

## John Brooks Walton

A career as an architect and author gives him a unique view of Tulsa's residential history.

### Chapter 01—0:55

#### Introduction

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**Announcer:** John Brooks Walton is an Oklahoma-born architect and architectural historian.

Raised in Ponca City, he moved to Tulsa after receiving his architectural degree, and marrying Margaret (Mag) Alice Stanley. He is best known for his long and celebrated architectural career with design, restorations, and books that encompass many famous landmarks.

Walton not only designed houses for his architectural clients, but purchased and restored historic houses. Some of these, including the Simpson house and the Skelly Mansion became home to the Waltons.

In 2003, when he was seventy-four, he began his artist career in the medium of acrylic on canvas. Walton's Line, by Oklahoma poet laureate Francine Ringgold was written for John and artfully describes his unique painting style.

Listen to the rich voice of John Walton as he shares his oral history on *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.

### Chapter 02—6:12

#### The Waltons

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**John Erling:** My name is John Erling. Today's date is November 14, 2012. John, would you state your full name and your date of birth?

**John Walton:** I'm John Brooks Walton. I was born April 28, 1929.

**JE:** Brooks? Where does Brooks come from?

**JW:** Brooks was my mother's maiden name.

**JE:** You were born in the year of the stock market crash.

**JW:** Yes, right before the crash.

**JE:** Well, and it happened September 18th, Black Thursday.

This makes your present age?

**JW:** Eighty-three.

**JE:** Where are we recording this interview?

**JW:** We are recording it in my office studio in Tulsa.

**JE:** And as a matter of fact, there's a story about this house office.

**JW:** Yes, it has a very interesting story. It was built in 1913, and it was the manager's cottage for the Manhattan Court Apartments, which were down at 11th and Boston. They were taking those down to make a parking lot and this house was going to be torn down. And I was fortunate enough to find it. They gave it to me, I moved it, and it's perfect.

**JE:** Yeah it is, it is just great. Where were you born?

**JW:** Kaw City, Oklahoma, old Kaw City. Old Kaw City is now underwater because of the Kaw Dam and Kaw Lake. But there is a new Kaw City, which, of course, is much smaller than the original one.

But my family relocated to Ponca City when I was seven, so I call myself a Ponca-Citian.

**JE:** But you did live in the Kaw City?

**JW:** Yes, yeah.

**JE:** And what year then about did they pump water in so they could—

**JW:** Oh my.

**JE:** ...dam up the lake?

**JW:** It went on forever but I would say about in the '70s. They had quite a time relocating Kaw because, first of all, the population was going down and down. Actually what I've heard is that Ponca City really didn't want Kaw City to relocate because their town site was prime waterfront. So they were not that encouraging about it.

But there was a family in Blackwell, the Peals, I believe was their names, they gave the money that it took to relocate Kaw.

**JE:** Let's talk about your mother. Your mother's name?

**JW:** Maddie Brooks.

**JE:** Where was she from? Where was she born?

**JW:** Her father was in the Run and they homesteaded out of Kildare, Oklahoma.

**JE:** You say the Run, and you're talking about the land run.

**JW:** Yes, the land run.

**JE:** Of '89?

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** Her father was in on that run?

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** And he came from where?

**JW:** Kansas.

**JE:** So he homesteaded then where?

**JW:** Out of Kildare, Oklahoma, which is north of Ponca City, I think fifteen miles or something like that. It's just a ghost town now.

**JE:** Did your mother talk about land run stories at her father?

**JW:** No she really didn't. She really didn't. Of course, I was familiar with the land run because of growing in Ponca. And when I decided to write my two books on the historic homes of Ponca City and Kay County I realized that in our family library we had a book that was put out by the Ponca City DAR in 1939, called *The Last Run*. And they have republished it. So it was a wealth of information for me.

**JE:** That would be your grandfather we're talking about. What was his name?

**JW:** John Brooks.

**JE:** What was your mother like? Describe her personality.

**JW:** Mother was a very warm and giving person. I had a sister that was six years older than I, and I had a sister that was five years younger than I, so the siblings really didn't have much in common until we grew up and had our own families.

Unfortunately, Mother died of cancer at the age of fifty-eight, but she was certainly a very warm and giving person.

**JE:** How old were you then when she died?

**JW:** I was twenty-seven.

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

**JW:** Bray Earl Walton. He was from the town of Gage, Oklahoma, in western Oklahoma. He and his family were there. They eventually relocated to Blackwell, Oklahoma, and lived there for several years.

**JE:** What was he like?

**JW:** Father was a very hard worker, very dedicated to his work. He was a salesman for a wholesale produce company and would travel on the road each day, would come back at night. I really did not appreciate my father that much until I began having children and realized the responsibilities that he had had. So we had a good relationship.

**JE:** You didn't appreciate him because of the way he treated you or—

**JW:** Oh no! No, not so much that. He was, how's the best way to say this? He worked very hard and provided for our family very adequately, but he wasn't that much of an outgoing person as far as the family was concerned.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JW:** He was a wonderful salesman. So that's sort of our relationship.

**JE:** The first house that you would remember that would be the one that you were living in, obviously. What was that like?

**JW:** The first house that I lived in I was born there. The doctor came to the house and I was born there in Kaw City. We did not own the house, it was on quite a bit of land. It had a servant's house in the back, garage, a washhouse, a tin little stable. The original owner had a couple of horses, and it had a gravel tennis court, which we never used, but it was there. We lived there until I was six.

And then we purchased a house and lived there for a little over a year before we relocated to Ponca City. And we took the house with us. We moved the house from Kaw City to Ponca City and added on to it. Put a fairly large addition on the back of the house. I have many, many memories of that house.

## Chapter 03—4:45

### John Always Knew

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**John Erling:** Were you taken with design as a very young four- or five-year-old?

**John Walton:** Three- or four-year-old. I always knew I wanted to be an architect. I would go with my parents to a friend's house, they would play cards or something. I would sit there and memorize the room and all the furniture in it, and I could tell you when I went home exactly what I saw. So it's something I always wanted to be.

**JE:** Even at four years old?

**JW:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** You knew that?

**JW:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And then you were taken with the house and furniture both, is that true?

**JW:** Yes, yes. My true love has always been residential architecture and in my design work I never design a room without automatically placing furniture in it.

I had a very nice compliment several years ago. I did a house for Dorothy Glen Adams in Bartlesville. Boots Adams was her husband, who was CEO of Phillips. She had been living on their farm and there was this terrible flood, it flooded it, and had three foot of water in it. So she moved into a condominium and I never saw any of the furniture until she got ready to move in.

She had this very, very nice lady decorator from San Antone, who helped her with the house. She came up several times and she told me, she said, "Yours is the only floor plan that I only had to change one thing in—I moved a door two feet over." But I had placed the furniture in the rooms.

**JE:** There were many times you worked with people and they were going to buy furniture for a home and so you would have no idea?

**JW:** Well, but you basically know what would be in a room.

**JE:** Right.

**JW:** So you plan it accordingly.

**JE:** Right.

**JW:** I was taught by John Duncan Forsyth that the best placement of a bed in a bedroom is opposite the door that you enter. So you look at the end of the bed, not at the side of the bed.

He always said, "The only attractive thing in a bathroom is the lavatory, so when you open the door you should be facing the lavatory."

**JE:** Was there a certain piece of furniture that became a favorite of yours in a house? Would it be the couch? Would it be a chair?

**JW:** No not, really not necessarily. I was very cognizant of all of the pieces of furniture so no, but I still enjoy seeing beautiful furniture.

**JE:** Your first education experience?

**JW:** I began developing my architectural skills and feelings starting in grade school at Roosevelt, in Ponca City. I have an old classmate who we still keep in touch with and she reminds me whenever we are at a class reunion, she said, "You know, you would draw floor plans and I would put furniture in it." She wanted to be an interior decorator. That's an interesting thing to be able to relive.

Also when I was twelve or thirteen years old, we took dancing lessons from Dorothy Wooden in Ponca City. We went to the Gens Marie every Saturday night down in the basement area and would learn dance steps and things.

She told me one time, she said, "You know that you took me to the first formal dance?" And I said, "Yes."

She said, "You sent me a beautiful nosegay of violets. That was so thoughtful of you."

And I said, "Joyce, I didn't send you those, my mother did. I had no idea what you had received for that dance."

I had a good time in school.

**JE:** Teachers must have noticed in elementary, you must have been drawing?

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** And all at that time?

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** And they sensed that here's a young man—

**JW:** I guess so. I guess so. I remember an incident in junior high, I forgot what class it was, social studies or something like that, I was always drawing when I should have been listening. And the teacher called upon me and he said, "You're drawing, you're not listening. You bring that drawing up here and I want to see it."

Well, of course, I was embarrassed to death. I took the drawing up and it was really a pretty good looking apartment house I had drawn. He looked at it and he said, "That's not bad," he said, "now put it away and go back and listen to me."

**JE:** Were you good in math?

**JW:** Yes, yes I liked math, yes. I really liked all of my courses. Chemistry and physics I wasn't that enchanted with, but the rest of them were great.

## Chapter 04—3:15

December 7, 1941

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**John Erling:** You said twelve years old December 7, 1941, you would have been twelve years old?

**John Walton:** Yes.

**JE:** Do you remember that day?

**JW:** I remember it well. It was on a Sunday afternoon, I was out in our front yard playing with some neighbor friends. My father came out of the house and announced that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. Yes I remember it well.

**JE:** Was it a nervous experience or—

**JW:** No, I was too young.

**JE:** Did it impact your immediate family or neighbors that went off to war?

**JW:** Well, yes, indirectly, none real close. I had cousins that were in the war but we had ration stamps, gasoline. My father, I think he had a seed card or something because of his travels, so we would usually use his company car rather than our family car to drive in.

**JE:** What were other products that were tough to get? Or you were limited in purchasing?

**JW:** Sugar, shoes, here again, it was all a new experience for me.

**JE:** You weren't really denied much—

**JW:** No.

**JE:** ...at all as a—

**JW:** No, no, no.

**JE:** ...youngster or as your family?

**JW:** No, that's right.

**JE:** Your father was a traveling salesman?

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** So it might have impacted the gasoline he used there. For business was it treated differently?

**JW:** Well, he worked for a very small company and he was given permission to use his company car for family driving.

**JE:** Right.

**JW:** So that's how we got the gasoline.

**JE:** And what did he sell, your father?

**JW:** He sold produce, fresh fruits and vegetables, primarily that. They had a big warehouse there in Ponca City, and I remember going with him. They had these cooler rooms at different temperatures. I remember the banana room very well. The big stalks of bananas were hanging by hooks in the ceiling, just solid. I was always cautioned because in shipping the bananas here from South America oftentimes a snake or two would get into the shipment, so we had to watch those.

But here again, I'll repeat, my childhood was a good life.

**JE:** So you're into high school. And that was a good experience?

**JW:** Yes, I had a ball in high school. I, unfortunately, met two very good friends, boys, and we became inseparable. I was always a good student, they were terrible students, but I took to them as a duck takes to water. And I got in a lot of trouble through high school.

I went to summer school every summer in high school, not because I had to, but because my friends had to. So I had a good time.

**JE:** Were you kicked out of a class ever?

**JW:** No but two months before high school graduation I had done something in one of the hallways and the principal, Homer Anderson, who was really a very nice person, we called him Birddog because if you did something he would follow you until you got to your classroom. He wouldn't apprehend you on the side. So we called him Birddog. But Birddog informed me that I was number one on his list so I'd better straighten up. And I did.

## Chapter 05—3:33

### Education

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**John Erling:** What year did you graduate from high school?

**John Walton:** 1947.

**JE:** Then you're on to college?

**JW:** Yes, I went to Tonkawa Northern Oklahoma Junior College for two years. I was very upset about it because my friends were all going to OU or OSU. But my mother felt strongly that I broke some of the ties with them, so I begrudgingly moved into the dormitory at Tonkawa. I didn't know it until years later, but at the end of the first semester if I was that unhappy I could go on to OU or OSU. But I loved it.

I met farm friends whom I had never known before from the rural communities. And I enjoyed my two years at Tonkawa.

**JE:** So it became an experience beyond the classroom.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** It was learning about other people. So then after Tonkawa for two years, where did you go?

**JW:** I went to OSU. Before I went to Tonkawa I went down to the architectural department at OSU and said, "I'm planning on going to a junior college for a year. Is that all right?"

And they said, "Yes, you can get all your basics and things out."

And at the end of the first year I decided I wanted to stay in Tonkawa, so I went back again. And they said the same thing. Well, when I arrived there in '49, I discovered that the architectural classes that you take in architecture design classes you could only take one a semester. So I was put four semesters behind, but I didn't care, I liked it.

It took me six years and three summer schools to get out, but it was fun.

**JE:** Then you were into the '50s.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** Do you remember then politically in the world the fear of communism and things?

**JW:** Yes. But here again, I really wasn't that interested in—

**JE:** Yeah. Do you have favorite songs or movie stars you recall from then?

**JW:** Oh my, of course, I always went to the movie in Ponca on Sunday afternoon; that's when they would change the movie. They'd be a group of us boys, about four of us usually, we would go to the movie and then we would get out and go down to Hal's Bakery. They were baking bread and we would each order a loaf of uncut bread, take it to somebody's house, pull the innards out of it and fill it full of butter and jelly.

I always had a weight problem, I never could figure out why.

**JE:** What were you drinking then? Cola? Pepsi or something?

**JW:** You know, I do not drink carbonated drinks. I never have.

**JE:** Really?

**JW:** No. I don't know why.

**JE:** How unusual.

**JW:** Oh I will drink a Coke or something, but I just never liked it.

**JE:** Do you remember hearing presidents on the radio?

**JW:** My first remembrance of a president was when Wendell Willkie was running. They had a headquarters in downtown Ponca and, of course, they had banners, pins, whatever there and you could just go in and take all you want. I wish I had saved some of those because they would have been priceless now.

**JE:** He was running against?

**JW:** Roosevelt.

**JE:** Did you ever see Wendell Willkie?

**JW:** No.

**JE:** You just remember the presence of him?

**JW:** I remember that Roosevelt came to Oklahoma City. My dad talked about going down to see him. He said, "The reason why is I would like to be able to say I had seen a president." But he didn't go down.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative). What year then did you graduate from OSU?

**JW:** 1953.

## Chapter 06—3:40

### Margaret Walton

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**John Erling:** Then what happens to you?

**John Walton:** Well, I had fallen in love. We were engaged to be married and we were married in October. We both graduated in June of 1953, and we were married October the 2nd or 3rd, I can't remember which, I think it's the 3rd. I hope my wife doesn't hear this. We were married here in Tulsa.

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

**JW:** Margaret Alice Stanley.

**JE:** How did you meet?

**JW:** We met at school through our fraternities and sororities. Both our fraternities and sororities were very close. She and I began dating by accident and the problem was she was pinned to a fraternity brother of mine who was in the service.

So as our relationship became more serious I became more concerned about that. And she said, "Well, I don't want to write and tell him." Said, "He will be here in February and I will tell him then."

So he came straight in the fraternity house. After he left, I called her, I said, "Well, did you get things worked out?"

And she said, "I didn't have enough nerve to."

I said, "Well, then I think our relationship needs to taper off."

And she said, "I agree."

So Valentine's Day was coming up and I bought her a pair of large silver-ring earrings, but I only gave her one with this note: Margaret's only half mine for she is Andy's too. So until the proper time a half valentine will do.

She sent back the pin immediately.

**JE:** Very good. That really worked for you, didn't it? So you're married and then where do you decided to settle down?

**JW:** I spent my first year working for an architect in Shawnee. I had graduated without any experience in an architect's office. The going rate for someone of that status was a dollar and a half an hour. So that's what I made when I worked in Shawnee. But we did work forty-four hours a week.

We were married in October. In December or January we discovered that Margaret was pregnant. We had no insurance, but we made it. She spent a week in the hospital at Shawnee. And years later, when we were cleaning out things, she discovered the bill for the doctor and the hospital was three hundred dollars.

So we had our first son in Shawnee, John Brooks Jr.

**JE:** And now as long as we're talking about children, how many children did you have?

**JW:** We have six children. We have four girls and two boys. And I jokingly say each one of them was a complete surprise.

**JE:** Did any of them take up your work?

**JW:** None of them wanted to be an architect or marry an architect. So no.

**JE:** We won't go there, huh?

In Shawnee, you rented an apartment there, more than likely?

**JW:** We rented a little mother-in-law's wing on a house that they had built for their mother-in-law. It was a little one-bedroom. We thought, "Oh it'll be fun to move to Shawnee because it's a college town." Well, it's Oklahoma Baptist and the Baptist didn't have much entertainment there.

So one weekend we would drive to Tulsa and stay with my family. And then the next weekend we would go to Ponca City, but we would always stop in Stillwater and visit friends. So it was a good year.

**JE:** So you were there then for a year in Shawnee?

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** Then what happens?

## **Chapter 07—3:30**

**First House John Walton:** We moved to Tulsa.

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**John Erling:** And why Tulsa and how—

**JW:** Well, because my wife was from Tulsa. And I had really developed a love affair for Tulsa in growing up in Ponca City. We never came to Tulsa to shop, we always went to

Oklahoma City because it was paved all the way, from Ponca City to Tulsa a great deal of it was gravel.

So when I was in college I visited Tulsa several times with fraternity brothers and I really fell in love with the town. So we were really ready to relocate here.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative). When you came to town did you rent an apartment?

**JW:** We had good friends, he had graduated two years before I did in architecture, and they were living in these apartments on 41st Street, just east of Peoria. They've been taken down, they were flat-roof apartments. And when they heard that we were moving here they rented an apartment for us without us even seeing it.

So we were there a year.

**JE:** Right.

**JW:** And then I built my first and only house that I've ever lived in.

**JE:** And where was that?

**JW:** It's 3521 South Urbana, Lortondale. I'm sure you're familiar with Lortondale.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JW:** It was a contemporary housing development that was developed during this time. It's off of Yale. Every architect's dream was to live at Lortondale. After we moved here, I immediately began checking to see if we could buy a house there. The smallest house they had was a little over twelve thousand dollars and I didn't qualify because I wasn't making enough money.

So I was fortunate that my family loaned me the money to buy this lot. It was a vacant lot. It had a thirteen-foot fall in the backyard, big trees and a creek running through it. So in summer of 1954, we built our first house.

**JE:** And what kind of money were you—

**JW:** The house and lot, it was a two-bedroom, bath, living room, very contemporary, deck across the back. The house and lot cost \$13,500.

**JE:** Does that house exist today?

**JW:** Yes. Every time we had a child we added on. The neighbors always said, "We knew when you were expecting when the carpenters showed up." We added on two or three times. We lived there for nine years.

**JE:** And contemporary was your first choice?

**JW:** Well, that's what we were taught in college. You know, you look down your nose at traditional. That was a no-no. And I looked down my nose at traditional. But it was a problem for me because I really had this true love of traditional architecture. And in my library today I have a book of houses designed by Royal Barry Wills, who was a well-known Boston architect. And he also wrote books. He did beautiful colonial style houses.

I found it at the college bookstore. Because no one else wanted it it was marked at half-price. But I kept it hidden, I never showed it any of my associates in college because I would have been laughed out of the architectural department.

But then I renewed my love and friendship for traditional houses when I went to work for John Duncan Forsyth during my apprenticeship. And I worked for him for a little over two years.

## Chapter 08—9:20

### John Duncan Forsyth

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**John Erling:** How did you get connected to this famous architect, John Duncan Forsyth?

**John Walton:** Well, he had his office here. I had worked for an architectural firm here for four years. I was very satisfied, it was a small firm, which I've always liked. They were very good to me, but I realized that I needed to diversify.

So I found out that Forsyth was needing a draftsman and I talked to one of his contemporaries, Tad Kirshner, who was quite a well-known architect here. Tad said to me, "I think the training would be good for you if you can last."

Well, I didn't know what he meant. I had worked four years for this architect. Well, the first three weeks I worked for him he hired and fired two or three draftsmen. He came into the office one morning and he came over to my desk and he said, "I would like for us to have lunch tomorrow."

And I said, "All right."

He went into his office and I talked to Bob Stoffer, the head draftsman, and I said, "Bob, am I getting fired?"

He said, "I don't know."

I said, "Now I want you to be truthful with me, I need to know."

He said, "John, I really don't know, but if you are you're the only one that he's ever taken out to lunch."

So I had lunch with Mr. Forsyth, Jack. He knew that I was leaning towards contemporary. He said, "John, I don't think you're satisfied here and I think you need to look for an office that does contemporary work."

And I said, "Uh, Jack, I am satisfied here because I'm learning. And as long as I'm learning I'm satisfied."

So the next day he fired another draftsman. He thought I was going to quit and he wanted to feel me out first.

**JE:** Well, that's great. He believed you. So then that relationship continued?

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** Was he a gruff kind of person?

**JW:** Oh yes, he was a complete snob, complete snob. But he did beautiful traditional work. The B. B. Blair house on Riverside Drive.

**JE:** And we'll talk—

**JW:** I worked for him when that was being designed. I learned a lot from Jack.

**JE:** But he had already, prior to you, done the Marlin Mansion in Ponca City.

**JW:** Oh yes, years ago. The John Maybe house here, the McClinic house.

**JE:** So he had a reputation?

**JW:** Yes, oh yes.

**JE:** And maybe was feeling snobbery.

**JW:** And what was happening to him, for instance, he had done the Howard Whitehill house here. The Whitehill's children were all gone and they wanted to move to something smaller. So several of the commissions that he had while I was working for him were these former clients who wanted a smaller house, or former clients' children who wanted a house.

**JE:** The Marlin Mansion. And there's a connection here because obviously you knew Ponca City so well and he had done that. It was known as Palace of the Prairies—

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** ...I believe. Just for background, Mr. Marlin was elected to the Congress from Northern Oklahoma 1932, and then he was the tenth governor of Oklahoma as of 1934. He was a Democrat and he made his fortune in oil so he had all this money to spend on the Marlin Mansion.

**JW:** Yes, which he lost. His money. He was able to save the Marlin Mansion because it was his homestead.

Of course, I've mentioned two of my books are on Ponca City and Kay County, and certainly the Marlin Mansion is included in those books. Apparently what happened, he had one of the largest oil companies in the United States at the time, and, of course, he was working on borrowed money. He was borrowing money from different New York City banks.

And the Rockefellers, I believe, Standard Oil, is that Rockefellers? They came to him and they said, "Why don't you consolidate all your loans with us and we will take care of them at a lower percentage?"

So he did, and immediately after that occurred, they called in all of the notes and he just lost everything.

**JE:** Jack, as you call him, Forsyth, here in Tulsa and in Claremore, he did the Will Rogers Memorial.

**JW:** Yes. You want to know how he got the Will Rogers Memorial?

**JE:** Sure.

**JW:** Well, when I did one of my books on John Duncan Forsyth I went to the Will Rogers Memorial, their library, to check things out. It was a competition. There were three architects, Donald McCormick, here in town, a New York City architect, and John Duncan Forsyth. And they had the renderings that McCormick and the New York architect had done for the competition.

I said, "Well, what about John Duncan Forsyth?"

They said, "He didn't have to submit one." Marlin was governor at the time so it was an in deal.

**JE:** We have Daniel Webster High School.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** Was a project of his.

**JW:** He associated with two other architects on that.

**JE:** Yeah, right. Where art deco was being featured.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** Daniel Webster.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** Just a little background on art deco because Tulsa is famous for art deco.

**JW:** Oh yes.

**JE:** As other cities are as well.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** Does that date back to the middle '20s? 1925 or so?

**JW:** Yes and into the '30s.

**JE:** And what was art deco?

**JW:** Well, it was a style of architecture. You have your traditional style, you have your art nouveau style, which was taken from plant life and things, very flowing lines to it. Art deco was probably representative of the time, particularly the Depression. And Tulsa was blossoming during that art deco period. That's the reason why we have so many wonderful art deco buildings here in town.

John Duncan Forsyth's home that he built for himself here in Tulsa, it's on Birmingham, close to the Tulsa Tennis Club. A white poured-concrete, two-story structure. It won a national competition by the National Concrete Institute, or something like that. It's been featured in one of my books. It does not look like it did originally because this large addition has been put on the front of it. A one-story addition, and it's very compatible.

The Siddenbacks, that own Siddenbacks Store here, lived there for years and years.

**JE:** We'll give him credit too for the Bartlesville High School.

**JW:** Yes, it used to be called College High, and it's a wonderful example of art deco architecture.

**JE:** You published a book titled *The Art and Architecture of John Duncan Forsyth*.

**JW:** Well, then I did one of the architecture of Charles Stevens Dilbeck, who left Tulsa in 1933, and relocated to Dallas. I have met his widow, and in Dallas, if you live in a Dilbeck house you have arrived.

**JE:** What would you say about Mr. Forsyth that you have learned from him that you have used down through the years?

**JW:** Except what came naturally, which wasn't that much, I received all of my training in traditional architecture through him. And apparently he recognized my talent because he would let me do a lot of design work on his structures.

**JE:** He was married many times.

**JW:** Six times. Henry the Eighth and John Duncan Forsyth. Twice to the same woman, but he liked to talk about his marriages. He had one that really he had to be in a real good mood to talk about her. So he would discuss the others but not this one. But he was married to Mary at the time I worked for him. She later on died. And then he married another lady. She outlived him.

**JE:** He died in 1963.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** Was that funeral held here in Tulsa?

**JW:** Yes, yes it was. It was at the Unitarians Church All Souls 'cause he had designed that.

**JE:** That's right.

**JW:** I believe he had leukemia. I went to see him in his later months. He'd lost a great deal of weight.

**JE:** Let's also give him credit, this is where Grand Lake comes in. He designed the Pensacola Dam.

**JW:** Yes. But he never mentioned that in our talks. He wanted us to all bring our lunches. We would sit around a table and he would talk, that's what he liked doing. His office at that time was on Detroit, Wolferman's Grocery Store was nearby. I would go over there and buy a little container of pimento cheese and a small loaf of French bread. I was eating on fifteen cents a day, I believe. I think I used the pimento cheese and the bread for two meals.

**JE:** But you said in all your sitting around in lunch discussions he never talked about the Pensacola Dam.

**JW:** No.

**JE:** I wonder why that was because—

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

**JE:** ...that too has an art deco style.

**JW:** Art deco. He didn't design the structure of the dam, he just designed the decorations, shall we say.

**JE:** All right. It is known as the world's longest multiple arts dam.

**JW:** Right.

**JE:** And that's because of his design for it.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** It could have been just a straight, flat wall, I guess.

**JW:** That's right.

**JE:** But he added that one.

**JW:** Right.

## Chapter 09—3:25

### More Forsyth

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**John Walton:** Another incident with Mr. Forsyth, you would be doing a job, a project, drawings for, working as hard as you could, and when you were about 80 percent finished with it he would call his head draftsman into his office but leave the door open a bit. And he would say, "What is wrong with John? He's not getting those drawings out fast enough."

Of course, what I did was work harder. So after, oh, the second time, I realized what was going on. So when I went to tell him I was leaving we had a nice conversation. You know, he said, "Some jobs you make money on and some you don't." And he said, "I want you to know that every job you worked on I was able to make money off of it."

**John Erling:** Hmm.

**JW:** And I started to say, "Then why did you tell Bob Stoffer I wasn't working hard enough?"

**JE:** Why did Mr. Forsyth even come to Tulsa?

**JW:** He came here to work here for John McDonald, the architect. John McDonald did the Irish Cottage on 21st Street, just west of Peoria. He was from New York and he had a family, was quite well to do, and had oil interests. He came here to look after their Oklahoma oil interests.

But he had this strong talent to be an architect, so he started designing houses. And eventually got his license. I always questioned why did Forsyth come to Tulsa? Because prior to coming to Tulsa he worked with New York City architects. And John Russell Pope, who did the National Archives Building, Forsyth had a great deal of respect for him. But he worked for one architectural firm in New York and they sent him to Shanghai. They had the commission to design Yale in Shanghai. He was there for two years.

So when I started writing about him his two daughters were still living. The oldest one, I visited with her, she lived in Albuquerque, and I said, "Why did you come to Tulsa?"

She said, "I don't know. We got off the boat in California and we took a train directly to Tulsa."

I finally decided that because of Forsyth's living in New York and because he was a bit of a snob that he had made contact with McDonald there. So that was the reason.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JW:** And then McDonald, well, he's done several houses here in Tulsa, but he also had an inn in Ponca City. He did the Clary house, the Dillard Clark house, several others there. Forsyth, in 1936, came out with a book on his architecture and he takes credit for those houses. And even another one, I can't remember the name. But McDonald died at an early age. He was here in Tulsa and developed health problems. Took the train to New York, and died shortly thereafter.

So I'm sure with the design talents that Forsyth had he probably did most of the designing on those houses. And I tell this in my book. I said that McDonald had been dead for seven or eight years, and I probably would have done the same thing.

## Chapter 10—2:05

### John's Architectural Firm

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**John Erling:** In 1965 you were out on your own?

**John Walton:** Yes, I had been in partnership for five years. And I went out on my own.

**JE:** Then you were searching for jobs in traditional architecture?

**JW:** Well, no, I really wasn't. I was looking for schools to design, apartment buildings, office buildings, anything I could get. Because I had had the responsibility of a large drafting room I didn't want that anymore. I said, "I want a small office and I want to be able to close on school closing days or whenever I want to." And that's sort of what I have done.

I was struggling the first several years but certainly was making a legitimate living for my family. And all of a sudden, one or two of the decorators here in town discovered I knew how to do traditional architecture. So all of a sudden, instead of going out and soliciting work I was waiting for them to knock on the door and come see me. That's how I evolved into it.

**JE:** The first house then that you designed as a job, was that in Ranch Acres?

**JW:** Yes. I did a ranch style house there for a client. It has a funny story, which I tell in my book. It was a vacant lot, there was a large twenty-year-old oak tree right in the middle of it and they really wanted to preserve that. So being the clever designer that I thought I was, I designed the house around it and made it a courtyard.

The owner, Mr. Brand, was just fascinated with my design. As the house was being built he was more interested in the courtyard than the design. He would say, "I can hardly wait to come home from work, get a drink, lie on a chaise looking up into the trees."

Well, they were trimming out the house and the tree began looking sickly. By the time the house was finished the tree was dead. But Mr. Brand was very philosophical about it and he said, "Well, I'll just have to wait twenty years to do that." He didn't make it.

## Chapter 11—4:45

### John the Writer

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**John Erling:** I don't know when it was when *Tulsa People* asked you to write about old houses in Tulsa.

**John Walton:** Well, actually, I approached them. I knew Jim Langdon from church so I went to him one day. And I said, "Jim, you know, I'd like to write a few articles on Tulsa's historic homes." I said, "I've never done anything like this before, and would you be interested in them?"

And he said, "Yes."

So I started. My first article was on the oldest house in Tulsa still in existence, which is on Owen Park. John Hamil was their editor and he was my editor and a wonderful teacher. But my articles, by the time John got finished with them, all they had in them was the facts that I had come up with. 'Cause I didn't know what I was doing.

But finally, and John tells this story, I've asked him to write the preface in several of my books, suddenly he said, "I found myself doing less and less editing and more and more using of what you have written."

So I did that for five, six, seven, or eight years.

**JE:** The writing, you must have enjoyed writing prior to this?

**JW:** Well, I had never had any classes in journalism or anything. I like to tell stories. I think that's what developed my writing.

**JE:** Developed your writing. Yeah. Because of the articles you wrote for *Tulsa People*, then that led to a book.

**JW:** Yes. John tells the story on that that I came to him in 1999, and I said, "John, I would like to write a book about my historic Tulsa homes."

He was very encouraging, but later he would say, "I thought, yes, every writer wants to write a book. And the bookstores are full of bargain tables of books that do not sell."

Well, of course, the first book was unbelievable. I think I ordered three thousand books and they sold out in less than two weeks. And then I reordered more.

**JE:** That was in 1999?

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** So I have that book in front of me here.

**JW:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** And I'd like to just kind of walk through it.

**JW:** Sure.

**JE:** And just pick out some houses. But we went past Tulsa's oldest house. Because there's a story that goes along with that and the story of Reverend Sylvester Morris.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** Can you tell us that?

**JW:** Well, he was an early itinerant minister. I think he was associated with the Methodist church. And he was also a carpenter.

**JE:** Tell us again where it's built.

**JW:** It's on Owen Park on the west end close to Edison. It's all boarded up. You used to be able to go into it, which I thought was wonderful. It needs some tender, loving care, and that's one of my projects that I have in mind that I'm going to try to do.

He built the house. He would go out in his horse and buggy, out into the countryside and minister to cowboys, bank robbers, whoever needed his help. He was quite well-known and quite liked. And he was out on one of these journeys one day, and these two federal marshals were out looking for whiskey runners. They saw him and they hollered at him and he took off thinking they were bandits.

They came back to town bragging that they had shot the hat off of this old man. He always wore a big, black, floppy hat.

And the next day the horse and buggy arrived. The reverend still had the reins in his hand and he was dead.

**JE:** So then who owned the house?

**JW:** That's another interesting story. It was located on North Maybelle. When they began doing urban renewal there, Meryl Ford got permission to go through the houses that had been emptied to look for any artifacts and things.

This lady came to him with this photograph of the house and she said, "Meryl, I know that house is still there."

Well, he looked and looked and couldn't find it and he told her. And she said, "You go back and look one more time because I know it's there."

Well, it was there, it had been completely built around and how he was able to identify it was the brick chimney sticking up in the middle of it. So they removed all the additions, returned the house to its original size, and relocated it.

I think the Methodist church still owns the house. They've talked about relocating it. They've talked about the Fairgrounds, but I think it's in limbo right now.

**JE:** That goes back to 1907, that the house was built?

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** So that was Tulsa's oldest house.

**JW:** That is still in existence, not the oldest house.

**JE:** We are calling it Tulsa's oldest house, but you mean in existence today.

**JW:** Okay, I think I clarified in existence there some place.

## Chapter 12—2:26

### Thomas Gilcrease House

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**John Erling:** We have the story then of a famous name of Thomas Gilcrease.

**John Walton:** Yes.

**JE:** Talk to us about the Thomas Gilcrease house.

**JW:** Of course, everybody's familiar with it. I believe it has a, I don't know whether it's green tile or green metal roof that looks like tile. I think it's tile though. It's a typical large bungalow of that period. I don't know whether it's still open to the public or not, but it's part of the Gilcrease complex. So I wrote a story about that. And, of course, Thomas Gilcrease had such an interesting history.

Well, in doing my research I discovered another house close by that I felt had similar lines to the Gilcrease house except it was an all-frame house and the Gilcrease house was a stone house. So I included that house also.

**JE:** But the Thomas Gilcrease house was built, I believe, in 1913.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** And it was not built by Thomas Gilcrease.

**JW:** You're right.

**JE:** It was actually built by a Tulsa attorney. But his fiancée died so the house was put up for sale.

**JW:** Yes, yes.

**JE:** And then that became then the Thomas Gilcrease home.

**JW:** Thomas Gilcrease house.

**JE:** But there's another side to this story that you wrote about in the book, how Thomas Gilcrease met a former Miss America of 1926, Norma Smallwood.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** He actually met her at a party in 1927. They were married and Norma Smallwood lived with him.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** And in that house. And then it came time when Thomas Gilcrease deeded the house to the city of Tulsa. There are some legends, I guess, attached to this house, and ghosts and—

**JW:** Well, ghosts, yes there's a ghost in a lot of Tulsa homes. Some are real and some not so real. In fact, my next book is going to be *Flowers by Mrs. DeHaven*, which is the Dehaven's Florist. They have a ghost, which I will tell about.

**JE:** All right.

**JW:** But, yes, as I say, I've encountered several houses that have ghosts and some are quite real and some are not.

**JE:** But about the Gilcrease home, anything unusual or different about that house that stands out? Is it just pretty fairly ordinary?

**JW:** Not really, the interior is typical of architectural styles of that period, including wood columns and things like that.

## Chapter 13—2:57

### Ghosts

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**John Erling:** You said about ghosts, "And some are real." Give us a real ghost story.

**John Walton:** Well, I'm going to preamble that with a little story. A teacher in Inola, Oklahoma, would bring his class each year to Tulsa to go to Philbrook. He got hold of me and he asked me if I would do a little bus tour with them around the historic homes of Tulsa before they went to Philbrook.

So I did it for several years. But those students could care less about historic homes in Tulsa. They were too busy flirting with someone or something like that.

But I think during my second year they were not paying attention to me, and somebody said, "Does any of these houses have ghosts?"

And I said, "Oh yes." Well, I got their undivided attention. So I would always talk about the ghosts in the house.

One of them was the Grimes home and he was very involved in the Tulsa fairgrounds. After he died, his daughter sold the house to a client of mine, a younger couple. We did quite a remodel on it and several additions.

So when I was writing my books on Tulsa's historic homes I thought, "I will include that in my book." I went over one Saturday and we sat in the kitchen and he talked and I made notes.

When he got finished, she said, "Aren't you going to tell about the ghost?"

"Oh," he said, "he isn't interested in the ghost."

And I said, "Tell, tell."

And he said, "Well, when we purchased the house the daughter gave us this large ring of keys. And she said, 'It's a key to every lock in the house.'" He said, "There was except for the outside basement door and we could not find the key to it.

"We called her and she said, 'My dad had a key to it.'" He said, "We looked and looked in the basement and we were all ready to call a locksmith." And he said, "I said to my wife, 'I'm going to go down one more time and look.'" "

And he said, "I went down to the club room. All of a sudden there was a presence next to me." He said, "It just happened in a second." But he said, "It absolutely made the hair on the back of my neck stand out." He said, "As soon as that occurred I walked immediately to the powder room, reached up on a ledge, and there was the key."

**JE:** Oh my.

**JW:** So that's one of the real ones.

**JE:** And the Grimes home you said. Where is it?

**JW:** Grimes, G-r-i-m-e-s.

**JE:** Well, where is that located?

**JW:** It is on 30th Street just east of Yorktown.

**JE:** Who was Grimes?

**JW:** He was very involved in the cattle business and was very, very active in the Tulsa Fair.

**JE:** So we have Grimes Elementary?

**JW:** Yes I would think, I would guess so.

**JE:** That would be named—

**JW:** Yes, I never thought about that.

**JE:** ...it would be named for him?

**JW:** Yes. And the Grimes house is in one of my books, it's not the first one.

## **Chapter 14—2:40**

### **Mayo and Harwelden**

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**John Erling:** The Mayo Mansion.

**John Walton:** Yes.

**JE:** Can you just talk about that?

**JW:** Well, it's a wonderful house, of course, the Mayos, the Mayo brothers.

**JE:** Let me just say it was the Mayo brothers, and by the way, elsewhere on this website I have interviewed Margery Mayo Bird.

**JW:** Oh yes.

**JE:** She was the daughter of John.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** But the Mayo brothers were Cass and John and they built the building at 5th and Main in 1910.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** And a connecting building in 1914.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** And then they also built the petroleum building at 5th and Boulder in 1920.

**JW:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** And then they began building the Mayo Hotel, completed in 1925.

**JW:** An interview that John Mayo had several years after they had built the Mayo Hotel, he said, "If I were to build another hotel I would build it right in the middle of a square block with parking all around it and parking underneath it." So I thought that was interesting.

**JE:** And it makes sense, doesn't it?

**JW:** Why yes, the Mayo has terrible shortage of parking.

**JE:** So then we have Cass Mayo's home at 2301 Boston.

**JW:** Yes, that's the one we're talking about today.

**JE:** Yes.

**JW:** It's a very traditional stone house, rather monumental. I would call it a two-and-a-half-story house. It's just a nice, grand house, beautifully scaled and detailed throughout.

**JE:** So this Mayo Mansion is on Boston?

**JW:** Yes, in the 22- or 2300 block.

**JE:** We're all familiar with Harwelden. Earl Harwell built that home.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** Can you expand on that?

**JW:** Well, he was an oilman. He built Harwelden, and it's a beautiful structure, I think either a Kansas City or a St. Louis architect designed it. One of their neighbors told me the story, which I did not include in the book. In the '30s, during the Depression, they had to move to Texas, to look after their oil interest. They just disappeared without even telling any of their neighbors or anything, just all of a sudden, they were gone.

They were down there two or three years. And they said that when they came back it was just as if they'd never gone. They never mentioned their traveling or anything.

I think Harwelden is a beautiful house. I think it's wonderful for what it's being used for.

**JE:** How did Harwelden come about?

**JW:** Oh the Harwells?

**JE:** Yeah there was Harwell, but then somebody called it Harwelden.

**JW:** Yes, I don't know whether that was done during the time the Harwells owned it or not. I just don't know.

**JE:** So it was in 1969, then, that Mrs. Harwell gave the home—

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

**JE:** ...to the Arts and Humanities.

**JW:** Uh-huh (affirmative), and I think it's a beautiful name for it, Harwelden.

## Chapter 15—2:45

### Jennifer Jones

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**John Erling:** A star is born. And the story of Jennifer Jones.

**John Walton:** Yes.

**JE:** Can you comment on that?

**JW:** Well, I have done these bus tours of Tulsa's historic homes. I always take them by Jennifer Jones's house and I will say to them, "How many of you know who Phyllis Isley was?"

And maybe one or two hands would go up. And I'd say, "Well, Phyllis Isley was Jennifer Jones. This is where she lived. She attended Monicacina. She always had wanted to be an actress."

Her father had a road show, I forget the name of it now, but they would travel from town to town and do performances. He owned the show. She always wanted to be part of it and he never would let her.

So her senior in high school, she had won the top drama award and all of her teachers had said, you know, "She needs to do this and become an actress."

So she told her father, she said, "I'm not going to college, I want to go to school in New York to become an actress."

He relented, but he said, "One thing goes with it, you are not to become a bohemian-type actress.

**JE:** She went on to starring fame, didn't she?

**JW:** Yes. You know, she had only played in two or three B movies when she was given the role of Bernadette. I would like to mention that at Monicacino, where she went to school, at the north end toward 21st Street there's a stone grotto and there's a stone statue of Jennifer leaning there in her clothing as she used in *Bernadette*.

When they had the premiere of *Bernadette* here in Tulsa, her parents presented the statue at that time. In my article about it I tell about the statue and I said, "Unfortunately,

you have to pass a series of metal carports to get to it.” Which was part of the monastery at Monicacina.

I’m sure my notes did not make any difference, but they have been replaced by wonderful carport stone and brick that is very much in keeping with the structure.

**JE:** Yes.

**JW:** So I like to think that I inspired them.

**JE:** I’m sure you did. The actual film was *The Song of Bernadette*.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** She actually did about thirty films, didn’t she, in her lifetime?

**JW:** I think so. She became a star after that.

**JE:** And she ended up being married to the great producer Selznick.

**JW:** Yes. And I think she just died a few years ago. She lived in Mexico for years.

**JE:** A lot of people don’t realize that story right here in Tulsa. And the home was at 301 East 20th Street.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** The Isley home.

## Chapter 16—10:15

### Skelly Mansion

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**John Erling:** Coming now to a mansion that you know very well, and that is, the Skelly Mansion at 21st and South Madison. Beyond the obvious reason, why is that so special to you?

**John Walton:** Well, my wife and our children that were left at home, purchased it in 1978, and we lived there for seventeen years. We’d completely restored it. We purchased it from Congressman James R. Jones, had it placed on the National Register. Today it is owned by the University of Tulsa. It’s a large house but it is a very livable house. The ground floor, the rooms flow to each other.

This was one of the problems that I saw with John Duncan Forsyth’s large houses. He would always have this grand entrance hall. And each of the downstairs rooms would feed off of that. So if you wanted to go from the living room to the dining room you had to go through the entrance hall. From the dining room to the library.

The Skelly house, the rooms flow, it’s wonderful. As I say, we lived there for seventeen years. All of our daughters went to Monicacina and there was a time period when they were receiving girls from Mexico whose mothers had gone to Monicacina. At that time, it was a boarding school. They wanted their daughters to come back one year to learn

English and this sort of thing. So through the years we had seventeen of those girls that lived with us. So we had a houseful.

**JE:** And how many bedrooms in that house?

**JW:** Oh let's see. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, two on the upper floor.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JW:** On the third floor.

**JE:** No swimming pool in that, is there?

**JW:** No swimming pool.

**JE:** Any ghosts in that house?

**JW:** No, not really. We would always joke. We had lived in a large house on Hazel Boulevard, which had two and a half floors, and there was a laundry chute in it. My wife would jokingly say, when she would go up to the third floor, which was the boys' bedroom, change the linens, and throw the dirty linens into the laundry chute, and if they bounced and hit her she knew it was time to go down and do the laundry.

So we could not find a laundry chute in the Skelly Mansion. And my wife missed it very much. We kept saying, you know, a house of that size had to have a laundry chute.

Well, after we sold the house, the young couple that purchased it and just lived there a short time, they discovered in one of the upstairs bedrooms, which could also be used as an office, in the closet was the laundry chute in the floor. And we never knew it.

**JE:** We see pictures of Mr. Skelly and his wife in beautiful dining experiences with all their friends around. So it must have a huge dining room?

**JW:** Yes. The dining room was enlarged. The original dining room was probably fifteen feet in size. The interesting story about the beginning of the Skelly Mansion, it was started in 1919, I believe, by one of the Aronson family, one of the daughters. During the construction she decided she didn't want it, and that's when the Skellys purchased it and completed it.

After they had lived there for several years, they enlarged the dining room to at least forty foot long. He was very active in the international petroleum expositions. He would have parties there and things. It was a beautiful dining room. We called it the Lounge because we used another room as our dining room. And this was where we lived.

**JE:** How much did you pay for that home?

**JW:** We were shown the house in 1977, by a realtor who was a good friend of ours. And we really were not looking for another house, but since we had never been in the Skelly house we wanted to see it. Well, it needed a lot of attention and it was \$275,000 in 1977. We didn't have \$275,000 and, as I say, we really lived in a very nice house.

But the problem was, Congressman Jones had so many political interests that he couldn't give the listing to one realtor, he had to give it to half a dozen. So there were

never any ads, there were never any signs in the yard about the house. Because the realtors, one was wanting to sell it and so the others couldn't sell it.

This was, I think, in late November, early December of '77. We looked at it and thought, "Well, it would be fun to have." And in the end of March of '78, the realtor called and she said, "They have just reduced the Skelly Mansion fifty thousand dollars," and that made it \$225,000. We knew it was going to sell.

So we went back and looked at it again. And after negotiations, we purchased it for two hundred thousand. I was asked this fall to give a program to the Dosons at Tulsa Historical.

I have these programs that I give on Tulsa historic homes, but I also have one on the Skelly Mansion. I gave that, I have pictures that I pass around and tell some of the interesting stories about the mansion. And I said in my books, "I always end with an 'and in conclusion,' so I will end this lecture with an 'and in conclusion.'"

I had the recent copy of *Tulsa People*, which had an article on houses in Tulsa for sale for over a million dollars. Of course, there was a large picture of the Skelly Mansion, and it was listed for \$2,650,000. And I said, "And in conclusion, in 1978, we paid two hundred thousand." That was the end of my story.

**JE:** It's interesting because in this year, 2012, the University of Tulsa purchased the Skelly Mansion and a lot of people probably don't know. That's the second time the University has owned it.

**JW:** That's right.

**JE:** Because the Skellys actually gave the home—

**JW:** Yes, Mrs. Skelly gave it after—

**JE:** Mr.—

**JW:** ...Mr. Skelly died.

**JE:** Um.

**JW:** Without any strings attached, she gave the house and all the furnishings. They kept it for a couple of years, I don't really think they did much with it. And then they sold it.

**JE:** According to your book they sold it to Harold Wrights.

**JW:** Yes. And Harold Wrights sold it to James R. Jones. We purchased it from him. At the time he sold the house he had an auction of all the furnishings. He hired this auctioneer company from New Orleans to come and do the auction. We were living in the neighborhood. I think they charged five or ten dollars to come to the auction.

And I said, "We didn't come because we probably didn't have the five or ten dollars." But the things went very, very cheap, very cheap. The article said that it had been estimated that the furnishings would sell in excess of a hundred thousand dollars. And they sold a little over thirty-five thousand.

**JE:** Hm.

**JW:** Harold Stewart, he was married to Joanne Skelly, one of the daughters. Years afterwards, I was visiting with him at a party. We were talking about that auction and he said, “You know, when we gave it to the University and the furnishings we had everything appraised for tax purposes.” And he said, “After the auction they went so cheap that the IRS came back after the estate.” And he said, “We had to pay a lot more taxes.”

**JE:** Hm. There’s a walk-in vault in that home.

**JW:** Yes, it’s a very elaborate bank vault door and it came from a bank in Kansas City. Actually, the vault itself is not fireproof or anything. It’s narrow but quite long. We always kept our Christmas decorations in it. And this house has an Otis elevator from the basement to the second floor. We always kept our Christmas tree in the elevator. And when we put in on the market to sell, we were still living in the house, the realtor said to us one day, “Everybody that looks at it wants to see the elevator. Would you mind taking the Christmas tree out of it?”

So we removed the Christmas tree.

**JE:** What made you decide to sell the home?

**JW:** Our children were in college or gone. We now live on Swan Lake, which we purchased in 1987, with the idea that in about ten years we would move to Swan Lake. We moved there in '95, and we love it there.

**JE:** Did you have a lot of friends want to be invited to the house because they wanted to see the mansion?

**JW:** Well, not necessarily our friends, but strangers.

**JE:** Would they walk up?

**JW:** They would come up—I know my wife was sitting in the living room one day reading, the living room had French doors at both ends of the room. She looked up and here was a lady peeking through the French door into the house.

So she got up and invited her in. But she was really upset about it. But we finally discovered that I immediately put it on the National Register of Historic Places. And, of course, there were articles in the newspaper about that. And people thought that because it was on the National Register that it had to be open to the public.

So when we decided that’s what was wrong, that was okay.

**JE:** So as far as you know today, that house is sound and solid and—

**JW:** Oh yes, yes.

**JE:** ...well taken care of.

**JW:** Well, the owner that has just sold it did hundreds of thousands of dollars of work on it. Just a lot, a lot of money. It’s in beautiful shape. The lawns and the gardens are just exquisite.

**JE:** So the top of your head, that property is worth what today?

**JW:** I would say it’s probably around two million, something like that.

- JE:** I won't ask you how much you got for it.
- JW:** No I don't mind telling you. We got nine hundred thousand for it.
- JE:** After living there?
- JW:** Seventeen years.
- JE:** Seventeen years.
- JW:** So we did all right.
- JE:** Yes you did.

## Chapter 17—3:15

### Philbrook

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- John Erling:** Another famous house is Philbrook, of course.
- John Walton:** Yes.
- JE:** Villa Philbrook. Built by Wake Philbrook and Genevieve.
- JW:** Yes.
- JE:** It's on twenty-three acres. Tell us about the architect and describe it a little bit.
- JW:** Well, it was designed by a Kansas City architect, Edward Delk. He is quite well-known in Kansas City. He designed the Bell Tower building for Phillips. He designed several large houses in Bartlesville. It's a large, Italian renaissance-style structure. And, of course, the Phillips gave it to the city for a art museum and it's being take care of beautifully.
- The story is, one of Phillips's right hand men was Otis McClintock, who was president of First National Bank here for years. He and his wife built the large house at 41st and Lewis, on the northwest corner, the big, white, French one. Beautiful.
- John Duncan Forsyth takes credit for designing that. The story was that he and Donald McCormick went into partnership to design it. I think Forsyth did most of the detailing and things. But Phillips said to Otis McClintock, "Now when you get ready to build that house I'm going to help you pick out an architect. Because," he said, "the biggest mistake I've ever made was in building Philbrook." He said, "I built a palace and not a home." He said, "I want you to use Donald McCormick because he will give you a good livable plan. And John Duncan Forsyth, who will give you a beautiful house."
- The two of them also associated on Southern Hills Country Club.
- JE:** Then they hired a landscape architect to design the gardens?
- JW:** Yes, he's a very well-known landscape architect out of Kansas City, well-known for his landscape design.
- JE:** I interviewed Chope Elliot Phillips, the son of Waite Phillips.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** He was eight or nine years old living there. And he'd go up on the top floor and roller skate because there's a ballroom up there.

**JW:** Yes. Oh yes.

**JE:** In the interview on this website, I said, "Well, was there a room in that house that you really liked the best?"

He said, "No," he says, "it didn't make any difference to me." He said, "As far as I was concerned I could just as well be living in a log cabin."

**JW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And he did not care about the wealth that went with it.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** I would encourage those who are listening to listen to Chope.

**JW:** May I put a little bit of advertising in here? My next book is going to be *Flowers by Mrs. DeHaven*, which I think I've mentioned. And in their archives, in 1927, Wake and Genevieve Phillips had an open house and they invited five hundred people for a sit-down dinner. They hired the entire staff of the Tulsa Club.

One of the busboys, who later became a waiter, and I forget his name now, he wrote the story of the open house as seen through his eyes. And it's wonderful and it's going to be in my Mrs. DeHaven's book.

**JE:** Is that were Genevieve, did she come down the staircase?

**JW:** Yes, he describes it as that. Some people that knew her said that they didn't think she ever did that, but who knows?

**JE:** Right.

**JW:** Makes a good story.

## Chapter 18—5:16

### Southern Hills—Kenamer Murder

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**John Erling:** So then about Southern Hills Country Club.

**John Walton:** All right.

**JE:** The story behind that.

**JW:** I got all of this from Bill Warren, who I did their house for many years ago.

**JE:** This is the son of W. K. Warren?

**JW:** Yes, yes. And he said that there had been quite a scandal in the '30s. The children in Forest Hills and there, they were out of control. There was a young man that was murdered.

**JE:** Yes.

**JW:** Two weeks later, one of his friends confessed to the murder, I believe, and he was the son of a federal judge here.

**JE:** Right, and I can background that because it was the night of Thanksgiving, Thursday, November 29, 1934, that the twenty-three-year-old John Gorrell, who was the son of Tulsa doctor John Gorrell Sr., was found shot dead in his car.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** And then it was two or three days later that nineteen-year-old Philip Kennamer, who was a son of a federal judge, turned himself in to Tulsa authorities. Philip Kennamer's story is that Gorrell had asked him to deliver an extortion note demanding twenty thousand dollars from the oilman Homer Wilcox.

**JW:** Wilcox.

**JE:** Under threat of harm to the Wilcox children, Homer Jr., and Virginia, the young Philip Kennamer had actually fallen in love with Virginia. And due to his love for Virginia he felt he had to intervene, and Gorrell ends up dead after a struggle in Gorrell's car with Gorrell's gun.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** So that's the background story to that Kennamer story.

**JW:** But do you know about the other killing?

**JE:** And then we have Sidney Boren Jr.

**JW:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** Whose son of a Tulsa University professor and a running buddy of some of these kids that you're talking about—

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** ...found dead in his car. And police decided it was a suicide.

**JW:** 'Cide.

**JE:** In the end, Kennamer was found guilty of manslaughter for the death of Gorrell. And then eventually, the governor paroled him. He went into the military in World War II, and then died in war.

**JW:** Well, they don't know. He was a paratrooper and he landed and disappeared. So the story was, was he killed or did he take on another name?

**JE:** And so there's a lore that goes along with that?

**JW:** Yes. So with that background, first of all, Dr. Kennedy owned the land that the Tulsa Club was on. He had announced to the Tulsa Club that when their lease was up, which was going to be in a couple of years or something, he was going to make it into a public golf course.

Of course, all the members were very upset about that happening. So they decided they needed to something. And this is Bill Warren's story that his father had told him. Bill said the only one in Tulsa that had money was the banks and Waite Phillips.

Waite Phillips owned this ranch out south of town. The board members of Tulsa Country Club decided they would approach Waite Phillips about building a country club in the South Tulsa, a very family-orientated club.

Because, getting back to the Kennamer murder and everything, one of my clients, Maryanne Bovard, who was of that era, I think, she said, “You know, after that the next year, half the young men in South Tulsa went to military school.” Said that the families tried to straighten them out. And apparently they had really gotten out of control.

Anyway, Warren and one or two others approached Waite Phillips about the possibility and what they wanted him to do was to give the land for the country club, and to loan them the money to build it. They kept stressing that it would be very family-orientated. This happened in October or November of that year, and they met with him at his desk at his office, presented the presentation, and they left. And didn’t hear a word out of him.

Christmas was approaching, they still hadn’t heard. So finally, Waite Phillips called Mr. Warren to come to his office. He went in and Mr. Phillips was sitting at his desk, which was covered with papers. And he said to Mr. Warren, “See all of these papers on my desk? The majority of them are people wanting to borrow money or are wanting me to give money. Most of them are ridiculous and yours is as ridiculous as any of them.”

Well, they said Mr. Warren’s heart sunk, but he said, “I will make a counter proposal,” Mr. Phillips, he said, “If you can raise a hundred and fifty thousand—”

**JE:** That’s right.

**JW:** “...I will match it.”

So Mr. Bows that lived at Bowlwood, had a dinner party and invited all of these men to participate. And they did raise a hundred thousand dollars. Mr. Phillips let them get by with that on it. But he said the same thing that he did about McClinic’s house, he said, “I want you to use two architects, John Duncan Forsyth and Donald McCormick. So that’s why they did it.

I had, and I’ve given them to the Tulsa Foundation for Architecture, the original tracings on Southern Hills Country Club.

## **Chapter 19—4:00**

### **Judge Kennamer—Dr. Kennedy**

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**John Erling:** We talked about Judge Kennamer. He had quite an outstanding home here in Tulsa, I believe.

**John Walton:** Yes. It was a lovely house. It was on Terwilliger Boulevard. It's just off of 21st Street on the east side of the street, and I think it's a stone and brick house. Wasn't extra large or extraordinary, but certainly a very nice house.

**JE:** You mentioned Kennedy, who was Mr. Kennedy? Is this the Kennedy building at 4th and Boston?

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** That's the same—

**JW:** Dr. Samuel Kennedy.

**JE:** Okay, Dr. Samuel Kennedy. Was he the one at the Tulsa Country Club that you refer to?

**JW:** Yes he owned that. He married a, I think she was Creek, I forget, but anyway, she had head rights and land. And he would purchase land around her property. So he ended up owning a great deal of North Tulsa.

The story is that at one point he decided to develop it and he had an engineer do a street layout and all of that for it. He went to the city and wanted it to be annexed into the city, but he wanted the city to pay for all the streets and things.

The city turned him down. So he was furious. And in his will, any land that he had left to any of his heirs, they could not sell it for twenty years after his death. So that's the reason why North Tulsa became South Tulsa.

**JE:** And then it seemed like there was a story about those who wanted to get into the club and they couldn't. They got mad and they all were driven then to southern Tulsa.

**JW:** They weren't mad at the club, they were mad because Kennedy was going to turn it into a public golf course. Now that's the story I've always heard.

**JE:** Okay.

**JW:** And I got that from Bill Warren.

**JE:** So then he has the Kennedy building at 4th and Boston.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** And then that is connected by tunnel to be known as the National Bank of Tulsa.

**JW:** Right.

**JE:** Which is at 4th and 3rd at Boston.

**JW:** Right.

**JE:** And so they're all connected here. Otis McClintock was the president of the bank at the time. And so we have all these luminaries here in Tulsa—

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** ...that are enjoying a good life.

**JW:** And when First National built their new building in the '50s at 5th and Boston on the northwest corner the McClintocks sold their house and lived in the Penthouse of the bank building, and I have that in one of my books too.

**JE:** You're grabbing second book now that you've written.

**JW:** Yes. Let me just look at the index and see if I can come up with some of the houses that might be of particular interest. The index starts with Tulsa's early years, 1901-1920. I talked about the Kennedy compound. Also the Carl Springer Mansion, which is located close by there, and it's a very large three-story house.

Then I go into 1921 to 1945, the Wedding Present house is in there.

**JE:** You want to go to any one of those and embellish on?

**JW:** Well, the two Sophian Plazas, the Sophian Plaza was built in the '20s. It is west of Denver, about at 15th, a couple blocks west of Denver. It was built by a Dr. Sophian, who lived in Kansas City, who was a very successful physician. And his brother was a contractor and they built the Sophian Plaza in Kansas City, which is more elegant than our Sophian Plaza here. But then they eventually would build the one that was here. It was *the* place to live during that time period.

And it has now been converted to condominiums. I think they're wonderful. I've been in several of them. If I were going to live in the condominium I would live in the Sophian.

**JE:** How many floors? Do you recall?

**JW:** Oh there's four or five at least.

## Chapter 20—3:30

### John the Artist

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**John Erling:** Let me talk about the fact that in 2003 you were seventy-four years old. And you were then becoming an artist in a different way.

**John Walton:** Well, yes, of course, I took art classes in college, primarily in watercolor. Most of them are abstract, and thank heavens, none of them are still in existence. Off and on I would dabble in art, but I decided to take a course under Ruthie Armstrong. I'd done watercolors and a little bit of oil. I had never done acrylics.

She said, "We're going to do acrylics."

And I hated it. My first painting was of a bottle. It was all right, it was a green bottle. I took it home and brought it back to my office, and I think I painted a lemon beside it or something, and it was all right. I just laid it there for a day or two and I took one look at it afterward and I thought, "Surely you can do better than that."

So I painted it all out and did a series of colorful jugs, and all of a sudden it hit—I loved acrylics. And I've been doing them ever since.

**JE:** You're doing landscapes?

**JW:** Do a little bit of everything. I cannot copy a photograph, I do not have that kind of a mind.

I was asked one time to a charity art show and I said, “All right.”  
And they said, “Now you need to connect with some Tulsa personality.”  
And I said, “Oh I don’t want to do that.” I didn’t realize that was one of the requirements.

So they called me a couple of days later and they said, “Well, we’ve got the personality that you should connect with and that’s Steve, Steve Sundry. He’s handled your books. You should do a portrait of him.”

I started laughing and they said, “What’s wrong?”

I said, “My portrait of Steve would look more like Daffy Duck.” So I said, “No, I don’t want to do that.”

They came back and they said, “Well, what about getting with Francine Ringgold,” who had been the poet laureate of Oklahoma, “and work with her and have her do a poem.”

I loved it. She did a wonderful poem called “Walton’s Line,” L-i-n-e, in fact, it’s about this long. You want me to read it?

**JE:** I would love to have you read it.

**JW:** In commenting about this poem I’ve always said the piece of artwork that I submitted was so-so, but her poem is wonderful. It is called “Walton’s Line,” and it was based on the fact that I used a lot of line work in my painting.

**JE:** Line work, what does that mean?

**JW:** Well, with a pen or something like that, just part of the composition.

**JE:** Right.

**JW:** “Walton’s Line:” A slim line separates the white from the black, jiggles and twists, totters like an old man trying to separate the land he once loved from the clouds he now craves. Even smells in the sun alluring as rest and sleep and soundless words he cannot read as he wishes. What can be done with this horizontal promise? The wobbling gate, unsteady rue of time? As the line swigs in the wind will he lift one foot and balance like an acrobat or stumble and shake until point of collapse? We are, or so it seems, all unsteady in this great walk, until from the distance, an orange light lifts, then settles a crown on each unsuspecting head.

**JE:** That’s nice.

## Chapter 21—4:20

### Art Lessons

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**John Erling:** You think your puppy, if you put him up on the chair so that he could be right there next to you?

**John Walton:** I'll put him in my lap.

**JE:** Who is our friend here?

**JW:** This is Rusty. Rusty is a rescued poodle. He is about thirteen years old. I've had him for four years. He was a complete surprise to me one Christmas Eve. I had had this wonderful cocker, Eli. Eli had led a good life but we had to have him put to sleep. So for several years afterwards, I would say occasionally, "I sure would like to have a dog."

And Margaret, my wife, would say, "We do not need a dog." And she was right.

Well, one Christmas Eve, and we always have all the family Christmas Eve. This particular Christmas we were at one of our daughter's house, Sue, and in came Rusty on a red leash. And I thought, "Someone's getting a dog for Christmas." Well, it was me.

We have bonded. He sleeps with me, he rides in the car with me, he's with me twenty-four hours a day.

The only problem is when Margaret picked him up he had a diaper on. And she said, "I should have known." But he's not completely housebroken.

**JE:** And you're holding him in your lap now.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** The room we're in right now, what is this room used for?

**JW:** Well, this is supposedly my conference room. I think we've talked about my building.

**JE:** Yes we have.

**JW:** And how it came.

**JE:** But I wanted to point out here, over here to the left we have a bust. And that is the bust of?

**JW:** Out of my head. I did it.

**JE:** It's just of nobody?

**JW:** No.

**JE:** One that you created. And then I'm looking at the wall behind you. You have all these paintings of chairs.

**JW:** I did a series of chairs.

**JE:** So chairs must have been one of your favorite pieces of furniture?

**JW:** Well, it was for a time period. I think my favorite are landscapes, and there aren't too many here in the room. My landscapes are all horizontal landscapes. My teachers have said, "Put some vertical trees in them."

And I said, "No, I want to do horizontal landscapes." All of these are created out of my head. I could not copy a picture if I wanted to.

**JE:** And that is kind of strange, isn't it?

**JW:** Yeah. It was interesting, I was in a class for a six-week period. Two of the others in the class I knew quite well. They had been in other art classes with me and they were both very accomplished. But they would copy pictures, very accomplished though, much better than I could ever be.

Well, in this short course that we were taking we were going to do a painting of just composition. And the teacher said, “The circle, the square, and the triangle are the basic elements of trigonometry. So you can use those, either just one of them or all three of them, but do a composition.”

Well, of course, that’s what I studied in architectural school so I just whipped out a composition. These other two could not do it.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JW:** They were so used to copying and doing a beautiful job of it, but they didn’t know composition.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative). If anybody has a talent that’s listening to this, it’s rare that somebody can use that talent without instruction from a teacher. Is that true? I mean, if you have it then you ought to go seek out a good instructor.

**JW:** Oh yes. There are some instructors that say, “All right, this is the way you paint a tree,” so that’s the way you’re taught to paint a tree. I’ve been fortunate not to have that type of instructor. But they can be very inspiring, taught me a lot about color. I love my art classes.

**JE:** Right behind you, you did your work on a different material other than canvas.

**JW:** Oh those series of small paintings, I was up at our cabin one summer painting and I ran out of canvases, we’re out of Tahlequah, so I began looking for something I could paint on. Well, under the cabin was a stack of marble tiles. I have no idea where they came from. There were no tiles in our cabin. Well, I got those out and started painting on them. And I painted some pumpkins, I painted fish, painted some pears, painted a landscape, and it was fun.

## Chapter 22—4:40

### America the Beautiful

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**John Erling:** We might point out that the Oklahoma Centennial Commission helped make a book possible, *The Artwork of Tulsa*.

**John Walton:** Yes.

**JE:** They asked you to do that.

**JW:** Yes, that was certainly a wonderful honor to have. For the celebration of our centennial I was given a grant to write a book about the centennial and no other requirements. So I selected a hundred pieces of artwork in Tulsa, both from the public and the private sectors and told the story of each one of them. And some of them have wonderful stories to tell.

It’s my only full-color book. I’m very, very proud of it.

**JE:** You have the *Historic Homes of Ponca City and Kay County*. And then you have *More Historic Homes of Ponca City and Kay County*.

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** On the top of your head, do you know how many books you have had published?

**JW:** Eleven.

**JE:** So you do know the number?

**JW:** Well, twelve, eleven and a half. We have a summer cabin at Wauhillau Outing Club. And in 2002, it celebrated its 100th anniversary. And I wrote a book, *A Family Called Wauhillau*, for the anniversary. You know, it's never been in the bookstores or anything like that. So I guess eleven.

**JE:** Your architectural work, you write books, you have your artwork in various forms. What are you most proud of?

**JW:** Oh my.

**JE:** In either one of those categories or—

**JW:** Well, I am equally proud of my architecture and my writing. My artwork, you know, it's okay, but I have a long way to go and I know it. But I like it.

**JE:** You have advice to architectural students who may listen to this? Advice to them?

**JW:** First of all, it's a long, hard row in the school of architecture. It's a five-year course. You have to have a lot of math. Actually, the School of Architecture in Stillwater, and I think this is true of most universities, there's two phases of it: architectural design and architectural engineering. And the first two years both styles or types take the same courses.

And then at the third year the architectural design branches more into art and design, and the engineering more into engineering. The only course that I ever flunked in college was Strength of Materials at Stillwater. But the story was in the architectural department that if you passed Strength and Materials the first time you weren't going to be a very talented architect, you'd be more of an engineer.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JW:** So if you have the calling and the feeling for it, yes, try it. Give it a try. To have to serve some apprenticeship time after you get your degree. And you don't make a lot of money, but you exist and do something you're happy doing.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JW:** So that's all great.

**JE:** Do you think—

**JW:** It's been a wonderful life.

**JE:** Do you have to be born with the gift or could it be somebody, not necessarily have that gift but in time they were kind of interested in it and they could learn the craft?

**JW:** Yes.

**JE:** The profession?

**JW:** I have talked to young people that are still in high school. I encouraged them very much. It's not easy but the rewards are well worth it.

**JE:** Yeah. So then we ask, how would you like to be remembered?

**JW:** I would like to be remembered, and I've asked this to be sung at my memorial service, I would like for them to sing "America the Beautiful." Because I would like to think, in my small way, I have helped to make America more beautiful.

**JE:** And that you have.

Another thought just comes to mind. As homes were being built and mass homes were being built—

**JW:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** ...'70s, '80s, '90s, now do you cringe when you see some of the work that's being done? Or do you—

**JW:** Some of it, yes.

**JE:** Oh.

**JW:** Tulsa is very blessed today because we have some wonderful architects. And some of those architects have done spec houses, so to speak. I've only done two spec houses in my life, and I haven't been in either one of them for years. But one of them, I have talked to two or three people who have either lived there or been there, and they have said that's the most wonderful floor plan. I have no idea what the floor plan is.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JW:** You know, it's long past.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JW:** But I think it's one of my duties and obligations to help and inspire the young ones coming up.

**JE:** Yeah.

**JW:** 'Cause we're going to have some great architects. They have them now and we're going to have them in the future. We always do.

**JE:** Well, thank you, John.

**JW:** My pleasure.

**JE:** And you are a great story teller. It's my pleasure to have met you. And now to share this for the many generations to come.

**JW:** Thank you.

**JE:** You're welcome.

**Chapter 23—0:33****Conclusion**

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