that had to write a song had to write it as brutally as I did. But the blasted thing made sense and sang well. I was smarter than the other contestants. I had two of my buddies sing with me and I had a girl playing the accompaniment. The civic clubs all liked pretty girls playing accompaniments. Three stalwart men belting out the Hurricane Song won the contest and won the \$25. The better songs—one by Bob Gilmore—who later became the head of one of the great oil exploration companies, his song was much better than mine. He sang by himself and he sounded like a bullfrog (laughter) and so he didn't win. He admits that if he had only had merchandising skills that he would have done better.

**ED:** But the fact remains that your song is still being sung.

**BH:** I know. It's amazing isn't it? A girl who was a music major wrote and sang a very beautiful

song. She is still here in town. Unlike most of the other people that I will talk about, she is alive. I'm so old that when I talk about anybody I have to say the late Bob Gilmore.

**JE:** Can you go into a little bit of the song right here?

**BH:** I don't know if I could or not. It starts out "Down the field to victory." It sounds like pushing the vacuum cleaner hitting the baseboard of the house. (Laughter) You know, you have to clean the baseboard as well as the carpet. So it's "Down the field to victory on Tulsa on." That's more singing than I have done in years. Let's see if I can go on. Of course the words are a story of their own. They've been changed—the song was first written with the colors of TU being gold and black. Oh, I can't do it, but anyhow I'm sorry. I wrote it for Tulsa to have black and gold colors. Then they changed the colors to red blue and gold. So I wrote, "On blue and gold, do as you're told." (Laughter) That didn't seem like it was a very good song. I wrote, "Go right ahead, blue, gold and red." I don't know what they finally wound up with, but I wrote a whole bunch of additional words. Our school colors would change, but we also were playing OSU. OSU changed its name. They were no longer Oklahoma A&M. They were now something much fancier. I don't know what the words of the song are now. I am sure that any freshman, if he were here instead of an old character like Dumit, we would get the right words.

**ED:** I should remember the right words because I sang them so many times in the past.

## Chapter 5 - 3:14

### War Censor/KVOO

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**Edward Dumit:** I would like to hear about during the World War II when you wrote some scripts for actors at TU to take on tour to some of the army camps. Have I stated that accurately? Or just what's the story there?

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** The students at the university and I performed at Army camps during the war because we felt very much out of it. People were being drafted. People were enlisting. People were doing their physical duty to defeat a nation whose pride was its army, to defeat a nation whose pride was to survive the violent kinds of experience. I was working at KVOO. I was not called up to serve because I was already serving and didn't know it. I was officially a censor of the words that went out over KVOO, which could have been words that brought death to our troops in the South Pacific if I didn't do my job properly.

**ED:** That was because KVOO had a—

**BH:** Unusually large wavelength.

**ED:** ...signal that was heard nightly in the South Pacific.

**BH:** It sent a signal to Guadalcanal as clearly as it did to Sand Springs, and a lot more clearly than it did to let's say Colorado. The heavy-side bounce of the signal meant that KVOO went into the South Pacific. They didn't know it. I didn't know it.

**ED:** The channel was a clear channel station and that always carried farther.

**BH:** But it also just by the accident—there's a name for that heavy-side bounce. The signal goes up to the heavens and hits that heavy side layer and bounces back down to the Earth. It bounces back down at an angle. So that the next time it bounces, it bounces at a reciprocal of that angle. It keeps on bouncing until it reaches Guadalcanal and it just goes on. You wouldn't believe how clear the signal is because I have since heard it. But at the time the government thought it would be smarter not to draft me, but for me to censor it. That censorship went on and on and on. I announced because KVOO was thinking gee, he is here anyhow so we might as well use him. KVOO used me as an announcer. I did the early morning news. I got up at 4:30 every morning and went down and read the copy to see that nobody had had done anything stupid. The newscaster could very easily have done something. We had one newscaster who broadcast that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was going to visit the bomber plant that day. That was all the Japanese needed to know as they plotted all of the things they plotted. I am told that I did a good job because we had no difficulties in the area in which I was working, but anyway, that's beside the point.

## Chapter 6 - 5:18

### Paul Harvey

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**Dr. Ben Henneke:** I felt like a slacker. I wore my street clothes and went to the university each day. I had a limited schedule because they had a limited enrollment. Also, since the government through KVOO was paying me, TU did not. (Laughter) That was years ago and I have forgiven them. So those of us who were not in the Army and who could do things, even if was 4:30 in the morning, we set up a little acting company and we performed. When we didn't perform we rehearsed. The company that rehearsed, one of the ladies later gave the university many beautiful things that it needed. Her family became a big donor for the university.

**John Erling:** Her name was?

**BH:** Mrs. Walter and the name of the family name was Chapman and the name of more of the

family that gave money was McFarland. You start with the McFarlands giving the library and other millions and then you have Mr. Chapman marrying one of the McFarland girls and giving. The money was made from the oil that was found on the land on which they lived. They were next-door neighbors.

**JE:** Let me bring you to after World War II. You saw the need to train people in radio after WWII. Is that true?

**BH:** I believe that every student should be trained in some field in which he could make a living. I wanted him to get an education and I wanted him to know the arts and I wanted him to be blessed with people like Alexander Hogue in art and Ringo in music. I wanted him to have been educated and I also wanted him to have had training that would help him earn a living. Hardly anybody hired actors—I wish they did, but in those days you got an acting job by starving for months and months. Maybe you got a job and maybe you didn't. It was terrible. But radio was a way into a lucrative kind of career. So I asked and fought for the university having a training program in radio and having a station where students could learn the skills of a radio person. People like Edward Dumit became students of the University of Tulsa and with what they learned they went out and got jobs. Some of them got jobs that paid as well as football paid. We were able to have a career available to a student when he had finished studying at TU.

**JE:** Would Paul Harvey have interacted at all? Did you know him at KVOO?

**BH:** Well sure! He's in my textbook. Paul Harvey had a magnificent voice and Ms. Ronan. Now, Ms. Ronan is the source of radio education and a source of kids being interested in radio. Ms. Ronan, a speech teacher at Central High School was one of the world's greatest ladies. She could have tears come to the eyes of any student and a warm sound come to his voice only with the mention of Ms. Ronan. Ms. Ronan had set up a deal at KVOO that a good student who was an apprentice (intern) could announce on KVOO after he took an audition and the station agreed. So Paul Harvey auditioned and was an apprentice and worked at KVOO on Saturday afternoons while someone who was a professional was going around doing things that he was supposed to have done that day or the days before and listening to this young man and helping him when he got into trouble, or bail him out if he got into serious trouble. Or would know enough to be still, because who would know that he had gotten himself into serious trouble because he got himself out. That experience is recorded in the *Radio Announcer's Handbook*. If you should want to know, there was a blue network and a red network in those days as a part of the national broadcasting company. KVOO, as a clear channel—carried both of them when it wanted to. It carried one part of the time and another part of the time. The announcers knew what was happening, but the listeners didn't have any idea they were switching networks. The Saturday afternoon broadcast was opera, and believe me, you are one of those people

who can take your broadcast or leave it, we knew that they left it. So there was another network carrying what was being listened to, but Harvey was put on at the part that they were sure was not being listened to. Eventually when the network was split up, they had to take the opera and they profited from it. Edward (Dumit) got a career out of it because it takes a good voice to do the opera.

## Chapter 7 - 1:52

### Harvey's Mistake

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**Dr. Ben Henneke:** Here's a voice from high school going to do the network. I think it was the Blue Network. Anyhow, every radio station at that time worked with announcer's reading copy. There was no such thing as an announcer ad-libbing. It was hoped that you could in case something broke down, but they didn't want you to ad lib. Most of the ad libbers had been so woeful (laughter). KVOO had a basic rule, don't you dare open your mouth except for what's on that piece of paper. (Laughter)

**Edward Dumit:** That's why they had a continuity department.

**BH:** Exactly, and the continuity department wrote down what you said. They wrote instructions for you that the program that you are now sitting there to announce about, which is coming out of Chicago is running long. So in the book it said the Farm and Home Hour will run long and you will have to fade into the opera, which was one of the French operas, help me out Dumit if you can. Do you remember it?

**ED:** I don't remember the opera, but the instruction was "monitor fade in."

**BH:** The laugh is that he didn't know any more about what was happening than if he had just been born. So he said, "You have just been listening to the Farm and Home Hour direct from Chicago and now we will have the Metropolitan Opera by Monee-tore-fah-deen." (Monitor Fade in) (Laughter)

**John Erling:** Did you know that he was a very talented person at that time?

**BH:** I thought if they send us very many like this we will win the network prize for boo-boos. (Laughter)



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**Chapter 8 - 6:13**  
**Bill Skelly / KWGS**

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**John Erling:** You became friends with an oilman at KVOO.

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** Lot of them.

**JE:** Wasn't there a special one?

(Pause)

**Edward Dumit:** His name starts with an "S."

**BH:** Oh, yes! Bill Skelly was one of the greatest men I ever knew. He gave us a radio station and I worked on it. He listened to it. He would raise Cain if we didn't do what he thought we ought to do. It was wonderful to have a listener who was that good. Bill Skelly was a wonderful self-man man. He was interested in his radio station.

**JE:** His station, we should establish, was KVOO.

**BH:** That's right.

**JE:** Would he ever listen to you on the air and call you and say—

**BH:** Oh sure. You might have to argue with him because you might have been right. (Laughter) He was proud of me because I would belly up to him when there was a mistake on his part but he thought it was on my part. Let me tell you about Bill Skelly. He was great for radio. He saw to it that KVOO became a clear channel as soon as possible. There was a station down in Louisiana that gave him a bad time because they were on the same wavelength and they weren't supposed to be as strong as we were, so you weren't supposed to hear them. But once you get the license— They would say, "Well, the engineer has made a mistake and we heard the voice of Shreveport." Well, you never want to hear the voice of Shreveport. If you are an announcer for KVOO and Shreveport comes in clear...what happened to your clear channel because Mr. Skelly is going to call you up. We eventually got the channel cleared. In that clearing, he (Mr. Skelly) became very impressed by the engineers working for KVOO. They told him that they needed an FM radio station so that they would not have to fight with anybody from Shreveport. They told him that FM radio was going to be the basis for FM television. They wanted to get ready for television and in order to do that they wanted to get into FM radio and learn all of the problems ahead of time.

**JE:** This would be back in the 1940s?

**BH:** Yes, about 1941 I believe. KVOO had its own television station that they made and used during the war because it had such brilliant engineers. It never went anywhere and no one ever listened to it because it had no programming. The engineers were there because they were working during their free time. I was there because I was waiting to get on the 4am or 5am broadcast on. Let me tell you about the KVOO's early interest in radio was

being overshadowed by its very great interest in a new thing called FM broadcasting, which didn't bounce the signal. No one in the South Pacific would hear me if we were an FM station and I wouldn't have a job. (Laughter) But FM broadcasting was a new thing that was going to be the audio for the really great invention called television. So to get ready for television, they started the radio station KWGS. KWGS was given to the University of Tulsa lock, stock and barrel by Mr. W.G. Skelly, one of the great men of the city, so that engineers could learn about FM broadcasting and so we could teach students about it.

**JE:** So the station came on the air in 1947. But you honored Bill Skelly by naming the station KWGS after him.

**BH:** Yes. K W (William) G (Grove) S (Skelly)

**JE:** But didn't you originally take this concept to the board of Tulsa University and convince them to have a campus radio station?

**BH:** Yes. I wrote a proposal called Five Reasons for Radio at TU. Each member of the board of trustees received the proposal, which was illustrated by the late Tid Gates, who was a brilliant young woman. It was typed out by the still living Nancy Kerr. We took it to the board of trustees who listened and were gentlemanly and finally voted in favor of it. One of the trustees was a wonderful man named Ed Thornton. The talk went on about the radio station and he said, "Young man, in my business when I've made a sale I know enough to shut up and hand my customer a pen so he can sign the document." (Laughter)

**JE:** Were you the guy who couldn't shut up?

**BH:** I was the guy who couldn't shut up.

## Chapter 9 - 4:36

### KWGS / OTASCO

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**Dr. Ben Henneke:** Let me say that there's a lot of learning that goes on at the University of Tulsa. Some of it is in the classroom, but lots of it is in other places of experience, one of them being KWGS. That name was chosen because he was giving us the station and because it had the initials of all of the tough stations in the United States, so you could get practice saying them. W is terrible to have to say as a call letter. That was another reason why we named it what we did. It was a coincidence that the man who gave the station had initials that we as announcers needed to practice.

**Edward Dumit:** I told my students to think of the two words "double" and "you." That's what a W is. So if you say double-you, those two words, it flows.

**BH:** Yes.

**John Erling:** We should point out that Mr. Skelly actually donated a tower and \$60,000 back in the 1940s to build that radio station.

**BH:** I never knew how much it was. Thank you for telling me. I'm glad you know the amount. The tower became one of those things that you immediately had to find another place for because kids wanted to climb it.

**JE:** Oh, it was on campus?

**BH:** It was right behind the station and the theater. It was a great place for somebody to hang the engineer's flag at the top of it, or to take down the engineer's flag from the top if it.

**ED:** It was about 435 feet high I think.

**BH:** I can tell you about how scary it was because I climbed to the top of it. I did so as a darn fool because FM is radio by sightline. You go as far as you can see. I put a pair of binoculars around my neck and climbed to the top of KWGS to see how far our signal would go. We had no listeners of course. The first people to listen to it were the dean of the arts & sciences college who got a free set, my mother who got a free set because she was going to listen and write us a postcard every time we goofed, and two other people. There were four people who could listen. One was the FCC inspector who listened to all of the stations who lived across the street from me. The deal was they had to write postcard to let us know when we made a mistake. So KWGS had a listening audience of four. Then one of the great men of Tulsa, who owned...

**ED:** Oklahoma Tire & Supply

**BH:** Thank you Edward.

**JE:** That was known as OTASCO.

**BH:** Yes. They had sets to sell and so we went on the air when they were selling sets. They would turn on a set in their showroom. They didn't want to be on in the early morning. But whenever they were on they wished we would be on and we needed an audience so we were happy to supply it. We were on anytime OTASCO sold sets.

**ED:** They also put them on the sidewalk outside to catch people walking by.

**BH:** I was inside announcing at the time. I never could see that. (Chuckle) I'm glad to know that Ed. I never knew that because Beaumont Bruestle and I wrote every word that was on the air because we believed in the commercial programming book of what you are going to play and what you are going to do. You weren't going to say "What-cha" as I know I am saying. But it was all programmed and written out. Bruestle and I together wrote a daily one-hour, original program so that the people at OTASCO had to listen at the store to hear that program. We put as many kids on that program as we could so that their parents would go to OTASCO. (Laughter) One of those parents who went to OTASCO to listen was the parent of Frank Simms, who became a national network announcer for Philip

Morris. He had the maximum number of commercial broadcasts that an announcer at NBC could do.

**ED:** Later in his career he was the announcer for several years for the Academy Award broadcast.

## Chapter 10 - 3:38

### First Words

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**John Erling:** What were the first words ever said on KWGS?

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** I'll let Edward say them. (Laughter)

**Edward Dumit:** I don't use language like that. (Laughter)

**BH:** We were fighting over it. Dr. Pontius wanted to say the first words. He, after all was the president of the university that was inaugurating this radio station. Mr. Skelly thought he ought to have the first words since it was being named after him. I certainly believed that I ought to say the first words because I had dreamed it and arranged it. The announcers thought they ought to say it because it was in their script that they should say it. So we were all standing and jockeying to be there and so I got my paycheck from Dr. Pontius and I thought I could beat him to it. (Laughter) It was a good station that was very well managed and very well prepared. The studios were probably the most beautiful studios outside of New York. The engineer was one of the great engineers who later made a career with the government doing very, very esoteric things with electronics. He looked at the switchboard that he had never seen before. He flipped the switch that he knows on all radio sets will get you to the tower. That switch is not ever broadcast because it is the switch that only goes one way, to the tower, where the engineer can answer your question. He said, "Howard, how do you turn this damn thing on?" That probably set a style for KWGS. (Laughter)

**ED:** Another thing that's interesting is that KVOO was interested in seeing from the experimental standpoint how an FM tower would operate under adverse weather conditions, particularly icing. You can tell us something about that.

**BH:** Oh! (Laughter) Well, they knew nothing about what would happen when they turned their signal on. They didn't know would hear it and who wouldn't. After all they had had a painful experience of AM radio and turning that on and somebody calling up and raising Cain that he was listening to a minister instead of us. It turned out that when you got ice on an FM transmitter, you broadcast on all the signals of everybody (all the other stations) in Tulsa. (Laughter) It was chaos.

**JE:** Did KAKC come on with an FM station just before KWGS?

**BH:** KAKC came on I think an hour or two before we did.

**ED:** I don't think it was that close.

**JE:** So were KVOO and KWGS the only two FM stations in the state of Oklahoma?

**BH:** The man who dedicated the station told us that we were the first in the nation.

**ED:** This was a representative from Washington, D.C. with the FCC, one of the commissioners.

**BH:** We got one of the commissioners of the FCC to dedicate us. He was listening with us as the engineers said, "How do you turn this damn thing on?" (Laughter) He made a comment on it and he said it was all right because probably there weren't too many people listening because it was a new station. Then he talked about the new horizon of broadcasting. It was great. We were pioneering a thing that has over the years done some very good broadcasting.

## Chapter 11 - 11:16

### Going to College

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**Edward Dumit:** Ben there was something else that you did that was innovative and was a way of giving public relations attention to TU. It was the "Going to College" program, offering high school students to come to TU.

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** Thank you, Edward. The people at KVOO who had worked with me during the war had allowed me to do Saturday night broadcasts when nobody wanted to be on the air. But they allowed me to do that to make extra money because I was back on the TU payroll 100 percent and I was married or I was planning on getting married. I was going to have to have more money than I was making at TU. They had a very great continuity writer named Randolph.

**ED:** He went by "FM Jim Randolph."

**BH:** That's right. He was perfect for the job. He later came and went to work for the university. We were doing such interesting things and he wanted a career. So we started KWGS. The university needed good students and it wasn't getting them. The Tulsa Public Schools superintendent put out a questionnaire to all of the graduating seniors and he gave the names of five schools: TU, OU, OSU, NSU and some other school like that. The questionnaire asked them to fill in their first and second preference for a place to go college. The results were that TU did not register on a single one of them in either first or second place. Nobody wanted to go to TU. Something happened that we got a feeling of

people outside of TU. KVOO had a listening audience in the Tulsa University broadcast area. So they had a program that people listened to and we (TU) needed to get students from it to want to go to TU. So we started a program written by Jim Randolph and Bill Skelly was also involved. They came to me and they said, "Because you are a college professor" I really was a lowly instructor, but they didn't know the difference—they said, "Since you are a professor and a TU faculty member, you are the perfect person to do this quiz show that we have thought up. We would like to do a yearlong quiz show program in every town our signal reaches. You have to do it because you have built up a listening audience and people know you on the radio." People knew me so well they would say to me, "If you would just do this or that we would run you for mayor." Or they would tell me, "You have good name recognition. You should be a politician." I was just a professor at TU who had been chosen to do censorship at KVOO and because of it I got to do the announcing in the early morning hours when nobody else wanted to get up and I had to. The quiz show program was called "Going to College." I didn't know anything about quiz shows, but nobody else did either. But I did know about asking questions because I was a professor. I asked all the teachers at TU to write questions for me and to provide the answers and they agreed to do it. We would ask the questions on the air at KVOO. The kids from Nowata or Coweta or whatever town (school) in Oklahoma we were playing with that day would provide the answers. The students that won the contest got \$25, which in those days was a fortune and he also won one semester at the University of Tulsa. The \$25 prize was not part of the original quiz show idea. I went to these various schools to get them excited about this broadcast. We needed them to choose bright kids to be on the quiz show and answer questions. The principal said to me, "But nobody goes to TU Mr. Henneke." I said, "Let's try to change that." They liked the idea of an assembly program, so we all had of these schools taking this assembly program. It was a hit. Everyone liked it. It was broadcast on Saturdays when everybody in town could listen to it. For example, everybody in Claremore was proud of Claremore's students and they wanted to hear them on the radio and they wanted them to win. The kids in lots of towns got a lot more than just a semester at TU and \$25. They got free Cokes at some restaurants and there would be a picture of him in the town paper. It was a big thing. Finally in the third year of the program we got somebody to take the scholarship. The program ran 21 years. Eventually we were getting all kinds of kids as you can imagine. The show had three people that asked questions. I only questioned kids for the first eight years or so. By that time I was needed as Dr. Pontius' assistant. Rod Jones and someone else did it.

**ED:** Rod was the principal host for many years.

**BH:** Yes. It kept on going and the high school kids loved it. We had to keep on getting new questions. Twenty-one years of broadcasting can eat up a lot of questions. (Laughter)

**ED:** Then you would drive to the city each week where it was to originate with two of the announcers who were broadcasting majors from TU and an engineer, giving them that experience.

**BH:** Ed wants me to tell you all of the gimmicks that were in this thing. (Chuckle)

**ED:** Well the best part is that the announcers liked it so much because you would take them for a steak dinner afterward for lunch.

**BH:** Oh yes. KVOO was making money and I, a poor man could give steak dinners to the radio announcers on the program out of KVOO's money and I could eat a steak with them as if I was an announcer. That was not the only gimmick. We had a notebook full of questions. We got four, big-shot people in town to be judges, so that that town was pleased that their mayor was a judge in that contest. They were to judge when there was a dilemma. For example, you got 10 points for a correct answer and fewer points for a question that was all but right. What is an "all but right" question? The very first show, a very bright kid answered the question, "What is a caduceus?" The audience moaned. He looked blank and then he said, "It's a snake that climbs up a sword." I said, "I'm going to let the judges determine how much you know about it." The answer is that a caduceus is a symbol of the medical corps, but I bet there are a lot of doctors that don't know what a caduceus is. I said to the judges, "If you don't give this kid 10 points, I am going to give him 10 points anyhow."

**John Erling:** And they gave him 10?

**BH:** Yes.

**JE:** So this program was on KVOO and not KWGS until it was simulcast?

**BH:** Yes, it was also on in Muskogee and Claremore.

**JE:** So it was syndicated?

**BH:** We broadcast to a whole host of beginning FM stations and there were some AM stations that took it. It had hometown appeal like you wouldn't believe.

**JE:** It wasn't just in Oklahoma was it?

**BH:** We did it in four states: Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri and Arkansas. We did Fayetteville, Joplin, Coffeyville and Pittsburg. We did not do Tulsa. KVOO was doing a thing already with Ms. Ronan where Paul Harvey was appearing with Central High School in Tulsa. So the show was for out-of-town listeners, which is what TU was looking for with attracting new students.

**JE:** So we have no idea how many of students. You planted the seed at the early stages of Tulsa University bringing hundreds and hundreds of students to TU. There was one in particular and I can't tell you his name. I'm sorry. He said, "Oh Ben, this is a real treat. I am so glad to see you. How are you? I was on "Going to College" way back when and I won and as a result I decided to be a radio announcer. There isn't anything to that. You just stand up there and ask questions and I can do that. I can be friendly. To prove to you that

I can be friendly, I'm a member of your board of trustees!" (Laughter) I wish I knew his name. But yes, it reached all kinds of people. It meant that TU was an academic institution you should consider.

## Chapter 12 - 6:37

### President of TU

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**John Erling:** You became president of TU on June 1, 1958. You served until 1967.

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** Yes.

**JE:** Leading up to that, did somebody come to you and they were expecting you to become president? Did you campaign for it? How did you become president?

**BH:** They had a search group made up of very good men. I submitted my application to that group and they must have read it. They asked me for an interview and they asked me questions about what I thought about the University and what I thought I could do for it. I told them that I thought I could do well for it, but I did not think I could do well for it for a long time. I told them that there were a lot of things that I wanted to do and being president of the University of Tulsa was had never been one of the things I had wanted to do. I wanted to write and I had wanted to act and I had wanted to take a job that NBC had offered me. But I told them that I would be delighted if they chose me to work for the University of Tulsa for a period of time. At the end of that time, I would say to them, "Nunc dimittis." The reason why I am clear with what I said to them is because I just said it to the people here at St. Simeon's. I wrote St. Simeon's a note to let them know that I'm not going to write a column for them anymore. The Board of Trustees looked at me as you. I said, "You are not supposed to know what that means. You're supposed to be an Episcopalian if you know what that means." (Laughter) it means, *please let your servant go according to your word.* So at the end of a period of time, I had a meeting with the board and I said, "Nunc dimittis" to them. To my astonishment, some of them cried. They adjourned the meeting and walked out and shook my hand. One man said to me, "You are the smartest man in the room." It was kind of a shock to them. That they had the fun of looking for somebody else and I had the fun of looking to do the sort of things that I still had not done. It worked out beautifully.

**ED:** The reason they knew you so well is that since 1952 you had been the administrative vice president of the University.

**BH:** They knew me as somebody who believed that a university should get along on tuition and what it earns on the side. We were earning nicely. We were earning so that the



government couldn't complain about our earning. By the time I was ready to say, "Nunc dimittis" we have an abstract service. We had a business abstracting every article written about the oil industry in every language and printing it in English and selling it to the American oil companies. We could sell them the abstract and we could sell them the full article. Those sales meant money to them because it saved them from trying to find somebody to translate an article that they desperately needed about fracking or some esoteric saying. The University of Tulsa and was able to translate it for them. We had a team of 20 people out here working on translating for the abstract service, which still goes on and which is being paid for by the oil companies. So, there's that job, plus all of the research that's going on in what we call the North campus. We have sold the north Campus to the Technical College of Tulsa. We sold that building and all of that facility to them. That money went into the building of a very fine brand new engineering building on the Kendall campus. It's the Kiplinger Building.

**JE:** Talk about the purchase of TU's North campus.

**BH:** We didn't purchase it. It was given to us. (Laughter) OU paid for its campus, but we never paid a nickel for ours. I'm not being indiscreet I hope. The University of Tulsa was a friend of the Standard Oil & Gas Company. The Standard Oil & Gas Company knew me the way that the board of trustees knew me—I had worked for them. The Standard Oil & Gas Company had employed me when they needed somebody to write a letter or a speech or anything where it got a little beyond what the oilman could write. I wrote it and we practiced it. At first I was on the per speech payment and then eventually I was on regular payroll because I became their consultant and everything except their oil business. That friendship got us an ear when I had just learned that they had moved out of a perfectly good building that I had been in many times. They were just letting it sit there until they found a buyer. All of the equipment in it and all of the furniture in it was going to go to that buyer. I said to the man I worked for, because I knew the company pretty well.

**JE:** Standard Oil?

**BH:** Yes, it was Standard Oil Company of Indiana. But the company here was called Stanolind. I said to him, "You know, that furniture is nicer than anything the faculty at TU sits on, or writes on, or keeps records in. So when you find out you can't sell it, you can give it to us and have a tax write off." He didn't know about the new law that allowed corporations to give things away and get a tax write off for it. I did know about that law and I knew they could. So we started one of the most interesting things that a university ever did, we started a furniture business. We hired a man to do refinishing. We would get a load of furniture and deliver it to TU and he would refinish it and get it back to where it looked brand-new. The Deans had made lists of who got what so I didn't get into making any enemies every time I gave out a piece of furniture. We had so much furniture. They

wanted to get that building off their hands. It turns out they needed a place to store the furniture until we could get it and then they could sell the building. KVOO said, "Well, we will store it for you." So all my friends rallied to the job of helping Henneke get the university going. So KVOO stored the furniture and we took the pieces out and refinished them for faculty members. Other pieces we donated to churches and schools that needed armchairs and things like that. They were very happy and we were glad to get rid of all this stuff that we couldn't use anymore.

## Chapter 13 - 4:35

### Standard Oil

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**John Erling:** When I said it was Standard Oil of Indiana, you said it was called Stanolind?

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** Well, the government had a lawsuit against J.D. Rockefeller because he was running a monopoly. That was against the laws of the United States. So they broke up that monopoly legally. So parts of that monopoly were: Standard Oil of New York; Standard Oil of California; Standard Oil of Indiana; Standard Oil Company of Illinois; there were all these different companies. Let me give you an example that you know all about. It's just like when the telephone company broke up and everybody got wealthy because of it breaking up. Then they all went back together again. It's like AT&T. These companies broke up. I worked intimately with three of them that were here in Tulsa. There was Stanolind, which you can see stands for Standard Oil of Indiana. That was my major company in Chicago. I worked for them too. There was Service Pipeline Scanlon Purchasing and Scanlon Oil and Gas Company. Scanlon Oil and Gas Company was a competitor with Skelly to find oil and to produce it and they found a lot of it. They were very wealthy. They sold a lot of the land that they found. Standard Oil of New Jersey discovered it had a problem with some of its holdings out in the West particularly. I was asked to write speeches and make them about the oil business and about great leaders and just about anything. They furnished programs to these high schools in Montana and Wyoming. So I had friends at Standard Oil of New York. So when it eventually came to building a university, and this is such a maze of names—to write about it you have to have sort of a who's on first catalog. I was a consultant on a regular payroll for Scanlon Oil and Gas Company and for them I wrote a program of discussion on politics believe it or not. One of the programs was about how local government is conducted. So every town in which a discussion leader went, he discussed the politics and the rule of that town and how it's

governed and who picks up the garbage and how it's arranged and that sort of thing. The company paid for that discussion program. There were 8,400 people who attended that program every summer. The program was held every summer for three years. After that, it was sold to other oil companies. I do know that Vice President Cheney could have heard it because he was a kid in Casper, Wyoming when we did it there. Wyoming was one of the states that asked if it could be done for wives and children as well as for oil company employees. So I don't know how many people participated in it.

**JE:** Let me come back to when you said the North campus was given to TU by Stanolind and that the North campus came about.

**BH:** Yes, because they couldn't sell it. I kept on saying, "Okay, when you finally make up your mind you can then give us the buildings as well as the furniture." And they did.

**JE:** Speaking of buildings, several buildings were constructed on campus while you were serving as president.

**BH:** Yes. It wasn't any big deal. I loved the people who did it, but I didn't really think of that as my first duty. My first duty was to get this university accredited. And the Going to College program was one of the things that got high schools accredited and got this college accredited. That was my big job. Yes, we built the Oliphant Hall and there never was a nicer guy than Mr. Oliphant. That he got hate mail because he was doing it, so you kind of wonder about things like that. But Mr. Oliphant gave us the money to build Oliphant Hall so that the arts and sciences teachers could have adequate teaching facilities so that the academic program that I cared about was being made brilliant. You can't really beat the old department head Pat Blair and Mrs. Barkley and Dr. Barkley.

## Chapter 14 - 6:40

### Phi Beta Kappa

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**Edward Dumit:** Why did we feel that it was so important to get Phi Beta Kappa accreditation at TU? Tell us about your efforts to make that happen.

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** What we had to get was accreditation. Phi Beta Kappa is icing on the cake. Stillwater (OSU) doesn't have a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. Nobody would say that they don't have everything else but that. It's one of those really snob things. I said it before it's icing on the cake. It is a very special something. If you get it, it means that other places recognize you as being a good school. But it's like the credit we get from a magazine that rates the top 100 universities in the United States. That has nothing to do

with Phi Beta Kappa except being part of Phi Beta Kappa makes it easier to make that list. This university has that as its goal to get up into the rarefied regions. We are currently 82 out of 100 and that's very good. We are the only school in the state to be listed that way. Our competition is the kind that makes your hair stand on end, the people who are ahead of you, who you have to get better than, well, the first three are Harvard, Yale and Princeton. The top 10 include sometimes Washington University in Saint Louis. We had no accreditation from anybody when I became president. Edward is right. In 1952 I was named the executive vice president because the board of trustees was embarrassed that we were not accredited. The board of trustees, which interviewed me, knew what I was saying, because I was taking on the job of getting the university accredited. They knew when that was done and when it could be paid for I would be going on to something else. I had lots of things I wanted to do. One of them, I am doing now. Anyhow, the accreditation is from the North Central Association. It is a group that is maybe not known by people like Edward because Edward is a faculty member. He maybe has to fill out a questionnaire, but he never knows what it's for or why we are doing it. But North Central said that we could not offer a Doctorate degree because we were not "good enough." It also said that we were not "good enough" to offer a Bachelor's degree in Chemistry. They could really slap you around. TU was the kind of school that they thoroughly enjoyed slapping around. We were young, in a new town and headed by a man who had been a smalltime banker. Although we had good teachers, when we lost those teachers, any of them for any reason, we did not replace them with teachers that were as good. Replacing ought to mean that you get someone better than yourself. We were hiring people that were as good as ourselves, but no better. You don't ever get any better that way.

**JE:** So you are talking about accreditation of the school, but I thought there was an accreditation to Phi Beta Kappa?

**BH:** Well there is, but we would have never gotten it had we not been accredited as a school.

**JE:** Okay.

**BH:** So you have to start there and that's hard. We were not accredited for anything. So we had to get the Bachelor's degree accredited and then the Master's degree. Then, we went for the Doctor's degree because we had a Dean Langenheim at the engineering school. He cared about the kids and wanted them to be good engineers. But he did not care about status. He was the greatest executive officer I have ever known and I loved him for it. But it took Scott Walker for us to get our doctorate in engineering degree approved. We had good people in English for example. Franklin Eikenberry is one of the greatest teachers of Shakespeare, admitted by Shakespeare scholars to have that rare honor. But he didn't care a thing about the status. He would wear the same shirt every day because the woman who was doing his laundry was not coming that week. He went right ahead teaching his classes

in Shakespeare. So what we got with accreditation is we got people from all over the United States to agree that what we did was as good as what they did. Then once we got that, we tried to get it down to where we were doing engineering so that we are now 82<sup>nd</sup> on this magazine's list of the top 100 schools. OU is not part of that list. How you get in it, I don't know, but all I can say is that I am glad we got in. We have our accreditation now to offer any degree we want anytime we want to offer it.

**JE:** The accreditation of Phi Beta Kappa, didn't that require that a certain degree of the faculty have their doctorate degree?

**BH:** It required a lot of things, but by that time I knew the game and I could play it. I said to the man, "Tell me what it is that you would like to have and we'll come as close to that as we can." He said, "I would like for you to have a university that if there were no Phi Beta Kappa, you could found it." So we did and it was a great honor. But this school, when I started going to college in 1944 had no students here except those that could go nowhere else. I was happy to see that our student body is totally selected—I don't think you should ever announce or take pride in how many you turn away. But this student body is so ready to go to college that we had better have a darn good faculty and we do.

## Chapter 15 - 1:13

### Radio Announcer's Handbook

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**John Erling:** Let me just jump back to radio. You authored the first textbook for announcers?

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** That's what I am told—at least it's the one that caught on.

**Edward Dumit:** *TIME* magazine said that.

**BH:** Well, yes. I had a review in *TIME* magazine.

**ED:** Yes.

**BH:** I got it on a Friday when we were doing our "Going to College" program.

**JE:** Didn't Ed, in a revised edition, coauthor it with you?

**BH:** Oh sure. Rinehart, who printed the textbook *Radio Announcer's Handbook* got good sales on it and got good reviews on it. They received letters from people saying that they wanted a television announcer's handbook. So we added a television part to the *Radio Announcer's Handbook*. I couldn't do it. I had become president of the University of Tulsa. I thought Ed could do it. All of the notes that I had saved from people and gave them to Ed. Ed sat in one office writing that while a girl from the theater was typing the copy for the second book so they could be sold and I could become president.

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**Chapter 16 – 6:44**  
**Blacks Off Campus**

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**John Erling:** Could you talk about downtown Tulsa and some of the stores you remember? Maybe in the 1950s, blacks in Tulsa—with separate restrooms and drinking fountains—does any of that spark some recollections?

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** Sure. TU is very proud of its record of integrating. We didn't have any trouble with drinking fountains and that sort of thing. We were as white as you could be until the government said it was wrong to be different. We were obeying the Oklahoma law that set us up. Although Indians were permissible, there was a state charter that said that blacks were not. So we were law-abiding citizens. Then the federal government said to everybody that they may be law-abiding, but you are obeying the laws that have recently been passed. The United States said that we must admit black people as well as white people. So we had a problem because the state of Oklahoma did not agree with the federal government, but the University of Tulsa did. Being a pioneer is a very interesting experience. Our experience, I think is worth telling you. After the war, we had set up a school for black people in the black community. The Booker T. Washington High School ran courses at night for black students so that they could make up work that they would have had, had they been in Tulsa. We were not proud of it, but we had a simpler University of Tulsa. That branch offered a multitude of courses. One year it offered a course in sociology. It didn't have enough students enrolled to make it pay off, therefore it could not continue. You had to have at least six people in the class to break even. The University treasurer saw to it that nobody was teaching a class with five people in it, because we would lose money and we couldn't do that. So, here was this class losing money and the teacher, quite innocently, said to the class, "This is really very strange. I am offering this same class on the north side and I am going to have to quit it because there are not enough blacks in it to make the class requirement. If they could come to this class, I could just teach one class." One of the people in the class whose name I never got, which breaks my heart, some young man in the class, because it was an enormous class, said, "Why can't they join us?" And the faculty member said, "It could cause a riot because it's against the law in the state of Oklahoma. I am perfectly willing for them to join us, but somebody here might object to it. If I was to take a vote, I am sure somebody here would not be very happy. I will be glad to take a vote and see what happens. I think I can have the blacks from the north side join us here. But I don't want any one of you to not what it to happen. You are obeying the law if you vote against it. We will take a vote. Raise your hand if you are for it. That's great. It looks as though everyone but one held up his hand, so we will continue on as we were."

Then he said to the young man, "It's surprising that you were talking about what to do and you are the one person that did not hold up your hand." The young man said, "I didn't hold up my hand because what we should all do is act like it was something strange. She is a person just like you and me. Evidently there was a woman in the north campus class, so essentially he was saying "she" is as good as you and me. I remember his speech so well that I have to explain how he was able to say "she." He said, "She is just as good as we are and she deserves an education just as we do. She probably is just as sweet as all the women in this class are, but she's getting a half-baked education over there because don't tell me that Mr. Wagoner, the second time does as good a job the second time around to three or four people as he does to us the first time around with 50 people. I don't want to see her embarrassed or treated like that. Other schools are segregating them and putting them in different parts of the room and I don't to have her come to this class and be in a different part of the room. We are really quite on the horns of a dilemma. If we greet her, we are making her special. And yet, how is she going to know that we just sit where we want to? What can we do?" The teacher said, "I will guarantee you she will come to this class if this class votes 100%. They did and she came and graduated. *Ebony*, the magazine called me because I was the editor and said, "I hear you've got black students going to the University of Tulsa?" I said, "Why of course." He said, "What you mean why of course?" I said, "Well, we have black students going to our university. You are the editor of a black magazine and you are calling me because you think that that's unusual. It is unusual. Now, what's the story that you want to get? I know that you would like to play it up and then you would wreck it. Leave us alone. Let us make our own successful movements. We don't want you to come along and get a lot of publicity with a headline and maybe a front page, but I'm glad to talk to you because what you do eventually will be important, but don't do it until I tell you what it is." He said, "You sound like you know what you are doing." I said, "Yes, what we are doing is the University of Tulsa is desegregated. The black man has to integrate it."

## Chapter 17 - 5:28

### Campus Integration

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**John Erling:** Let me come back to state of Oklahoma. Did they say anything?

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** OU was the only other school that would admit a black student other than a black school. They roped off a section and a magazine wrote a story about it. This kid did not want that kind of a story about the class he was attending. So we didn't rope anybody

off. Every other night school teacher was told that they could teach at night school and have black students. So they passed the word along to the black community that they could attend classes at TU at night. All we had to do was to get them to break the barrier that we had. The barrier was the town. We had to get places where they can eat.

**JE:** Because we should point out that they couldn't sit at the same lunch counter.

**BH:** Yes, that's true. Now, we didn't have any day at TU to worry about. When they came they ate with everybody else. We didn't have very many. But being allowed to eat with everybody else was so unpopular that people that didn't like integration wanted to boycott the people who were feeding us (the cafeteria). We got a black community of students and never had anything like a boycott or a riot. The lady who got the first degree, whose name I will not mention, had the same kind of trouble that Mr. Oliphant had building a building. There are rednecks in the world—people do not like what's going on. Every time we had a new thing, we had a new fight. I don't know how many college presidents there are who have had a burning cross put in their front yard, but I awakened to one. The where to eat issue was so big that the people who were feeding us quit their job and we had higher others. The barbers agreed to cut black hair and we had a barbershop in the student activities building. It was the same building in which you went to eat. Blacks went downstairs and got their hair cut. Then the union voted that blacks would not get their hair cut in the city of Tulsa. My barber called up the director of the student activities building and said, "We can't cut any more black people's hair."

**ED:** Was that Jess Chouteau the activities director?

**BH:** Yes. He called Jess Chouteau and said, "Jess I can't cut any more hair." I said, "I will call you back, keep the boy there." I did one of the smartest things I've never done. I called up Burch Mayo. I said, "They won't let blacks hair be cut." He said, "They just *think* they won't let blacks hair be cut." He called at the barbers union and said, "There are six chairs in the barbershop at the Mayo hotel. Are they union? If so can I get out of it because I want them to cut black people's hair." So, black hair got cut and we got over that hump. It was one thing like that after another—week after week. Nobody knowing any difference—because a black student would never know that there was a boycott planned. The boycott was almost in existence. The Oklahoma City papers loved it. They wrote all kinds of stories about the trouble TU was having over integration—but we got through it.

**JE:** So TU was the leader in this effort to integrate blacks because OU wrote them off and didn't really integrate them as much as you indicated.

**BH:** As far as I know, I wasn't trying to be any leader. We just agreed with the government. I mean, the guy who put the cross in my front yard evidently didn't agree with the government. But our trustees never took a vote. They just did things such as say, "That drummer you got sure has helped the band!" (Laughter)



**JE:** Then was there a point then that the first black athlete was recruited to TU?

**BH:** Oh yes. It was Willie Towns. There was a very great black man here in Tulsa called Mr. Lacey who did many great things for black people. Mr. Lacey helped Glenn Dobbs recruit the first black athlete. He would say, “No, you don’t want that one.” When Willie Towns came along he said, “Glenn, that’s the man.” Because he believed that the first black athlete at TU would have to be someone that everybody would agree was a great athlete.

**JE:** Let me establish the years again.

**BH:** It would be in the 1960s while I was president.

**JE:** Okay.

**BH:** We had played teams (in football) that had black players. We were looking for a black football player—believe me—because we were integrated. We needed to be able to say to the government and to anybody that asked questions. It was a little strange to be asked questions by the Presbyterians and to be able to say to them, “We are desegregated, we just aren’t integrated all the way through all the colleges.” And we weren’t.

## Chapter 18 - 2:57

### ROTC/Award

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**Dr. Ben Henneke:** To advance in the ROTC, you had to pass a university program and special intellectual tests provided by the ROTC. You also had to pass a physical.

So, we might have a student in the ROTC that the Presbyterians were interested in, who was desegregated but who in his sophomore year was not integrated because the ROTC said, “He flunked his physical.” So in the white community we had to get people to pass the ROTC so that the blacks could then be admitted to the program. We got blacks in the ROTC as soon as one could pass the exams. He made it all the way through. The senior ROTC got a prize from the president. It was a cup. He was presented that cup at the fly up of the ROTC. Our ROTC was part of the Air Force. They had an end of year activity, which was national in scope. It was held across the U.S. on the same day. It was called a fly up and they would get their pins and their bars. This nice black man, who had helped the university become integrated in ways he never knew—his father was the elevator man for the chairman of the board who asked each time he got on the elevator, “How’s your boy doing?” This fine young man was to get the award and I was to give it as the president. We all go to the hotel and the honoree didn’t show up.” The Colonel of the outfit felt it was his duty to call him up. He had been notified that this was a breach of everything the Colonel

believed in. So he called up this kid and it turns out that the kid didn't show up because he was afraid he would not be admitted into the hotel. He was black and that hotel to his knowledge had never integrated.

**John Erling:** Was that the Mayo Hotel?

**BH:** No, I can't recall the name of it, but it was a hotel that we could get and it had integrated. The boys who set up the program—I had never seen grown men cry before period that we had grown men cry when it was announced that he did not come because he did not believe the hotel was integrated and he thought he couldn't come. So he got his award from me at a special outdoor march. I had to draw lines on the ground where I was to go because I wasn't in the service and I didn't know how to behave (marching). So I followed the white line that they drew on the ground for me (laughter) and gave him his cup.

## Chapter 19 - 2:06

### Willie Towns

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**Dr. Ben Henneke:** The next one you want to know about is the football player Willie Towns. Willie Towns was what we had to look for. Nobody who lived south of Tulsa would play for us and nobody who lived north of Tulsa would be stupid enough to come to a segregated town where he couldn't go eat anyplace he wanted to, or go to a movie and sit where he wanted to. I mean why would a good football player from Tulsa not go north? That's why we could not get Tulsa to be into football. Willie Towns was from a place in Mississippi, where Tulsa was like heaven compared to the place he was coming from. He knew that part of it was integrated and he liked the coach. There was a coach named Glen Dobbs that came down and talked to his family. Glen Dobbs was as likable of a man as I have even known. If I were a mother with a football-playing son I would sure let Glen Dobbs be his coach. So Willie Towns, a great, big, wonderful black man integrated the football program. He really integrated it. He took his helmet off after every play in which he was featured, and he was featured in a lot of plays. (Laughter) He got so many tackles on his own and so many assists, that when we finally got into a bowl game against the University of Mississippi and the Press voted on the Most Valuable Player, they elected Willie Towns, the black tackle from TU. The TU team stood up and applauded Willie. The Mississippi team sat. So Willie won the MVP award and people there (at TU) thought he was great.

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**Chapter 20****Dr. Ben's Quill - 5:58**

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**Edward Dumit:** I would like to add something that requires no answer. I want to mention the many sides of this man. It comes through in his publications. If you look at the widely diverging interests he's always had—he has tackled many challenges. The first book was *The Radio Announcer's Handbook*, the first textbook on announcing and radio production. His second book was another textbook called *Reading Aloud Effectively*, which was for classes in oral interpretation. Then after that we did a revised edition of *The Radio Announcer's Handbook*, which was released as *The Announcer's Handbook*, including television.

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** I must say that I am really proud of the job he did for me. He should be giving equal billing on the book.

**ED:** I assumed it would say “revised by” or something like that. But he put both of our names equally on the book cover above the title. I can never express my appreciation enough for that. The book was in circulation for 25 years and probably still would be circulating if I had gotten around to doing another revision.

**BH:** The first book is \$144 on Google.

**John Erling:** (Laughter)

**ED:** Oh, is that all?

**BH:** My daughter-in-law decided to get a copy of every book her father-in-law wrote to have on the shelf for the great-grandchildren when they grow up.

**ED:** Did she have to pay \$144?

**BH** (Laughter) No, I had one for her. But she got Internet prices on everything. I felt pretty special that day. Please go on with your story.

**ED:** Well, I wanted to go on adding that besides the more than 100 scripts that you wrote and did with a group of actors that joined you in reading what you told them to, that you also wrote this amazing book about Laura King.

**JE:** Who is Laura King?

**ED:** Well, she was the actress that Abraham Lincoln had gone to see the night that he was assassinated.

**BH:** She pillowed his head in her lap.

**ED:** Yes. She literally held his head in her lap while he was dying. But, Ben's interest goes beyond that with her because she owned and managed her own acting company. For a woman at that time to be doing the things she did was just unheard of. From what we know, it was something of a detective story for Ben. He spent 10 years researching it and it's a fascinating book about her life and what she had to overcome. Then, after that he

turned it into a one-woman show that was done by Lisa Wilson who is now the head of the theater department at TU. It would be interesting to note just how Ben decided to do all of that and how he accomplished it. Then after that, some of the articles he had been writing for the *Tulsa Tribune* were combined out here at (pause)

**BH:** Saint Simeon's.

**ED:** Thank you.

**BH:** See, we can help each other. (Laughter)

**ED:** That's a fair trade. The Saint Simeon's Foundation published a book of the articles he was writing for their newsletter each month called *Writing With a Quill Pen*. The newsletter is called *Quill of The Hill*. Then more recently, they published another book combining articles he did for the *Tulsa Tribune* as well as other articles for the *Quill Pen*, and it is called *Typescript*. But the most amazing thing, is this latest thing he has done, which is amazing beyond all comprehension. He finished it two or three years ago at the age of 93. It's called, *A Ravenna Mosaic*. It is, as the subtitle says an account in verse of personal reactions to the colored tiles that make up Christian art and 4th 5th and 6th centuries with her, when that city, Ravenna, was a capital of the Roman Empire. That was because of his interest you that grew through years of teaching humanities and taking students abroad to Italy and places like that. Does that give you kind of an idea? There is no end to the facets.

**JE:** It gives you goose bumps.

**ED:** Yes.

**BH:** Thank you Edward.

## Chapter 21 - 5:20

### Dr. Henneke on Ed Dumit

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**John Erling:** Is there any one thing that brought you the most satisfaction when you look back on your life?

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** Yes. I have more friends than enemies. I will give you another one. I had more successes than failures. It's been a life filled with very friendly, loving people— many of whom acted out of character when they did things— (laughter) but the university has profited from my friends. People are warned before they begin to help me then I will work them to death because I never know when to quit. But they come work for me anyhow and they do great things for the University. I am proud of them. Like Edward, he came

on staff to help out. Boy, we had the flossiest graduation ceremony in the United States with Edward announcing the names of the graduates as they crossed the stage, which is not part of his job. I mean, we hired him to be the associate professor of speech and he's a good one. At a time of the theater, which is recorded in a great book called *Threads* by a man named Dr. Beaumont Bruestle back in those good old days of the theater. Edward acted in it and starred in it and did wonderful things. He made me do the TU fight song. (Laughter) Edward did a musical comedy where he was dressed as Julius Caesar. He did a number that stopped the show every time he did it. (Laughter) He was magnificent. You won't be able to see him dance and you won't be able to see his knees coming out from under that toga, but maybe you can hear a few lines of him singing the Tiber Rag.

**Edward Dumit:** What, you mean right now?

**BH:** Right now.

**ED:** Blow your nose is badly angled. Do not scorn what seems old fangled. I did a dance. Oh, I've got the rhyme wrong. But anyway, it's leading up to a take off of the Tiber Rag that was very popular back in the 1920s. The melodies were similar.

**BH:** It's all right you are. That was cruel to put you on the spot. I'm sorry.

**ED:** Yes, I would need to see those words again. But they were very clever. Much more clever than I am right now then when I was singing I would kick up my leg as high as it would go, only one of them. Cleopatra would join me onstage and then all of my soldiers and my bodyguards would also come into it. The lady who played Cleopatra was so gorgeous and the men that surrounded her were so handsome that I doubt that anybody noticed that I was on stage after that. But it was a wild dance that we all participated in. We got a standing ovation every night or an encore. Why am I telling all of this?

**BH:** Because I told a lot of stuff I told. I hope that whoever listens to this appreciates that one of the really beautiful, masculine voices that has charmed people for a great many years is being recorded at least in his 80th year, which is a very unfair thing to do. I, who had a distinctive voice—was never in Edward's class. I never tried to be in Edward's class. My machinery (voice) was not of that sort. My machinery was of a style so that I was recognizable. All I needed to do was to talk and somebody would say, "Oh, you're Ben Henneke. I listen to you." It's a sin to take me, when I'm 95 (laughter) and feeling every minute of it today, but—

**ED:** We are so fortunate that at 95 you are able to share all of this with us.

**BH:** But I don't know that I have told enough of the story of the University.

**Chapter 22 – 3:41****Greatest Statement**

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**John Erling:** The community is so fortunate that you have lived a long life at 95 years old and all the things that you have contributed to this great community.

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** I am not only 95 years old and all that. I listened and remembered it. The greatest statement ever made in this town as far as integration is concerned and evidently you are interested in getting a story about how we integrated. The greatest statement ever made was made by the wife of the principle of Booker T. Washington High School when Booker T. Washington High School was all black. The principal was black and God forgive me, but his name escapes me right now. His wife was at a meeting in which they were talking about what Tulsa had to do to be the kind of city you would like it to be. She asked if she could speak. She said, “I hope that Tulsa will be a town in which all of the merchants will permit a black lady to relieve herself when she’s caught downtown.” And as I said earlier when I commented about the boys crying when the Lieutenant Colonel of the ROTC could not come because he didn’t know it was integrated—I had never before seen a group of men and women cry until after she said that Froug’s was the only store in Tulsa that allowed them to relieve themselves. She said blacks could go to the police station if they needed to relive themselves but no other place.

**JE:** Froug’s department store where was the only store that would allow blacks to use the restroom?

**BH:** That’s what she said and she ought to know.

**Edward Dumit:** And Dumit’s Rugs and Linens also—it was a family business.

**BH:** Good. She did not know that.

**ED:** Probably because we just had a small bathroom at the back of the store and nobody ever used it except the family running the store. But anyone could have. As a matter of fact there is a black man named Allen Shaw who came in to our store regularly. He was a friend of the family and he did odd jobs for us. He was welcome to use the bathroom at our store.

**BH:** What this says is that this town ought to be proud of what it did and how it moved forward. It moved without praise so many places that you would never would have thought unless you were a black person of where you could not go. You grew up with signs designating white and black in the railroad station or the airport or wherever. You just grew up with it. You didn’t know it was a painful thing. Every time I would make a speech about integration or desegregation and God knows I made a lot of speeches, I would say, “Blame me for being cruel and heartless and ignorant and anything you wish because I

never was aware that there was a difference.” I went to TU because that was all there was. I didn’t know that black people couldn’t go to there. As far as TU was in those days, they were nuts if they refused anybody. But the law was telling them to refuse blacks and that was part of the Indian Law.

**JE:** Yes.

## Chapter 23 - 1:47

### Dumit on Dr. Henneke

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**John Erling:** Let me just say thank you Dr. Henneke.

**Dr. Ben Henneke:** Sure thing.

**JE:** There are many people at the university right now who would love to be sitting here. There are people in our community who would love to be sitting here and they would like to be able to say thank you Dr. Henneke for what you have meant to the University of Tulsa and to the City of Tulsa. Ed, I am going to let you say the final words to us. Why don’t you verbalize what you might think that President Steadman Upham might say and some others might say to him right now.

**Edward Dumit:** Well, they would all say thank you. I certainly know that. In my own case, of course, you, as I have said publicly before, were one of the people I considered my mentor. You’ve questioned my use of the word mentor. (Laughter) But you and Isabelle Roman and (inaudible) are the three main influences in my own career. All of us know how much you have done for the university and the city all through these years in so many different areas. You’ve been an actor, a playwright, a director, theater manager, teacher, artist and scholar. Those are all words that I saw particularly when you were inducted into the Tulsa Hall of Fame. It mentioned teacher, artist and scholar renowned for his warmth, humor and grace. That’s a wonderful thing to say about anyone.

**BH:** Yes, it certainly is. Was I there? (Laughter)

**ED:** It was 1992.

**JE:** Thank you.

**Chapter 24 - 0:19****Conclusion**

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**Announcer:** You have just heard our conversation with Dr. Ben Henneke, president emeritus of Tulsa University. His book, *Laura Keene, A Biography* is available in our bookstore. Dr. Henneke's story is preserved through the generous donations of our foundation underwriters on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).