

Harry Clarke

His family's claim to fame was Clarke's Good Clothes—this is an Oklahoma retail success story.

Chapter 01—1:08

Introduction

Announcer: Clarke's Good Clothes, founded in 1929 in Tulsa by Harry Clarke Sr., developed into a clothing store for men, women and children. From its downtown location, the store expanded to Utica Square Shopping Center in 1962 and then to the 50,000 square-foot store in Southland Shopping Center at 41st and Yale. In 1976 the expansion continued to Tulsa's Woodland Hills Mall at 71st and Memorial, and then on to Joplin, Missouri and Oklahoma City.

Harry Clarke Sr. was very well-known in the Tulsa community, and following in his father's footsteps, Harry Clarke Jr. also participated in local business and civic organizations. Further, his sister, Madge (Clarke) Wright, who served as vice president of advertising and public relations for the clothing store, became active in Tulsa, coordinating Miss Oklahoma's wardrobe to teaching watercolor painting at the Philbrook Museum of Art. Clarke's Good Clothes was known for special promotions such as Straw Hat Days and Coffee Call. Harry Clarke Jr. is the storyteller of this Oklahoma retail success. Listen to his account on the Oklahoma oral history website, *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.

Chapter 02—6:37

1929

John Erling: I'm here with Harry Clarke, on this the 4th day of April, '09.

Harry Clarke: I'm Harry Clarke, and I've had Clarke's Good Clothes second generation. Dad started the business about 1914, in Bristol, Oklahoma. Had stores in the small oil town, Slick, Stroud, Drumright, Cushing, and then bought the store in Tulsa in 1929. I was one year old when we moved to Tulsa.

JE: State your age and birth date.

HC: Okay. December 16, 1928. I was eighty in December, eightieth birthday last December. Still doing fine. Jogged two miles this morning. Good Lord willing I'll be here a long time.

JE: And you're in good shape too.

HC: Oh yeah. And I'm still selling real estate around the lake and believe in staying active.

JE: So okay, in 1929, he came to Tulsa?

HC: Came to Tulsa. And the main reason there, they were doing well in Bristol, but Louie Grant was the head of Home Federal Savings and Loan. Louie had moved from Bristol to Tulsa and they had just kept after Dad to move over here. So finally a storefront became available, it was Crews Kelly, at 317 South Main in downtown Tulsa.

Crews Kelly there was the father of Ira Crews that had Crews Lumber Company, the person to heirs down on I believe it was 2nd Street. I've still got the original bill of sale, eighteen thousand dollars is what he paid.

JE: So your dad bought it from Crews Kelly?

HC: Yeah, Crews Kelly was two people and they ran the store. Kelly worked for us a long time after.

JE: So Crews is one person?

HC: Crews and Kelly, those were the two partners in the business that he bought.

JE: So they already had a clothing store?

HC: There was a clothing store there. They weren't doing too well.

JE: So your father, his name again was?

HC: Harry Clarke.

JE: So you're Junior?

HC: Well, I'm really not. Dad was Walter Harry Clarke and I'm Harry Alfred Clarke. Dad didn't like Walter so he went by Harry. And so when I came along I didn't like my nickname so I became Harry Junior.

JE: So you bought the clothing store, Crews Kelly, and then revitalized the business.

HC: Yes. He came in and went to work on it and built it, really built the business. Madge, my sister, came into the business a little ahead of me. She went to TU and worked in the business. We both grew up in it. Every Saturday I was down in the stockroom wiping boxes, helping mark merchandise, so you kind of come by it naturally.

Madge was the hardest, the talent there and later was my partner and ran the promotional end of the business.

JE: And clothes were for all ages?

HC: Yeah. Well, originally we were Men's, Women's and then we had a Boy's Department. And then in '61, we were having a tough time because we didn't have a suburban store. Utica had opened in '51.

JE: Utica Square?

HC: Utica Square, the first group of stores that opened there. And we were not there. And in '61, a furniture store and another store were going out of business, King Dickson was the furniture store. He was an early pioneer furniture merchant.

He always kind of liked me and King called me, and said, "Do you need that store?"

And we did. So we got a lease and opened in November of '61.

JE: In that location?

HC: In the location we had at Utica Square for all those years. And later we got the corner, which I think was called The Sportsman, was a sporting goods store. That's where we put the men's store.

JE: Then you had your downtown store?

HC: Kept the downtown store.

JE: And Utica Square?

HC: Opened Utica Square. Southland was supposed to open in '62, I think, and it didn't. It was '65 before it opened and that, of course, was the big store, the main store.

JE: So then you had three stores going?

HC: Three stores.

JE: How long were you able to have three stores?

HC: Well, I see Woodland came along, somewhere along in there we opened the store in Joplin. And then we ended up opening up two in Oklahoma City.

JE: How many stores did you have at one time?

HC: Seven. A couple too many. When they built the mall at Joplin we had a chance to get in there. Joplin, at that time, was really growing and booming. And then later it hit a slow patch. We had a chance to get out of Joplin and we did.

JE: So you had three stores when Woodland Hills came about?

HC: Yeah. Three stores and going very strong in Tulsa. The downtown was going down but Utica and Southland were both very strong. Both did about the same performance in square footage sales. Utica was more Women's than it was Men's, just because of the configuration of the store. Southland was really the balance store.

Our business was about 65 percent Women's and Girl's and 45 percent Men's and Boys.

JE: When you went to high school you were the best dressed guy in school, weren't you?

HC: No. I went to military school.

JE: Really?

HC: Yeah. During the war it looked like we were going to be in there a while so I think Dad and Mom figured that I would have a better chance if I had a better military education. Western Military Academy in Alton, Illinois. That's where I went to high school.

JE: All four years?

HC: Yeah. Really was up there five years and it paid off well, because what I learned there really helped keep me alive in Korea. I missed World War II but spent thirteen months in Korea. It was there I read the “Cease fire” to my command July 27, of '53, if I remember right.

JE: What was your job?

HC: I was the second lieutenant. I was the supply platoon leader for the Second Division.

JE: You were a commissioned officer because of your high school militariage?

HC: I had a commission out of high school and the Illinois National Guard. But then I spent a year in New York going to school, and retail school. Then went over to Stillwater and finished up and was in advanced ROTC. So I had a commission coming out of there. And the pattern was, shortly after you'd graduate they'd take you into the service and they would send you for four months to school. They sent me to Fort Lee, Virginia. Then they would send you close to home for four months, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. And then off to Korea.

JE: What year was that?

HC: I got there in February of '53. And then I think the “Cease fire” was July 27, of that same year.

Then I got out of there in March of '54, came back into the business. You got a readjustment coming out of that and back in. But Madge was there-she was doing the promotion. She wasn't running the promotions yet but she was there.

In '57, Dad had a pretty serious heart attack, and, ready or not, Madge and I had to pretty much take over.

JE: How old would you have been about that time?

HC: Twenty-eight, I guess.

JE: When your father had the heart attack?

HC: Yeah.

JE: In '57?

HC: Yeah, yeah. Now he was still there but we kind of picked up the reins along in there.

JE: You had the single store downtown?

HC: Single store downtown.

Chapter 03—2:42

Downtown Tulsa

John Erling: Let's talk about the downtown store for a bit here.

Harry Clarke: Oh, yeah, those were the days.

JE: Those were good days, weren't they?

HC: Oh yeah, everything was downtown. John Duncan was still there.

JE: What was John Duncan?

HC: Brown Duncan.

JE: Brown Duncan?

HC: Mrs. Brown, Oklahoma City, that was her relative I think, but he was the partner over here. He ran the store. And there was two big department stores, Brown Duncan's and Vandevvers. The Vandever brothers were still alive at that time. I'd met them but I didn't know them that well.

JE: There were five Vandever brothers. They were the department store and Brown Duncan was a department store.

HC: Two major department stores, yes.

JE: And they sold clothes as well?

HC: Oh yeah, oh yeah, they sold everything.

JE: So were they competitors then of yours?

HC: Oh yeah, they were competitors. Renberg's was right next-door.

JE: Right next door to you?

HC: Yeah, and George was right next-door. I'll tell you, the retail community ran the credit bureau, you know, we competed like the dickens for business but we worked together. At one point, Tulsa had its own credit card, had a little blue credit card and there were six people, the department stores, Renberg's, Clarke's, Froug's, which was another department store right across the street. Mike Froug's and a couple of other stores later joined in. But you could have that credit card—this is before the MasterCard and Visa and all that began.

JE: Were you then ahead of your time, in a way? Were other cities doing—

HC: Well, it wasn't me, it was just the—

JE: No, I meant the community.

HC: Well, I think most communities did. Tulsa was a very aggressive, progressive community. You know, Tulsa and Dallas were considered the two kind of fashion, upscale communities in the Southwest. It was exciting to be a part of.

JE: And this was in the '50s and early '60s?

HC: '50s, '60s, well, on up into the '70s.

JE: What were some of the restaurants downtown? Where would you go for lunch?

HC: Nelson's Buffeteria. Now at that time it was located down in the Skelly building, down on 3rd Street. And then Frank had the Coney Island's on down on 3rd, west of 3rd there.

JE: The Greeks.

HC: Oh the Greeks, yeah, they're down there.

When I was younger we had an hour for lunch and you never went to lunch from twelve to one because that was when everyone had lunch hour. So you either went

to lunch early or went to lunch late. We'd go down and get a couple of Coney's and a pop and then we'd go over to Sears, which was a block away, and go down to the Tool Department and spend the rest of the lunch hour looking at all the tools and fishing tackle and all like young kids will.

But Sears was a major factor. I think George Thompson was the head of the Sears at that time. But they were all, you know, they were the civic part of the town at that time. The civic stuff was pretty much run by the merchants.

Chapter 04—5:50

Gunda

John Erling: You personally were involved in the city.

Harry Clarke: Oh yeah. Yeah, I loved it. Madge and I both, Dad believed in that. He was president of the Chamber when he was thirty-five years old and kept on a second year at thirty-six. When I came back I got very involved in the Junior Chamber of Commerce. Was president in '57.

My first project was getting an elephant for the Tulsa Zoo. And Gunda is still there. We talked to Leroy Sipes Grocery Store, very fine grocery store, into giving us a thousand dollars worth of groceries and we raffled it off. We raised enough money, and I think Hugh Davis was heading the zoo at that time. They went to Florida and brought that elephant back.

JE: That would have been in?

HC: '54.

JE: And Gunda the elephant?

HC: He's still there. I was laughing because they were talking about it had been in the zoo fifty years. And yeah, I remember that.

JE: Why was the elephant a project?

HC: Well, the zoo needed an elephant. The Junior Chamber's whole concept was helping young men at that point to develop the skills to be civic leaders. We sold fair tickets, was another thing we did to raise money. And we did a Christmas Shopping Tour for needy kids. There was twenty-two standing committees. I headed membership for one year. We had over eight hundred members and about 150 that were really involved in a state organization.

George and I was involved. You know, I remember Georgy Boy way back then. I was first governor; he was still in his twenties at that time.

JE: What was he doing in his twenties?

HC: I don't remember what he was doing but he was very involved.

JE: Involved in Tulsa?

HC: State organization, Junior Chamber of Commerce.

JE: Okay.

HC: We had a national convention; I went to three of those. And they had state conventions and we were involved in those. You'd make friends, well, in fact, the year I was president here, Wendell Ford, who is now the Senator from Kentucky, I believe, or has been, I don't know if he still is or not, was the national president. He and I became good friends. When he and his wife were here, when he wasn't traveling, well, they were out at the house. We had a little old swimming pool. We were kind of their family away from home.

JE: So as you were involved then other merchants were involved too?

HC: They were, they were involved long before I was. You know, I just came in and the credit bureau was run by the merchants. Bill Ricent headed that. He had to have someone check the credit out, and so everyone really kind of swapped the credit through the credit bureau. And that's where this credit card came up.

Then the Christmas Parade was put on by the merchants. Downtown Tulsa Unlimited, Bud Loost, that grew out of an effort to save downtown when everything was going suburban. So the merchant group was kind of the leaders.

JE: Even though you were competing it was never a hostile competition of any sort?

HC: It was dog eat dog on the day, but it's like most things, there are things you've got to work together on. Mike Froug had Froug's Department Store, and that was the third department store, kinda. Right across from us. I think Orin Smelion was his son-in-law and he got me involved in United Way.

He called me and he was kind of cantankerous, but he and I always got along great. He headed the United Way, the retail part of it for a number of years. Then he shoved that off on me and I did it and it ended up going through all the chairs.

If I've got to pick one thing that I did that I'm most proud of—head the United Way drive. You know, the biggest single job in Tulsa. Spend the best part of the year doing it.

JE: How much money do you think you were raising back then?

HC: We raised right at three million dollars.

JE: Pretty good amount in—

HC: Well, you figure I think the minimum wage \$1.25 an hour. You know, the town wasn't that big at that point. But not near what Kathleen has been raising lately.

JE: Kathleen Cohen.

HC: Neat lady.

JE: What did a suit cost back then in the '50s?

HC: A hundred to a hundred and a quarter to get you a heck of a fine suit.

JE: What brand was it?

HC: Hart Schaffner and Marx. That suit today would probably cost you \$700, \$800. You know, a necktie is an easy way to do it. I remember Uncle John Mabee. John Mabee called Dad one day and he said, "I need some ties for Christmas." I guess he was up in his seventies then but he came in and Dad had me help him. The best ties we had in the place were ten dollar ties.

And he picked out a dozen, fifteen ten-dollar ties.

JE: John Mabee, tell us who he was.

HC: Oh he was probably one if not the richest man in Tulsa. Mabee's Center is named after him. He was a mule trader. He started out in the oil business. Liked to play the backward, bumbling, I mean, just smarter than a fox though.

I know that day we bought those ties, Dad wrote the ticket out and he said, "Well, now Harry, where do you want me to put my X?" And he put an X on there. Shoot, Dad laughed.

And he was the biggest single contributor to the United Way through those years. His name's on a lot of buildings.

JE: At ORU the Mabee Center.

HC: The Mabee Center, that was—

JE: Comes from him, from that family.

HC: Came out of the foundation. I met, through Dad largely, so many. Bob McDowell, who was president of DX Oil.

JE: Had you any out of town celebrities who happened to come into your store?

HC: Not particularly. I've got some pictures, I've got a bunch of old newspapers. When the movie *Tulsa* came out and had the premiere in Tulsa, we had a stagecoach parked in front of the store. And Chill Wills climbed up in the driver's seat and they got some pictures of that.

We did the wardrobes for Miss Oklahoma, Madge did, I stayed away from it. For thirteen Miss Oklahoma's. And then had one Jane Ann Jayroe.

JE: Jane Jayroe, I guess.

HC: Jane Jayroe, yeah, went all the way to Miss America. That was kind of exciting.

My sister, unfortunately, passed away early but at her funeral there were five Miss Oklahoma's that showed up to pay their respects, which I thought was pretty nice.

Chapter 05—3:05

Stud Horse Note

John Erling: You said that the merchants were really major contributors. What about the oil companies and Bill Skelly and do they play in them?

Harry Clarke: Oh, well, oh yeah, well, Bill Skelly was a big contributor to everything. You know, all the oil companies. No, the merchants were just kind of the ones that seemed like got things started. You know, you get into aviation and if it hadn't been for Bill Skelly the airport probably, you know, the old stud horse note, there was ten or fifteen of those guys that would get together and decide to do something, like they want to build an airport out there. And, "Count me in for this much," and "I'm in this much." They'd put the money up and then they would figure out how they were going to get the money back, if they ever did.

JE: Let's talk about the Stud Horse Note.

HC: What they would do, okay, they wanted to build a bridge across the Arkansas. The oil business was really over on the west side of the river, Slick, Stroud, the Drumright field, and the Cushing field, those were the big fields. But there was no place for those people to live. So the bridge in 1901, I think it was, was built across the Arkansas to bring those people into Tulsa, and they promised to provide them a good place to live.

Well, those people all came over here but when they had some project civically Fletchers, I think the airport was a good example, and they didn't have time to wait for bond issues and all that other stuff so the heavy hitters—

JE: Do you remember some of those names? Bill Skelly—

HC: Well, Bill Skelly, Bob McDowell was DX, Bill Warren, the Warrens, W. K. Warren, the drilling company G. C. Parker, Bobby Parker's dad, I remember him. We lived at 25th and Lewis, was the end of the city, and the Parkers lived at the southeast corner of 21st and Lewis. Add at, of course, Cinder, Pipe, and Supply was back in there, that's Henry Rissue.

JE: Henry Rissue.

HC: Oh yeah. That's back kind of when Dad was involved in the Chamber.

JE: I was just thinking, did they buy their clothes in Tulsa? Did they buy them from your clothing store?

HC: Some did, some didn't. That was really never an issue as far as Dad was concerned. They were so good, not only loved us, but there's so many businesses been so good to Tulsa. You know, this town when it comes push to shove will really stand up and—well, you know. You've run enough campaigns when you were on the radio, to do good stuff, man, they'll really get in behind you and help you.

But like in '71, I think it was, when I ran the United Way drive things were tough, but I wasn't dealing from strength, I didn't have a big company. But we went out and sold the need. I remember it going to the newspaper and I had asked if I could have the meeting of the editors and everything and needed their help. That was kind of a dumb meeting. They gave me up pretty good, but we wouldn't have made that campaign if they hadn't of after—

JE: The *Tulsa World* gave you a tough time?

HC: Yeah. They were questioning and that was their job. But then they gave me the publicity we needed to put the drive over. I didn't mind that. That's what I think we need more of today. Ask the questions and everything up front rather than wait until after it's over and say, "Hey, wait a minute, what happened?"

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 06—6:25

Commercial

John Erling: You mentioned radio a little bit ago. Talk to us about the commercials you would do for Clarke's Good Clothes.

Harry Clarke: Okay, well, I came back out of Korea in '54, into the business, and Dad was doing a TV commercial on Sunday evening, Hugh Finnerty Sports. Sunday evening we had to go to the store and pick up all the stuff and take it down to the TV station. We had to do it live and it was midnight before we got back home. And the display guy had to come down and do the display and they were one-take. It was kind of beginning to change but Dad said, "You know, this is a young man's game." He said, "You're going to start doing this."

So in '54, about that time they had started using film, 16 mm film. The one that did our production for us, they would share the tape. In other words, you'd do a commercial and then they'd take it from station to station and play it. But they had a little house on Boulder Park on the west side of Boulder on the park and we would go down there and they would tape commercials.

JE: Was that a production company or was that a TV—

HC: No that was channel 8, that was who did our production. Al Clauser and Roy Pickett were the two guys that filmed those. Set the lighting and everything up and they had a great, big camera and we'd start doing those. We didn't do as many live. I did a few live. Here came tape along, I did commercials for twenty-five years. And every Friday morning Madge would write them. That's the hardest day's work I ever did.

I put them to memory—

JE: So no teleprompter?

HC: Well, they had a teleprompter. I didn't use a teleprompter. You know, you can tell some people they're just great, and other people you can just see them word for word for word for word on a teleprompter. So I could typically put a minute's spot to memory in about fifteen minutes.

We did two. I'd kind of memorize one going in and then I'd forget it and work on the second while they were changing the set.

JE: That's pretty amazing talent you had to do that.

HC: If you do it every week it's like anything else—

JE: And then you knew your product quite well.

HC: It really wasn't so much about doing the product. We were selling the people and the service.

JE: Remember some of the things you would do? Can you do a commercial right here?

HC: Oh, wasn't it always what we called the bring-'em-back-alive commercial I always did after Christmas. There was a commercial that went kind of: Happy holiday to you from all of us at Clarke's. Certainly we at Clarke's wouldn't want the happiness of your Christmas to be spoiled by errors in the gifts you received. If you received any gift from Clarke's we will gladly and cheerfully make it right. Come in and see any of our friendly staff and they'll be glad to make the exchange. Some of you may have had the good fortunate of receiving a Clarke's gift certificate. It is good for any item at any time just like greenbacks. So happy holiday to you from all of us at Clarke's.

JE: That's very good.

HC: Well, I did that commercial every year, more or less, I changed it a little bit. You know, you're selling a service. We sold clothes but what business are you really in? We were in the appearance business. We had to make people feel better and you weren't selling needs, you were creating desire and want.

Madge was good at that, she was just fantastic. Won a silver Addie, lost her way too soon. She was sixty-two when she passed away.

JE: Wow. You did radio commercials too.

HC: Madge and I did some radio commercials. She projected so much stronger than I did when we were talking that she'd have to sit behind me about three feet and then we'd talk. Dick Smith, Servian Productions.

Dick and I met in the Jaycees in '55, '56. When I was president he was the director. Then he was one of the big seven deejays from KKC rock and radio station.

JE: Yeah.

HC: Then he started the production company and Madge started using him for all of our production. I haven't seen him for some time but we're still good friends.

JE: When you did the TV for channel 8, John Chick you said—

HC: Johnny Chick. Yeah, did the sound. That was *Mr. Zing and Toughy*, the children's show. In fact, they came on right after us. We had to get in there at nine o'clock and had to get two commercials, and I think they came on at eleven or twelve, something like that. But they'd be breaking down our set and setting up their set as soon as we got through.

Well, Johnny did all the sound, or a lot of the sound on those. Sadie, at that time, was our account executive.

JE: Sadie?

HC: Adwan, who later ran the station. I'll say this, we never were out there to cut a spot when Sadie didn't come through some time while we were there. Just to be sure everything was going all right. You know, again, that's customer service. She knew we were going to be there, she didn't stay long, would just touch base. That's what there's not a whole lot of anymore.

There used to be an old saying that everyone wants service but no one is willing to pay for it. And that's kind of what's happened.

JE: He was known as John Chick and you're calling him Johnny.

HC: John Chick, I knew Johnny Chick.

JE: He did the TV programs but he would take a bet on you?

HC: Well, we'd be ready to do a commercial and I'd go over to the corner of the studio with my script and I'd be going through it, going through it, going through it 'cause when you come back on the TV you want to be as relaxed and as natural as you can be. And so I'd come back, they had a loud speaker in the studio. They'd say, "Harry, give me a test."

I'd recognize his voice so I'd give him the testing, "One, two, three." And there's still a commercial. Just before we were ready to do the countdown Johnny would come on and he'd say, "Harry, I got five bucks on you." And that meant that he'd bet some stranger in there that I was going to nail the commercial the first take.

And I did about 89 percent of the time I did. Still, talking about putting a little extra pressure on you.

JE: Being on television too back then had to kind of make a celebrity out of you, I mean, wherever you went.

HC: No, not really. I'll tell you an interesting story on that. We were on the ten o'clock news and we'd been on the ten o'clock news for a long time. So Madge came in one day and she, "Harry, I think I'm going to shift part of our television schedule to the six o'clock news."

And I said, "Fine." So we did that. I hadn't been on that a week and I had people I'd run into say, "Hey, when did you start doing television?" Because it's an entirely different audience. Six o'clock at night there's a whole group of different people that watch the six o'clock news than watch the ten o'clock.

Chapter 07—4:17**Promotions**

John Erling: Let's talk about some of the promotions the downtown store, now back in the '50s and—

Harry Clarke: Okay.

JE: What were some of the promotions that you would do?

HC: You had your holidays, you had your Christmas, you had Easter, you had Father's Day, Mother's Day a little less. We were at that time really heavily a men's store. There was a photographer and it was called the Braggin' Wagon. He had a little trailer set up. We did a promotion look-alike, dad and son. They had parking meters at that time, you had to pay for the meter for a week. And we'd park that little trailer, like a house trailer, not very big but it had signs on it. And you'd come down there and he would take the picture and then the prize is which father and son looked the most alike. We did that for a number of years, that was a good promotion.

JE: Did you have a promotion called Miss Teen?

HC: Dance party. That was a little later. That really came after Utica. When we opened Utica the teenage shop was called the Miss Tulsa Shop. At that time we worked with two or three manufacturers. Thermo-Jack was a big teen, women's apparel provider. So we had a Thermo-Jack board.

And I still, in fact, not too long ago I ran into someone and she went, "I have a son on the Thermo-Jack board."

JE: Thermo-Jack was what?

HC: Manufacturer. It was an updated teen shop. Then channel 6 did the dance party every Saturday. That was kind of a takeoff of the national dance party. We had sponsors in that. At one time we had ice cream cones. Then they changed the laws to where unless you had running water in the scoop deal you couldn't get it out.

There's a picture I've got of 1957 Straw Hat Day. It was a big day. General Joe Turner was a good friend of ours who was the World War hero and was head of the International Guard here for a long time. He flew a B-26 down almost between the buildings, I mean, he rattled every window in town. And on the third pass they dropped out three dozen straw hats. The street's full of people, I mean, there's no traffic, it's wall to wall people from 3rd Street to 6th Street. And the deal was that if you got one of these straw hats you could come in and get one that fit you.

JE: It must have been a scramble.

HC: I was in school. Herb Coulter, who was Dad's right hand, knocked on his door and he said, "Mr. Clarke, you've got to come see this." They had no idea that it would be that big of a

deal. But it was. And like I say, there wasn't room to put another person in there. But it was during lunch hour. See, everyone went to lunch pretty much the same time, twelve to one. All the office buildings, all the oil companies.

We did a couple like that. We did a Hickok Belt promotion. The Hickok salesman had an airplane so we were going to give away, oh I think, a hundred belts. We took gliders, little airplane gliders and my job, I had to glue them all together, test the flying, and get them going. And they took these up, in fact, somewhere I've got a picture of me standing out by the plane. I guess I was about eight years old, nine, something like that. But they took those up and did kind of the same thing, flew over certain neighborhoods and things and they'd dump out these gliders. And, of course, they'd glide all over. If you got a glider you'd come down and get your belt. And a—

JE: And there was never any problems that came up from that?

HC: Naw (negative).

JE: If you did it today it would wild, something would be wrong.

HC: Oh yeah, no, no. Like I said, I grew up 25th and Lewis, the backdoor was always open. Mom may not have been there, as long as I had my bicycle, and we played work-up. You know, there was nothing organized, but the kids in the neighborhood, we'd go down to Cascia Hall and play on their ball diamond in the summer and play work-up.

And then when I got hungry I'd come home and if Mom wasn't there, there was always a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in the icebox and a glass of milk. So I was as happy as a June bug. You know, I never had a helmet. Streets weren't paved, there was kind of a gutter on each side of the streets. Like I say, they weren't paved, they were oil and they graded them once a year.

Oh we loved it when they graded the streets. You know, everyone went out watching. But then when it would rain the water would flow down each side of the street, we'd make boats and float them. We could go from Lewis clear on down to Yorktown, two blocks in the gutter on those streets.

JE: The life was really good, wasn't it?

HC: Oh, hey, it was. We had a great time.

Chapter 08—5:30

City Government

John Erling: In your adult life, and you were running the store then as a young man, the mayors that would have been of the city of Tulsa.

Harry Clarke: Jim Maxwell was the first one I really was involved with. Jim was a Jaycee, was president a couple, three years ahead of me. Became mayor thirty-two years old, I think, and was, I think, five terms. Jim talked me into spending three years on the Planning Commission, which is an experience. I think 106 public hearings that I sat through. You don't make a lot of friends but I think we did a lot of good.

I had talked to Dad about it before I did and he said, "No. Go vote your conscious. Do what you think."

Ed Dewby was chairman of that. Parson Echols, who was the Director of Trinity Episcopal Church was on it. There was great people on that.

JE: The name of the committee was, commission, I guess?

HC: The Sinten County Metropolitan Planning Commission. Each county commissioner had a couple appointments, the mayor had two or three appointments that did all the zoning, did all the planning. I was on there from '57 to '60, three years.

We approved the expressway plan while I was on that and I lived to see it completed. Broken Air Expressway, all of it, the inter-dispersal loop, that was all planned and done. Interesting here too, still a good friend of mine, at that time Ken Neal was running the City Beat.

JE: Of the *Tulsa World*?

HC: Yeah, who had just retired as one of their editorial staff, I believe, in January. But he was covering the City Beat and I always thought he was a neat guy. I never saw him miscarry anything or report what didn't happen. He was just right-up, heads up all the way. I saw him, oh I guess, about a year ago in Utica Square, at Queenie's having lunch.

But Jim was in there. Of course, L. C. Clark on that. People thought we were related but we spelled our name with an "e," he didn't, but I knew L. C.

JE: And who was L. C. Clark?

HC: L. C. Clark was a mayor. He had Clark Harlan Hardware, they were in the hardware business, among other things. That was before Jim. And then Hughley, of course, was in there who I've known.

In fact, the one that I've kind of kept track of, Sid Patterson, was Street Commissioner who was up with trees, which I think is one of the greatest. You're talking about coming up with something that really has caught on and I think improved Tulsa's look so much. Hundreds of companies have gotten involved in that.

JE: Gilcrease Expressway would have been part of your expressway?

HC: Yeah, yeah, Gilcrease was part of it. The only part of it that wasn't the southeast, which is Maple Ridge, that I say was changed because it ran right through a very nice addition. It's one of those deals that if they'd done it earlier it would have been all right, but that was one of the early additions, kind of south of Lee School. But basically, it was built

to Broken Arrow. The loop was virtually built as it was designed at that point. And now they've extended it, expanded it, widened it.

JE: In other issues the city had been then in the '50s, '60s?

HC: I remember when the City Hall, which they've just moved out of, and the Maxwell Arena when it was first built. You know, that's one of the changes. When I headed the United Way drive in '71 we had a kickoff dinner and we had a kickoff. Now they do it with kind of a rally. It's interesting the change that takes place but that's where they would hold the dinners, that big assembly hall there.

And, of course, back when I was in the Jaycees we worked on the Gilcrease. We had a bond issue for the Gilcrease.

JE: For the museum?

HC: Yeah for the museum. Thomas Gilcrease, as I recall, had all this collection of art but the oil as it did, cycled down, and he couldn't meet the obligation. So he said, "If the city will raise the money I'll give it and give my home." Which he did. And we worked every lunch hour. We'd give up lunch and we'd go out and work the streets. We had a speaker car and stand on the corner and pass out leaflets and flyers. That was fun, you know? Good things.

JE: Then the vote came in?

HC: The vote came in and the vote was successful, that and Filbrook both. Very enjoyable.

JE: You were involved in all this because you liked to do it. You didn't do it because of your business, or did you?

HC: No, it connects, but Madge took the arts because she was an artist, so she took the arts. She loved the ballet and partly liked the orchestra but she took those and I took the Chamber and the United Way. Yeah, I liked being a part of it. You know, that's where it's at. In Tulsa, the finest people, that's where you meet them. They're involved in the civic area of the city. That's where I met Henry and lots of other people that were all involved.

Alfred Aaronson was one. Alfred was on the Planning Commission but the library was his passion.

JE: So we have the Aaronson Auditorium today.

HC: Absolutely. That's why. But he was an oilman and he just fought and fought for libraries.

Talking about people, I always think of Dan Peomes and Highway 33, what an institution he was. Of course, that's now, I guess, 412.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

HC: You can go way out there and it's four-lane. Used to be a tough ride. As a kid you're always, "When are we going to get there? When are we going to get there?" And if we were coming home from a trip, I remember the KVO towers, three tall towers that were way out on 11th Street. When I finally saw those towers I knew we were getting close to home.

Chapter 09—4:50
Clarke's Employees

John Erling: You remember some of the names of employees that would have worked in your store? Particularly downtown.

Harry Clarke: Herb Coulter was the gentleman that headed the women's division. Herb started with Dad at Bristol. Then he left to come over to go to TU. Then when Dad opened the store here Herb came back. He was his right hand and he was really involved in the men's division. Then at a point in time, the gentleman that was running the women's floor left so Dad said, "Herb, go up and look after that till I can find someone." And he never left.

Of course, he went to the service, went into the war and came back. He was in the PX service but came back and ran the women's division until he passed away. He was like a second father to me. He was a great, great guy.

And then Harold Castleman, the bald-headed gentleman. He and I were always together. The store was really kind of organized, had four floors. The first floor was Men's Furnishing, Sportswear, and Shoes. Second was Men's Clothing. Third was Women's, and fourth was the Boy's Department and the Office.

There was a person in charge of each floor. You bought the merchandise and you hired the people. In other words, you had to buy it and then you had to sell it. So the first floor, Harold Castleman was running that when I came back in the business and he and I worked together.

Then Herb ran the third floor. And Jack Kinsley ran the Clothing Department and the second floor. And then my brother-in-law, Bill Wright, ran the Boy's Department. And the advertisement was on the fourth floor over that.

So shortly after I came back, Castleman got pulled away to go to Kerr's in Oklahoma City, which was a department store. Better job. He left in 1957, I remember because I came home from a Jaycee convention. The family always got together on Sunday evening at the folks' house for dinner, just kind of a standing family deal. So we're having dinner and Dad said, "Castleman's leaving, do you want that job?"

And I said, "Yes I do." I guess that's when the fun began. You know, finally I had something to do, I had responsibility. I took it and it was mine. And I loved buying, I loved promoting, I loved hiring the people, I guess if there was anything I loved to do more than anything else is to motivate people. Success is not out there some place, it's in your head.

I always go back to one of the things I always loved to use. In the Olympics there was a high-jumper called Fosbury and he did the Fosbury flip. Which was the first backward

kind of flip over the bar. But when he would start he'd rock back and forth. Someone asked him what he was doing when he was doing that and he said, "I'm picturing myself going over the bar."

So I used that thousands of times in promotional meetings. "Picture yourself succeeding. Picture yourself making the sale." Most of us tend to do the other, "Hope I don't mess this up."

JE: Right.

HC: So you've got to do that positive.

JE: Remember some really outstanding sales people you had that were really successful?

HC: Oh Noel Holmes. Noel Holmes had been in Tulsa. He'd had a business gone in the Dakotas, and he came back and Coulter brought him to me. And he said, "Harry, this is Noel Holmes, and you need to give him a job. He's good."

It was Christmas time and I needed help and said, "Fine." So Noel came in about Thanksgiving and led the floor through the holidays even though he wasn't one of the regulars. So then I said, "What about Clothing, you want to take a shot at Clothing?"

He said, "Yeah I'd like to do that." So it moved him up to the second floor and he again took off like a skyrocket.

About in that time a gentleman that was merchandising that passed away quite unexpectedly. And I said to Noel, "Would you like to help me merchandise this?"

He said, "Yeah," and so he and I worked together for, I guess, ten, twelve years. And it was great.

My philosophy was I like to surround myself with people that I felt good with, that I felt comfortable with.

We were talking about Castleman, that guy that went to Kerr's. When we opened Utica in '61, I called Harold and I said, "We're getting ready to open the suburban store and I want you to run it." And he did. We opened that in six weeks after we got the lease. Oklahoma Fixture, we were designing during the day, they were building fixtures at night, installing them the next day. Castleman was putting the people together and Coulter was putting the merchandise together. Less than two months, not much time. But we opened.

Then we opened Southland, he opened that store, and then after that he became the operational vice president. He and I were just like two brothers. He had a lot of things to get done but he and I worked till six thirty, seven, we'd go get a bite of dinner, come back and work until eleven or twelve. It was work but it—

JE: It was fun.

HC: Oh yeah, oh yeah. You know, you've got to love what you do.

Chapter 10—2:05**Clarke's is Sold**

Harry Clarke: Really only had two bad years in the retail business, and those were the two after I sold the business. When I had a contract with M. M. Cowan.

John Erling: The only two years that were bad were after?

HC: For me. After I sold the business. In other words, you sell a business and you usually got a couple years' contract to stay around. And I think you're supposed to be seen and not heard. But I could see mistakes being made, you know, it tore me apart.

JE: And who did you sell the store to?

HC: M. M. Cowan in Little Rock.

JE: That was clothing?

HC: They were very fine clothing. They did more business than we did. They were kind of the Neiman Marcus of Arkansas. Very fine family apparel store.

JE: What brought you to that decision to sell it?

HC: Madge had some health issues and we lost her—in fact, two years to the day. My contract ended two years after the sale and she passed away one day later. But she had a contract until she was sixty-five to stay on with them. And they needed someone here to run the promotion. They were going to do most of the stuff out of Little Rock but they still needed someone here.

JE: When you sold then how many stores did you have?

HC: Six. We'd closed Joplin. Joplin, the economy had tanked a little bit, we had a chance to get out of it, so we felt like it was a good business decision to do it.

JE: Then in town you had the four?

HC: Four in Tulsa and two in Oklahoma City.

JE: Because you were downtown, Utica Square, Southland—

HC: Southland and Woodland.

JE: Then you did go to Woodland?

HC: Oh yeah, yeah. Woodland was a good store. It wasn't as strong, you measure a store on dollars per square foot. Woodland is a younger mall. On the other hand, there were some people that liked to shop out there that we'd send merchandise out for.

JE: And the downtown store survived through all of this until your sale?

HC: Yeah. Really we should have closed it probably five or six years before. I tell you, if you make mistakes in judgment many times it's emotional mistakes. That's where it began and you just hate to do it. And we should have done it. I think Madge knew it and I think I knew it. But it would have been tough on Mom if we'd of done it.

Chapter 11—7:00**Change to Clarke's Logo**

Harry Clarke: When we changed the sig—the original Clarke's were little, fat letters and then we modernized it in the late '60s. I'd go to a lot of seminars and get ideas. You need to get inspiration and you need to get out of your business some. So I went to one and then the Hudson Bay Company was the one they were talking about. That was up in Canada, and Hudson Bay is kind of old as can be. They were losing their business, they were stuffy, stodgy. This company had consulted with them and they changed it and turned the company around and they went to the Bay.

So Madge and I talked about it. We decided to go to Clarke's and do it all lowercase, and that's the way for ten years the sigs were. The c-l-a-r-k-e-'-s was done in lowercase. I bet we had a hundred—we had the art department doing Clarke's every way you could conceive. And this one kept coming back to us, so we're going to make the change. And I said to Madge, "Before we do this we need to go out and talk to Mom."

Mom, at that time, was in her nineties. She lived to be ninety-seven, neat lady, oh, great class angel. Marvelous to take care of, appreciated everything. After Madge passed away then Jackie and I took care of her, brought her to Tulsa and took her to the grocery store. Every Thursday take her to get her hair done. Richard had been doing her hair for, oh I guess, twenty-five years. And he pampered her. So he took this sig out to show it to Mom. And Madge gave her the spiel of why, times were changing, showed her the sig, she looked at it and a tear came out of the corner of her eye.

Oh gosh, I'm telling you, talk about feeling bad, tear came down her cheek and she said, "You're not even going to spell Clarke with a capital C?"

I guess we were there an hour and a half but she finally came around. Madge was good at that, she had a lot of props and things to show her. But that was one of the toughest.

Toughest job I ever had was taking her car away from her at ninety.

John Erling: Why did you feel you needed to change the sig, the lettering?

HC: The old sig was dated. Like I say, it had started in '14, and it was just not today.

JE: Yeah.

HC: We dropped the "Good Clothes." It's interesting that I've had a number of people that were very smart, Harvard MBAs, things like that that I knew that were in the advertising business. And they'd say, "Why are you keeping that "Good Clothes"?"

And I said, "Well, it's been pretty good to us." But we kind of felt like, "Okay, it's time."

Still, I'll run into people and they'll say, "Well, I used to shop at Clarke's Good Clothes. Paid your money and takes your choice."

JE: Well, it didn't hurt your business any but—

HC: No, no, but I don't think that—

JE: You were identified.

HC: You know, if there was one mistake, it would be the biggest one I saw that M. M. Cowan made when they bought the business. About six months after they bought it they changed the name from Clarke's to M. M. Cowan. And the day they changed the name the sales started down dramatically. And I had friends say, "They insulted us all."

When Bill Dillard brought Brown Duncan's it was Brown Duncan's for three or four years. Then it was Dillard's Brown Duncan's for three or four years. And finally it was Dillard's. He was smart enough to step it, step by step, give people a chance to get used to it. He'd modernize the stores.

JE: Communities take ownership.

HC: Oh, hey, no question about it. You ask people, "Where did you shop?" "Oh, Clarke's, Renberg's." Those were the two as far as apparel that would pop into their mind. There were lots of others, Streets was another one. There was a bunch of other stores, but yeah, they feel like, and that's what you want them to feel like.

JE: It was their store.

HC: Their store, yeah, absolutely. You run a retail store from the selling floor, you don't run it from an office. It's interesting because Castleman and I, the manager, was so close in Southland, I was standing by him one day and a lady came in with a problem. And she went up to him rather than me. She got right up in his face, and she said, "Mr. Glock," and she was telling him her problem.

And I just moved away, I just let him handle it. I thought, "Well, there's no sense me getting in there." But people do, yeah, they take pride. And I think the fact that we were very involved in the city.

JE: How long then did M. M. Cowan last?

HC: Four years.

JE: And they left because business went down the tube?

HC: Oh yeah. Yeah.

JE: When you sold the business would you say you were at the peak or was it beginning to come down?

HC: We were still growing, but I was tired of working ninety hours a week. Madge's health was poor. I could see that, I didn't see her passing away in two years, but it was just time. But I had lots of debt and I can say that if I could just get rid of some. M. M. Cowan were very similar, we were about 85 percent the same lines.

Like I say, the biggest mistake they made was change the name. The day they changed the name, and they lost over half the business in four years.

JE: Wow.

HC: Yeah.

JE: That had to hurt you.

HC: Oh yeah, well—

JE: Because even though you weren't in the business it was theirs, just emotionally something that your dad started to see it change, and then to see it go away.

HC: Well, if you sell a business you've got to realize that can happen. And it happens more often than not, probably. I think they should have survived it.

JE: You sold at a good time then? It was good timing.

HC: Well, everyone, you know, I sold because it was just a good time for us. But then in '82, the cycle went down in the oil business. Everyone said, "How come you were so smart to sell when you did?" Well, it wasn't that I was so smart it was just like it was the time. Life was timing and we were lucky on that one.

JE: When was it you sold, what year?

HC: Closed December of '82. I remember we went down, closed at the BOK, that was our bank and the happiest day. M. M. Cowan assumed all debt and they took over the business.

JE: Was that a tough day for you?

HC: Yes and no. You're working up to it so you knew it was coming. Like I say, not near as tough as the two years that followed.

JE: Because you had to be in the store?

HC: Yeah I had to work like everyone else.

JE: You still—

HC: And they'd give me whatever jobs they wanted to give me.

JE: They were hoping the public seeing your face in the store would help?

HC: No, the jobs they gave me I wasn't where the public could see me usually.

JE: Then why would you stay on? Why did they have you on?

HC: They paid me. You have a contract. You have a contract to fulfill and I fulfilled that contract. I had my pride, I was going to be to the end and perform. Every job they gave me was performed in an exceptionally fine way. You know, if they asked me to speak I blew any other people away with what I did. You know, that's the way we were. Yeah, there's only one way to do something and that's right up top.

Chapter 12—3:12**Buying Trips**

John Erling: Where would you go on your buying trips? Where would you buy your clothes?

Harry Clarke: Clothing was bought in New York. A lot of the women's was bought in New York.

Dallas was a big market. There were probably six women markets in Dallas a year. And then the gift market, but then you got cosmetics. I spent four and a half months a year on the road some place. Worked three shows, Chicago. On January 15th in Chicago is not much fun. And I hear you'll get cold too being in Chicago.

We were there one time when the lake froze over. We were working with Hart, Schaffner, and Marx. They took us to the John Hancock building for lunch and as far as you could see over Lake Michigan was just jagged chunks of ice sticking up.

JE: So there you were buying clothes—

HC: Well, at some point you develop a staff of buyers. We had thirteen buyers, we had two divisionals. In other words, we had a man supervise the four men's buyers and we had another guy, Rick Sunlighter, that supervised the women's buyers. And then we had a divisional that supervised all of them.

But I would go into the market and I would spend the day with each buyer. Marilee was sportswear buyer, passed away recently. Had Marilee's in Utica Square. Most talented women's buyer I ever met. She worked for us and she was a jewel.

So we were going to New York and she said, "I want you to come with me on Thursday." She said, "We're going to Liz Claiborne," which, you know, is a very fine ladies' salon.

I said, "Fine." So I worked my schedule. I'd go with the children's gal one time. I enjoyed it. Dress buyer one day and trying to be helpful, but basically, that's their buy. Their bonus and everything is based on that.

But we go into Liz Claiborne's and all of a sudden a little person comes in in a black men's tailored suit with short hair slicked back. I didn't really know what it was, whether it was man or a woman. It was Liz Claiborne. All sharp, just as sharp as she can be. But that was her look, I mean, just not a hair out of place. And she was charming.

JE: So you carried her line for many years?

HC: Oh yeah. I've kind of gotten out of touch but I can still a good line, yeah. You hunted for those and Marilee was so good at that. Rick, her husband, was the divisional. They met in the store and got married. Rick was over the women's division and Marilee came as a junior buyer. Then when the women's buyer retired she stepped up. She merchandised two and a half million dollars worth of women's sportswear, which is a big chunk.

After we closed they opened Marilee's on Utica Square and she passed away of cancer within the last year. Sad day. Lost what I call alumni. I love those kids, we hired a lot of them and they were like family.

Rod McCalmum was another one that we lost in the last year. Rod was the manager of the Southland store, the big store. After we sold he went to Miss Jackson's and managed Miss Jackson's up until a couple of years ago.

JE: Back in the '50s in the stores did you have air-conditioning?

HC: Oh yeah. I remember when I was a kid, used to love to go downtown to the store because it was cool. We had a carrier, it was a huge plant, three stories tall, big cooling towers and everything. But yeah, they were cool.

Chapter 13—3:28

Fire of December 19, 1945

Harry Clarke: I remember the Renberg fire in December of '45. I was in school. I came home from school. I was in the airport in St. Louis, and heard that the downtown district of Tulsa was on fire. I didn't know who or what. When I got in late that night Dad told me they'd been in the store and smoke—

John Erling: Renberg's was right next door?

HC: Right next door, yeah, it completely burned it and it smoked up a lot of our—you know, he was about half sick with smoke and eyes all—

JE: Amazing they could save your store.

HC: Oh yeah. Well, the roof fell in, probably what saved the whole block. When that tar roof fell in it let the heat out top. Of course, we had their wall and our wall, but it scorched the boxes that were backing up against the walls. It was, if I remember, December 19th.

JE: Of '45?

HC: '45. Yeah. I got in and we went to work that next morning cleaning up to see what we could salvage and get the store open for Christmas. We opened, I think, three days later.

JE: The smoke did not damage all your merchandise?

HC: No. The things that were in boxes the smoke browned the boxes but the merchandise that was inside and things that were in cases. Merchandise that was exposed, the insurance company picked it up.

JE: How many stores were affected by that? It started in Renberg's?

HC: Yeah, it started in Renberg's, they were the only store that burned but there were Globe and Dick Barton's on the other side and we were on this side. There were two stores

beside us, Flag's and then another one. And then Walgreens was on the corner. I'm sure it smoked everyone up somewhat.

JE: So you sold the stores and then you spent your two years with M. M. Cowan. You were at what age then?

HC: Late fifties.

JE: Late fifties? A very young man. Did you think you were going to retire?

HC: Yeah. You know, I had a little place up in Vail, Colorado, and loved to ski, and then I had the place up here and loved to fish. I had some real estate investments in Tulsa. I had the Distribution Center and I thought, "Well, I'll spend part of my time doing that and part of my time up in Grand Lake, that's not such a bad life up there.

JE: The Distribution Center?

HC: Well, we had a warehouse. As we got more stores, which was on 38th Street, 7333 38th Street. It's still there, but it was where all the merchandise came and was processed and we took it into the store. As you get into shopping centers that space is so valuable that you can't afford to do your marking and your process and you've got to go to a warehouse, or you've got to have some place. Some businesses did it in their downtown stores where they really didn't need it.

JE: So even though you had left retail you had this Distribution Center?

HC: Well, it was leased.

JE: Oh, so how—

HC: [At first I] had it leased and then I didn't have it leased and then you couldn't give it away. I, listen, that's a whole other chapter. But I lasted eight months in retirement and I was going nuts.

JE: Then—

HC: My fishing friend up here was Don Butler, the old bass pro. Number one member of bass. Neat guy. And he said, "Heck, go get your real estate license." And he said, "Come work for us."

So I've been doing that for eighteen years.

JE: Here in the Grand Lake area?

HC: Yeah, Grand Lake area and I used to work the whole lake. Now I don't work quite the whole lake, I kind of stay to the south end. But it keeps me off the street and I enjoy it. You know, I spend two days in the office. You know, everything is on computers nowadays. All of the multi-lists and everything is on the Internet so I can do it anywhere.

Chapter 14—6:24**Southland Shopping Center**

John Erling: So as you reflect I have a hunch you're going to say Clarke's Good Clothes store downtown in the '50s and '60s had to be a sweet spot of your life.

Harry Clarke: Yeah. Well, the whole Clarke's experience. The suburban stores too, Southland was a jewel. More merchants came through to look at Southland, we were laying the store out and had twenty-one thousand square feet on the main floor, which wasn't quite enough. So we made the decision to put the clothing department in the basement. Malcolm McKeon was the architect who laid out originally the Utica Square. Neat guy, loved him.

And I said, "We're considering doing this." And he designed, you may remember, the stairwell? That went down into there? We called it the Imperial Room. And it gave us more space. That basement space did over a million dollars worth of clothing business back in that period of time.

So I've got to say I love the downtown, but I loved the experience of the '50s and '60s. That would take you through Southland. Southland did its fifth year projection the first year.

JE: Hmm.

HC: We opened in an ice storm and had forty thousand people to the store the first three days. I thought we were going to wear the carpets out on the opening.

JE: That's when all of Southland opened. You were there at the beginning of Southland.

HC: Yeah, at the beginning of Southland.

JE: Right. And there was no hesitation on you to say, "Well, they're going to build a shopping center and we're going to go there." You knew that was a smart thing.

HC: Well, we were in there. Well, I'll tell you, the time I spent on the Planning Commission gave me a pretty good understanding of demographics. I'd spend hours and hours and hours at night. You'd take how many houses were in each square mile, and that is the sweet spot in Southeast Tulsa.

JE: For those who don't remember, Southland was on which corner?

HC: Promenade. It's not promenade.

JE: It's now promenade.

HC: Yeah.

JE: That was Southland. And—

HC: And South Roads was on the north side, and that's where all the box stores are.

JE: And Southland was first?

HC: Well, Southland was supposed to be opened in '62, and it didn't get opened until '65. South Roads opened later.

JE: So that opening in Southland, forty thousand in the next three days?

HC: Three days, yeah. Thursday, Friday, Saturday we opened. There was wall to wall people, they were ready. It was unbelievable.

With Utica we'd started Coffee Call. When we opened Utica we were looking for a hook. If you get a couple shopping together and the woman wants to try on something what does the husband do? Well, he could have a cup of coffee. So we found out we could buy Noritake china, cups and saucers, by the gross. And they always had too many. Always got a good price on them. We put a dishwasher in, we put a coffeemaker, made a deal with Cain's Coffee and we developed Coffee Call. We made little drugstore tables with wire chairs and that was such a hit that when we did Southland it was right in the center of the store. It was before you got on the escalator, right around the corner there, right in front of the Service Desk. Again, if you're got a service problem, sit down, have a cup of coffee, we'll have this gift-wrapped, whatever it was.

But Southland was the jewel. I have to say, I loved downtown and all that, but after the first year we went to Max Campbell, who was the developer, and said, "Hey, we want our second floor." We had a right to request that at a certain point in volume and we reached it the first year.

JE: When you put in the Southland store did the Utica store take a hit in business?

HC: No. Not at all.

JE: You feared that?

HC: We had programmed 20 percent hit, none at all. It stayed even one year. Our philosophy was to keep the advertising percentage going. So as soon as it started knocking the figures out we increased the advertising.

JE: And downtown stayed strong too?

HC: No, downtown just—

JE: Did that begin to suffer at Southland?

HC: It already had.

JE: It already had.

HC: We'd lost half our downtown volume before we got Utica opened. Yeah, that was tough. That's one thing in the planning process, it's hard to get people to go where they don't want to go. You know, you can say what you want, I love downtown, but convenience.

When I grew up on 25th and Lewis I could walk two blocks, catch the bus, and I was downtown in fifteen minutes. For a nickel. When I lived out there behind St. Francis Hospital, hey, it was a run to get downtown. I think they're doing this right, I think the BOK Center is probably a dynamite move for downtown.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

HC: With that shopping center opened at Southland the whole town was just ready for this brand new concept, wasn't it?

HC: There was nothing out there. A lot of housing but there was really no center. Utica's a unique center, Utica will always be a great center. And I love it. That's where Jackie and I go for lunch when we go to town. But if you don't have the space there for Dillard's and Macy's and Penny's, the big stores.

JE: And then Southland came along, first indoor mall.

HC: It wasn't an indoor mall when it was opened. It was an outdoor mall. The mall was not covered at Southland.

JE: Oh.

HC: Southland was an open mall. You could get from store to store there was trees, we'd get to Walgreens. Interesting, the same lady that ran the counter at Walgreens downtown later ran the one at Utica, later ran the one at Southland. Allie Box, I think was her name. We'd go in, Castleman and I would go in and have a cup of coffee. Three thirty, four in the afternoon, you know, you just kind of relax for a few minutes. She made the best short-stack I ever ate in my life.

When the weather was bad downtown I'd go down early, because we opened the store at eight for the cleaning people. And I didn't want them standing out in the cold, so I'd go down and then I'd let them in. Then I'd go next door to Walgreens and get a short-stack. Short-stack and a cup of coffee was fifty-one cents then.

JE: In the '50s?

HC: Yeah it was in the '50s, but like I say, I've had a lot of short-stacks in my life. Allie made the best short-stacks I ever ate in my life.

JE: There's a romanticism that goes with this that kind of makes me almost envious of the time that you lived and the good time that you had then.

HC: Oh listen, as far as I'm concerned there wasn't a better time in Tulsa. The town wasn't that big, it just was great.

Chapter 15—5:45

Clarke's Good Years

John Erling: You give me a warm feeling about your family. Your mother, your father—

Harry Clarke: Oh, hey—

JE: You had a good family that you came from.

HC: Oh a good family. You know, if you're building a business every dime we could come up with went into the business. We didn't have a fancy home. It was a nice home, it's at 25th and Lewis. It's still there. I drive by it every now and then.

Dad paid \$11,500 for it, I think. Three bedrooms, one bath, furnace didn't work very well but we all grew up there. We didn't really move out of there until, well, I was gone, Madge, we were all gone out of the house. Dad had a heart attack after that and they couldn't get him up and down the stairs. You know, it was a neat neighborhood. Shoot, Utica Square at that time was a bowling alley and a miniature golf course and hospital, was the little red hospital over there. Saul's Grill was right across the street. Times were good.

Sometimes everything's got to be so grandiose and I think sometimes everything gets over-organized. We had a bunch of great kids in that neighborhood and they all got along great. I had the best.

My dad had Parkinson's for twelve years and Mom took care of him. My kids have done well.

JE: And let's name your children.

HC: I've got a son, Harry Jr., he lives outside of Washington, DC. He's the younger one. He went through the MBA program at Stillwater and just was fortunate enough to get on with IBM. Spent fifteen years with IBM and then was with BM, and then was McAfee Security and now is president of HandiSoft, a small software company that's out of Washington. Oakton.

Then Kathy is in Edmond. She's the principal of Cross Timbers, the large grade school over there. She has two daughters. The younger one is at OU, just selected as one of the twelve outstanding sophomores. Her older one was a merit semifinalist. Went to the University of Georgia. They both made the Pom Squad as freshmen in their schools.

Hey, life is good. My kids, we ate dinner at seven o'clock usually but we had dinner every evening together. And laugh and talk and you know. I think that's one of the problems.

I had the goals for my kids, I wanted them each to play an individual sport and I wanted them each to be on a team sport. So I wanted them to learn they got to be part of a team, but in the final analysis if it is to be, it's up to me. Which is ten two-letter words that say the way life is. And that came from an oilman, Spurgeon, Wayne Spurgeon.

He and I used to swap saying. Dad had a hundred of them. You get what you inspect, not what you expect.

JE: You get what you inspect?

HC: Inspect, not what you expect. But Wayne was good. If I'd see him anywhere we always tried to have one. His brother was a professor when I was in Stillwater, and economics professor who later became president of BOK.

JE: His name?

HC: Gene Spurgeon.

JE: Gene. And then there was Wayne, and Gene.

HC: Wayne, Wayne was, I think, president of LVL. Gene used to tell a story that his mother thought Wayne was changing jobs to many. Every two or three years he'd change jobs but he kept moving up in these oil companies. She wanted him to stay with one job and then stay with it.

John, I've just been so fortunate, so lucky. A lot of good friends like you.

JE: Well, here you are eighty?

HC: Eighty last December.

JE: And your mother lived to be?

HC: Ninety-seven, so I've got some good genes.

JE: You've got another twenty years to go, don't you?

HC: Yeah. Part of my health I had a great internist named Bob Lubin who was just marvelous and straightened me out early when I didn't eat right and didn't exercise and was a workaholic, and got me to start jogging. I jogged two miles this morning. Not too fast anymore.

JE: Yeah.

HC: But got me eating right and getting out of the business.

JE: So when's the last time you've been fishing?

HC: Well, I haven't fished all winter. You know, it's interesting as you get older these old bones don't take to the cold weather like they used to. But it won't be long.

JE: Well, thank you, Harry, for this. This was very good.

HC: Oh, hey, I've enjoyed it.

JE: You just told us about the way it was back then and we wish we would have been there with you.

HC: Well, you were there part of it though. You know, you and I met--

JE: It was in '76, when I came to Tulsa, so in there.

HC: All your Dad contests. We had a contest Father's Day. You had to come into the store, you had to draw a picture of your dad for Father's Day and you won a bicycle. I think we gave away about ten bicycles. You were nice enough to be the judge on that. Yeah, Madge said, "They've got this nice new guy down at KRMG, I'm going to ask him to do it." So.

JE: And Ron Blue brought me in there.

HC: Ron Blue, yeah. You know, we had so many great, great people. Quick story there, we had a vacation promotion. Ron came to Madge and said, "Madge, I'd like to put this promotion up for most of the year," or something, I don't know, but anyway, we had a rule: We didn't enter contests. We were in business to do business. Some stores get so carried away with trying to enter window contests and all this.

So Madge came to me and Ron said he'd do all of it. I said, "Fine, we like Ron." And we won the Governor's Cup that year for vacation promotions. We did a deal two weeks during the summer, Oklahoma vacation land. And we got all kind of brochures in the stores, around Coffee Call, promoting Oklahoma. So Madge and I drove down.

George Nye was the governor at that time, he presented the award. He and I laughed, we had a good time together because he and I'd been friends before.

And I've still got that plaque over her at the lake up on the wall. Always laugh about that. You know who we beat out for that? *Daily Oklahoman*.

JE: Oh.

HC: And so, little organizations can win.

JE: You bet. Thank you, thank you.

HC: Thank you, John.

JE: That was great.

Chapter 16—0:33

Conclusion

Announcer: (music) This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time on *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.