

## Chapter 1 – 0:54

### Introduction

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**John Erling:** It was Cinderella who sent Danny Williams to Oklahoma City. As you would expect, Danny had his own version of that story. And when he was working in Texas, he sent it to WKY and he was hired. Thank you, Cinderella. As a result people in the Oklahoma City area are well-acquainted with Spavinaw Spooferkin, Chief Spoofer Spinner, Hocus Pocus and other such names. Danny dominated the radio market with his morning radio show for many years on WKY until 1979 when he left the station. But Danny Williams also dominated the Oklahoma City TV market, playing host to Championship Wrestling, the daily variety show, Danny's Day, and the Children's Show, 3D Danny. We recorded this interview June 18th, 2009 in the conference room at KOMA. Danny's wife Maureen was in the room and kept us on the straight and narrow. Listen now to an Oklahoma broadcast legend, Danny Williams.

## Chapter 2 – 5:09

### Danny's Start in Showbiz

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**John Erling:** Today's date is June 18th, it's 2009. Sitting across from me is the very famous Danny Williams.

**Danny Williams:** My real name is Dan Hamill Williams. I was born in Fort Worth, Texas on April 21st, 1927. When I came to Oklahoma City, they started calling me Danny. So I became Danny Williams. There really is no Danny Williams. I invented him.

JE: Did you offer that name? I want to be called Danny?

DW: No, no, no. The boss there Hoyt Andres started calling me that and it stuck.

JE: Alright, but let's start back in your radio career in 1947 and that was in Austin, Texas.

DW: That is correct.

JE: You started telling children's stories.

DW: I started a station called KTXN in Austin, Texas and the first program I had I played classical music on Sunday afternoon.

JE: What drew you to radio? How was it that you even got on there?

DW: I needed a job and I had a pregnant wife and I was going to school and my GI Bill was about to run out.

JE: So how old were you then?

DW: In 1947 I guess I was –

JE: Twenty?

DW: Twenty. Yes.

JE: 1947, so you must have been a performer of some sort to gravitate to radio –

DW: Well...

JE: In high school or anything?

DW: Well, no during high school all the guys went to the service during World War II, and I got a job introducing strippers on the Jacksboro Highway in Fort Worth, Texas when I was 16.

JE: And how did that come about?

DW: Well, I just, you know I was trying to do stand up and all that stuff and I went up there and asked for a job and got a job.

JE: So were you a stand-up, as in comedian?

DW: Yes.

JE: Telling jokes standing up at 16 years old?

DW: That's what I started at, of course I stole all the jokes, I didn't write any of them you know.

JE: Right.

DW: But nobody else knew what they were so it worked out.

JE: So that was working for you?

DW: Right.

JE: Then you became a stripper announcer.

DW: Yeah and then I went in the Navy in 1944 and I was in the Navy from '44 to '45. And I came home and I heard about the GI Bill so I decided to go to college. And I found out that disk jockeys made payola, so I studied radio to become a disk jockey.

JE: You started college and dropped out.

DW: No, I graduated in 1949.

JE: Oh, you did? Which university?

DW: University of Texas.

JE: Oh really? Studying then, journalism? Broadcasting?

DW: Yes, broadcast journalism. And when I was working for KTXN after the classical music show on Sunday afternoon they put me on Saturday morning playing kiddie records. And

before long we ran out of the records and so I started telling the stories myself.

JE: Were they out of books? Or did you make them up?

DW: Yeah, like Cinderella, and The Three Bears and I'd do all this stuff and I'd put a lot of embellished stuff in there, like the three bears got their loans from the FHA and stuff like that.

JE: So adults got interested in it too?

DW: Oh yeah, it got real popular and then at the station I started doing University of Texas basketball play-by-play. And I did everything. I even did a show on Sunday night at an African American funeral home. At 10:30, which was a weird experience.

JE: Man you just worked everywhere didn't you?

DW: And then I went to work for Lyndon Johnson at KTBC in – ?

JE: What did you do there?

DW: I was morning disk jockey. In fact I worked with one of the greatest disk jockeys that ever happened Cactus Pryor.

JE: He was on KTBC and what was it about him because I think you kind of learned a lot from him?

DW: Oh, we was unbelievable, he was a real funny guy. A really great disk jockey and he used to do a deal which he still does today I think. People would invite him to a convention and he would pretend that he was a Swedish physicist and he would talk to the crowd before the show. And then he would stand up and tell everybody he wasn't a physicist and tell everybody what they (had) said to him. I mean it was a great act. He also wrote a parody of the Mule Train, which became pretty popular.

JE: So did you draw a lot from him and used – ?

DW: Absolutely.

JE: And used techniques of his –

DW: Absolutely, I've drawn a lot from everybody. I don't know anything.

JE: Yeah, we all steal from everybody don't we?

DW: Yeah, I do.

JE: And then you hosted a record show there for –was Lyndon Johnson around any when you –

DW: Oh, yeah he'd come in every once in awhile. This station was in an area and it had a long –it was a long building between the alley and the street. And he'd come in and before he got out of his limo he had a book and his people would tell him who's who in the station. And he'd come in the station and he'd say, "There's a pencil there. I told you all to move that the last time I was here." He was a hell of a guy, he really was.

JE: And Lady Bird too maybe? Did she ever come?

DW: I never met Lady Bird.

JE: Yeah. At KTBC, you stayed there for?

DW: I stayed there for almost a year and I graduated from Texas in 1949.

JE: In school and working at the same time?

DW: Yeah, right. That is correct.

JE: What drove you to college because there could have been a lot who would have said, you know I can make more money, I can do radio already, why do I need a college degree?

DW: Let me say this about all of that. I was born with a guy who was a barber and a sharecropper. I never had any money at all.

### Chapter 3 – 2:43

#### Birthday Parties

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**John Erling:** Talk about your family background a little bit here.

**Danny Williams:** Well, my father was a barber and a sharecropper. A third of the feed and a fourth of the cotton, and I worked on the farm. I started working when I was six. I used to milk six cows in the morning and six in the evening and I hate cows to this day.

JE: And that was in a farm, where?

DW: Tarrant County Texas? The reason I started college is they had the 5220 Club when I got out of the service in World War II. They'd pay you \$20 a week for 52 weeks, and (when) that ran out they'd pay you to go to college. So I decided to go to college so they'd pay me some there and –

JE: Because you knew you didn't want to go back down on the farm –

DW: Well I didn't really want to go back down on the farm and I really kind of wanted to go back into the Navy, but my parents really didn't want me to.

JE: Were you performing along these times, I mean –

DW: Oh yeah, yeah.

JE: You know a lot of young kids on the farm or in the city, if they wanted to be performers, there were opportunities in church, did you have that, kind of – ?

DW: No, I didn't do that. I didn't do that.

JE: Okay. Alright.

DW: But doing the kids show, in San Antonio and in Austin, I used to do birthday parties and I made a lot more money doing birthday parties than I ever did on the radio and TV.

JE: Alright, so then, you mention San Antonio and you were KTBC for about a year.

DW: Yeah, then I was at KTSA.

JE: And how did that come about? Did you ask? Did you-?

DW: No, I went down there and auditioned and the guy hired me. And, we were bought by the San Antonio Express, the big newspaper in San Antonio. They had a big auditorium upstairs in this building, and in the afternoon I would have three to four hundred kids in the audience, and I'd tell these stupid stories and you know –

JE: That you just made up?

DW: Well, I didn't make them up I just extrapolated the regular story you know.

JE: And then you'd just add to them?

DW: Yes.

JE: As you went along?

DW: Yes, yes, yes.

JE: And then you did voices too didn't you?

DW: Yes, I used to be –when I first started, I lost it 'cause I never kept doing it but I was an excellent impersonator. I could do a lot of different voices, but then as I got into TV and so forth, I didn't have the chance to do that I lost the – you know they say that if you don't use it you lose it? Well, I lost it.

JE: Well you did this Uncle Dan show at 5:15pm in the afternoon?

DW: That's correct, every day.

JE: And the children's stories, did all the voices –?

DW: Yeah.

JE: And I understand your morning show, which was 6 –9, actually beat out The Breakfast Club?

DW: Which was the biggest show in radio at that time.

JE: And I remember –

DW: Don McNeill.

JE: Don McNeill, I remember listening to it myself.

DW: Yeah, yeah.

## Chapter 4 – 4:28

### Payola

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**Danny Williams:** I've had a real gift of being able to pick music that people like. And I would take payola.

**John Erling:** You would?

DW: I took a lot of it.

JE: Did you really?

DW: Yes I did.

- JE: So, how did that work because –students are going to be listening to this and they hear the word payola, what –
- JE: Well, it wasn't illegal then, okay?
- JE: No, and so, tell us how that worked.
- DW: Well, like record promoters would come to the radio station, and for a while individual disk jockeys, they would you know, hustle but then it became the program director. And the first payola I ever got, I got tickets to see the Harlem Globetrotters for playing Buddy Clark records. And I found out rather quickly that is you played the wrong music on your show and didn't get very good ratings, you wouldn't get payola. And then when I left San Antonio and came up here to WKY and they put me on the radio in '57 I would get as much as a nickel a record that was sold in this town. Rockin' Little Angels, I made so much money off that record it was unbelievable, what's the guy that signed Elvis? His name was Sam –? And he had a brother named Phil who would come through the country in a bus, and have all the disk jockeys in his bus for about three days, and have us play these records and what you did was, you'd play these records and you just rode them. You'd play them all the time and if they didn't sell you'd quit playing them. So I made a lot of money but in 1960, they made us criminals.
- JE: Let's do back here. How did they track you and getting your nickel a record? How did that work? How could they prove that the sales were coming from you? I guess because you were so dominant in the market?
- DW: Well, if that record sold –
- JE: Took off?
- DW: Took off –
- JE: Then you got the credit for that –
- DW: The distributor –you know then there weren't a whole lot of distributors of the records. There were two here in Oklahoma City, two distributors. And they kept count of it. And they wanted me to play the records and they wanted me to be real good friends 'cause I was a real record mover. I really was.
- JE: Would you play once an hour, twice an hour, how did you?
- DW: Hell, I might play it every hour and tell everybody how good it was and so forth and I'd say, this is our ride record this week go buy this.
- JE: So you would tell them to go out and buy it?
- DW: Oh yeah, sure.
- JE: So name some songs and performers that you were promoting like that.
- DW: Sam Cook, Little Richard, records from Sun, a lot of [resh] records, that they called records rhythm and blues records in those days.
- JE: Did Elvis get in on that?

DW: No, Elvis was too big. We'd play him anyway.

JE: Okay so what years? This would have been in the '50s?

DW: '57 to '60 when they made it illegal.

JE: So before that, in '57 what kind of money do you think you were making?

DW: About \$77 a week, from the station.

JE: Yeah, but what about payola? Oh I made as much as \$3,500 a record.

JE: Wow. A record?

DW: Yes.

JE: So times how many records?

DW: Well a bunch of records.

JE: You were in tall cotton weren't you?

DW: Oh wasn't I? Yeah.

JE: And so you stuck all that money away and that's what you're retiring on today, right?

DW: (Laughter) No. I'm retiring on social security.

JE: What a ride!

DW: I made a lot of money John, but I never saved it.

JE: Yeah, but in your 20s making that kind of money. You were top dog.

DW: Oh yeah, but you know gambling money and payola and money you make like that don't have any home. You don't ever get to keep it, it goes somewhere else.

JE: Yeah, did you buy nice things? Houses and cars and all that?

DW: Yeah, I bought cars, like, I had convertibles, I mean I didn't buy anything substantial, which I should have, 'cause I was afraid of the IRS.

JE: Yeah.

DW: You make a lot of money –

JE: It was not taxed.

DW: You can't spend a lot of money. Otherwise the IRS will come get you.

JE: How did you get paid? In cash?

DW: Oh yeah. I'm not that stupid. (Laughter)

JE: So the record producer or whomever would come to the station?

DW: The distributor would pay me.

JE: And how would he pay you? At the station or did you have to go off location?

DW: I'd go to his place and he'd pay me.

JE: He'd hand you an envelope full of cash?

DW: Yeah.

JE: Wow.

DW: But I wasn't one of the big payola guys in the country there were guys in the East who made millions.

JE: And I can't remember their names right now, I don't know if you do.

DW: There was a guy in Philadelphia, I can't remember his name right now, Joe Niagara. God, he was huge.

JE: Yeah.

DW: Huge. Huge. Huge.

JE: Yeah, but you were making enough money right here.

DW: Well it didn't happen every week, you know? That just happened on certain records.

## Chapter 5 – 3:35

### Cinderella / WKY

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**John Erling:** So then, you sent a recording of Cinderella to WKY?

**Danny Williams:** That's how I got the job.

JE: In 1950, they heard that and what was special about Cinderella?

DW: Just the way I told it and you know about the – I don't even remember to this day, but I put a lot of adult stuff in it you know, and so forth and that was what was special about it. And I had a lot of voices on it, which they loved.

JE: That's what they loved. Yeah, right. So then, WKY Radio, but then you were hired to work on television.

DW: Well, that's a real weird story but –

JE: Let's hear it.

JE: I got in as being a real energetic person, I mean I talked fast, I talked loud on the radio even though it was microphone and handset. So when I first got up here, they put me on the radio and the Chief Announcer at WKY didn't like it at all and so they sent me to the television station. When I came to WKY, they had nine of the greatest announcers I've ever heard. You'd get on the elevator and they'd say, "WKY" and the walls would rattle they were all, Ben Morris –

JE: More Names?

DW: They had Bill Fountain, Jack Cleverly, a bunch of 'em I mean you know. There in the '50s most of them went to California to hear their voices on national commercials and all that stuff, they were really good. And they wouldn't work on TV, they didn't think TV was ever going to happen. So I go to TV and I do live spots for \$2. They didn't have any teleprompter. The Lord gave me a wonderful gift in those days I could read a minute of copy and give it back to you word-for-word after I'd read it one time.

JE: Wow.

DW: It's just a gift.

JE: Yep, it is.

DW: Can't do it today.

JE: Let's bring you back to WKY because that was fifty thousand watts, it went out across the country.

DW: Five thousand.

JE: It was five thousand? But it had very good coverage didn't it?

DW: It had great coverage for one reason and one reason only. What I was told is WKY's transmitter probably has the greatest array of ground-wires of any transmitter in the country. And those ground-wires would transmit that signal so far it was unbelievable.

JE: So Chicago, other major cities?

DW: Yeah, it went everywhere, yeah.

JE: Heard WKY? And so when you came there you were assigned to what show?

DW: The first show I did was Championship Wrestling on TV.

JE: So they didn't even let you on WKY Radio?

DW: One time.

JE: What show, was it in the morning?

DW: It wasn't a show, I did the breaks. "This is WKY AM-FM, a Service of the Oklahoma Publishing Company."

JE: And so the Head Chief Announcer?

DW: He didn't like me.

JE: For what reason?

DW: He didn't like my voice and my style, or anything.

JE: So, he did you a favor? How did you approach the TV –

DW: Well, the guy that hired me was the guy that built WKY TV, Hoyt Andres. And he liked me from the start for some reason or other. And he sent me to the TV and I became the station announcer for the TV station.

JE: Somewhere along the line they realized you're more than just an announcer for the TV station?

DW: Oh, yeah, they gave me a lot of stuff. They kept me to do the wrestling at Stockyards Coliseum. I'd never seen a wrestling match and they did the deal in wrestling where they'd throw the referee out of the ring, and he comes in later and the bad guy has gotten on the good guy and he goes "1...2...3" and he'd count him out and the crowd goes crazy. And I thought this is the fakest, no-good deal, and I thought My Lord I've lost this show and this is the first time I've ever got to do it. Next week I come back and the same people are sitting in the same seats.

(Laughter)

**Chapter 6 – 2:36****Spavinaw Spoofokin / Anita Bryant**

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**John Erling:** You played characters on TV Spavinaw Spoofokin?

**Danny Williams:** Oh yeah, that was my first kid show –

JE: What was that?

DW: They gave me a kid show right after that and I was Spavinaw Spoofokin, Chief Spoofokin Spinner of Spoofokinland and we had a puppet Gismo Goodkin and an artist, and I would tell these kids stories and he would draw pictures.

JE: You created all that? That came out of your mind didn't it?

DW: Well, I guess.

JE: Like Spavinaw Spoofokin why would you come up with a name like that?

DW: I didn't come up with it, Hoyt Andres did. Hoyt Andres was – he's my mentor and the greatest –he knew more about radio and TV and people than anybody I ever met in my entire life.

JE: And he was a native of Oklahoma?

DW: I don't know where he was a native of, but he was an ex-FBI agent and he was the guy that was the program director of the radio and the TV when I got here and he was smarter than this room.

JE: You played off of that, he did have some basic ideas obviously –

DW: Oh yeah.

JE: Through your own intuit, so the two of you really worked well together –

DW: Oh right, yeah, yeah.

JE: On this children's show. What a great relationship that had to be.

DW: Well, he left me alone, he let me do my own thing. Then that lasted for a little while and then in the fall of that year I started my own show called The Danny Williams Show where I interviewed people who'd made the run in Oklahoma.

JE: Right and I wanted to get to that but then you were also part of Hocus Pocus?

DW: Yes.

JE: What was that about?

DW: It was a comedy show that they wrote and I played different characters on the show, it was a variety show.

JE: On WKY TV, Fountain of Youth?

DW: Yeah, I did that. That was a talent show, I was the emcee of that.

JE: This was the American Idol then, back then? (Laughter) Ted Mack's Amateur Hour.

DW: Yeah, that's what it was. It was Ted Mack's Amateur Hour.

JE: Fountain of Youth, did you discover talent you think that went on to national –

DW: Anita Bryant was on the show and –

JE: So that helped her career?

DW: Well, she was on Sooner Shindig too. She was in Miss America and won the talent contest. She's a very talented girl.

JE: Right. Norge Block Party?

DW: Yeah, I did that for awhile.

JE: And what was that about?

DW: Oh it was like a game show, and we'd go to different stores where they'd sell Norges and you know, and we'd have contestants on and just do stuff like that just a game show.

JE: That was an appliance brand?

DW: Yes, Norges refrigerators –

JE: Refrigerators.

DW: That's correct.

JE: And so you got talent money for all of this?

DW: Oh yes –

JE: And you were making?

DW: Not a lot. (Laughter)

JE: But you were still making good money?

DW: Well, I was doing pretty good but I got to tell you the truth. I made a lot more money playing golf and playing cards than I ever made in this business okay?

JE: Is that right?

DW: That is correct.

JE: Well this is the way one would want to hear all sides of Danny Williams.

## Chapter 7 – 6:34

### Danny Williams Show

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**John Erling:** But then you have an honor, because you were chosen to read the first live newscast.

**Danny Williams:** That's correct –

JE: On WKY –

DW: One time though. (Laughter)

JE: Why? Did you embellish that too?

DW: Well a little bit, but I've always thought news is just a bunch of fiction that people make up. When I first went to work in San Antonio, Texas, they had a UPI and an AP machine by the news room, stories would be a little different. And these guys would go back there

and they would decide which one they were going to read and they'd read it and act like they were there and they didn't know whodunit from sick 'em, so I knew that TV news was just something made up.

JE: Well then, how were you selected to read that first live newscast because you weren't anywhere close to news mentally?

DW: Well, they just decided they wanted to put on a newscast and they had me read it. Every time they had something to do in the early days of TV they had me do it, and I was willing to do anything.

JE: Well then you were also the biggest name they had, so it made sense –

DW: At that time, yeah –

JE: To have the biggest name read that newscast.

DW: At that time.

JE: Right. Fall of 1950, The Danny Williams Show began.

DW: Yes.

JE: And that's when you interviewed these pioneers.

DW: Yes, that's correct and we'd break it up in the middle with kids, like the Art Linkletter House Party. And the funniest thing that ever happened in my career happened in that show. This is 1950, Korea started, and the Army and the Navy and the Air Force brought a lot of people to Tinker and left their families there and sent their men overseas. So I'd have all these kids on, and I had a bunch of kids on, on this afternoon, and they were all from Midwest City. And one of my stock questions was, "What does your Daddy do?" So I asked this little kid, I said, "What does your Daddy do?" And he said, "He's in Korea." I said,

"That's wonderful." I said, "Do you get to sleep with your Mama?" And he said, "Yeah every night but Tuesday and then Uncle Phil comes over and sleeps with her." (Laughter)

JE: And you just moved right on, right?

DW: Well, I hope so. I don't know. It might have stopped me. I don't know. It's so long ago.

JE: But, these great stories of the pioneers –

DW: Oh yeah, I should have taped all that stuff.

JE: I was going to ask, they were not taped?

DW: I should have taped it. I heard some of the darnedest stories I mean some –

JE: Any one of them, or two that stand out?

DW: Well, it won't sound very funny now but it was so funny that day that I had a woman on one day and she said, "Boy it was cold back there in '89, (1889) man if it hadn't have been for that Lovers Gin Tonic we'd have all died. God Bless the Chilled Tonic.

JE: That was a popular show –

DW: Until Channel 9 came on the air and I owed the rating people about nine folks. (Laughter.)

JE: Because what happened?

DW: They put on a cowboy in the afternoon who could hardly say his name and Hopalong Cassidy movies and that blew me out of the tub.

JE: Because of the movies, this was kind of a new –

DW: Well, as you well know, being a veteran yourself, TV in the early days was controlled by kids. I mean, you did a program for kids, that's what got the ratings. And this guy did a deal for kids, and kids don't want to watch interview from old people I mean that's not their gig.

JE: Where did your show go then?

DW: They took it off and I went to Hoyt Andres and said, "Well I'm going back to San Antonio, 'cause I mean, you know I figure I'm done here and I know I can make it in San Antonio." So, he said, "No, you're not going back to San Antonio." I said, "Why not?" And he said, "'Cause we're going to put you on, on Monday afternoon. You're going to have a (inaudible). You're going to be Dandy Dynamo, Captain of the space science center and you're going to be able to go back and forward in time." I said, "You're crazy." He said, "No, that's what we're going to do." So I didn't know anything at all about science and so forth at that time. But you know in those on TV you couldn't wear white 'cause it would glare. So I went out and bought me a smock and dyed it blue and put it on and go on the next Monday afternoon at 4 o'clock. I have 22 minutes of film and 36 minutes to fill and I invented all kinds of things out my mind out of desperation. You know there ain't nothing like pressure to make you come –

JE: Yeah, kinda force it.

DW: The show just got better and bigger and they gave me another actor and we started doing this, that, and the other thing. And NBC came down here and watched the show and they were going to put me on, on Saturday morning and if I did good on NBC Saturday Morning, they were going to put me on in place of Pinky Lee on Saturday afternoon. Well, that guy Weaver? Weber? Who was Chairman of the Board at NBC he got kicked out and that was the last time I heard of those folks which was a real break for me because at that age, and the way I was they would have eaten me alive in New York, that would have been the end of me.

JE: So you would have been in your 30s about that time?

DW: No, no, no (laughter)

JE: Forties?

DW: No I was still in my 20s.

JE: Still in your 20s?

DW: Oh yeah.

JE: Man this is big heavy stuff happening to you at a very young age.

DW: I guess.

JE: The show outranked the Mickey Mouse Club.

DW: Yes sir.

JE: The first time a local program had ever done that.

DW: That is correct. We slaughtered 'em in the ratings.

JE: But then when NBC came calling you thought man! You had to think this would be great.

DW: Well in a way I did and in a way I didn't. You know? I didn't much want to leave Oklahoma because you know I'm kind of weird. I'd rather hunt and fish and play golf than do anything. And Oklahoma is a great state. God, it's a great place to live. It was very exciting you know to think you might be on the big time and so forth and the money would have been unbelievable.

JE: So, maybe you were kind of relieved that that went away is that true or were you crestfallen because –

DW: Nah, it didn't bother me one way or the other. 'Cause I really in the back of my mind never thought it would happen anyway. I never thought it would happen.

JE: Yeah.

DW: There are very few things in my life that I ever thought would happen. And that's the truth.

JE: But the things you didn't think were going to happen probably were the best for you?

DW: Oh yeah, no doubt about that. The Lord has blessed me to an extent that's unbelievable. Like a lot of people have said about me, I've done more with less than a lot of people I know.

JE: (Laughter) No. God gave you a talent and you know that from the very beginning.

DW: I know that but the good Lord has helped me, I know that.

## Chapter 8 – 5:17

### Religion / WKY / KOCY

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**John Erling:** They had some kind of conversion experience in church that –

**Danny Williams:** Yeah, I was about six years old. My family went to church every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, every Wednesday, every prayer meeting. At school, read the Bible in the morning, at lunch and so forth. No I was brought up a Christian and –

JE: In a Baptist Church was it?

DW: No it was Church of Christ. I mean I always said the biggest decision I ever made was to walk down that aisle and to accept Christ as my Savior. And I'm not saying I'm a very good Christian, but I still, I believe in-

JE: The point is you're a believer and you know what that message is all about.

DW: Yes, I do.

JE: So, in 1957 WKY Radio wanted you?

DW: Yes, for the morning show.

JE: And then it was all right to be on WKY.

DW: Oh, yeah. It was wonderful. They loved it. They loved me.

JE: That was the morning show, 6 to 9 and it brought the station Number 1 ratings.

DW: Well, it didn't get Number 1 right away. But I had been out of the music business for quite awhile and I wasn't paying a whole lot of attention to radio 'cause I was on TV and I started listening to the Number 1 Radio Station in Oklahoma City and heck, they were playing Rock 'n' Roll. And in the morning we were playing overture music, you know.

JE: Okay.

DW: So I started putting in a little Rock 'n' Roll in the morning and the Program Director flipped.

JE: I suppose.

DW: He just went crazy.

JE: Yeah.

DW: So we had a big meeting and of course I've never gotten along real well with Program Directors for some reason or the other. So I said, "Well, hell I don't want to do this morning show I don't like to be a failure and you ain't going to win with this." I mean you've got to follow the people, I mean, you know, the people don't follow you.

JE: What was the other station?

DW: KOCY.

JE: They were playing Elvis and –

DW: They were playing Top 40 music.

JE: Top 40 music.

DW: They were a Top 40 station.

JE: So then how did you resolve this for WKY?

DW: Well, I kept talking to them and I kept playing it and the ratings went up a little. And John Moler, God bless him, was real smart. He was the Manager at WKY and I told him and he knew it himself and I said, "We've got to get rid of this NBC, and we have got to become a Top 40 station or we're not going to survive. That's where it's at and that's what's happening. You can't buck the trend, I mean you've got to go with the flow in life or you'll get run over by the train."

JE: Right.

DW: So he made a business plan and went to the Gaylords and they dropped NBC in '58 and in 30 days we were Number 1. By 1960 in the morning I had 80 percent of the audience share.

- JE: Okay so then, you'll probably not give yourself credit. But if KOCY was Number 1 and playing this kind of music, you added your personality to that and that's what made you Number 1. It was –
- DW: I guess –I don't know.
- JE: It was you.
- DW: That's giving me too much credit I think, really.
- JE: But then if they –if you were playing the same kind of music they were why did people come to you? It was because of you.
- DW: Well and the station, we did a lot of promotion, we had a lot of good disk jockeys and we did a lot of community service and we did it right. They were doing it on the cheap and we did it, you know.
- JE: Okay. So that top announcer who didn't want you at WKY was long gone by this time?
- DW: Well, yeah. (Laughter) He was a good guy though.
- JE: This contentiousness cause I know what this is like to have management not care for what you do sometimes. That struggle to finally break through, you did them a huge favor. But it was unnerving for you for a while there wasn't it?
- DW: Not really, when I was young and at that age nothing unnerved me I had more guts than a thief I mean I was going to do it my way or the highway.
- JE: Because you also knew, if it doesn't work here I'll go someplace else and get a job.
- DW: Oh yeah, you can get another job, hell there's jobs everywhere.
- JE: So, that was in '57 and you continued there –
- DW: Until '79.
- JE: Until '79 and you retired from WKY Radio. Now that's some –
- DW: No, I quit.
- JE: You quit, why?
- DW: I quit. Well, what happened was I'm on WKY Radio and I'm doing really good. In 1967 an opening came on TV for a daily show. Don Paxton had been doing a show on TV and he left. And I got a show called Danny's Day in 1967 on TV. It was on every day at 12:30. So I was on TV and radio. I had been so lucky with ratings. We would beat the soap operas in the ratings and everything. And of course then I had the big break. The first girl that worked with me was a girl named Linda Scott who was so talented but she's been reared in Mexico so she didn't know what was going on in the United States and it made her very, very funny. Then I got a girl named Mary Hart, who is now on Entertainment Tonight, in about '69 or '70 –
- JE: Seventies, yeah.
- DW: Or somewhere in there. And she and I just did great. And then she went to California.
- JE: So you did your morning radio show –

DW: Then did the –

JE: Then Danny's Day in the afternoon.

DW: Yes.

JE: That was a long day for you.

DW: Well, hell it wasn't as long as on the farm when you get up at five o'clock and milk six cows and go to school and come home and do all that again. I thought it was easy myself.

## Chapter 9 – 2:46

### Danny's Day

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**John Erling:** You interviewed celebrities on that Danny's day show?

**Danny Williams:** Oh yeah, I interviewed everybody I'd ever heard of on that show. Johnny Carson, Rock Hudson, David Letterman, Shirley MacLaine. I interviewed the lady who they made The Sound of Music out of. I interviewed Presidents, Governors, everybody. And NBC used to have what they call a junket every year. They would send about 10 television stations around the country, and they'd put us all around a pool at the Universal International Hotel. And they'd have these shows come from one to another and you'd interview them. Hell, I interviewed damn near everybody I ever heard of.

JE: Is that how you got Carson and those people you'd go to those?

DW: Well Carson, I got Carson he came to town and did a thing and I went to his hotel room and interviewed him.

JE: That was on television so you brought in cameras?

DW: Yeah, that was a hard interview. Golly, he was tough.

JE: When he was performing he was performing but other than that he wasn't a chit-chat kind of guy was he?

DW: Well, he wasn't the day I met him. He was alright, he was a nice enough guy.

JE: And you helped people get started in the business like The Oakridge Boys?

DW: Yeah, they started on my TV show. There used to be a theater here in town at the Lincoln Plaza Motel, and they had been a gospel group, and they came here to town to perform and they were deciding to change over to country or to pop. And they were here for a week and they were on my show every day for a week on the TV show.

JE: Singing gospel or secular then?

DW: No, no they were singing secular stuff like they do now. My show by that time had been noticed by a lot of people and they noticed them and they went on to be just huge.

JE: Danny Cooksey.

DW: Yeah. Little kid, little cowboy.

JE: You gave Argus Hamilton a break.

DW: Yeah.

JE: Did he come around and ask to be on?

DW: No, Argus used to hang around, just hand around. Argus Hamilton is probably the craziest human being I've ever known, but extremely talented.

JE: But we should say he's a comedian –

DW: Yeah.

JE: He's a columnist. Writes a column even today.

DW: That's correct.

JE: But he was an Oklahoma City boy.

DW: That's correct.

JE: And he hung around because –

DW: And his Daddy was a Methodist Minister.

JE: Was he funny? How is it that you were attracted to him?

DW: I wasn't attracted to him. He was attracted to me. I'll help anybody that wants help. He just kind of watched me and saw what I did and saw the kind of comedy I did and he just said if he can do it I can do it and he did it and does it well.

JE: And so you invited him on to perform?

DW: Sure.

JE: He'd sit and talk with you and you guys would trade jokes back and forth?

DW: Sure. Sure.

JE: And then what kind of a break did that give him? Because he went out, and he's in Los Angeles now.

DW: Well he started doing stand-up and then ended up in LA. Golly, you sure do a lot of research don't you?

JE: Yeah, I do.

## Chapter 10 – 4:37

### Mary Hart / Wheel of Fortune

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**John Erling:** Talk to us about Mary Hart, she's still performing of course.

**Danny Williams:** Mary Hart, is probably next to my wife Maureen is the smartest woman I've ever met. She's from South Dakota. She finished in the Top Ten in the Miss America Contest in some year, I don't know what. And she married a guy and they moved to Oklahoma City, and Linda Scott had left my show, she and her husband moved somewhere else. So every time we'd have an opening for that show we'd have 200

women come in. The Program Director at that time was a guy by the name of Bill Thrash. So, he had all these women to interview on a Monday, he comes down on a Tuesday morning and says I've found the girl. I said, "You have?" And he said, "Yeah, I want you to meet her and the four finalists." So the first time I ever met Mary Hart, I said, "Boy, you're it. Are you ever it." Golly, she had so much charisma. She was so good looking. Well, she didn't know TV from noodles. And she worked with me for about a week, and I took her back in the dressing room and I broke her down she cried and all this stuff and so forth, but she heard what I was saying.

JE: What were you saying to her?

DW: I was saying, you don't know anything about TV. You've got to start paying attention and you've got to learn how to do this stuff. And she heard everything I said, which was amazing to me 'cause I've had very few women understand anything I said. (Laughter) Anyway, and she got to be –she's a real pro. I mean this girl is a pro, pro, pro.

JE: Because she learned at your side, and you took time, 'cause I suppose at first it was difficult to work with her? She was –

DW: It's always difficult to work with anybody new.

JE: And so then when you talked to her that way she began to perhaps relax more and –

DW: Yeah.

JE: And kind of go with the flow.

DW: Well she just listened to me. If you're going to learn anything in life you've got to listen.

JE: Right.

DW: Most people –most of us me included, we don't listen.

JE: They say one of the hardest parts of an interview is to listen.

DW: Yeah, well that's the whole secret to interviewing people is to listen. As you well know.

JE: Right. How long did she stay with you then?

DW: Three years.

JE: And then what happened to her?

DW: Well, I sent her out to California and she interviewed Shirley MacLain. Shirley Jones, yeah and she had a husband.

JE: We should say that your wife is here.

DW: My wife is Maureen is here in the studio and I'm 83, and I can't remember very well and I have to use her mind a lot, okay?

JE: Right and we should say we're here in the conference room of KOMA and their other radio stations.

DW: Okay. She comes to me and she says, "This guy's going to take me to California." And I said, "Mary, you're definitely ready to go to California, but this guy is a pure phony. All he wants to do is get you in bed."

JE: And his name was?

DW: Marty Ingels, Shirley Jones' husband.

JE: Okay.

DW: Well anyway she goes to California and she damn near starves to death. She finally got PM Magazine out there, and it didn't last long and she lost that. She calls me and she's crying on the phone. She got the Regis Philbin Show and she couldn't make it there because she was in love with a guy here in this city. Well anyway, Maureen and I went out to California, and I helped raise Jay Bernstein, who's Mother owns Jerome's here in the City and was agent for Farrah Fawcett, Suzanne Sommers one of the strongest men in California. And Jay really liked me so we go out to California and Maureen and I take Mary Hart over to Jay Bernstein's house and I introduced her to Jay and Jay really got her started in California. As you well know, once you get to LA or New York you ain't going to get anywhere unless you have an agent. And Jay Bernstein is one of the greatest agents in the world. Hell, he got her \$150,000 for a prospect show they didn't even do. That's how good he was. Then after she got to be good, like all those other women, she dumped him. (Laughter.)

JE: But then did she jump soon to Entertainment Tonight then?

DW: Yeah.

JE: From Jay? Did Jay get her that job?

DW: I don't know. I really don't know. I know one thing, she's married now to a guy named Burt Sugarman who's got more money than Ben Gump. Maureen and she are real close. We're still friends. We exchange Christmas presents and cards and call one another and send messages and so forth. I was on Wheel of Fortune some years ago and we had dinner with Mary and her husband in Beverly Hills. And her kid's room looks like Toys R Us. And she's done real well. She's an exceptional person.

JE: And still was a down-to-earth person?

DW: Oh yeah, a pretty human being.

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## Chapter 11 – 6:10

### High School USA

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**John Erling:** Your Danny's Day beat out the soaps? All my Children?

**Danny Williams:** Yeah.

JE: Young and the Restless?

DW: Young and The Restless, all that stuff. Carrie Robertson who replaced Mary Hart, we even did that with Carrie. Carrie's probably the most talented girl that I ever worked with.

She could sing, dance, act do all that stuff but she didn't want to do that on the air it took too much work, so she wouldn't do that. (Laughter)

JE: Oh, with all this talent and she didn't want to be on the air?

DW: Well, you know to be a singer you've got to rehearse, you've got to do this, you've got to do that. I don't blame her for what they were paying her.

JE: You also became a movie star?

DW: Not much of a movie star.

JE: The movie was?

DW: High School USA

JE: What did you play?

DW: I played a school-teacher.

JE: How did that come about?

DW: Maureen, my wife, we went to California and went to this high school and everything and I'd never seen such an inefficient deal the way they make movies. We made this one deal in one day. They shoot, the first scene, they shoot everybody. Then they shoot you individually and I had one line: "Well you see one another every day, when are you going to get married?" Well this movie comes out and you got a lot of people who will turn it on late at night and they'll see me in that first scene and I'm not in it ever again. I've had a million people say, "Hey John, Danny Williams' movie's on, come watch this." And they'll go turn it on (laughter) and I'm never in it again. I wouldn't want to be in the movies. That's the most tedious deal. They'll shoot one scene and then they break down and they relight the deal and then you do the same scene over again and over and over and over.

JE: And that experience didn't leave you saying, Boy I'd like to become a movie star?

DW: No, not at all.

JE: You got some dollars for that though.

DW: Oh yeah, I got paid for ten years. Probably the biggest one –day salary I ever got in my whole life. Every time they'd show it they'd send me a check.

JE: That's all it took from you is one day to –

DW: One day and one line, and they sent us a check for ten years.

JE: Like –

DW: Residuals.

JE: Residuals.

DW: The first time they paid my airfare, hotel and all of my expenses, for the first deal I got, I think it was a thousand dollars. And then I'd get checks for \$500, \$600, \$700 –

JE: And so that would have been early '80s? That was nice extra money to have.

DW: I guess. Luck again. L-U-C-K.

JE: Yeah, but don't put yourself down here because, yeah, we have luck but talent has to be

matched to luck and you know that.

DW: Well, thank you a lot.

JE: This is all television and movies, about '84 you returned to radio, KEBC. You left WKY.

DW: In '79. What happened, in 1979 at WKY they made Lee Allen Smith the Manager of the TV station, so the guy that took over for him wanted me to be the Program Director. Well, I'd already decided I didn't want to be the Program Director anymore because the year before they had sent me to Charlotte, North Carolina because our ratings on the radio were sliding a little bit. And when I came back I said, "Well they're doing exactly what I told you we ought to do." So we started doing that and we came up again. Well this guy went to the TV station and Dee Sadler came and the manager of the radio station. After I got back and made the station Number One again they hired a consultant for \$25,000 a year and didn't give me a quarter. So I decided right then I wasn't going to be the Program Director anymore. I was the Program Director for WKY from 1958 to 1978.

JE: But Lee Allen Smith was Manager?

DW: He was Manager of the Radio Station and then he became the Manager of the TV station. We had separated by then. PUBCO sold Channel 4 in 1974.

JE: So you did not want to be –

DW: Not the Program Director, hell it wasn't going to pay anything and they worked their butt off. And I was doing a TV show and a radio show for them so what would I want to do this for? Anyway they hired a guy, Dan Lucas to be the Program Director of the radio station. And the first day he's there, we have a meeting, and he says: "What we're going to have to do is be more visible." And I said, "How in the hell can I be more visible? I'm on TV every day." So the next day I play a record that became a big hit by Kenny Rogers and Dottie West, I don't remember what it is now. But it was a huge record. So he calls me in to his office, and he says, "I don't want you playing that record. You can play whatever records I tell you to play and that's it." I'm the Number One Jock in town, I've got like 45 percent share at that time nobody else was even close. So I went in to Dee Sadler and I said, "Hey man, this Program Director said he's going to tell me what to play in the morning, and I said I've been pulling the music and playing the music on WKY since '58. Are you going to let him do that to me?" He said, "No I'll talk to him." I said, "Good." So the next Monday, I asked him I said, "Did you talk to Dan?" "Nah," he said, "I didn't." I said, "Well we better have a meeting when I get off at nine o'clock." So I get off at nine o'clock and this guy and I go round and round. And he finally says, "Well I'll tell you one thing. I'm not going to program three-quarters of the station and you program the other quarter." And I said, "Well that's real good." I said, "I'll see you guys around." And I walked out, and man I have PUBCO call me, he called me, they went from Number One to Number 12.

JE: And WKY has never been the same?

DW: Never have, never gotten over it.

JE: And they tried to get you to come back?

DW: Oh yeah.

JE: And you had made up your mind not to?

DW: Hey Man, let me tell you how I am. Like I said, I'm crazy and I know I might be an ego-maniac, but once I'm through with you, I'm through with you. I mean, ain't no second chance with me.

JE: They probably offered you more money too?

DW: That never came up. I wasn't after the money I wanted some kind of control. I mean I told them I said to this guy, "Let me ask you something. Am I responsible for my ratings?" They said "Yeah." I said, "Well how can you be responsible over something over which you have no control?" I said, "That doesn't make any sense." And it didn't. So I said, "Adios!"

## Chapter 12 – 5:28

### Likes / Dislikes / Bible Reading

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**Danny Williams:** So then I did KEBC when they'd need a vacation guy in the morning. Then when I lost the TV show in 1984, KEBC hired me full-time. And I couldn't get along with their program director either.

**John Erling:** Was it over music again?

DW: Music and jealousy and a lot of stuff like that.

JE: Yeah.

DW: I have a tendency, I don't know why it is, but people either like me or hate me. For instance in 1963 or something, and advertising agency from Dallas came up here to make a focus group deal and they got 1,000 high-school kids and they asked them three questions: What is your favorite soft drink? Who is your favorite disk jockey? And which disk jockey do you dislike the most? Five hundred of the kids said Danny Williams was their favorite, and 500 said I was their least favorite. I won the whole survey. (Laughter)

JE: And management probably couldn't figure that out, why you were hated as much as you were loved.

DW: Oh I think they knew that. I think they knew that.

JE: But did they think that was a good thing because in a way it –

DW: Why sure it was a good thing. If you're going to be a real big personality in the media, you've got to have both sides. Because these people talk and a lot of people that hate you listen anyway 'cause they want to hear you mess up.

JE: They do, and they want to get mad again.

DW: Yeah. Right. I think they knew that because I hadn't been here, the first year I was here and I started the Old Lady Show and I would read the Bible at halfway through. And I started getting death threats. You know –

JE: Wait a minute what show did you – what show – when was this?

DW: Fifties. Well I was interviewing the old timers.

JE: Okay, right. And so during that show –

DW: I'd read the Bible. And I got that they were going to kill me and shoot me, and all this kind of stuff.

JE: So you've read from the Old and New Testament and-

DW: Yeah.

JE: And what came to you to think well I need to read the Bible?

DW: Because people in Oklahoma like the Bible. This is a very spiritual state. And it's a wonderful book and I just thought it was the thing to do.

JE: And so how long did that go on?

DW: Well it still goes on, I read the Bible every morning –

JE: No, (laughter) no, no, on the show?

DW: It went on 'til the show went off.

JE: But despite (the fact that) you had death threats you continued to read the Bible?

DW: Oh yeah, that didn't scare me. And, you know, what the heck, everybody's going to die. (Laughter) I'd been in the service.

**Maureen Williams:** How about the lady that you calmed down at the TV station?

DW: Well that time a lady came out to WKY, and came into the lobby and there's a hubbub going on and they've got the Manager and the Assistant Manager, the Program Director and threw everyone in the lobby. And finally the switchboard operator called me and she said Danny you've got to come down here, this is awful. So there's woman who came in from Wewoka or Watonga, I don't remember which and she was telling everybody that they've got to get me off the air because I'm spying on her on the TV. And it scared these guys to death. So I go down there and I said, "Hi, how are you? I've been watching you. See? I'll tell you what (you need to) do dear. If you go on home, I'll promise I'll never do it again. Okay? And I really do appreciate you coming in to tell everybody." And I gave her a big hug and all that stuff and told her how pretty she was and all that stuff and she left the station. People never scared me. I mean what the heck. They're alright. She's okay. She's just crazy. I'm crazy too, so what?

JE: So did that end? She didn't come back?

DW: She never came back. I never heard from her again.

JE: Because she was convinced that you had quit spying on her.

DW: Yeah.

JE: You went on your own and created your own enterprise, a public relations firm.

DW: Yes.

JE: And you still have it –

DW: With Maureen.

JE: So that was going on –

DW: Yeah.

JE: While you were still in radio and you had them both going?

DW: In 1986, when I got tired of KEBC I couldn't stand it anymore, you know. Keep Everybody Country was their deal. And I got sick of that. I went to work for AMI which was a company which retrofitted DC-3 aircraft. I became the Vice President of Marketing. I'd never read a marketing book, I didn't know anything. So I go to work for AMI. Aero Modification Incorporated.

JE: Gotcha.

DW: What we did is we'd retrofit DC-3 airframes. The old DC-3 was probably the greatest airplane ever made but these engines, those big ol' radio engines were worn out and we put turbo prop engines on them. The first year I was there I sold 9 million dollars worth of business. It cost me more to sell them than I made. Okay? Show you how bad I was. I learned to speak Spanish. I traveled all over the world. And I'm not going to tell you a lot about what happened but these people that run this company, they were just trying to build it up as a big deal and sell the company. They weren't interested in selling airplanes. And I won't go into all that cause it's too complicated. But I had a 70 million dollar contract in 1992 and the guy who owned the company fired me because I was giving the guy in South America that helped me sell it too much money. So, when that happened, you know I packed it all up and sat on the beach for about a year.

JE: But you were making some pretty good money then doing that?

DW: No, I wasn't. No. (Laughter)

JE: If you could generate those kind of sales there must have been some kind of commission?

DW: I didn't know anything then I was working with my family. It was my family that owned this, okay?

JE: That's why it's too complicated.

DW: I don't want to go into all that.

JE: We don't need to.

**Chapter 13 – 6:07****KOMA Calls / Fired at 82**

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**Danny Williams:** And then KOMA called me in 1992. And offered me a deal.

**John Erling:** And that was Vance –

DW: Harrison.

JE: Harrison.

DW: And anyway I came up here and he said. “We want to hire you for a year.” and I said, “No.” I said. “I wouldn’t go to work for you for a year.” I said, “Cause you might not like me, and I might not like you.” And I said, “I’ll go to work for three months.” So we made a three-month contract and at the end of three months their ratings were beginning to move a little bit, and they wanted to hire me again for a year. They wanted to sign me a contract. I said I wouldn’t sign this contract. I mean I would’ve been a slave if I would have signed it. I’d already been screwed on contracts. I’d learned that lesson. So finally we got together and he hired me and I went to work for a year, and the next year they raised it, I mean good. The next year after that, they raised it again.

JE: Your salary?

DW: Yeah. And I finally ended up making more money than I’d ever made in radio and TV, and then this last year, Renda Broadcasting, who I was working for, they got in real financial trouble and I was making more money than any disk jockey they’d ever had. So they retired me. And so now I’m not doing anything.

JE: So when you came to KOMA you were –

DW: Sixty-five.

JE: Sixty-five and back into radio at 65.

DW: That’s it.

JE: And you did a morning show?

DW: That’s right.

JE: You did it from 6 o’clock in the morning until –

DW: Five thirty to nine.

JE: Five-thirty til nine?

DW: Yeah.

JE: And that’s a drag at sixty-five, even –

DW: No, it wasn’t a drag, I enjoyed it.

JE: Because you enjoyed it?

DW: Yeah.

JE: And playing music and having fun with it.

DW: Yeah.

JE: And they let you go and Vance just –

DW: Yeah and they didn't tell me a bunch of stuff to do and all that stuff.

JE: You said you retired but they said this is the end of your –

DW: No, they retired me.

JE: Yeah.

DW: That's a long story too. But anyway, I retired, but I retired because of what they offered me okay?

JE: They lowered your salary?

DW: No they didn't lower my salary they were going to have a retirement party and all that stuff.

JE: So you got fired?

DW: That's what I think but I'd have a hard time proving that.

JE: Because they made a retirement party which was huge?

DW: Yeah.

JE: They put on a great show for you.

DW: Yeah.

JE: And so then you retired and so then you were eighty –?

DW: Two.

JE: Eighty-two years old.

DW: Yeah.

JE: But you wouldn't have continued on much longer. Would you? Would you?

DW: Yeah.

JE: You would have?

DW: Yeah.

JE: You'd still be on the air today if they would have allowed that?

DW: Yeah. Sure.

JE: Because you enjoyed it that much?

DW: Well you know I don't mind working, I never have.

JE: But you?

DW: Let me tell you something, doing a disk jockey show ain't anything like milking six cows every morning.

JE: And that's always back here isn't it? In the back of your head.

DW: Yeah.

JE: You've been honored in so many ways. You're in the Oklahoma Hall of Fame.

DW: That's correct.

JE: The Historical Society has a tribute to you? You donated one of your costumes to it and so they have really honored you, as you should have (been honored)?

DW: Oh, well thank you.

JE: Were your parents show business people? They weren't?

DW: No, they were cultural people. Farmers.

JE: Then you did get fired a few times in your career?

DW: I don't think I ever got fired really.

JE: Okay.

DW: I don't ever remember getting fired from anything.

JE: Did you ever lose sponsors –

DW: Oh yeah.

JE: Because of something you did?

DW: Oh yes. Oh yes.

JE: What would be the story?

DW: Well, I hate to tell this 'cause it's liable to offend a lot of people. But do you remember when Jaws was real popular?

JE: Yeah.

DW: I'm on the radio one morning and I say, "Hey, did you guys hear they made a sequel to Jaws, it's called Jews, it's about loansharks. And man..."

JE: And where were you when you did that? What station?

DW: WKY.

JE: All right. And so what happened? How fast did the reaction hit?

DW: By Noon, I think we'd lost about \$80,000 worth of business.

JE: And management, how did they handle that?

DW: Well, I apologized and they passed it over and I got to keep my job. I shouldn't have said that. I should never have said that.

JE: Did you hear it someplace else or –?

DW: No, I made it up.

JE: When you said it and turned your microphone off did you realize that you had said something?

DW: No. I thought it was just a real clever pun.

JE: Did they come in during the show and say you've screwed up or?

DW: Nah, they never said I screwed up, I mean they really never got on me very much, they just, the sponsors got on me.

JE: But some of those sponsors probably came back?

DW: Three days later.

JE: So you had to apologize for that?

DW: Well, certainly. I've apologized a bunch of times.

JE: So another incident? Any other incident where you would've lost a sponsor, or even had

to apologize for something you said?

DW: There's been a bunch of them but I can't remember them right now. The funny thing about it is, and I'm sure you understand this too. For instance if you make a joke about cats, cat lovers, they don't find anything funny about it. I mean I've apologized for things that are so silly, so many times it's ridiculous. It's amazing to me how I ever lasted as long as I did in the business. 'Cause I like to tell jokes. And jokes, you know, some people like them and some people don't.

JE: They could offend.

DW: Absolutely.

JE: Would you tell a joke knowing it's going to offend?

DW: Absolutely if I didn't work for somebody. Sure because you look back in this business, show business, all the people in this business that have ever been hugely popular, are hugely controversial. When I first started and went to college at The University of Texas, the most popular person on the radio was Arthur Godfrey. And you couldn't find anybody that liked him. And everybody watched him. Okay?

JE: And listened on CBS?

DW: Sure, as you well know the way you get ratings, you get people to talk about you. And if you're not a little controversial or something, nobody will talk, because everybody likes to talk about controversial subjects.

JE: So the people that will be listening to this eons to come, Arthur Godfrey was a very famous radio and television —?

DW: That's right.

JE: He was a variety show and he was a great conversationalist and had people on to sing and so when you say that to me that people didn't like him, I didn't realize that. 'Cause I did, I remember I was a young boy listening to him. What was it (that was) offensive about Arthur Godfrey?

DW: I don't know but you'd say-somebody- did you hear Arthur yesterday? I can't stand him!

JE: Right.

DW: I mean you know, it's just what I would hear around town you know?

## Chapter 14 — 5:05

### Depression

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**John Erling:** As you would look back, what would you claim would be some of the really high points of your career? That you look back and say that was a sweet spot?

**Danny Williams:** Meeting my wife Maureen that was a great spot.

**Maureen Williams:** Career Danny.

DW: Oh, in my career?

JE: Where did you meet Maureen?

DW: Here in Oklahoma City.

JE: At a radio station?

DW: No.

JE: But you met her here?

DW: Met her here in town.

JE: Yeah.

DW: The highlight of my career, boy that's a hard question.

JE: When did you have some of the most fun was it back in your 20s when you were doing children's shows?

DW: The most fun was when I was doing the kid show. And we were doing radio remotes, we used to have a lot of fun doing that and playing basketball with women all over the state that was a lot of fun.

JE: You played basketball?

DW: Our radio (stations) had a basketball team and we'd play a women's team every Friday night during the basketball season. Work all day and then go do that and you'll about die.

JE: And, what station, when-?

DW: WKY.

JE: Okay.

DW: And we had a perfect record, we never won a game.

JE: Did you do that on purpose?

DW: Yeah, it was a promotion, you know.

JE: No I meant never lose a game 'cause you probably could have won?

DW: I doubt it. (Laughter) I really do doubt it. I really doubt it.

JE: How about embarrassing moments, is there a moment that you said, Oh, no I did that and I am so stupid, I'm embarrassed.

DW: There have been some of those but I can't remember exactly what they are. I've tried to wipe them out of my mind. But I'm sure I've been embarrassed. I guess one of the most embarrassed I ever was one of the first plays I ever did in college, my fly was open during most of the play. That was kind of embarrassing. (Laughter)

JE: And nobody told you or couldn't I suppose because you were out there.

DW: I was hard to embarrass.

JE: We were talking about Carson and I don't think he was a people guy but you seem to be... you enjoy performing, but you're a people guy too aren't you?

DW: Oh yeah I love to –

JE: You love to mix well with people.

DW: Oh yeah. I don't judge people. That is one thing I do not do. My favorite Chapter in the Bible is the seventh Chapter of Mark. "Judge not that you be not judged." You know I try not to do that. I do it sometimes but I'd rather I didn't.

JE: Are you always generally positive like this? Are you always ready with a joke, or is there a darker side than you could be negative or?

DW: Well, let me put it this way my brother. I go both ways.

JE: Yeah.

DW: I can be as negative as any human being you have ever met. Of course as far as I'm concerned, positive is just the opposite of negative I mean, you know. If you're going to know the truth you've got to know all of it. You can't just know one side. So, I guess the worst thing that's ever happened to me is that in 1993 or something like that I developed clinical depression and that is the worst thing that ever happened. Oh Lord it's awful, just awful.

JE: Did they know that in the City here, that you had —?

DW: I don't think so. But the fact that I had a job and worked is what saved me because I'll tell you something, you cannot be depressed if you're busy. There's no way to be depressed if you're busy.

JE: But then, you were busy and how did you develop this?

DW: Damned if I know.

JE: And how long did that continue on?

DW: I had it for about, what?

Maureen Williams: It came after your Fort Worth —

DW: Oh yeah, it came after I got fired from AMI, that deal with my family. That's what happened. I was really depressed and I had too much pride and I wouldn't go to a psychiatrist and I finally did go to a psychiatrist and he decided that I had clinical depression and he gave me Paxil, and I got to feeling better in three days.

JE: And that's what brought you out of it then.

DW: Yeah.

JE: And how long were you depressed?

DW: Probably six months. It's awful man I'd cry in the middle of the afternoon and God it's just terrible.

JE: And for people to hear this and here we've heard about this career and all the fun you've had on radio and you're telling jokes and so forth. That that could actually happen to this person —

DW: Well, yeah. It happened to Mike Wallace, why couldn't it happen to me? (Laughter)

JE: Exactly. Right.

DW: It could happen to anybody.

JE: It can. But when we see somebody on radio and television and they're always this, we think they're that way all the time, and so that's why I'm kind of talking on the off-the-air personality of Danny and then we're human.

DW: Oh, it was awful. If I hadn't have been married, and had Maureen, I would have probably killed myself. I mean –

Maureen Williams: It was scary.

DW: I was really messed up. I'm not kidding you.

JE: Thank God for drugs because that's what brought you out of it.

DW: Yeah.

JE: And you've never had a bout with it since. Do you ever sense yourself going –

DW: Every once in awhile I get a little off if I forget to take my medicine.

JE: So you still take it for that?

DW: Oh yeah. I'm afraid to quit. (Laughter)

JE: I don't blame you. You've been there.

DW: Afraid to quit.

JE: You've had chances to go to bigger markets?

DW: Yeah.

JE: In radio?

DW: Yeah.

JE: We talked about television but certainly in radio you were –

DW: Radio and TV both.

JE: Could have gone, but did you turn them down or did they?

DW: Yeah.

JE: Why did you turn?

DW: Because I love Oklahoma. I'd rather quail hunt and play golf and gamble than do anything.

JE: So, markets like Chicago, New York?

DW: Pittsburg, New York, various places, I can't remember all of them.

JE: Yeah.

DW: I never paid much attention anyway.

## Chapter 15 – 4:57

### Student Advice / Gin Rummy

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**John Erling:** When students talk to you and you talk to students, about this business, they ask you lots of questions. What do you say to those that want to be in radio and television?

**Danny Williams:** I tell them that if they get into this business they might not take it too seriously. Because it's not the entertainment or the news business. It's the advertising business. That's what the business is all about. And you'll do a lot better if you get into sales or management. If you're going to want to be an entertainer or an actor, if you're ever going to make any money you're going to have to go to Chicago or New York, or LA or Dallas or Houston. You aren't going to make any money in a small market, cause they have people pay them to be on, other than pay you to be on.

JE: So then they might say to you, look what you did? I want to be you. I want to do what you did.

DW: Well, then they've got to learn how to hustle on the side. I told you earlier, I made more money playing golf and cards than I ever made in TV or radio.

JE: And so what's your handicap?

DW: At that time it was 2.

JE: Wow.

DW: Today it's probably 100. (Laughter)

JE: But you'd get these guys out on the course and perhaps they didn't know what a good golfer you were?

DW: That's not it, it's just some people just like to gamble. There are people who like to throw their money away. During the oil boom at Oak Tree Golf Course, there would be 6 or 7 helicopters come every day at Noon. And guys would get off those helicopters and they had 5 to 10 thousand dollars cash in their pocket. And I played gin rummy during the oil boom with guys at Oak Tree for ten cents a point, which is really juicy, that couldn't count to 6.

JE: You said helicopters, so they'd come in from where?

DW: Their offices here and then take guys that had come in from Chicago and New York and they'd fly them over some well location, you know. Some of the guys that made the most money during the oil boom, never set a location or anything. They just took people's money and send the reports and so forth. You were asking what was my most exciting time in life? I guess it's when we lived at Oak Tree from 1979 to 1984. That was my most exciting time. Golly.

JE: So you had a home out there at Oak Tree?

DW: Yeah.

**Maureen Williams:** Two and a half acres.

JE: Two and a half acres.

DW: And a horse, a stable, a kennel and everything, boy we high-rolled it. I'd get off my TV show at 1 o'clock and I'd get in my car and start for Oak Tree and there would be helicopters going. it looked like Apocalypse Now. And when I'd get there, there would

be 50 or 60 guys there and they would just be blowing to play something. I played a guy every Thursday for one summer, every Thursday and I tried to give him strokes, I tried every way I could, but I never missed winning \$1,000 bucks from him every Thursday. There are certain people who like to lose. You may not believe that if you've never been a gambler, but there are people who can't wait to throw their money away.

JE: And we don't figure that out do we? Why they have that –

DW: Well, we figure it out. You might not figure it out, but I figured it out real quick. (Laughter)

JE: How did you figure it out? What –

DW: Just through experience.

JE: But why would they want to lose and then he comes back –

DW: Don't ask me. I don't know.

JE: I know –

DW: I don't have any idea. I have no idea.

JE: And then you were a popular personality in town too so, and they knew that you gambled.

DW: You they knew I'd play and I'd play high. And they knew that if I lost I'd pay off too that was one thing I'd do. And I would lose some, you know spread it around and make everybody think I was a sucker.

JE: So that had to be a fun, fun time for you?

DW: Oh, it was fantastic. It was hilarious. It was hilarious.

JE: Amazing. Many people idolize you, performers to listeners. Who were your idols as you went along on your career?

DW: You mean the people I idolize?

JE: That you idolize and look up to, right.

DW: I thought Jerry Lester was one of the funniest people I ever met. He was the emcee of Broadway Open House in the early days of TV. I thought he was hilarious. Brother Dave Gardner is one of my favorite people of all time.

JE: And he was out the South wasn't he?

DW: Yeah.

JE: Comedian, he was a radio person and he would put out records.

DW: As far as women, Ann Blyth was one of the first people I ever interviewed and the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen other than Maureen. God she was pretty.

JE: Here you are 83, do you miss any performing right now? Would you like to be performing? Would you like to be on the radio here at 83?

DW: If you would have asked me that yesterday, I would have said yes. But today I'll say no.

JE: And what's the difference?

DW: One day. (Laughter)

JE: How would you sign off you shows?

DW: I've always signed off, "I love you, pass it on." That's the way I sign off.

## **Chapter 16 – 0:15**

### **Conclusion**

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**John Erling:** You have just heard an Oklahoma Hall of Fame legend Danny Williams. If you will Google Danny Williams Oklahoma City you will find even more information about this broadcast giant. The interview you have just listened to is exclusive to [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).

– END –