

Frank Robson

Frank Robson is a business man, philanthropist and a member of the Sam Walton Family.

Frank Robson Transcript

Chapter 01 - 1:01

Introduction

Announcer: As a champion for public education, Frank C. Robson founded the Claremore Public Schools Foundation and has encouraged the formation and growth of school foundations state-wide. A long-time supporter of Claremore Public Schools, Frank and his wife, Ludmila, gave eight million dollars to help construct a performing arts center for the district, and another three million toward an endowment for staffing and maintenance of the facility.

The owner of Robson Properties, Frank is a member and past chairman of the Board of Directors for RCB Bank. He is also involved in cattle ranching for beef production.

His many civic duties include serving on the Executive Board of Boy Scouts of America, Indian Nations Council. Robson was presented the OSU Graduate of Distinction Award, and has been inducted into the OSU Alumni Association Hall of Fame.

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Chapter 02 - 4:32

Milk Shakes and Raw Eggs

John Erling: Today's date is November 2, 2009. This is John Erling. I have Frank Robson here.

Frank, good morning to you.

Frank Robson: Good morning, John.

JE: You'll state your full name, your date of birth, your age as of this date.

FR: My full name is Frank Carr Robson and I am eighty years old, born October 18, 1929. Just had a birthday, eighty years young.

JE: And where are we today as we're recording this?

FR: Well, we're in my office in Claremore, Oklahoma. This is the company office of Robson Properties.

JE: Tell us where you were born.

FR: Well, I was born in the back bedroom at 411 East 6th Street in Claremore, Oklahoma. And it was the time when the mothers stayed in bed for two weeks after the child was born, and I was a big baby—I weighed over thirteen pounds when I was born.

JE: And whose house was this?

FR: This was in my folks' house, L. F. Robson and Hazel Carr Robson.

JE: And did you live there for a period of time?

FR: I lived there, born and raised there. Lived in the house that I was born in, and we had a great neighborhood.

JE: Let's go back to your mother's name and where she was from, the maiden name from maybe what country and all that.

FR: Well, she was from Kansas. She lived in Oswego, Kansas, and then she moved to Claremore. Her father worked for the Owiwoods Lumber Company, that was a chain of lumber yards that was in this area at that time. He was later the manager of the Owiwoods Lumber Company yard here in town. And he died when he was like only forty-eight years old. And my mother was the secretary.

And my father came to town, he was from Georgia. He graduated from the University of Georgia Law School.

JE: And let's get your father's name.

FR: Yeah, Leland Stanford Robson.

JE: Okay then, so then he came to town—

FR: He came to town. His first visit to Oklahoma was he came out here selling Wearever Cookware from door to door. This was just prior to statehood, about 1906. Of course, the state became a state in 1907. And he sold Wearever Cookware so he could go back and finish his education at the University of Georgia.

And he liked it out here so he came back then in about 1910. And met my mother, she was a secretary here in town for a company. He decided he wanted to come here, and the reason he wanted to come here, one reason he wanted to come here was in Georgia, the land was basically owned by relatively few people. And he thought this was the last frontier and it was an opportunity for a lifetime.

So he came to Claremore, met my mother, and they got married and he set up a law practice here.

JE: So he went back and got his law degree?

FR: Law degree, uh-huh. Came out here and practiced law. He and G. C. Spellers. Mr. Spellers later moved to Tulsa because he thought more opportunity was there. And my dad stayed here.

My dad didn't have a law practice, of course, and he told us to make a living, what he did, and he couldn't type, but he could do it with index fingers. And he would type other people's papers for them for ten cents a page, on a hunt-and-peck system. And that's the way he made enough money to survive until he got some clients.

JE: So then he got some clients—

FR: Got some clients.

JE: And had a law firm right here in Claremore.

FR: Law firm here, right.

JE: And then what does he do?

FR: Well, he practiced law for years. In 1929, he bought a half interest after he had had a successful law practice going. In 1929, he bought a half interest in a ranch that was owned by the Bilby family. And it was about eighteen thousand acres. In Wagoner Rogers in Tulsa County.

Then in 1934, he bought the other half interest. And, of course, this is right in the middle of the Depression.

JE: In '29, the stock market crashed.

FR: Yeah. And '34 wasn't any better. So I didn't see much of my dad during that period of time because he got ulcers. He owed everybody in the country because he had borrowed money. He went for two years to each creditor and debtor, telling them that if they'd give him time he'd pay them back. And he got ulcers, and the only thing he could keep on his stomach was milk shakes and raw eggs. And he lived on that for a couple of years.

Chapter 03 - 3:23

RCB Bank

Frank Robson: And finally the culmination, what really got this whole family started out here was there was a tremendous coal reserve under this ranch. It was what they called the Crowberg vein of coal. It's about tumulus coal, high BTU, good for the steel mills to make coke out of.

And in 1937, and he leased that to Sinclair Colon Coke Company, which is Russell Kells and Merle Kells, which now today is Peabody Coal Company. They mine coal on the ranch of the nine years, 1937 to 1946. And they shipped about twenty-five to fifty railroad cars a day of coal out of Catoosa. That's what got us started.

John Erling: So that was just the luck of the draw?

FR: Well, he knew those reserves were there—

JE: When he bought the ranch?

FR: When he bought the ranch, yeah, but still, I mean—

JE: He didn't know to what degree?

FR: No, no, no. He wasn't a geologist or anything. He just could tell where the outcrop was.

The geological outcrop in this area. You know the coal, if it outcrops here, as it goes west it drops about thirty-five feet to the mile.

JE: So he had accumulated enough money, or did he get loans to buy the ranch?

FR: And his law practice, well, he got some fees that were sufficient for him to make a down payment on it. No, he didn't pay for all of it.

JE: And then made payments and then the coal, of course, probably paid it off?

FR: The coal is what paid it off, yeah. And then in the middle of the Depression, he helped start what was then the Rogers County Bank. I asked him about that and he told me, he said, "What happened, we had all the banks in town had gone broke except one. And Mr. Escue was the banker. And Mr. Escue was hard of hearing when he wanted to be. And when he wasn't, well, he could hear you very well."

Anyway, my dad went in to borrow some money from Mr. Escue. Mr. Escue, he brought in fifteen thousand dollars worth of negotiable securities. And Mr. Escue asked him how much he wanted.

And he said, "All I can get."

And he said, "Tell you what I'll do. I'll loan you five hundred dollars."

And I asked my dad what he did and he said, "I just picked my fifteen thousand dollars worth of securities up, walked out the door, and made up my mind that if the town was ever going to grow and the area was ever going to grow, we had to have another bank."

And he didn't have the money, but it took him a year and he started organizing the people here. And in a year's time they raised twenty-five thousand dollars. A few dollars here, a few dollars there.

And what really put him over the top was an oilman named Bartley Mileum in Chelsea, Oklahoma. And the oil and gas people did very well even in the Depression. He had some political clout and the finances to get him started.

So they opened the bank in January of 1936, with twenty-five thousand dollars worth of capital. And today that bank has grown to the total assets thereabout a billion, three hundred and twenty-five million dollars.

JE: Was known then as Rogers County Bank and today is known as RCB Bank.

FR: Yeah, RCB Bank.

JE: Because you went out of the county and went into other areas.

FR: Yeah, so anyway, that's the way good things start.

Chapter 04 - 4:57

Robson Family

John Erling: So then, that puts your father in the banking business—

Frank Robson: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: It puts him in the ranching business—

FR: Ranching business, and the law business.

JE: And in law business.

FR: Yeah.

JE: So how long did he carry on with the law business?

FR: Well, what he did is he did something that very few people do. Something that I haven't done. When he was fifty-five years old he retired, and he formed a family partnership. And each member of the family was a one-sixth owner in the partnership. And that was formed in 1946.

He turned the operation of the ranch over to my brother Nick and he just came in one day after they had worked together for a while and threw the keys on the desk and said, "It's all yours. Call me if you need me." And walked out the door. And my brother Stan, he went to Florida.

JE: Okay, we haven't established that yet.

FR: Yeah, you're right.

JE: Your family, your brothers, tell us who they are.

FR: Our family, there are four of us. My oldest brother is Stan, Stanford Robson, and we call him Stan. Then my sister Helen, Helen Robson Walton. Walton was her married name. And then my brother Nick, Nick Robson. And he was named for Nick Bilby.

And Nick Bilby was one of the brothers, they had purchased the Bilby Ranch from in Wagoner Rogers in Tulsa County. And part of that ranch was the old, what used to be the Scully Ranch, used to be the Vertagers Hunting Club. And he sold that part to them back in the Depression days for a hunting club. Promoted that and sold it to them, to the oilmen in Tulsa for a hunting club.

JE: And talk to us about that hunting club then. And where was that?

FR: It was on the Vertagers River. It was called the Vertagers Hunting Club. A group of oilmen in Tulsa owned it.

JE: Do you know who they were?

FR: Oh yeah. W. E. Scully was one of them. Sinclair was one of the people, and there were several others.

And, of course, it's still there today. And the clubhouse is still there. It's been renovated and there are different owners and all. And John Williams, the local person here in town, owns part of it now. Had thirty-three hundred acres in it, and he sold that back in the Depression to try to get some money to keep his creditors from—sold that portion off.

JE: I see.

FR: And then kept the rest of it. Yeah.

JE: All right. So then as you went through your brothers there and then you're the youngest? Is that true?

FR: Yeah, I'm the baby. I got all the benefits. My brothers and sisters all looked after me. When my brothers came back from the service they brought me all kinds of goodies from the service.

And Nick, my younger brother, was a liaison pilot for the Artillery, in Germany. And I asked him, I said, "Weren't you afraid those Focke-Wulf Fighters would shoot you down?"

He said, "No, we didn't worry about them." He said, "It'd be going so fast that if they tried to pull out they'd hit the ground."

I said, "Well, weren't you worried about ground fire?"

He said, "Not really." Of course, he was, but he was just telling me, he said, "If they shot at us with ground fire," he said, "we'd just direct all the artillery right on them and blow them off the face of the map."

JE: You said sisters?

FR: Yeah.

JE: Did you name everybody? You named Helen as one sister.

FR: We just had four of us. I just had one sister and two brothers. There's four of us. And my mother and dad.

That was a partnership. Dad and Mother included all of us in the partnership, everybody was equal partners. He retired and he said we could run it. And my oldest brother, Stan, in the service, he went to law school at OU and then on to Arizona because of his hay fever. And graduated there with a law degree.

And my brother Nick, got a degree in finance from Oklahoma University.

And my sister, Helen, got a degree in finance from Oklahoma University. We had a planned family.

JE: Planned? How do you mean?

FR: Well, planned family, my dad had it all worked out where my brother was supposed to take over his law practice. Nick was supposed to run the bank. And I was supposed to run the ranch. And Helen was supposed to, of course, get married and have lots of grandchildren.

The way it worked out, Stan, his hay fever was such that he couldn't live in this part of the country, so he went to Florida and he wound up, first, running a dime store in Wilton Manor, Florida. Later became a general contractor and built the Jackson Minute Markets Convenience Stores. And then wound up building the three hotels there and about a hundred-odd thousand feet of not mini storage, I would call it small business buildings.

So Nick, then, instead of being the banker wound up being a rancher. And my sister, Helen, of course, married Sam Walton. Then I wound up being the rancher and having the bigger interest in the bank, the RCB Bank here.

Chapter 05 - 7:36

Frank the Typist

John Erling: Let's talk about the first school you attended.

Frank Robson: Yeah. I went to grade school here in Claremore. I was born and raised here. I went to kindergarten here and then to grade school and then on to high school.

JE: Back in grade school do you remember classmates' names?

FR: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Had Bobby Bowling, and had the Williams sisters, they had Gordon Montgomery, Buddy Mutton who later changed his name to Mutong, Dale Farbro, John Green, these are all just local people that were—

JE: Are any of them around today?

FR: Well, a lot of them are not here anymore. But there are some here. We have homecoming here every year and there'll be ten to twenty of us in that class that come back to homecoming every year.

JE: Out of high school?

FR: Yeah. Out of high school.

JE: So then you went to middle school or junior high?

FR: Well, we went from the grade school and the grade school was right on through high school, in the same area, really.

JE: Okay.

FR: At that point in time, we had the Hiawatha School here in town. Hiawatha was a big, yellow brick building adjacent to the high school. And it was the first through the fifth grade. And then with the upper grades we went to Claremont, which was in the northeast part of town. And then we came back then and went to the high school, which the facility is still here but it's not used anymore as a school.

JE: So what year did you graduate from high school?

FR: I graduated in 1947.

JE: All right, then you went on to further school?

FR: Yeah, went to high school.

One thing that happened here that I think is important is some of the teachers we had are excellent teachers. I had a math teacher named Miss Gasset. And we had a lot of servicemen coming back out of the service at that point in time, after World War II, to get their high school education. And she was excellent.

And I had a typing teacher, Miss Langley. Miss Langley was a single lady, Indian, Cherokee Indian. Beautiful woman. And she was the typing teacher and there weren't very many boys in the typing class. Lots of girls, not very many boys.

JE: And you were?

FR: I was in typing class and one reason I went into typing class is I think my parents' influence. You need to have a skill of some type. So, Miss Langley would get right down in your ear when you were having a test. I never could understand why she would get so close to you when you were having a typing test. So finally, one day I asked her. I said, "Miss Langley, why do you get down and look right over somebody right next to their ear when they're having a typing test?"

And she said, "I'll tell you why." She said, "When you get out and you're typing for somebody and your boss comes around, I don't want you getting nervous and making mistakes because he is standing behind you, watching what you're doing."

JE: That's great.

FR: Which I thought was just fantastic.

JE: Yep, yep.

FR: And I had an excellent chemistry and physics teacher, Lloyd Denny. He made it to the point where you just couldn't wait to get to his class. Colly Sanders was probably the best student in that class. Just an excellent, excellent teacher. Just presented it so well.

Anyway, these are just some of the people that have influenced me. And then one teacher that—I've got to tell about two other teachers, if you don't mind. They had one teacher we were all in love with. Her name was Miss Mason, in the fifth grade. And I will never forget, we had to get up and make a speech. So my speech was on bituminous coal, about the BTUs involved in bituminous coal and about the deposit and how it came to be, and the mining process, and how it was taken to the tipaloon and how it was sorted and how the clinkers and all of the foreign material was gotten out of it. And how it was shipped to the steel mills, and made into coke, and how it fired the furnaces and what the end result, of course, was steel.

My dad would have us at home, he would have us get up and recite whatever talk we wanted to. Then he would make positive criticisms of what we were going to do. And this lady was, she was just an absolutely phenomenal—she was a single person. She later married, she was good.

And another teacher we had who just passed away recently was June Faulkner. She was just special. Just absolutely special, beautiful woman. Those two teachers, all the boys were in love with their teachers.

JE: You probably wanted to work harder in class.

FR: Oh yeah. They were just really good.

JE: That's great.

FR: And then we had one other thing that happened in high school. We had a fellow named Paul Kaminski come to Claremore from Kansas City. And he was a union musician. And we had very little small band programs, small vocal music programs, and he started the high school choir, boys choir and girls choir.

And I never had sung previous to that and I finally realized that really the true, I'd say true fun, the true feeling you can get, there is no feeling better than when you're singing and having a good time with a song. There's just a, it just releases endorphins in the body in a way that it's not released in many other ways.

JE: Were you a soloist?

FR: No, no, no.

JE: A choir, you just joined the choir?

FR: No, I was just a choir man.

JE: But the fact, that feeling of joining all of these other people?

FR: Yeah, with the boys choir and with the mixed choir, when both choirs got together and all. And then of course, he did a great thing with the band. We had an excellent band here. And he used to bring over union musicians from Tulsa. We used to have, years ago we had minstrels here. You can't have a minstrel today you know.

JE: Tell us what a minstrel was.

FR: Well, a minstrel was when everybody would dress up, they would blacken their face, and they would go through and put on skits and have songs. I mean, the song I remember singing was "Mule, keep your tail up, keep the sunshine out of my eyes." And I sang that.

And we had some skits like one fellow is walking across the stage and one fellow is Mr. Indolockenay and the other guy is Mr. Bones. The fellow on the stage looks over and says, "Mr. Indoockenay, what are you doing?"

And he said, "Well, I don't know."

He said, "What you got that ladder for?"

He says, "I'm taking my case to a higher court."

And it was just slapstick. But you can't do that today because it was making fun of the colored race. And rightfully so it's changed.

JE: Right. But all that fun you had musically, that came about because a teacher—

FR: Yeah.

JE: Asked you, “Would you come and join our chorus?”

FR: Yeah, that’s right.

JE: But the other thing is, you had to be able to carry a tune.

FR: Oh you had to carry a tune.

JE: But you didn’t know that, did you?

FR: No, no.

JE: Until that teacher asked you.

FR: We had little very music instruction until Paul Kaminski came and got everything organized here. Oh, it was minimal, but nothing like it was after he came.

Chapter 06 - 2:56

Frank in the Army

John Erling: In high school, did you kind of know what you wanted to do in life? Or was it too early yet?

Frank Robson: Well, my goal, you know everybody’s got a goal, and we worked at the ranch. All of us, myself, Nick, Helen, Stan, everybody worked at the ranch every summer. While we was living in town we always worked the ranch. I love the ranching business and the cattle business, and always thought if I could just own a section of ground and have a hundred head of Hereford cows, that would be the greatest thing I could possibly have. So we’ve been able to accomplish that.

JE: So that was your goal, even in high school?

FR: Oh yeah.

JE: All right. So then you went on to college.

FR: Yep.

JE: And where did you go to school?

FR: I went to school at Oklahoma A&M, which is now Oklahoma State University. Majored in Animal Science. In 1950, when the 45th Division was activated, I was on a trip with a friend of mine in Europe. Fred Chapman, a friend of mine, and his folks took a trip every year someplace.

When I got back in August, the 45th Division was activated and I was in the National Guard at the time. And we were shipped off to Camp Polk, Louisiana, for about six or eight months. And then we got on a ship at New Orleans and went through the Panama Canal and went up to Frisco and picked up some colored troops. There was five thousand of us on the USS Gaffney. It took us thirty days from New Orleans to Hotaru, Japan.

We were in Japan for about nine months’ training. One result is, I knew how to type. So one morning at Camp Polk, Louisiana, they said—I was in the reconnaissance company at the time, and I was a cannoneer. I wasn’t a guy that was shooting the cannon, I was the

guy loading the cannon, in a tank. They said, "Who can type?" And two of us held up our hands.

They said, "Come with us."

The 45th Division had twelve thousand Oklahomans in it. Division strength is twenty-two thousand, so we had ten thousand people to bring in the Division. And they took us up there because we knew how to type. Taught us then to give the various MOS, they call it, which is your skill, to these incoming troops. And there were ten thousand of them.

And I later, because I knew how to type, got transferred into the Division Headquarters, was in the Morning Report section.

And then when we overseas and got ready to go to Korea, why they put me in charge of all the casualty reporting for the 45th Division. And that was my job in Korea. And during that period of time, Sergeant McDonald and a group of us did a Standard Operating Procedure on reporting casualties. And I understand they still use it today.

Chapter 07 - 4:16

Stick and Tin Can

John Erling: So then you were in the military for how long?

Frank Robson: I was in '50 to '52. And I came back in '52 and went back and graduated, came back in the spring of '52.

JE: Went back to?

FR: Went back to school and graduated in '53.

JE: When you were living here in Claremore, what did you do for entertainment? And I'm told if you'll talk about, you take a train to Tulsa to—

FR: Oh, yeah.

JE: To the Orpheum Theatre?

FR: Yeah.

JE: Can you talk about that?

FR: Yeah, yeah. We'd take a train and go to the show in Tulsa. Now of course, we had three local movies here. And you could go on Saturday and pay a dime and stay all day in the movie, if you wanted to, here in town. Oh we worked up basketball, worked up baseball. We had half a block that was empty, east of our house, with nothing on it and we had a lot of neighborhood kids. And at night we used to play "Red Rover, Red Rover, please come over."

When we were little guys, we played Hide and Seek. The other thing the boys would do, we'd go out on Dog Creek, east of Claremore. We'd either camp out or we'd go hiking out there. Mr. Swan that owned the dairy, would let us go up and down the creek. We just made our own fun. And we played Shinny, with a handle a homemade stick and a tin can. It's street hockey, it's Shinny. But we played Shinny on the streets and had a big croquet

contest about every year just east of the house. And all the neighborhood would come up and me and the boys and the girls would play croquet.

My dad was a great checker player, he loved to play checkers. He and Dr. Swift used to play checkers for hours. Yeah. We made our own fun.

But going to Tulsa was a big deal. That was an all day trip.

One time I remember in 1941 or '43, my mother and I went to Tulsa. And we came back on the Frisco Railroad, which is now Burns and Northern, Santa Fe. And we were the last train to come on the track before the flood washed out the railroad track. The force of the water, I will never forget what the force of the water was, the water force took a railroad rail and wrapped it around a huge tree in a U-shape. The force of the water, the magnitude of the force of the water was such.

JE: Did you go to Tulsa to the dentist there?

FR: No, we went to the dentist here. What we went to Tulsa for was we shopped. That's why you always went to Tulsa, to shop, or to see some entertainment sometimes.

JE: The rancher John Hughes in Bartlesville, did you guys meet up in the dentist's office? I don't know if he told me—

FR: Oh, yeah. He's, what happened was, this was an orthodontist is what it was. Yeah, in an orthodontist's office, and we didn't know each other. I went over to get my teeth straightened, so we would go, I believe it was every two weeks. Every two weeks or once a month. I believe it was every two weeks. And he was there. And I didn't know John and he didn't know me, you know? We were in the same waiting area there and he recalls that. I really don't recall it.

JE: And now you're best friends?

FR: Oh yeah. He's a great friend of mine.

JE: And the ranchers—

FR: Anyway, the dentist, or the orthodontist there, went for two years. And after two years of going there he finally said, "You know, I think we're going to have to pull that front teeth to ever pull those together."

And I told him, "No way." I said, "You can't take care of that in two years there's a good chance you won't take care of it in another two years." That's why I didn't have it done. My mother wanted me to, but this tooth right here, see how it's back in there?

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative), yep.

FR: Yeah, what he was trying to do was separate those out and make room for that tooth.

JE: Right.

FR: When what he should have done is pulled the tooth.

JE: Yep, yep.

Chapter 08 - 5:09**Frank Sells Cookware**

John Erling: So when you came out, you graduated from Oklahoma A&M in?

Frank Robson: Yeah, in '53.

JE: '53? Did somewhere along the line do you meet your wife?

FR: Well, I didn't till later.

JE: Okay. So then what did you do out of graduation?

FR: During that period of time? Okay, while I was in school I sold cookware.

JE: Was that because—

FR: Well, my dad said it was a great experience. You get to know people and you always sell. Everybody sells, whether they think they do or not. Everybody is a salesman. So I sold cookware in Stillwater, to mainly telephone operators and secretaries. And you'd make an appointment with them and see them that evening. And sometimes you'd bake a little cake on top of the stove for them.

JE: You baked a cake for them?

FR: Oh, yeah. Bake a little cake for them on top of the stove. So I thought, well, that's a good—I was making good money. So, I thought I wanted to do it full time. So, I went to work full-time after I got out of school. I worked for probably about a month.

If you don't mind, I'll tell you one funny story that happened. The people that were training you were just super. I mean, they were a class act on how to get appointments and so forth. So, we were on the streets of Shawnee, Oklahoma, in the morning. And what we'd do in the morning was we'd walk down the street and then we would see a young lady or two come together and we'd stop them. Well, there's an art to stopping people on the street.

So, the salesman that was teaching me, why he went down and he stopped this person. And just as he got to them, just as he got to them, he just wheeled and said, "Excuse me." And of course, they stopped. And he went on his spiel about, had a little gift for them, and if they would let us come do this demonstration for them where they lived and what time, and make the appointment, that kind of thing.

So he said, "Okay, now you do it."

So, this is me doing it now. So, here these two girls come down the street, and I start walking toward them before we started to pass them. And the two girls broke and ran and the trainer says, "No, no, no! What you do is act like you're just going to pass them. And at the last second, you say, 'Excuse me.' "

So, but anyway, we did very well. We had a commission. We were on commission and we could make, some say it was 35 percent of the cost of the product. And some of them

we could make 45 percent of the cost of the sale of the product. And it was three Esso Coal-rolled aluminum.

And you have funny things happen to you. I had one thing happen here in town that really, really made me quit selling. Mrs. Jones lived out next to the cemetery. I didn't know her, but I called on her and I showed her my cookware. And of course, I had a case, and I had a velvet cloth all over each piece of cookware.

And I took my case in and I showed the mother the cookware and all. And she said she wasn't interested in it. So the girl said, "Well, what I'd like to do is I'd like to buy a three-knife set for my mother."

I said, "Fine, we'll do that." So I wrote up the order. And what I didn't realize was that the girl was graduating from high school that night.

And the mother said, in real dour straits, you know, "We have to go get the graduation gown at the cleaners."

I said, "Well, I'll do that."

So the young lady and I jumped in the car and went down to the local cleaners here in Claremore. And got the gown and brought it back.

And when I got back, the mother had put all of my cookware inside the case and told me to leave. And I don't know what made her mad. But I said, "Well, here's your gift."

She said, "I don't want your gift."

And so I turned around and started for the door, I knew it was time to leave. I never did figure out what caused it all. And so just as I left, she picked up a pillow and hit me, threw it across the room and hit me in the back of the head. And just as I got to the front door, John, it had an etched glass, old, old frame, you know, etched glass in it. And as I went out the door, she slammed the door, and it caught my left foot. And it broke that glass in that door.

And I left there and I didn't look back. And I went home and sat on the front porch. I never felt so bad in all my life. And I decided right then I was going to do something besides sell cookware.

Chapter 09 - 8:00

Ice Business

Frank Robson: So anyway, that ended the cookware business there.

John Erling: Right.

FR: And so then I went on to work and I went to work at—I wanted to learn the livestock business, you know, from a practical standpoint. So, I got a job at Jarbo Commission Company at Tulsa Stockyard. As a weigh boy. And a weigh boy at the stockyards. What happens is that when they come in, John Erling, he sends twelve black calves into the

stockyards. And Harry Jones, he sends fifty black calves. And Bill Smith sends two old cows that they're going to slaughter. And they make a ticket, drive-in ticket. So, all this is separate.

My job then was to take those cattle out of the pens, keep them all separate as far as ownership, but they'd all be co-mingled. There'd be thirty, forty, fifty of them in one bunch, with maybe fifteen or twenty different owners. And you had to keep all that separate when you got to the scales. And you had to tell who it went to and who the shipper was. And then, of course, they made a scale ticket like that.

And that's when I really began to appreciate what other people do. Because I thought being a weigh boy at the stockyards would be a very simple thing to learn. But you have to be very intelligent and on your toes to keep twenty-five different owners on fifty or sixty cattle all mingled together, a lot of them the same color, the same sex. So it made me have a lot more respect for what somebody does that you think is not a skilled job.

JE: But here your family, your father was in the banking business?

FR: Yeah.

JE: That didn't seem to interest you apparently. You could have gone to work as a teller, but you didn't do that.

FR: Yeah. Yeah, he was never actively a banker, he was a stockholder.

JE: Okay.

FR: Not a banker. And he was later president of the bank, in fact, the president of the bank back then wasn't necessarily active, he was on the board and in the management of it.

JE: All right.

FR: But not in everyday.

JE: So it was an investment. But even so, but you were attracted to cattle and ranching?

FR: Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah. So anyway, I worked there for six or eight months and then an opportunity came up here that had an ice and cold storage plant, here in town. And my dad helped me buy that. It was Lightner Ice and Cold Storage.

JE: Okay, tell us for generations who don't know, because this was a time when we really didn't have refrigerators, I suppose.

FR: Yeah.

JE: So what about this ice? How would you sell this ice? And who would you sell it to?

FR: Well, what we did then, we had an eighteen-ton block ice plant. We produced eighteen tons of block ice a day, and the blocks of ice were three hundred pounds. And then we put in a ten-ton shell icemaker, which made crushed ice. And we distributed that to three wholesaler dealers, one in Locust Grove, one in Chelsea, and one in Catoosa. Of the block ice.

And then we started merchandizing the crushed ice and we put on individual, like you see in a convenience store now? Where you go and buy a bag of ice? Those kind of containers, refrigerated units? And we put probably thirty or forty of those out. And so we would deliver our product to these wholesalers that, in turn, sold to construction

companies and fishermen and so on. In these three different towns. Then this other was out of the retail business.

So anyway, that's what it was. And we sold beer. They were doing \$36,000 a year and we turned around and in about two years we were doing about \$240,000 a year in volume. And the way that we did that is that we put a slaughterhouse in the back. And so we custom-slaughtered hogs and cattle, and we cured hams and bacons, processed meat for people. We went out in the country and we slaughtered cattle and hogs, cattle mainly, and brought them in finished them up there.

JE: So you were in the butchering business?

FR: Yeah, we were butchers.

JE: Ice and butchering?

FR: Ice and butchering. And then we had lockers there. We had 550 lockers. And the lockers, of course, were just zero storage units. And people would go in and we'd process their meat and put it in a locker for them, and lease them a locker. And we'd come to this central point to get their product out, because then they didn't have home freezers.

So then later on what we did for a marketing, we took the phone book and did a complete survey of everybody that had a home freezer. And then we started an advertising program of what our products were to those people who had storage at home. We bought beef from Dougdale Packing Company in St. Jill, Missouri, and we got into the frozen food business. And we started selling a home freezer plant with meat and frozen foods.

JE: I didn't ask you what your major in college, what was it?

FR: Animal Science.

JE: Okay, you did answer. Okay, but you had this bent for business?

FR: Yeah.

JE: You had a business mind.

FR: Well, I suppose, but one point I really want to make is that when I got out of the Animal Science School in Stillwater, Oklahoma, I didn't have any accounting and I didn't have any finance. And when I got in a retail business, I didn't know "Come here," from "Sic 'em." As far as the accounting and that part of it went, you know. I knew that what I had to do was some basics as far as mark-up goes and all.

So what I had to do to augment my education is, first thing I did, I hired some real smart people, smarter than I was. Which is what you need to do all through life. And I hired Yuna Dean, who had her leg almost cut off in an automobile accident. She was bookkeeper at the Federal Savings and Loan here, and they let her go because it took her too long to recover. So I hired her, and she was still on crutches, to come down and set up my books for me.

Then I hired a fellow named Tommy Duncan from Tulsa, that had run a company over there for Mr. Rogers on 15th Street, very successful, to come help me in the processing and in the curing of hams and bacons, and in the beef end of it.

But what I really needed, I went up to, which was then, Oklahoma Military Academy, which now is Roger State University. And I took two accounting courses up there to give me the education. Because an Animal Science degree at OSU, it teaches you how. How to do is fine, but whether it's profitable or not is the secret. If you know how to do it well it doesn't make any difference if it's not profitable.

JE: Right. Right.

FR: And still today, they don't require accounting and finance in the Animal Science School. And I have done everything I can possible do to try to influence that. They have it as an elective, but they don't have it as a requirement.

And the veterinarians that get out of veterinary school at OSU, they've got no accounting or finance. They're business people. They're business people without the tools to make them successful business people.

JE: Yep, yep.

Chapter 10 - 6:40

Frank Gets Married

John Erling: There's a story about you and your ice machine broke down on the 4th of July.

Frank Robson: Oh yeah. What we did, we put one of these self-contained units in Nowata, Oklahoma. And it was coin-operated, you go up and you put your fifty cents in and you get a ten-pound bag of ice. You always have a malfunction in most businesses on the worst possible day, you know. And this was the 4th of July and there was water running down the street. And we were trying to service these people, and we had this big unit that was about six or seven feet wide, and about twenty-four feet long, refrigerated unit that we would load with crushed ice. And it went down.

And this is where John Hughes and Hubert Savage saw me. They were going to the lake or something. I was working my buns off and the water was running down the street, and it was a disaster. It was just totally a disaster.

JE: John wanted me to—

FR: Yeah. Ha-ha.

JE: Okay. So somewhere along the line here though you did meet your wife?

FR: Yeah, I met her when I had the ice plant.

JE: Okay, and her name?

FR: My wife's name is Ludmila, Ludmila Elliot was her maiden name. And her father and uncle had a ranch out at the top of Keithville Mill, out west of Claremore here. Hubert Savage and myself were at the Elk's Club on Saturday night, that was at the top of Will Rogers Hotel.

JE: Let's talk about the year about—

FR: This was in 1956.

JE: Okay, so you were at this—

FR: Yeah, about 1956. And so Mr. Elliot called and Mr. Elliot said, "Frank," where he found out where I was, I don't know. Probably called me house at home, my folks' house. And he said, "I've got a problem."

I said, "What is it, Mr. Elliot?"

He said, "I had a heifer get down in the feed trough upside down." He said, "I can't get her out." Said, "She's going to die, I need you to come out and butcher her."

Now this was on a Sunday night, so Hubert Savage and I, I said, "Hubert, you want to go?"

And he said, "Hell yes."

So, we went out and we got our kill truck that we had at the locker plant. And we went out and we lifted the heifer out of the feed trough and cut her throat and took the insides out.

And Mr. Elliot said, "Come up to the house." And Mr. Elliot, he was a great fellow, and he wanted to show us how much he appreciated it.

So we went up there and we started conversing and all, and that's where I met my wife. And she was there. We were kind of, we felt pretty good. We had had a snoot or two. I asked her later what she thought.

She said she thought I was the most overbearing person she'd ever met in her life. And that's the lady I wound up marrying. So anyway, we started dating and we got married in 1957. She's a wonderful lady.

We used to sit up out there at their ranch at twelve, one, two or three o'clock in the morning talking across the breakfast table. So we got married in 1957.

JE: And then your family. Tell us about the children you have.

FR: Oh, yeah. I got three boys. Lloyd came the next year, he was born November the next year. Then after that why Mark was born in 1960, and then Sam in '62. They all were raised here and to show you the difference in times, we were living in a little one-room apartment, and had this one son. And when the second son came we knew we had to get in a bigger house. And so, Kenneth Hall owned a sheet metal shop here in town and he and his wife had gotten a divorce and she got the house. And it was 1,050 square feet and she wanted to sell it.

I had had a hernia operation. After we got married I had a hernia operation and I was in the hospital. And she came to the hospital and said she wanted to sell it, said, "Either take it or I'm going to sell it to somebody else."

So we took it. It was \$13,750 for a whole house, the house, lot, and all the furniture in it. She just walked out the door, locked the door. The payment on the house was at 4 percent, \$79 a month. So that's where we raised our kids.

JE: And that was?

FR: That was 1409 North Dorothy Street, in northeast Oklahoma. And our kids all went to kindergarten here and elementary school and graduated. Lloyd went to OSU for about a year or two, but dropped out. Mark went to Oklahoma State University and graduated with a Business Administration with a major in Finance. And Sam went to Trinity University down in San Antonio, and later on came back and got an MBA from University of Wyoming, up in Laramie.

JE: Are they involved in any of your business today?

FR: We've all owned different properties together. They have basically their own property. Which my wife said, "I told them to get out and do something on their own. They did."

JE: When you were back at Oklahoma A and M, would N. Henry Iba have been back in those days when you were there?

FR: Yeah, oh yeah.

JE: And you remembered him?

FR: Oh yeah, Mr. Iba was great, a great fellow.

JE: You weren't a player or anything?

FR: Oh no.

JE: But you were a fan of the game?

FR: Oh sure.

JE: What are your remembrances of Mr. Iba?

FR: Oh probably when he won the national championship, which was the year before I went there, '45 and '46. And Jack Shelton played for him. His wife was from Vinita and I'd known her forever. Her father, Goodpastor was his name, and my father, rode back and forth to Oklahoma City. My dad was at one point in time in the '40s was the state highway commissioner. And Mr. Goodpastor was in the legislature. So we, what the relationship was there, so anyway.

Chapter 11 - 7:56

Commercial Real Estate

John Erling: Let's take you then, you're married and your ice business.

Frank Robson: The ice business, and I was making a little money one year and lose a little money the next year. And I had three kids. I finally decided that I was going to have to do

something different. The idea was to build about twelve convenience stores. And if I could get twelve convenience stores at about two thousand a month, that would be twenty-four thousand dollars a month, that would make me a good living.

So I started looking for that. So Git-N-Go people were the big convenience store people back then so we took an option on a piece of land here, then went to them and made a presentation. We knew they wanted a store. Mr. Bryant was the head of the company at that time. We negotiated that and we had to have \$325 a month to make it work, rent.

And they said, "Well, we can only pay three hundred." And we were in their office negotiating.

And I said, "Well, I can't do that. I'd love to build a store for you."

They said, "We just can't pay it."

I said, "Well, we appreciate very much your time," and we got up and started to walk out.

And they said, "Well, come back and let's talk about this."

I knew I had them right there. So we got the \$325. But the interesting thing I want to tell you about is how it all happened and how people help you. And if you don't help from somebody along the way, you got real trouble.

This land that we bought was owned by the captain of the Highway Patrol. The captain of the Highway Patrol back then, was told to get a person named Olan Downey and make sure that he was at a federal hearing in Washington, DC. There was a company that was sodding the highways and they were, had been charged with illegal acts and so forth in the sodding process. And there were three, two local people here. They were represented by a good friend of our present state senator then.

So, when we got ready to do this convenience store we went around in about three blocks of that store to tell the neighbors what we were going to do to get it zoned. And everybody agreed it was a great thing.

The senator, because the highway patrolman had been charged to get Olan Downey to Washington, DC, and the other two people were close political friends of his, why he didn't want us to get it zoned. Simply because he didn't like the fact that Reese, the highway patrol captain, was doing his job.

So, we got to the city council. And we started having the city council hearing and we started to go down there and the state senator had probably fifty people there against it. And so we said, "Hey, we can't do this." So, we delayed it for like two weeks or a month, and we came back. By that time, it had all died down.

They were talking about, "The kids are going to be running across the highway to get gum and they'll get killed. And there'd be traffic there and we can't have that." All these kind of things.

So anyway, we went back. There were nine people on the council and the vote was

4-4. And A. M. Huffman, a local insurance man here, said, “You know a lot of people are against this,” but he said, “you know we’ve got to progress in this town.” He said, “We can’t just be against everything.” And he said, “This young man has got a good project and there’s nothing wrong with it.” And he said, “I know some of you don’t like what I’m going to do, but I’m going to vote for it.” And the vote was 5-4 to zone that piece of property.

And we built the store and it still rents today. So, that’s the way we got started in the commercial real estate business.

The other help we had, John, was you couldn’t get a small loan with an insurance company then. So a friend of mine, Don Broadland, got us, he was a mortgage broker, he got us a \$31,000 loan at 7 percent for 20 years. And it was with the Oklahoma Tire and Supply Company Retirement Fund.

JE: Would that have been OTASCO?

FR: OTASCO, yeah, yeah. So what I’m saying is, if we hadn’t had help from Mr. Huffman, and if we hadn’t had somebody that could have helped us get started with a mortgage, a small amount—most insurance companies won’t mess with you unless it’s a half million, a million, million and a half, two million, five million dollars. But economics don’t work for you.

So, there’s a need today for those kind of mortgages for people trying to get started, because most people getting started don’t have five million dollar projects.

JE: Right. So somebody listening to this is going to say, “But your father was a board member of a bank—”

FR: Yeah, he’s a banker.

JE: Why didn’t you go to that bank?

FR: Well, long-term money banks are not interested in making twenty-year loans, on real estate at that time.

JE: Okay.

FR: Now we’re talking about a fixed rate loan. Now a bank will make you a variable rate loan, but the interest rate may be 2 percent today and ten years from now it may be 15 percent. And I’ve seen the interest rate in the ‘80s, prime rate going to 23 percent. So if you had a variable rate loan your interest rate was going to be 23 percent and it broke hundreds and hundreds of people, because they had variable rate loans. We had to have a fixed rate loan.

JE: So I’m thinking you were in the construction business then?

FR: No, no, we were the developer, what you would call the developer.

JE: Okay.

FR: In other words, what we did, we went over and we found the tenant. We found the land, we got

a general contractor, and we built it. And then we made our leases and we owned it. Yeah.

JE: And then why did you choose convenience business?

FR: No particular, no particular reason.

JE: Okay, so then—

FR: It was something we could do, you know.

JE: So you developed that one, and Git-N-Go, and moved in?

FR: Yeah, Git-N-Go, moved in. Had a laundry next door. Fifteen hundred square foot laundry and a twenty-four hundred square foot convenience store.

JE: So, is your ice company still operating at the same time?

FR: Oh, yeah, yeah.

JE: All right. So then you will go on to develop another property?

FR: What we did there, that started the development end of it. That's about the time that Sam Walton started his discount store business.

And that's the other thing, our family has always helped each other. In other words, it hadn't been just one person over here doing something. We've always helped each other, and we've always been in business together. And we've never had any family fights, which is a rare instance, you know.

Chapter 12 - 17:11

Sam & Helen Walton

John Erling: So okay, then you introduced Sam Walton doing that. But your sister, Helen?

Frank Robson: About Helen, that was unusual for a woman probably to even get a college degree back then, maybe, but the fact that she went into finance—

JE: What drove her into finance?

FR: Well, I think it was my dad's influence. He wanted her to get a degree where she was self-sufficient and where she knew about business.

And I think that's a mistake we make today is that more students don't take accounting and finance, because it applies not only to the business you're in, but it applies to everyday jobs and your personal finances at home.

JE: Exactly. I couldn't agree with you more.

FR: My sister Helen married Sam. It was during the war, really.

JE: 1943.

FR: 1943, yeah.

JE: How did Helen and Sam meet?

FR: Well, they met at the bowling alley.

JE: Where?

FR: In Claremore. We had a bowling alley here and he pulled that old line that old men have used forever and it still works. And that is, “Haven’t I seen you some place before?” So anyway, she was bowling and he met her at the bowling alley. Then they got acquainted.

Sam moved here because they—he lived here in Claremore versus Pryor, he was working at the munitions plant at Pryor. He thought he would probably go in the service, so there was no place to live in Pryor. So he found a room here and that’s the reason he wound up here.

JE: And he was born in Kingfisher, Oklahoma.

FR: Yeah, born in Kingfisher, his dad worked for a mortgage company. He grew up in Shell Bottom, Missouri. At one point in time, was the youngest eagle scout in the state of Missouri, fourteen years old. And saved a person’s life when he was about fourteen or fifteen. He was drowning in the river. Milked cows. And he had a girlfriend there. And he always told me the girlfriend and he had a secret signal. When she was at home she would pull a certain window shade down and that would let him know that she was at home.

Sam went on to the University of Missouri in Shelbina. They won a state championship. They were state championship. He was a quarterback there so he’s always been—an eagle scout at fourteen, he has always been an achiever. And he was at the University of Missouri too.

JE: So how did he get to Claremore?

FR: Well, he came to Claremore after he graduated from Missouri and went to work for J. C. Penny Company in Des Moines, Iowa. He came to Claremore to work at the munitions plant and the job was available so he came to work there. Because he thought he’d be drafted.

And he met Helen and they got married.

Then in his physical examination they found out that he had a heart murmur, and that’s the reason he didn’t go overseas. His brother Bud went overseas and flew B25 Bombers. And Sam, they wouldn’t send him overseas.

Two or three things happened, if you don’t mind I’ll tell you about them. They’re really interesting, I think. And that is that Sam, one of his jobs was that he was stationed at a prisoner of war camp in Southern Arizona in charge of something like ten thousand German prisoners, during World War II.

And my brother Stan was in the Navy, Lieutenant Senior grade in the Navy. And the Navy uniforms have lots of blue and lots of gold braid on them. Of course, everybody knows the Germans are very regimented and attentive and so forth. So my brother Stan wanted to go down to see Sam and Helen at this prisoner of war camp. So Sam wanted to show Stanford, my brother, the prisoner of war camp. And it was a huge facility. And they had an exercise ground encapsulated with a huge fence that had a walkway on top, where

the Germans would go out and do their exercise and so forth.

So anyway, Stan and Sam walked out on this walkway and the Germans looked up and saw this gold braid on my brother Stan. And all of a sudden, they said, "Ach fung," and ten thousand heels all clicked together at the same time. And Stan said it just scared the holy hell out of him.

Later on I was talking to Sam and he said, "They never had any discipline problems in with all those Germans." And he said, "They hung two or three of them." The Germans hung their own people, for either disorderly conduct or not obeying a senior officer or something like that. They had their own trial and took care of their own problems. Which was interesting to me.

JE: Weren't you the ring bearer in the wedding?

FR: I was the ring bearer in the wedding. Yeah.

JE: Of Helen and Sam?

FR: Yeah, yeah. At the Presbyterian church. And Helen was always active in the Presbyterian church and has held national offices. And she was active in what they called Sub-Debs here in Claremore. It was a girls organization and very active and all the girls in town belonged to it.

JE: Do you remember when Helen brought Sam home and brought him around your family?

FR: Oh yeah, sure.

JE: And your father, did he take to Sam? They approved of him right away?

FR: Yeah, yeah.

JE: What kind of a guy was Sam? Do you remember?

FR: Oh, he was great, just absolutely phenomenal. Probably one of the most thoughtful people I've ever known in my life. Yeah. I'll give you a good example of that. It was, he could have had anybody in the world build buildings for him. I told him I'd like to build some for him.

So, he gave me the opportunity to build about between ten and twelve shopping centers for him. And it wasn't any different than if he was going to hire you to do it. I mean, it was strictly an arm's length transaction. Everything in our family has been business, but it's always been arm's length, irrespective of whether it's father/son, father/daughter, cousins, whatever.

JE: So, this wasn't what we say a "brother-in-law deal"?

FR: No, no, no, no, no. No, no. It was a long ways from that. Anyway, we built about a million, a million two hundred thousand square feet of shopping centers and they all had a Walmart store in them.

The thing I was going to tell you about was that Jimmy Carter had him down to Georgia to hunt on one of these structured hunts where they have, you know, the wagon and the birddogs and they put the birds out and all. So as a consequence, rightfully so,

Sam had the President Carter down on his lease that he has down there. The Secret Service people came a week or ten days ahead of time and Bud Walton looked in their trailer, the Secret Service guy showed him their trailer with all their guns and ammunition in there. He said they had enough stuff in there to start World War III in that trailer. Night scopes and all these things.

So anyway, my point is, Sam Walton is entertaining the former President of the United States. Lloyd Elliot, Phil Smith, Ron Leeval, and myself were ten or twelve miles away at another camp hunting on a contract day basis. And Sam called me over there and he said, "Frank," he said, "we're having the President here tonight for dinner. We're having some guests over and we'd like for you to come over."

I said, "Well, I've got three people with me," and I told him who they were and he knew all these people.

Well, he said, "Bring them along."

So we went over and we had dinner with President Carter. Then around a campfire, everybody sat around the campfire and we went around the ring and everybody told who they were and what their business was and what their interests were and that kind of thing.

Well, my point is this, very few people that I know of if they were introduced, if they had the former President of the United States there as their guest are going to be thinking about having their brother-in-law, that's ten miles away, to come over and have dinner with them. Now he didn't have to do that, he was something else.

JE: Age wise was he much older than you?

FR: Oh, I don't recall what the age difference was, but he was older, yeah, yeah. Probably I'd say ten years older, something like that.

JE: So he was, obviously, a real great member of the family.

FR: Oh yeah, yeah.

JE: It was just like having your own blood around.

FR: Yeah, yeah. And the opportunities he gave. My brother Nick was running the ranch, and of course, we all had an interest in the ranch and he included my brother Nick in some of the things that Wal-Mart did as far as locations and things of that kind, you know.

My brother Stan built a store for him in Owasso. He was just as thoughtful a person as you could ever imagine anyone being.

JE: You remembered him though when he married Helen that he was just then, I mean, his first Ben Franklin store—

FR: Yeah.

JE: How did he get that?

FR: Well, he got that in Newport, Arkansas, and I think the guy's name is Jones that owned it. But anyway, he bought that and then he immediately, with his expertise in retail, he immediately had the—the volume, I think, was thirty-five thousand to start with and in about two, or three, or four years, well, he got it up to like a hundred fifty or a hundred eighty-five thousand, which was a huge volume back then. And my dad helped him some, get started.

JE: Did he grant him a loan?

FR: I think he loaned him some money, yeah.

JE: To buy that?

FR: No, he didn't loan him all the money, but he helped him some, you know, financially.

JE: So that when he bought the Ben Franklin store?

FR: Yeah, in Newport, Arkansas.

JE: And then he hadn't developed his concept yet for Walton?

FR: No, no, no.

JE: Walmart. And Walton's Five and Dime was a store, I believe then?

FR: Yeah. But Ben Franklin to start with and then after he got so many Ben Franklin stores then he started a Walton Five and Dime. And he had about twelve or fifteen stores. And they were individual stores.

JE: Did you help him along the way in any of this?

FR: No, not really, that was his own, that was his own doing. The thing that happened when he got the idea for the discount store business he went to City Products, which owned a Ben Franklin franchise, and proposed to them his idea on a discount store and wanted them to be his partner. And they didn't think it was a good idea, but they weren't interested in that.

And so then, he lost the store in Newport because he didn't have an option to exercise and extend the lease. And the building owner kicked him out and put his own son in the store. So, that's when Sam and Helen moved to Bentonville.

And I'll tell you one reason he moved to Bentonville was Helen didn't want to go to a major city and raise her family. They were going to go to St. Louis and she wanted to raise her family in a different place than that. So they went over to Bentonville. Bentonville had three thousand people in it then and the biggest deal in town was the Kraft Cheese Plant. And Grade B milk. All the dairies had Grade B milk and they all sold to the cheese plant, Kraft Cheese Plant.

And the difference in Newport, Arkansas, and I will never forget Sam telling me this, the difference in Newport, Arkansas, and the difference in Northwest Arkansas, the one thing that really shows you the frugality of the community, in Newport, very seldom did they have anybody come in to the store. They sold shades for windows, pull-down shades,

and asked for the ends off of shades that they had altered to fit the window, maybe they'd have somebody in Newport once a year.

When he got to Northwest Arkansas, it wasn't uncommon to have somebody come in once a month or maybe twice a month and ask to get the ends off of the shades that they had cut so they could patch their existing shades. So just a much more frugal people and most of the folks over there either had dairies, and there was a big apple orchard area at that time, they had lots of apples up in that area. But it was a difference, a great place to raise a family.

JE: So that frugality, did that help form his concept or his model for the store?

FR: I don't think so. No I don't think so.

JE: No? That they would be interested in discount they were so frugal?

FR: No, I don't think that had anything to do with it.

JE: Okay.

FR: That's just the make-up of the population where you have a huge farming community down in Newport. You know, large farms there. And up in Northwest Arkansas, here you got these individual operations, small dairies, apple farmers that watched every penny. Just a different mindset.

JE: Yep.

FR: And what I thought was really interesting about the difference in the two communities, you know.

JE: Maybe nationalities? Maybe it was anything like that?

FR: I don't think so. Yeah.

JE: Do you remember him, he would try things, obviously, in his store.

FR: Oh yeah.

JE: Do you remember him talking about that and trying?

FR: Oh yeah, he made a lot of mistakes. He made a lot. They'd try it and if it didn't work they'd try something else.

JE: Yep.

FR: And he was always, we went to Mayo together, go through the Mayo Clinic. While we were at Mayo, in Rochester, Minnesota, well, he looked at every store in Rochester. You know, he'd go in and talk to the store manager and ask him how business was and see how they were merchandising. And some stores he'd ask them about their under counter stock and have them show him their under counter stock and how they took care of it. He was always looking for new ideas, and he was the best judge of people that I've ever seen. And he never forgot anybody's name. It's kind of like the old chef, you know, they had talking about the twelve steak houses. He said, "You know, Ruth's is good, there's all kinds of

different steak houses.”

Then they asked the chef and said, “Which one do you go to?”

He said, “The one where they can remember my name.”

And that’s the way Sam was, once he’d met you he knew your name, which is a real art.

JE: Is it true that he’d just drive around in a pickup truck and he was not a—

FR: Oh yeah. He had an no flair to show anybody that he was bigger or better than they are.

And the other thing that he did, he was a great competitor. He used to play make-up basketball game when he was sixty-five years old. We’d go to the gym and have make-up basketball game.

JE: And you played?

FR: Oh yeah. And he played tennis, we played tennis, he would always beat me at tennis. I could beat him at ping pong every now and then.

JE: It sounds like you and Sam developed a really good relationship.

FR: Oh yeah, we were—

JE: It wasn’t just because you were related?

FR: No.

JE: It was a spirit.

FR: No, no, he was a super guy, yeah. He was—

JE: And then we should say Sam and Helen, their children and their names.

FR: Yeah, yeah. Sam and Helen’s children is Rob Walton is the oldest. Then John was the second son, then Jim, the third son, and then Alice, Alice Walton.

Chapter 13 - 4:24

How to Make a Deal

John Erling: But while you knew him you came up, you were a retailer yourself.

Frank Robson: Yeah, well.

JE: To some degree. You were in the ice machine business—

FR: Yeah, but we were really, and that’s one thing that I found out, at the same time we were in the cattle business. We had purchased a ranch, in addition to what we had down there in Catoosa. We had purchased a ranch up in Craig County. My father helped me with that and my brother Nick and I owned it fifty-fifty.

My dad was a great deal maker. He got together with Frank McNab and there was a great coal deposit up there so he worked it out with Frank McNab where there was 1,680 acres and there was about five million tons of coal on it. And we were going to get enough advance royalty that it would make the payments on it. So we up and we looked at it. And there was two old gentlemen that owned this property up there. They had 4,700 acres of

ranch land, 1,200 acres of farm land. And they died. One never had any children and the other one never married, and their name was Rasley Forest and Samly Forest. But they had lots of sisters. So there was twenty-one heirs to the property and they wanted to sell it. This was in 1959, and it was advertised in the Wall Street Journal for cash offer. And they got an offer of fifty-five dollars cash. So they decided to divide it up and it'd bring more. And so they sold the easterly part, about 1,200 acres for \$75 an acre. We bid \$70 an acre on the west part.

My dad, we got a call at home, my brother and I happened to be there, my father was there, and Mr. Wheatley, the lawyer for the estate, called and he said, "L. S.," he said, "we can't take your offer of \$70." He said, "We'll take \$75." And he told my dad, he said, "Now I've got all twenty-one heirs in my office here and that's what it takes to buy it." So there was five dollars difference in 1,680 acres, only \$8,850 and I told my dad that we ought to go ahead and take it.

He said, "No, no." He said, "We just can't pay the \$75." He said, "We'll pay that \$70 and our offer is still good." So he hung up, and I just about had a conniption fit. I was sweating, I broke out in sweat, you know, to lose a deal for \$8,000 when we never a deal worked out to pay for it.

So he said, "They'll call back in about thirty minutes and I think they'll take our offer."

And I said, "Okay."

Well, in about thirty minutes the phone rang and Mr. Wheatley said, "L. S., we're going to take your offer of \$70." He said, "Well, that's fine."

My dad said this, he said, "Anytime that you've got twenty-one heirs that are waiting in an office with a lawyer, what they are interested in is the money. And five dollars an acre is not going to make a whole lot of difference."

JE: 'Cause that's why they gathered, that's why they gathered.

FR: So anyway, that was going on all the time that we had the ice plant and we were building this little convenience store. And then we started building stores for Sam.

JE: And how long did that go on, building stores for Sam?

FR: Oh, we built a center a year for about fifteen to eighteen years. Something like that. And we built little strips that are here in town and we built the supermarket here in town, sixty thousand foot supermarket. You know, we built some other stuff around, and we bought and built some convenience stores for Git-N-Go. And we've got centers in Claremore and Pryor and Vinita and Pittsburgh, Kansas, and Sapulpa, Broken Arrow, Tulsa. We used to have one Seminole, sold it, and Stillwater.

Chapter 14 - 4:37**Profit Sharing**

John Erling: There was a point here where Sam and Helen, their worth was continuing to increase.

Frank Robson: Yeah.

JE: And beyond, because you were being successful yourself and all, but theirs was, obviously, continuing to increase.

FR: Oh yeah.

JE: Did that change dynamics? Did people act different or—

FR: No.

JE: Talk to me about that a little bit.

FR: No, didn't change Helen's personality, didn't change Sam's personality, or Bud Walton's personality one iota.

JE: Yeah.

FR: And that takes a special breed of cat to do that. Because a lot of times we become enamored with our importance, you know. And not them.

JE: Yeah.

FR: And the other thing they did to include us, they sold when Sam had the Walmart store number 12 before they went public, here in town, why he sold Nick 48 percent interest, my brother Nick, interest in this store, and sold me a 48 percent interest in this store here in town. So that's kind of how we were tied together and—

JE: Well, in that case, he was reaching out because you were family. But by George, you had to come up with your own money and make that all happen.

FR: Oh yeah, sure, but still, the point I want to make is that we've all helped each other. And they've probably helped me more than I've helped them. But anyway, that's just the way it was.

JE: Yeah.

FR: And as an example, in Pryor, Oklahoma, he wanted a store in Pryor, it's store number 22. Number 12 was here in Claremore. It took me two years to put together seven different parcels of property. The last parcel I put together was an Indian lady by the name of Vina Yates. She lived with her son-in-law, Mr. Brown, and her daughter. A lovely person. But she didn't want to sell, she wanted to trade.

So, I looked at every farm in Mays County trying to get one I could trade for Ms. Yates's place and finally one day, she said, "If you'll buy that farm up on Pryor Creek, north of town, I'll trade you this."

So, I went up and made a deal with the guy to buy it and then came back and on a big chief tablet wrote a contract out and had her sign it and me sign it to make sure nobody changed their minds in the meantime, you know.

But it took me two years to put that site together. And Sam waited for me to do that. Now a lot of people would have just said, you know, "It's not fast enough, you're not moving fast enough. We can't have that." And we working at it every day. And we'd traded for some of it, we bought some of it, and it took seven different pieces to put the store location in the best location you could.

JE: It shows the tenacity of somebody like yourself that just kept at it constantly. You too could have given up.

FR: Oh yeah.

JE: Sam might have walked away and said, "You're on your own," but you too could have given up and you didn't.

FR: Yeah, yeah.

JE: I mean, as students listen to what we're talking about today, this is a real life lesson for them to hear what you're saying. If you believe in this goal then don't give up, you've got to keep after it.

FR: Yeah. So anyway, then of course, from there he went public, you know.

The other thing he did that he included all his people in his business. You know, everybody was part of the company and the profit share. Georgia Sanders that worked for him here in town at this store number 12, when she retired from the company she had \$259,000 is what she retired with. When she cashed out of the profit share plan.

There was a truck driver that I remember that had \$750,000 and he drove a truck for Walmart. And had been worked there probably twenty years or more. But still, he included the people in his business.

Chapter 15 - 4:03

Sam and Chicken Catchers

John Erling: Kind of recap what you and what they should draw from the life of Sam Walton and his business life. What are some life tools, shall I say?

Frank Robson: First thing you need to be excited about what it is you're doing. Don't do it just because it's going to make you a few more dollars than something else. And I think that's what he did. He always wanted to be a retailer and he enjoyed it. He worked like a Trojan. Nobody ever worked any harder than Sam Walton did.

A good example of that is, he would go to work at 4:30, 5:00 in the morning at Bentonville. And he'd go down to the donut shop, and the only people at the donut shop at 5:00 in the morning at Bentonville at that time was Sam Walton and the chicken catchers. Nobody else was up. And the chicken catchers were professional chicken catchers. They would catch a chicken between every finger, so a professional chicken catcher would go

in the chicken house and he could go in with his fingers and pull out eight chickens at one time and put them in the coop. And they'd load the coop on the truck and then take the truck to the processing house where they would slaughter and process the chickens.

And today they do it with a vacuum system. They still have some chicken catchers, but that was all there was back then was chicken catchers. There wasn't any vacuum system. Now they've got a vacuum system where they suck the chicken up in the vacuum system into the cage.

JE: Okay.

FR: But anyway, the only people up at 5:00 in the morning at the donut shop was Sam Walton and the chicken catchers. Professional chicken catchers. He went to bed early, he went to bed at 8:00, 8:30 at night. And read every newspaper there was. I mean, he would just scan for business opportunities to see what other retailers are doing and what their prices were and what their specials were and all.

And the nice thing about it, if you played tennis with him, you know, if I beat you, John, at tennis, I may say, "Well, gosh, John, I beat you today." Sam never would say that. If he beat you at tennis he'd say, "Well, your game was off a little bit today. Your back hand wasn't just what it normally is." I never heard him taunt anybody in anything he did. He just had a way about him that—

JE: Yeah, real humble man.

FR: Well, always a respect for the other person. If you were doing something wrong he didn't mind telling you that you were wrong. But Lee Scott, that used to be the president of Wal-Mart Stores, Lee Scott didn't treat some of the truck drivers right at Walmart. Sam called him in and said, "Lee," and he had talked to the truck drivers and found out what had happened, had gotten all the details. And he said, "Lee," he said, "what you did wasn't right." And he said, "You either go and apologize to the truck drivers or you need to find another job." And Lee Scott went over and apologized to the truck drivers.

JE: And he remained on?

FR: And he remained at Wal-Mart and was eventually president of Wal-Mart Stores. Yeah.

JE: That's a great story.

FR: Yeah. I'm just saying he could, he wasn't soft, I don't mean to say that, he wasn't soft. But he was as fair as anybody that I have ever known.

Chapter 16 - 2:15

Walton Family

John Erling: Meanwhile while this is happening, Helen is raising the babies.

Frank Robson: Raising four boys, yeah, well, three boys and a girl.

JE: Did she ever get to use her finance degree?

FR: Oh yeah. She was, Helen had a big influence on Sam just to what they did. They talked about their business and all. She was supportive in what he was doing. I've heard of some instances where wives are not particularly supportive and all. But this wasn't the case, she was very supportive in what she did.

JE: So, she talked along with him and was very interested? He could come home and talk to her about the business?

FR: Oh sure, yeah. Yeah, they were great communicators. And that to me is the secret of a good marriage. If you can communicate everything you'll work everything else out. When you don't communicate is when you get problems.

JE: Right.

FR: And what he did, he took the families on vacations. They would take thirty-day trips up the western part of the United States and camp out. They went up and down the Buffalo River I don't know how many times. You know, he would work hard, but he would take a certain period of time, a segment of time, and he took off thirty days one time and they went all over the United States and wound up in New York City.

JE: He had his fishing gear and his children in New York City? His boat and all?

FR: Yeah, oh yeah. Had a canoe on top of the car and they went in looking like a bunch of tramps into a play that they wanted to see. So yeah, it's a Horatio Alger story.

JE: Yep, it's interesting your families, you are RCB Bank, Walmart, Sam Walton, RFS Bank.

FR: RFS Bank, right.

JE: So, you really and you're competing against each other.

FR: Oh yeah, yeah. And Jim's a good competitor too, he is really a good banker.

JE: The son of Sam?

FR: Yeah.

JE: And you are friends, of course?

FR: Oh yeah.

JE: But you still have this business that you're competing in.

FR: Oh yeah, well, Jim is a stockholder in our bank.

JE: Okay.

FR: Yeah, it was a family. My dad divided everything up so each one of us got an equal amount of stock in Rogers County Bank.

Chapter 17 - 4:33

Henry Wells

John Erling: There are some stories—

Frank Robson: Yeah.

JE: And you have to talk about Henry Wells.

FR: Oh yeah, okay.

JE: The Henry Wells story.

FR: All right.

JE: And who was he?

FR: Yeah, Henry Wells was a notorious bank robber, cowboy and a notorious bank robber back years and years ago. The way this came about was John Hughes in Bartlesville, was telling me about Henry Wells when he was growing up. John used to go to the beer parlor, the snooker parlor, and Henry Wells was the guy that racked the balls. And Henry Wells was way up in years. And Henry Wells used to tell John and all the young high school boys about the fact that he used to rob the banks. And if the bank in Burbank, Oklahoma, got twenty dollars in it he would rob it. And they would all kind of laugh at him.

So John was a director of the National Livestock Credit Corporation, Oklahoma City, and I was also a director of the National Livestock Credit Corporation. And we were in a meeting. We had an annual meeting every year and we were at this meeting and the inspector that inspects the cattle, they make cattle loans at National Livestock Credit, and a fellow by the name of White, Mr. White was telling us a story that his mother had told him. And his mother had told Jim White this story numerous times and it was the same every time.

And what had happened was, Jim White's mother and grandmother had come out of the grocery store at Wynona, which is south of Posco, Oklahoma on Highway 99, had done their grocery shopping. And there was a bank across the street, and just as they came out of a store the bank robber across the street had robbed the bank and he was trying to get on his horse. The horse was going in a circle and he couldn't get his foot in the stirrup.

About that time, the butcher ran out of the store behind them where they had been doing their grocery shopping, still had his apron on, and a rifle, and he shot the horse dead. And they captured the bandit. And they looked in the money bags and there wasn't any money, there was confetti. And what had happened was, the banker and the robber had conceived this robbery so that they could split whatever the proceeds were that they were going to take out of the bank.

And lo and behold, the banker robber was Henry Wells, the same guy that was lining up the snooker balls at the snooker parlor in Barnesville, Oklahoma, when John Hughes was a teenager growing up.

JE: That's funny.

FR: Yeah, that's a heck of a story. One of the funny stories, you know, you have funny hunting stories? When Sam had President Carter down in south Texas on his hunting lease down there, why they went out hunting. Of course, they had the Secret Service people had to

go with him and all. And there was a fellow down there that kind of heads the hunting up on this ranch and his name is Walter Shields. So the dogs all came down on point. And the birds weren't going to get up. So Walter Shields walked into this little grove of trees to get the birds up. And the birds got up.

And about that time, Walter looked down and he was standing on top of a rattlesnake. And all of a sudden, he jumped off the rattlesnake, they shot the snake, shot him in two. The bird dog went in and half of the snake with the head on it bit the bird dog on the nose.

So after all this melee was over with they asked Walter Shields, they said, "Walter," they said, "why didn't you pick up a club and hit that snake in the head or do something to it?"

And I thought Walter's response was the best I've ever heard. He says, "You just don't do your best thinking when you're standing on top of a rattlesnake."

JE: That's great, I love it. That's a great story. That was great.

Chapter 18 - 2:56

Dinah Shore

John Erling: Okay, through your notes there are there things we haven't touched on that you could bring up?

Frank Robson: Oh I was thinking about, there's one thing that happened during Sam's military days. He was stationed later in Ogden, Utah, but they live in Salt Lake City. This was when their first son was born, Rob.

And so my mother and I went out to Salt Lake City, and that's when I met the Italian fellow on the train that had been a prisoner of war. So we got out to Salt Lake City and Sam asked me one day if I'd like to go up to Ogden, Utah. And he was stationed at the base where all the paraplegics and amputees and all coming back from World War II, the hospital was there. And it was something that I'll never forget. And the reason he took me up there was because Dinah Shore, the famous singer, was coming through to entertain the troops.

So we got there and we went in this huge auditorium and there were several hundred, I can't remember how many, I'd say fifty hundred to two thousand soldiers and sailors in there. Some of them had one arm off, some of them had one hand off, some of them had one leg off, some had both legs off. There were several quadriplegic individuals there. And she was there to entertain the troops.

She came in with her piano player, no music, no words, entertained the troops there for, it was supposed to be an hour and fifteen or twenty minutes, and some two hours later, she finally wound up the entertainment. They wouldn't let her leave. And the thing about it was, she had a program, a short program, and then she asked for different songs

that they'd like to—requests they'd like to hear. And she knew the words to every song that they requested. And the piano player knew the music to every song that they requested.

JE: Yep.

FR: And this went on for over two hours, and I was just amazed at the fact, first, that she would come and take that time to entertain those guys and what their sacrifice had been for their country. And then the fact that they knew all the songs and all the music and she knew all the words and never looked at a sheet of music or any words to any of the songs.

And those amputees, they ate that up, I thought the ceiling was going to fall down they gave her such a rousing reception, you know.

JE: Yeah, it's a great memory.

FR: Yeah, great memory for me, yeah, really was.

Chapter 19 - 4:31

Ranching Business

John Erling: But here we are today and you're in the ranching business?

Frank Robson: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: And what is it that you like about the ranching business?

FR: Oh, I think the number one thing is you're just close to nature. And I enjoy just going out and looking at a wonderful ranch. I don't have to do any work or own any part of it or, you know, it's beautiful—

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

FR: —what we have. And I enjoy, I used to buy a lot of my own cattle. There is no greater accomplishment than going out and buying one individual animal at a time, and then put them all together where you make them look like they all came from the same place, as opposed to being a big one and a little one and a thin one and a fat one and a small-bone and a big-bone. So all those animals are even enough and enough alike that they all fit together. And that's an accomplish in itself.

And then the other thing is the nature part of it. We've got, we're so blessed in Northeast Oklahoma, in the state as far as that goes, but particularly in Northeast Oklahoma, where we have the tall grass, the little bloom stem, ended in a switch grass. And one of the things that makes ranching profitable in this area is the fact that the cattle had come off here, ready to market, to the feedlot are one of the few places in the United States at that particular time of the year that are ready to go to the feedlot. Everything else comes later, either earlier or later. And as a consequence, it normally makes for a good market.

JE: What do you think about ranch land and people who want to get into it? It's tough now, isn't it?

FR: Oh yeah, yeah.

JE: Unless you're probably born into it?

FR: Oh it's a high capital investment. Your return is limited simply because if you have a grass operation, why you sell your cattle once or twice a year. Whereas a normal retailer, I'll give you a quick example. Walmart turns their chickens 240 times a year, so if they get a chicken in Walmart, a day and a half later it's gone. So they take that dollar and they turn that dollar 240 times a year.

Whereas if you're in the ranching business, you're going to take the dollar that you've got in your calf and you're going to sell that dollar once a year. So you can see if you make just a little bit and turn it 240 times a year—

JE: Right.

FR: Then it's going to be much more profitable than it is just taking your dollars and turning them once a year. So the business end of it, it's a difficult business to be in. The capital investment is the main thing.

JE: Yep.

FR: And the best way to get started, I think, is a land lease. If you could get a long-term land lease then you don't have that high capital investment. And you've got a fixed cost of what your overhead is going to be. And then your veritable cost is going to be your labor and your feed and all those things. So I think the way to do that for somebody who's not in it and wants to get in it is through some kind of a lease process.

JE: So you have ranching, tell me the businesses you're in today.

FR: Well, mainly we are in the ranching business. We've got to ranches up in Craig County and we've given our children all the interest in the ranch down in Wagoner, Rogers, and Tulsa Counties.

Then we have a real estate company that owns the shopping centers. So it's in the real estate end of it. And then we are in the banking business with RCB Bank.

Chapter 20 - 3:48

Giving to Community

John Erling: But you believe it's very good to give back to your community. You have the beautiful facility here, the Performing Arts Center in Claremore, that you, your wife, your family contributed largely to in a major way. That has to feel good that as you leave this earth that you leave behind something to help others.

Frank Robson: Well, yeah, I think that's important. I think every member of our family feels the same way. I always liked what George Kaiser said. George Kaiser said, "If you're going to give something to somebody, give it to them while their hands are warm." And I think that's important. If you're going to do something you need to do it now, not thinking that after

you're gone something's going to happen.

My wife and I helped build this Performing Arts Center, and of course, what we did was we gave it to the school, the school needs it. And as Dizzy Dean said, and he used to get after Dizzy Dean, the old pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals, he said, "Well, you're bragging too much. You're bragging about how good you are at pitching."

And Dizzy Dean's answer was, he said, "If you done it you ain't bragging."

JE: Great, great.

FR: So anyway, I have to brag a little bit about the Performing Arts Center. It is a beautiful facility. And Wally Wood and Craft and Associates was the architects. We did it on a private letting and we picked five contractors that we'd had experience with, to build it. And each one of those trades, the electrician, the plumber, the masonry contractor, all the different trades, that we picked five individual owners of each one of those trades. And those five general contractors had to use one of those five people in the various trades that we had picked. So we picked the best people and we built it and we had a lot of support from the community. The school gave us the land to build it on.

JE: The school being?

FR: The Claremore Public Schools, yeah, Claremore Public Schools. And then we had a lot of help from the community on the seats. We sold seats in the facility and we raised about \$225,000 by selling seats in the facility. And the community was extremely supportive of that.

I've seen a lot of great shows there. The opening show was *The Beauty and the Beast*. It was a full house.

JE: That has to make you feel real good.

FR: Oh yeah, oh yeah. And it's 70,000 feet, 70,000 square feet. And it's got some of the facilities in it has a Speech, Drama, and Debate room. And then we have a Black Box Theatre that seats about 150-170, it has the same acoustics, has the same everything the main theatre does. The facility where they build sets, that's very good. Then we have the band in the back. And with offices and storage and everything like you'd like to have it. And then we have the choir in the back also. And the stage is 114 feet wide and 45 feet deep. And we had doors on that to keep any sound out of the production area that are 12 feet wide and 17 feet tall and are insulated and weigh 4,000 pounds each. And you can move them with your finger.

And then we have a band shell, we have a lift, have a spiral lift for the orchestra pit, and it seats 1,037 people. And the acoustics are just wonderful in it. And it does make you feel good.

JE: To hand that off to public schools because you were educated here in public school?

You're a strong believer in supporting public schools? The community is fortunate to have you maintain that vision.

FR: Yeah. And we've got great public schools here. Rich Mosier manages our companies, on the school board. We have had several academic scholars from the national level and state level. Academic All-Americans at state level and also national scholars here. And one of our—we won the Academic Bowl multiple times, State Academic Bowl multiple times.

We have in our junior high school we have a what they call a fab-lab that was started by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, excellent teacher, David Eisenbark.

Then we've just started, in our high school we've just started a pre-engineering program, this year. And in four years we'll have a full engineering program.

Chapter 21 - 3:48

Accounting and Finances

John Erling: Have you been able to emphasize in the school system here how important accounting would be?

Frank Robson: Oh I've tried to. But probably not as much as I have at the university level. Because what we did at the university level, I badgered them so much was that I got them to run a survey. They do a student survey every year at OSU. And it cost every student who goes there two dollars. They were surveying the kids that had just been out of school a year or two. Well, those are not the kids you want to survey to find out what your problems are. What you want to do is survey somebody who's been out five years, somebody that's been out ten years, somebody that's been out fifteen years, that have seen possibly what the lack of certain things has meant to them in their progress in their company, or their job working for somebody else.

So anyway, we got them to include in this survey certain questions at OSU about Would more accounting and finance have helped you in your present job or with the company that you're working for? And then the second questions was, Would more accounting and finance have helped you in your personal life? And the answers came back, these were people that had been out of school one year, five years, ten years, fifteen years, the answers came back 64 percent of the people answered that more accounting and finance would have helped them in their present job. And 62 percent said that more accounting and finance would have helped them in their personal life.

And I couldn't, for the life of me, get them to change the curriculum to include finance and accounting as a requirement. They have options, they can take that.

JE: Right.

FR: So anyway, yeah.

JE: Well, that's a great lesson for those students who will be listening to us now. And I want to thank you for giving us—

FR: Thank you, John.

JE: About two hours of your time here, and even more. And so as you talk about it, you've lived a blessed life?

FR: Oh yeah. I've had a lot of people, a lot of help from a lot of people. My folks were excellent teachers. My dad always talked about business over the dinner table while we sat down to have dinner. Well, working on the ranch sometimes we wouldn't get in till late. And I never came home that my mother didn't have dinner ready for us. Now it may be, we always went to work at 7:00 at the ranch and got home, we quit at 6:00, every summer. So when we got home, why dinner was ready.

JE: And you then talked business, talked about the ranch?

FR: Yeah, talked about the ranch, what we did.

JE: Which kind of impresses on us the importance of families having meals together.

FR: They need to talk, they need to communicate.

JE: Right. It's not so much about the food, it's about the talk.

FR: Yeah, yeah. You bet.

JE: All right.

FR: Well, John, thank you.

JE: Thank you. This is very good. As you know, this goes on a website and because of today's technology generations beyond us can listen back to what we've talked about today. And that's what the purpose of this whole thing is about.

FR: Thank you.

JE: Thank you.

Chapter 22 - 0:33

Conclusion

Announcer: (music) This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories.

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