Joyce Jackson

1st Black Female Journalist on Oklahoma TV

Chapter 01 –
Introduction

Announcer: Joyce Jackson was in Junior High School when she became part of the Katz Drugstore sit-in in 1958, the beginning of a movement that contributed to race relations reform in Oklahoma.

Joyce was the first black woman hired to be on television in Oklahoma, at KOCO 5 in Oklahoma City, becoming an award-winning broadcast journalist, producer and talk show host.

In 1982, she began a career in the Oklahoma Department of Justice as a public relations officer until 1997, when she left the agency to become the Communications Director for the Illinois Department of Corrections. She returned to the Oklahoma Department of Corrections as the Executive Communications Administrator in 2005.

Joyce also worked as a professional model for 20 years and owned a modeling and charm school.

She retired from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections in 2014, after 24 years of service.

In her oral history interview, Joyce talks about threats on her life because she was on television, Penn Square Bank, Bobby Seale and the department of corrections.... on Voices of Oklahoma.com

Chapter 02 – 10:07
Shy Girl

John Erling (JE): My name is John Eling and today's date is March 30th, 2022. Joyce, would you state your full name, please?

Joyce Jackson (JJ): My name is Joyce Brenda Jackson (chuckles)

JE: And why are you laughing?

JJ: Because in school everybody said my name was backwards because everyone that had the name of Joyce, it was the middle name, it was "Brenda Joyce." Yeah, and so, they would always say, "Well your name is backwards!"

JE: Oh, how funny. Your date of birth?

JJ: 10-28-1944

JE: And that makes your present age?

JJ: 77.

JE: Alright. And we're recording this interview here at the Oklahoma History Center. We're right across from our state capitol and I'm happy to say that Voices of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma History Center are in partnership together. We do the same work we collect, we preserve, and we promote all this great history of our state. So, Joyce, where were you born?

JJ: I was born in Anadarko, Oklahoma.

JE: Your mother's name?

JJ: My mother's name was Lilia May Walker.

JE: And where was she born and grew up?

JJ: She grew up here in Oklahoma, but mostly in El Reno.

JE: Describe her personality. What was she like?

JJ: My mother was one of those people that was -- loved to be involved in lots of community things and she was very popular, had a beautiful smile, and I thought she was the most beautiful woman in the whole wide world.

And I always -- I was the oldest in our family of kids but I always thought that my other sisters were more beautiful, you know. I was -- like I said, I was really bashful in school and my mother had such an outgoing personality.

When we went to school, she knew all the teachers and they knew she would be up there if anything happened to us. (laughing)

JE: So how many brothers and sisters did you have?

JJ: I had two sisters. My sister Jonni and my sister Melva, and I had a brother, Walter, and then I have a half brother named George Arnold. He lives in California and my half sister in California is named Donna.

JE: Are they all living?

JJ: No, the only ones that are living are the ones in California, Donna and George -- who we call Tom all the time because, when he was a little kid, he used to beat on everything like a tomtom.

But my other sisters and brothers have all passed away.

JE: Yeah. So what would you draw from your mother as you were growing up -- and look back and say, “I got that from my mother.”?

JJ: Well, I guess getting involved and being involved in the community. I didn't realize she had planted that because I thought mothers -- always at these affairs that was at church, and the affairs in the community, and if they were having picnics or whatever they were doing -- and if they were raising money for something, Mother was always involved and she didn't finish college, and she always wanted to be in the organizations that presented young ladies. So, she she sent me to charm school because she thought I might become a tomboy, so, yeah.

JE: How old were you when she sent you to charm school?

JJ: I was like, I was about 10 and I thought that was silly -- go to charm school -- but my teacher was a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful black woman and she

taught us how to be young ladies, how to sit properly, eat properly. And so I ended up enjoying it, but when she first talked about it, I thought, “Oh, that's so silly,” and because I ran around with all the boys in the neighborhood, you know; they started looking at me a little differently after I did that. (laughing)

JE: How thoughtful of your mother to do that. Great.

JJ: Yeah, yeah.

JE: Then your father's name.

JJ: My father's name is George Arnold. That's why I have two half-brother and sister in California -- George Arnold. And my mother and he had divorced because they had divorced, I don't remember when; but the majority of my life, I was with my stepfather and mother. And my stepfather was an absolute angel. He was wonderful.

JE: And his name?

JJ: His name was Walter Walker. And so when I went to school, my name was “Walker.”

JE: Okay. And, so then, let's draw on him: his personality -- that must have influenced you.

JJ: My stepfather was very laid back. He grew up in Watonga. He grew up on the farm. He had been in the service; he was kind of quiet -- very deep, daddy was. I called him “Daddy,” and I called my real father “Daddy G,” because what my real father did to our childhood is, all the time we were growing up here in Oklahoma, my daddy had moved back to California, so about every two years like clockwork, my sister Jonni and I would go to California and go to school. And, so, I guess I had the experience of having been in an integrated situation in California and then come back home and you're always in a segregated situation. And so that happened my entire life because when I graduated from Douglas High School, that same year I went to California to go to college because my daddy wanted me to go to school.

JE: Well that was good for you to get in an integrated situation. Can you think back -- was that difficult or nerve-wracking for you to come in at first?

JJ: At first it was, because coming from Oklahoma being in an all black situation and then going to California and the first -- the younger years -- we went to school in Fresno; and then, as we got older, we went to school in Oakland. But in Fresno, in that area, there's a lot of farm kids that we went to school with and so a lot of hispanic kids, a lot of asian kids. It was just different for me. Like I said, I was very bashful and so... but I made great friends.

Really didn't have any negative experiences in going to that integrated school. I do remember a little hispanic boy that said that I must drink a lot of coffee and I said, “I don't drink coffee.”

And he said, “Well, you're really black so you must!” (laughing)

JE: Isn’t that something?

JJ: And so I told my grandmother and she said, “These kids don't know anything! You know.

JE: Right.

JJ: But that was the only -- and it was just kind of strange for me. But other than that, I really didn't have any negative experiences in attending school in California.

It's when I began coming back to Oklahoma and then realizing that you're in a bubble.

JE: So what year about?

JJ: Well it really hit me, I think, during the period of time that I was in school under Miss Luper, because we were living in Spencer then and living in the Parkus Heights addition, which is where Dungy's school was.

And Miss Luper was always telling us that we were as good as -- and should be allowed to not have to pick up our lunches, buy our food, and pick it up at the back door -- and not be allowed to sit in a restaurant. And I didn't have the opportunity to go to New York when she did the play, because my parents didn't have money. But Miss Luper raised money for everybody to go! (chuckling)

JE: Okay and we're going to get into more of that. But I had to take a note here. You keep talking about “shy,” because you're obviously not shy.

JJ: (Laughing) So when I think, I think that person is still in there.

JE: Oh, really?

JJ: Yes, yes. Because I can be in an environment where lots of people are mingling and I can engage with everyone, but I can easily sit in the corner and observe people without it really bothering me.

JE: See, some people will see a group of people and they'll run to them so they can talk.

JJ: Yeah. No.

JE: But you're not that person.

JJ: No.

JE: You'll see that crowd and -- that’s ...

JJ: Yeah. Yeah, that's fine.

JE: ... leave them there!

JJ: And if they engage with me, then I'll engage with them. But yeah, I'm not -- what's the test? The test that they do to determine whether your? Myers Briggs tests! The test where they determine whether you're outgoing, or laid back -- one of those. Well ...

JE: You tested.

JJ: Yeah.

JE: You tested “shy?”

JJ: Yes, yes, yes. And people can't believe that because I've been in so many ... out-front -- the person out front or starting things.

JE: I have that in me too.

JJ: Yeah. Yeah. But I think I realized that a lot of people that are in the public eye -- it becomes, it started out as a make-believe.

JE: It's weird how we can jump on stage...

JJ: Yes.

JE: ... and do that right the minute you get offstage.

JJ: Yes.

JE: Johnny Carson was that way.

JJ: Yes. Yes. I, I -- Yeah.

JE: But if I'm up here, I'm in control.

JJ: I'm in control. Absolutely.

Chapter 03 – 11:20
Hamburger and a Coke

John Erling (JE): So, education. Your first school then -- it was between here and California.

Joyce Jackson (JJ): My first school was in El Reno when I was real, real small. And then, from El Reno, we moved to Oklahoma City. And so it was in Oklahoma City and then in California.

JE: Alright. And then junior high?

JJ: Junior -- when I was 12 and 13 -- I was going to school at Dungey. Yeah. And then from there went to Webster here in Oklahoma City, when I came back from California; and then from Webster to Douglas.

JE: And then you graduated from Douglas when?

JJ: In 1962.

JE: I'm going to bring you, then, to the lunch counter sit-ins. I have a date here of August 19th, 1958.

JJ: Right.

JE: Katz Drug Store.

JJ: Right. I was not a part of the original 13.

JE: But you were about 14 years old at that time?

JJ: Right. Well about 13; about 13.

JE: Alright. So, Clara Luper: Let's talk again about her and her vision and what it was she did that led to the lunch counter sit-ins.

JJ: Well, like I said, I wasn't a part of the original 13. I was in her class and she was always talking about the fact that we needed to have respect and be allowed to do the things that whites never had to deal with. Things like my grandmother and my mother: when they would buy us clothes, they would measure our feet for shoes, and measure our bodies for clothes, and your head for a hat or whatever, because you weren't allowed to go in and try on clothes.

Miss Luper never talked about the sit-ins until after that happened because that was initiated by her daughter at one of the meetings. So when they started, people in the community were afraid when they started the sit-in, and they were afraid that the kids would get hurt. And, of course, I was in the class and I was a part of the NAACP Youth Council and she was a youth advisor; and so she invited us if we would like to participate.

I went home and asked my mother, and -- oh my goodness -- she had apparently been talking to the people in the community and they, “No, no, no, no, no! We don't want our kids to be hurt, we don't want our kids to go to jail, we don't -- no!”

And I cried because everybody wanted to do what Miss Luper was a part of. Everybody loved Miss Luper because she was so full of energy, and everything was a lesson. Everything was a lesson. We learned so much. She didn't just teach history and social studies. She taught everything.

So, when I cried because mother said no, I went and told my daddy: “Mother said ‘no,’ and everybody else's is participating.” And Daddy told Mother, “Miss Luper loves those kids and those kids love Miss Luper; she would never let anything happen to those kids and so you need to let Joyce go; you need to let her go.”

My mother was all upset but she said, “Okay, okay. She better not let my daughter go to jail!” (Laughing)

JE: And then maybe we should -- I've interviewed Joyce Henderson for this and I've interviewed Marilyn, who's Clara's daughter, I've interviewed. In fact, I interviewed Marilyn here in the history center in the exhibit --

JJ: Oh, okay!

JE: We sat right there and did that. But Clara -- and you can tell the story again here -- Clara had a play. Tell us about that.

JJ: Yeah. She did the *Brother President* play. I was not a part of the play because I knew that I couldn't go to New York. I wasn't a part of the play

because she had lots of people that were part of the play. But when they decided to go to New York -- of course, my parents didn't have the money -- and Miss Luper raised money for the kids to go, but Mother said “No, no.”

So when she came back is when they were all talking about having stayed in a hotel and going to the restaurant and everything.

JE: Yeah -- in St. Louis.

JJ: Right, right, right.

JE: They were accepted there.

JJ: Right, right! And I wasn't a part of the meeting that they had when they came back; and that's when they decided to go downtown. And so they had gone downtown and it was on the news, and that's why I said the community was rumbling about these kids going downtown and Miss Luper taking kids. And so I didn't get a chance to go when the NAACP guy was here in Oklahoma and saw the play, and invited them to New York. So I didn't get that opportunity. And so I joined the group after that. After the Katz thing.

JE: And did your mother approve of that or you just go do it anyway?

JJ: (Laughing) Yeah, she approved.

JE: She did?

JJ: But a lot of times I did go when she went to work! (Laughing)

JE: Alright. And then, of course, Clara told the students to be nonviolent.

JJ: Right, right. Well, they would teach us to be nonviolent because she would have sessions when we start meeting at Calvary. They would, each time, we would have a prayer. We would have songs to kind of build us up; and then we would go through the techniques of being nonviolent: turn your head, not be aggressive, not talk loud -- even how to sit on the floor so that if they hit you, you wouldn't fall over. Those were the techniques that they

taught us. And we went through those techniques each time we got ready to go on a march; and we would march two by two downtown.

JE: From Calvary Baptist? Calvary Baptist Church.

JJ: Yeah.

JE: Two by two downtown to a sit-in.

JJ: Yeah.

JE: At Katz?

JJ: Well, no, it wasn't at Katz because cats had been already resolved in three days.

JE: And you went to Johnny Brown's?

JJ: We went to Johnny Brown's. I remember going to Cress -- remember going to Anna Maud's. Was it? Yeah. Anna Maud's. And, oh, it was several stores downtown -- because I didn't get to go every time they went. And so that's why a lot of times it might have been 200 people there and the next time it might have been 500 people there. So it was just, after that, I got a chance to go up until I left, up until I left Oklahoma.

JE: And did you get a chance to be arrested?

JJ: Yes!

JE: And go to jail?

JJ: Yes. (Chuckling)

JE: (Chuckling)

JJ: (Laughing) That's one of the questions that kids ask you when you do a presentation at their schools: "Did you ever go to jail?"

I said, “Yes!” And I said, “What's terrible about it is that I was excited to go because my friends have been!”

And people always ask, “Were you afraid?”

We weren't afraid. We were with Miss Luper, and we had no fear of being a part of anything that she did. She was our teacher. And -- no! It's when people ask me and I think, “No, we were too naive to have any fear and the excitement of going to jail was because we were all together; and we would laugh and sing and because somebody would get us out and feed us and we'd go home!”

JE: So were you hauled in on a paddy wagon?

JJ: Yeah, yeah!

JE: Full of children! (Laughing)

JJ: Yeah, yeah! And what I didn't realize until I was grown up is, Miss Luper had made arrangements or had talked to the chief of police to make sure that we were always treated right and carefully watched over during that period of time.

JE: What about -- there had to be negative -- when you did a sit-in?

JJ: Yes.

JE: Okay. How did the white patrons there treat you?

JJ: Not very nice. The thing that still astonishes me today is that grown-up people would say ugly things to kids. They would call us all kind of names and pour coffee on us, and push us, and spit on us, and cough in our faces, and all those kind of things. We didn’t have -- I think we didn't get the attention -- nationwide, like Greensboro did, because of the fact that we didn't have out-and-out violence and we were kids. But, yeah, they treated us poorly. Yeah.

JE: How did that make you personally feel?

JJ: I would sometimes share that with my daddy and I never really told Mother that because she probably would have said “You can't go back anymore!” (Laughing)

So she would say, “Were you kids okay today,” or, “I saw where some kids went to jail. Did you go to jail, Joycie?”

“N -- No...” (Laughing)

JE: (Laughing) Truth is, you’d been in jail that day!

JJ: Yes! Yes! So, so yeah. We were just ashamed of the way that adults would do kids.

JE: Yeah. Marilyn, Clara's daughter, said in her interview that somebody threw a chimpanzee on her.

JJ: Yeah. I wasn't there that day ...

JE: Isn’t that something?

JJ: ... yeah.

JE: Spit on them.

JJ: Yeah, spit on them. And through -- yes. That's why I said all kinds of things they would do to us. We were non-violent because we were obedient to Ms. Luper.

JE: And then, like in the case of Johnny Brown, they too came around and I believe that Mrs. Brown and Clara became --

JJ: Became very close friends over the years.

JE: Yeah.

JJ: Yeah. That was -- that was something. But, yeah, that was one of the hardest places.

JE: Johnny Brown's?

JJ: Johnny Brown's. Yeah.

JE: Because it was in a department store? There were more people around maybe?

JJ: Well...

JE: Why was it more difficult?

JJ: Because it seems that we were down there a lot and it took a long time.

JE: Okay, right.

JJ: Yeah. That was apparently during the time that Miss Luper and Miss Johnny Brown's finally got together.

JE: I remember asking Marilyn about it and she said, "All I want to do is a hamburger and a coke."

JJ: Yes, yes!

JE: Hamburger and a coke.

JJ: And! And what people didn't realize is that we didn't have any money (laugh); if somebody gave us some!

JE: So if they served you, you couldn't pay for it anyway! (Laughing)

JE: Yeah, we didn't have any money! (Laughing) So yeah. Yeah. Just a hamburger and a coke. Yeah.

Chapter 04 – 9:24
Bobby Seale

John Erling (JE): You know, Greensboro actually happened about two years --

Joyce Jackson (JJ): After, after and that's why the history has Greensboro being the first and the most impactful. But it was not.

JE: It's not true and, last summer, I had occasion to be in North Carolina. I was in Greensboro and I was at their black museum there and I went through that and so they tell their story and I knew our story and they have a huge restaurant that they were on; they have about 35 stools there. It's pretty impressive what they have. But I also understand that Greensboro contacted Clara Luper and she gave them -- you tell it.

JJ: Right, right. Well, what happened is they attended -- some of those students from that area -- attended the youth conference that they had every year for the NAACP. And it was at the youth conference that Miss Luper was making a report about the activities that had taken place in Oklahoma; and she shared that with them, and so they took it from there and decided to go back to Greensboro and do it. But they got that information from Miss Luper at the youth conference.

JE: Yeah.

JJ: Yeah.

JE: As you moved on in your life -- became an adult -- you certainly had to reflect on that. That was a good education for you, wasn't it?

JJ: Yes. (Laughing)

JE: You know, because it wasn't the last time you had to feel being black in Oklahoma.

JJ: Oh, no...

JE: It was when you were 19, it was when you were 25, and maybe -- I guess I'm putting words in your mouth -- but maybe that education there in the sit-in helped you there.

JJ: Right. And it did; it helped me to really just maneuver through life because, like I said, when I graduated from Douglas, I moved to Oakland and went to college there in Oakland at the junior college, which was a couple of blocks from where we lived on Grove in Oakland.

And the school was the Marriott Campus Junior College -- Marriott Community College -- there. And I don't think it's no longer in existence. Or did someone say they moved it to the Berkeley area?

But anyway, that's where I started going to college and that was a whole new experience in that my neighbor across the street from me was Bobby Seale. Yes. (Chuckling) And my father and his father apparently had been in the service together.

And so when I moved to Oakland, my sister and I, and when we moved to Oakland, my daddy introduced me to Bobby and said that he wanted Bobby to watch out for me because I was from Oklahoma, even though I was 16 and felt that I was a grown up. My daddy said he wanted Bobby to watch out for me -- very naive, you know.

JE: How old was Bobby about that time?

JJ: Bobby was ... I think Bobby is two years older than I am.

JE: All right, and why is Bobby Seale's a name that the whole world knows about?

JJ: Bobby Seale was one of the founders, along with Huey Newton of the Black Panthers and I was a part of that organization at the very beginning when they first started organizing.

But when I was a part of the organization, we were going to a local church, feeding the kids, and tutoring kids after school is how it started -- an after school thing. And then they started bringing in black medical

professionals to help do a kind of a health clinic for people in the community. And so that's how I got involved. And I was involved when they first started naming the group The Black Panthers.

When other people were coming from San Francisco and being a part of it, we used to meet in the courtyard at the Merritt Campus and just talk about black history and talk about the laws. And it was during that time that Huey and Bobby felt that there were too many black boys and men being roughed up, or beat up, or taken to jail by the police. And when they felt that they weren't deserving of that, it didn't really hit the fan until Bobby and Huey read the law books there in California and decided that they had the right to bear arms because that's what the constitution in California said.

And so they went to the capitol to demand that the police -- some way, somehow -- that there's some laws in place that would discourage the police from abusing blacks in the community; and they went to the state capitol to talk to the governor and they was doing one of the sessions and it hit the headlines in the newspapers because they went armed.

And when my daddy saw that, I was not with the group; I was at school. And when my father saw that, he went off.

“I can't believe that I trusted him with you and you are involved in this kind of...”

He said some really ugly things and went across the street and told Bobby's father and Bobby that they weren't allowed at our house and he was really angry with me that I hadn't told him. Anyway, it was a big blow up; and my daddy decided but “Well, I'm going to send you back to Oklahoma, because you have just gotten involved in things that I would never condone.”

I begged to stay in California, but he sent us back to Oklahoma.

JE: At what age?

JJ: I moved back to Oklahoma in ... I think it was ‘67.

JE: When you went back to Oklahoma, how old were you?

JJ: 19.

JE: Alright.

JJ: I was 19.

JE: Is that the last time you saw Bobby Seale?

JJ: No, I saw him probably about 15 years ago in Illinois, and he was making a presentation at the University of Illinois; and we talked briefly because he had so many people around him.

JE: But he did remember you.

JJ: Yes, yeah.

JE: Yeah. Yeah. Well, overall The Black Panthers then had this image.

JJ: Yeah, they blocked them all over the country.

JE: But they were not nonviolent.

JJ: They were non-violent when they started and it was the different groups that became violent over a period of time.

JE: Right.

JJ: But I get very upset that people assume that it started off as a hate group or none. And it did not. It started off as a group to teach us and to mentor the kids and to try to uplift our community and make us knowledgeable. And so really and truly it's some of the same elements that Miss Luper was teaching us about how to treat people and how people should treat us. They went about it in a different manner and in teaching us the laws and those kind of things. But yeah, it became known as a hate group and a terrorist group and that was not true. No, it's not true.

JE: They had both going for him, didn't they?

JJ: Right. Yeah.

JE: But there was that ying-and-yang to be violent or nonviolent and we had Martin Luther King and then you had Malcolm X and they chose, the two of them, two separate paths obviously.

JJ: Right -- and eventually came together -- but you're right, because they felt that you have to seize your rights. You can't just allow people to put you off and to say, “We're working on that,” or, “Someday.”

JE: But you'd have to say that the path Martin Luther King took was more effective than The Black Panthers.

JJ: Absolutely.

JE: Is there any organization -- Black Panthers -- today or has that gone away?

JJ: I think it's gone away. I've I've from different people that different groups have tried to spring up in places I think it was like in Detroit, Chicago, where they came up with something called The New Black Panthers. But, apparently, it never it never lasted.

JE: Is he still alive, Bobby Seale?

JJ: The last I heard he's still alive. He had run for city council, he had run for mayor at one point

JE: Of where?

JJ: Oakland.

JE: Oh!

JJ: Yeah, yeah. But the last last I heard he's still alive and still lives In Oakland, but is now just, I guess, aging quietly. (Chuckling)

JE: (Chuckling) Yeah. Don’t we all?

JJ: Yeah. Right.

JE: He’s about 79 then.

JJ: Right, right. And he did write a book. He wrote a book about barbecue! (Laughing)

JE: Oh. (Laughing)

JJ: Yeah, he wrote a book about barbecue. But I have been told that there's a book that he collaborated with someone about The Black Panthers. I haven't read it.

JE: Okay.

JJ: But, yeah.

Chapter 05 – 4:36
Deaths in the Sixties

John Erling (JE): College -- you graduated from college?

Joyce Jackson (JJ): No, I did not graduate. I moved back to Oklahoma. I had not graduated.

JE: And you didn't go back to school?

JJ: And I didn't go back to school until I started working at Channel Five; that’s when I went to school.

JE: Alright. In the ‘60s -- you were growing up in the ‘60s.

JJ: Yeah. Right. Because when I came back to Oklahoma, I got involved with the sanitation strike (chuckling) that Miss Luper was doing.

JE: Nationwide, in the 60s, for those who are listening back to us: In '63, John Kennedy is assassinated.

JJ: Yes.

JE: Do you remember that day? And tell me about what your experience was.

JJ: I remember everybody crying and everybody being so upset because, in our community, he was like a light; he was someone that people had a lot of -- I guess a lot of faith in -- in that he was always trying to do the right thing and trying to make sure people were treated equally. And, so, yes.

JE: So blacks felt they had a friend in him?

JJ: Right, Right. And so that was very impactful. I remember seeing it on television. It wasn't real. I mean, in your mind it wasn't real, but it had a major impact on the black community because they really did feel like it was somebody that was going to make a difference.

JE: I remember radio stations, whether they rock and roll or whatever, they were all playing classical music, all of them classical music. So that was in '63. And you remember Sam Cooke -- songwriter.

JJ: Yes.

JE: Civil rights activist,

JJ: Right.

JE: He was shot at the age of 33.

JJ: Mhmm, mhmm. And I remember the fact that people like Aretha was involved with the civil rights movement, with Martin Luther King; and of course, when Martin Luther King came to Oklahoma City, I didn't get a chance to attend Calvary at that time, but when he came to Oklahoma

City to be -- and I'm trying to remember if I was even in the city at that time, I might not have even been in the city -- but I just remember reading about...

JE: When would that have been about '50s or '60s?

JJ: It was in the '60s, I think it was in the early '60s. Yeah, yeah.

JE: And then in the '60s, we have Malcolm X assassinated by members of the Nation of Islam; and then we're not done yet in '68. Tell me about the day Martin Luther King was assassinated April 4th, 1968 -- where you were, what you heard, and what you felt.

JJ: I felt sick to my stomach and I was at my home here here in Oklahoma City -- not my parents home, I was I was with my baby in the apartment where we were. I had just gotten off from work because I worked two jobs and they made the announcement on television and I was just sick to my stomach.

JE: Yep.

JJ: Because, I -- my first thought was: "I guess this country is going to try to kill off all the blacks that are trying to make sure we have rights and are taken care of -- that everybody that's speaking out." So, yeah, it was -- people were crying on the street. People were calling each other and churches were coming together and so, yeah, it was quite a moment.

JE: I always remember, at the end of the day, Robert Kennedy took a stage and he tried to calm the crowd and he did a good job and then little did he know he would be assassinated -- April, May, June -- at three months -- April, May, June -- that two months later he'd be assassinated. Just two months...

JJ: Yeah.

JE: ... By Sirhan Sirhan in Los Angeles and he was in the presidential primaries at that time. And that too had to be impactful for you --

JJ: Right, right!

JE: -- because you knew how much Robert cared about the blacks and all that and Martin Luther king and so that happened to you too.

JJ: But people were more, I think, because all those things happened, people were then just kind of in shock, just disbelief that these things keep happening.

Chapter 06 – 14:35
KOCU Channel 5

John Erling (JE): So you're back in Oklahoma City; and then you're 19, and you went to work for Channel 5 KOCO. Why? Why even the television station?

Joyce Jackson (JJ): I was working two jobs when I came back home. I was working two jobs. I didn't have a car and we lived in an apartment; and I caught the bus, and I was working downtown at Lerner's and working in the evening at OIC (Opportunities Industrialization Center).

And at OIC I was teaching people how to use the cash register, and my boss -- her name was Nan Wright -- Nan was the community allocator for OIC. And it always makes me laugh because my son would say, "My mom is an alligator." (Laughing)

"What does your mama do? She's an alligator."

So my boss decided to give me a raise and put me on full-time at OIC and that's when I went to work for Nan as an allocator. And one day she called me in because Nan and I not only went out to businesses to talk to them about making a contribution to OIC. OIC was started by Reverend Leon Sullivan out of Pennsylvania and they had OICs all across the country. It started kind of like a trade school for people that didn't go to college, or people needing new work skills, people on welfare, or people coming out of prison, or people coming from the service. That's why OIC was

established.

And so Nan called me in one day and said, “What about if we talked to some people at one of the television stations about creating some jobs that they can train people for and then we'll have another source for employment.” She said, “I want you to call television stations and make an appointment with whoever is in charge of production or jobs or whatever and see if they'll talk to us about creating some jobs and if they would like to be a contributor to our process.”

And I said, “Well, what stations do I call?”

And she said, “What's your favorite station? And I said, “Channel 5.”

And she said, “Why?”

I said, “Because they have Ho-Ho the Clown and Pokey the Puppet and that's what I look at with my son!” (Laughing)

And I said, “That Ho-Ho and Pokey, they're wonderful!”

And so she said, “Well, then, call that station, if that's your favorite station.”

I said, “Okay.”

So I called out there and they connected me to the vice president and he was also the public relations person and that was John Harrison. And John Harrison listened to me and said, “Well, I didn't know anything about OIC. Is it okay if I come down and we come to OIC and we talk and maybe we can come up with something?”

I said, “Please!”

And so he came to OIC and he talked to a group of us that was an administration and he came up with some production jobs and to have them trained at OIC -- to have some of the professionals at [Channel] 5 to come to OIC and train people. And they did make a contribution to OIC. And so the second year that they were doing that, we would see John

come down every once in a while.

He called me and he said, “I'd like to talk to you -- talk to you about coming to work for me.”

And I said, “Oh, no. Don’t you have to have a degree to work at a television station?”

And he said, “You don't have your degree, Joyce?”

And I said, “No. I dropped out of college.”

And he said, “Oh. Well, I’d still like to talk to you.”

I said, “Okay.”

The lunch was a funny situation because I was pretty sheltered, even though I had gone off and gotten married. And the reason I say I was pretty sheltered is because I invited my mother to come to lunch with us. So she would be there because I was having lunch with John. And so my mother was there and John laughed about that. (Laughing)

He said, “Well, how about that? You wanted protection?

I said, “Yes, sir!”

And he teased me about that for many years. But he offered me a job being his administrative assistant because his assistant was -- her and her husband were moving out of state because he had a better job offer. And he said I would be giving tours, part time receptionist, his administrative assistant, and helping him with maybe clients that came in to do commercials.

I said, “Well, let me think about it.”

And so when mother and I left, mother said, “Why did you say let you think about it? That's a, you know, you'll be working at a television station and whatever you paid, you will be more than what you're getting at OIC.”

And I said, “Because there's nobody black out there.”

And mother said, “I think there is one person. There's a black guy that gives the prayer when the television goes off at midnight.”

And I stayed up to watch that. And so then I called John and I told him okay -- because I didn't want to go if it was just all white. I went to work at Channel 5 in January. I got hired in December. I went to work in January and it was 1970. John took me on a tour and introduced me to everybody and everybody was, I guess, on their best behavior, they were all nice.

JE: And they were all white.

JJ: Yes, yes. And, so, when we got back to his office, I said, “Where is that black guy that does the...“

John said, “Well, he's the janitor, but he's a minister at a church, and he gives the prayer when we close the station.

And I said, “That's the only reason I would work out here.”

And he said, “You wouldn't work out here because I offered you the job?”

I said “No, you just need to have more black folk out here.”

He said, “Well, okay, I'm starting with you.” (Laughing) Okay. So I went to work at Channel 5 and it was traumatic.

JE: Traumatic?

JJ: Well, it was wonderful. Everybody was kind to me there in the station. But the phone calls, and the people said once -- John put me on the air six months.

JE: Okay. Talk to us about that. You're doing all the things he described the position to be.

JJ: Doing the telephone and giving the tours. We would have a couple of run-ins with clients that would say, “You work here?”

“Yes.”

“Would you go out to my car and bring in my things for the commercial?”

And I said, “No, I'm not the maid.”

And then a couple of times a couple of ladies were kind of ugly and I was ugly back. (Laughing) And that's when Ho-Ho came in, hugged me, and told me: “Joycie, it's not nice to use ugly words.” (Laughing)

And he said, “Make those words so special that you only use them for special people. (Laughing)

He said, “You can't cuss out everybody!”

I said “Okay.”

So it was after that, that about six months after I was there, John called me in and he said, “I want you to go downstairs and I'm thinking about putting you on one of the talk shows we have.”

And I said, “I don't have my degree.”

He said, “Yeah, you told me that,” he said, “But I'm gonna teach you how to be on the air.” He said, “You can talk.” (Laughing)

And I said “Okay!”

So John started working with me to do a talk show with the guy that had a talk show -- he was a law student -- and we became good friends, too.

JE: But you kind of did an audition, they wanted to see what you look like on camera.

JJ: Right, right. And they took me down in the studio and John put me in the middle of the studio and had me just answer some questions that he asked me and I started crying and the camera guys were laughing. I said, “I don't, I don't think I want to do this.”

And he said, “Why?”

And I said, “Because everybody will be looking at me.” (Laughing)

He said, “That's okay, Joyce. That's okay if they look at you. And so...

JE: What made you cry?

JJ: What made me cry just thinking about all the people John said would be looking at me. I guess just the fear of that.

But John said, “Joyce, you talk all the time. So just just talk, just be Joyce.”

JE: Right. But there's more than just talking. You had a nice appearance, you looked good, you on camera. I went back and I looked at some of your work when you were very young and you're very attractive today and you were then. So the eye also has to be pleased while they watched to some degree.

JJ: Well, I never thought I was. Even though I did modeling sometimes here in Oklahoma City on the Pat Shockey. Because I ran into her fashion show that she was putting on at one of the stores -- I think it might have even been Johnny Browns -- many years later and she asked me to be a model. So I had done that. But I never thought I was. I never thought I was nice looking. And so John apparently thought I was.

JE: And he also -- not everybody is telegenic or photographic. You know, some can be good looking and the camera doesn't treat him right, but it treated you right.

JJ: Right.

JE: So you had that going for you. Okay. So he talks to you, you're crying. You don't know if you want to do this, tell me what's next.

JJ: So we did that a couple of times. And finally he put me on the show and it was called The Now Generation. I can't believe I can't remember that young man's name because he became an attorney. We would have guests on all the time. And when we first started off, he would just kind of tap me on the knee to say, “Okay, it's your turn to talk.” It got easier and easier. But the first time I cried -- just the fear of people looking.

JE: Yeah, that was an audition. But you didn't cry when you went on the show?

JJ: No.

JE: Okay. So then what things did you talk about in that show?

JJ: Oh, we talked about community projects. That was one of the public service shows. I ultimately ended up doing three additional shows after that by myself, after the young man left and finished law school. Then I was put on a show called What's Happening and did that for, I think, a year. And then I was put on a show called Black Review. And then when John talked to me about -- that was during the period that Ben Tipton had closed the, KBYE closed it down, and he had been blackballed from radio.

And John was saying, “What do you know about this Ben Tipton?

I said, “Ben Tipton, everybody loves Ben Tipton. He's probably the best DJ in the whole world, you know, in our world.”

And he said, “What would you think about him coming out here to work?”

I said, “I think that would be great.” I said, “If anybody deserves it, he does. Ben Tipton has taught so many people.” I said, “He was teaching me for a while before I got into television when I was working at the Soul Boutique.”

JE: He was teaching you radio?

JJ: Yeah, for a period of time.

JE: So he was a big name in this town on radio station?

JJ: A big name. He had been a DJ and he had a whole crew of kids that he was teaching radio and they were on radio, on his show, and had different segments during the doing his program. He was the best-known DJ in this area.

So John and I talked because John said, “Well you know he's been blackballed because he closed that station down.”

It was because of discrimination, some problems with discrimination -- not against him, because he was hired by the owner. It was some situations he had with the sons, Mr. Lynch's sons and they were the reason that I didn't continue to take lessons from Ben at the station.

JE: But how could Ben close the radio station down? He didn't own it.

JJ: He didn't own it; he took it off the air, he shut it down.

JE: How could he do that?

JJ: He did it, he did it.

JE: Okay. Alright. Alright.

JJ: Yeah, he didn't have the right to do it. He did it because of all of the racial problems they were having. And so the FCC apparently blackballed him because he did that to Mr. Lynch's station, KBYE. And when John talked to me, it was not long after that had happened and it was all in newspapers and everything and John said, “I'm going to talk to our lawyers and see if it's possible for us because he's been blackballed.”

And I said “What does that mean?”

And he said “It means that he's not allowed to be on the air -- radio or television.”

I said, “Yeah, I think you should talk to him because Ben is a good friend of mine and Ben would be wonderful. Everybody would love to see Ben.”

He talked to the lawyers, the lawyers met with Ben, and the lawyers got FCC to release that and he started to work at Channel 5 in the news department. And he did the show with me Black Review probably about two times. And then John said, “Why don’t we give Ben The Black Review and give you another show?”

I said, “Okay.”

And so Ben took over The Black Review and I did a Saturday Review which was just community-wide -- Oklahoma City -- on different things. And Ben focused on people that had done historical things, but it was always the black community.

JE: Yeah.

JJ: Yeah, right.

Chapter 07 – 7:00
Ida B

John Erling (JE): Who were the other personalities -- this would be in the ‘70s Channel 5 -- who did news, and weather, and some people would remember?

Joyce Jackson (JJ): Well, the person that took me under her wing and the very person that I realized later on that people thought we would not get along was Ida B. I didn't realize she had been a teacher before, but when I met Ida, just kind of took me in like her child and was always giving me pointers. And Ida B was the very first person that put me on television live, because she did her show live. Ida B was the biggest thing in Oklahoma.

JE: So she did a talk show?

JJ: Yeah, she did a talk show for a long, long time when she would go, she had different sponsors, like a travel agency -- and I can't remember the name of the agency -- but she would take people. People would sign up and go on a trip where Ida was going as part of the commercial package that they paid for Ida's show.

Ida went to John and said, "I want Joyce." Instead of bringing in -- she would bring in people either from radio or from in the community, you know, just to tape her shows why she was gone -- and she asked John about me doing her show live.

And he said, "Yeah, if Joyce'll do it, that would be great." And so John called me in and he said, "I don't want you to do it."

And I thought, (gasping) "Oh, I can't do that! That 's live! That means if I screw up -- " (Laughing)

JE: "Or if I cry!" (Laughing)

JJ: " -- they can't fix it!" (Laughing)

So John said, "It's gonna be okay."

But Ida was always so much fun. And when she she used to have models on her show and when she realized that I was doing some modeling every once in a while for fashion shows at stores for Pat Shockey, she had me on the on the show doing some modeling.

But Ida was always like a mother figure to me because she was always -- "Sit up, sit up straight!"

JE: Any other names? Personalities?

JJ: Well Ho-Ho the Clown, of course, Ed Birchall. We became close-close friends working out there and I was friends with all his family and, of course, Dr. Bob Blackburn; he was "Bob" when he used to come out to the station -- that's his mother, Ida B."

JE: Oh, okay.

JJ: That was his mother. And so I met him when he was --

JE: Of course, Bob Blackburn was the director here of The Oklahoma History Center for many years.

JJ: Right! Yes. It was just a little kid when he used to come to the station.

JE: That's cute. Right. And how about the newscasters or weatherman?

JJ: I just ran into somebody I worked with. I just ran into Jane Jayroe the other day. I hadn't seen her in a long, long time, but Jane started out there.

I remember when Jane first put her on television, she smiled at everything and I remember her first hard news story. She smiled at the (laughing -- but it was just you know, reaction. So Jane worked out there, later as I was leaving, Jane was out there.

JE: And let me just say, I've interviewed Jane.

JJ: Yeah, yeah.

JE: And you talk about shy? She was shy.

JJ: Yes, yes.

JE: She actually became Miss America.

JJ: Miss America

JE: And she was hoping she wouldn't be Miss America because all this attention that was on her.

JJ: Right, right.

JE: She tells that story -- overcome shyness. Another one who was shy was David Boren.

JJ: Oh, okay!

JE: He had a hard time asking people for money and knocking on the doors and coming out. Right.

JJ: Yeah, yeah.

JE: So anyway, but Jane Jayroe, we have her interview Voices of Oklahoma.

JJ: And I was trying to think of the main anchors that were out there. Jerry, I can't think of his last name. He was in the sports department. He was there for a long, long time. And the two main anchors: there was one blond female, I can't recall her name right at the moment. She was there a long, long time because that's when she was the main anchor. But the anchor we had had for a long, long time was.

JE: I can't help you because I wasn't here.

JJ: Yeah. Right, right. I'll have to think you have to pull up their names.

JE: All right, so, but you did these talk shows, but you did some news stories?

JJ: Yeah. They started putting me in news as a filler sometimes. It wasn't until Gannett purchased our station that the news director was a vice president with Gannett and over USA Today when he came to our station. Then he was there … God, it's awful to lose names and then they come back to you at some strange time. But he watched me do some of the little talk show things and he talked to John and then he called me one day -- caught me in the hall -- and he said, "You ever think about coming into the news department?

And I said "Noooooooooo!" (Laughing)

JE: You're always saying no.

JJ: "No, noooo!" I said, "Oh, no! That's too scary."

So he said, “I want you to give it a try. I want you to give it a try.” And so I shadowed some of the reporters. I shadowed -- matter of fact -- each one of the reporters: the sports person, and we do sports stories, and I've shadowed people -- wreck on the highway or something.

And then because I had been a partner with the guy when I first started on the talk show, they said, “Well, we want you to fill in some time, like, on a weekend.”

And so I started doing that.

JE: Newscasts?

JJ: Yeah. Yeah.

JE: And you couldn't believe that either.

JJ: No, no, no. And that's when I decided. I told John, I said, “I'm thinking about enrolling in college.”

He said “Good.” He said, “Good.” He said, “But you need that for you. You don't need that for what you're doing.” He said, “Because you're doing fine. You're doing great.”

And when I enrolled in Central State University -- when it was Central State -- the professor said, “Did you come to just observe?”

I said, “No. I came to get my degree because I dropped out of college.”

And so a lot of the students thought I came to teach. (Laughing)

JE: Because you were several years older than them.

JJ: Yeah. And, not only that, they saw me on television all the time.

JE: Oh, okay.

JJ: Yeah, Yeah. They were seeing me on television then on a regular basis because once I started working, filling in, then I ended up working in the news department.

Chapter 08 – 4:04
Penn Square Bank

John Erling (JE): So you became a news person.

Joyce Jackson (JJ): Yeah.

JE: There was a big story called the Penn Square Mall.

JJ: Biggest story in Oklahoma -- in the country.

JE: Tell us why. Tell us about it.

JJ: It was because of the oil boom. And it was because of the money that was given out by Penn Square Bank. And they were connected to Chase Manhattan and of some other major banks across the country. And they closed down. And I got word of it. My husband was an attorney and I got word of it from some of the people that he worked with.

They called me and said, “Just got a little bug to put in your ear.”

I said, “What's that?”

They said, “Penn Square Bank is going to close today.”

I said. “No!”

And he said, “Yes, they're already in Washington. There are people in Washington that's getting ready to close that bank down.” And he said, “So that might be a story for you.”

I said, “Okay.”

So I went to my news director and I said, “I've just gotten word from a reliable resource that Penn Square Bank is going to close today.”

And he said, “Oh, my God.”

I said, “Yes, what should we do?”

And he said, “Call and see if you can talk to the president that's out there at Penn Square.”

So we called on our way and we were told the President was unavailable. We went out there anyway and went in the place, cameras rolling, and saying we'd like to speak to the president.

And so he came down, and we went in his office, so we have him on camera saying, “Oh, no, there's not any problems with it.”

And they closed it that day, probably right after we stepped out of the bank. It wasn't long. They closed the bank and it made nationwide...

JE: Yes. I remember. I was in Colorado on vacation. I heard about it.

JJ: And people were lined up.

JE: To get their money out.

JJ: To get their money out, yeah.

JE: And they couldn't.

JJ: They couldn't, yeah. And that became the biggest story.

JE: And you broke the Penn Square Bank story.

JJ: Yes.

JE: Right. But he sat, and looked you in the eye and said, “No, there's no problem.” And within 3, 4 hours later, then it was announced. Did you get in on that announcement?

JJ: We were there! We were sitting out front.

JE: Did they close it? Did somebody come out and announce that they were closed?

JJ: No, that we saw these guys in suits go in. And then later on, we saw the bank closed and locking the doors.

JE: And you got video of that? And you were the first television station there.

JJ: Yes.

JE: Probably the only one.

JE: The only one.

JE: Because you were there anyway and you decided: “We're going to hang out tand just stay here.”

JJ: Right.

JE: You saw the suits once. Wow. What a big story.

JJ: Yeah. we saw the suits, we thought --

JE: “ We better hang on.”

JJ: “We better wait.” Because we called back to the station and we said, “We got an interview. But he denies that there's nothing wrong, there's nothing happening. And we saw the suits go.”

And so the news director said, “Just wait.”

JE: Just wait. What great advice. Well, that was pretty exciting for you to be the first person.

JJ: Yeah. Right. Right. And it was the first time that -- it was during the days where the networks would purchase stories from locals. You know, if they became big enough, that they, of course, purchased that story. I'm on that story when they did the ABC broadcast and got a little stipend for it. (Laughing)

JE: Did you get on yourself?

JJ: Yeah, I was when I did the story. Yeah. They put a snippet.

JE: When it went nationwide.

JJ: Went nationwide. I got a little snippet from them paying me.

JE: They paid you. They paid you a snippet.

JJ: Yeah, yeah, snippet! (Laughing)

So that -- after that -- lots of people got paid, you know, for doing different things. I knew that they were doing that before, but I never had a story that big and didn't expect that one to be big.

JE: Right.

Chapter 09 – 5:27
First Black Female Journalist on Oklahoma Television

John Erling (JE): So, you broke that. But then we also we've been talking about you being on television. You're the first black television person in Oklahoma.

Joyce Jackson (JJ): Female. Female. Because they had blacks at -- black men -- at 9 and 4.

JE: Okay.

JJ: Yeah.

JE: Alright. First black female.

JJ: First black female, because -- and I didn't realize that. I didn't realize that because I was a founder of the Black Media Association because we all joined the National Association of Black Journalists of that year, and we started a little organization, because it was just a handful of us. I was the only female. But I thought I was the only female here in Oklahoma City and, come to find out, I was the only female in the state to be on television.

JE: You kept saying “No, no, no” along the way and, in spite of that, look at all the great things that happened to you.

JJ: Right, right. That's why I said I never planned anything.

JE: So how long were you at Channel 5?

JJ: I was at Channel 5 about 12-and-a-half years.

JE: Did you ever want to go to bigger markets?

JJ: I got offered three times to go to a bigger market.

JE: Where?

JJ: But, like I said, ABC.

JE: Oh!

JJ: Yeah. My husband was an attorney here -- practicing attorney. My kids were in school, because he had two daughters and I have a son. And so the first time I got offered they were in middle school; we talked about it. I got sent to New York because New York ABC was then sponsoring my talk shows. They were a sponsor. General Foods was the sponsor for my talk

show here in Oklahoma.

And I got offered to go to ABC to work in news when the kids were, like, in middle school and my husband I talked about it and he said, “Whatever you want to do, you know I'm I'm with you 100%.” He said, “But I will say I don't want to live in New York and I don't want to have to take the bar again and be in a place,” he said, “But I'll do whatever.”

And so the guilt of taking my kids out of school and pulling my husband away from his profession, I decided it wasn't worth it to move to New York and start a whole new life. So I turned it down and then, a couple of years later, I got offered to go to Houston and it was an ABC network station. And then the third time I got offered to go to ABC -- what I didn't know is my boss was trying to persuade my husband because I had told him, I said, “Well, no, my husband doesn't want to go to New York, I'm not going to New York.”

But then the third time I got offered, what I found out later is, my husband, during that same time, got an offer to work with the CIA. He came home all excited about some people contacting him about an interview to work with the CIA in New York. We talked about it and he did the interview and then he came home and he said, “I think your boss had something to do with that.”

And I said, “No...”

And he said, “Yeah,” he said, “I'm not going to New York.” (Laughing)

And so when I asked John about it, he said, “They just asked the station ‘did we know somebody that was qualified?’” And he said, “And I recommended him.”

And I said, “John you were just --” But, no, I got three offers to go to the network.

JE: What a compliment.

JJ: Yeah, that was a compliment.

JE: Did you ever have regrets about that?

JJ: No, no, no. I even got nominated for a Peabody Award -- two of our documentaries. And one of the ones that I was involved in, Victims of Circumstances, which was about 2nd Street and about Roscoe Dungy and it's at -- it's where they keep all the Peabody nominations.

JE: So you got the award?

JJ: Yeah, I didn't get the award. I was nominated.

JE: Nominated.

JJ: Yeah. And that's like -- that's like the Academy Awards. You get nominated.

JE: Absolutely!

JJ: Yes. Right. Right.

JE: No question.

JJ: That's somebody that felt that your work was that good.

JE: Absolutely.

JJ: Yes. And so that made me feel this big! (Gestures largely) Right.

JE: Family names. We need to know your husband's name.

JJ: My husband was Melvin Combs and he's no longer. He passed away at the end of 2021.

JE: Wow. Recently.

JJ: Yeah.

JE: And your children's names?

JJ: My children. Lori Combs is my stepdaughter, and she is an attorney, and she's been practicing now for 30 years. She's getting ready to retire. The other daughter is Shari Combs, and Shari passed away three years ago. And my son's name is Taft Jackson.

JE: Taff?

JJ: Taft. T-A-F-T.

JE: Oh!

JJ: Uh huh.

JE: And what does he do?

JJ: And he lives here in Oklahoma. He's working here.

JE: Yeah.

JJ: Yeah.

JE: Why'd you call him Taft?

JJ: His father's name was Taft.

JE: Oh. Okay.

JJ: Yeah. That was when I was married his father, Taft Jackson.

JE: The only one I know is Robert Taft.

JJ: Yeah. Right. Right. (Laughing) His name is Taft Jackson.

JE: Alright.

JJ: So, yeah. So right now it's just Lori and Taft.

JE: Okay.

JJ: Yeah.

JE: All right. So you're again at Channel 5 for ...

JJ: ‘Til ‘82.

JE: That's 12 years of work.

Chapter 10 – 8:22
Continued Threats

John Erling (JE): Then what do you do at 82?

Joyce Jackson (JJ): Well --

JE: In ‘82, I should say.

JJ: What I did is I decided, when John Harrison decided to retire -- he decided to retire ‘82.

And we talked and he said, “Are you gonna stay with the station?” And he said, “I think now that your kids are grown, that you might consider moving out of state, you know?“

And I said, “No, John, I don't think I want to move out of state.” I said, ”But I don't think I want to stay at the station.”

They had changed management and everything and Ida was no longer there, Ho-Ho was no longer there, Pokey was no longer there -- who was a production guy -- just all of the familiar faces.

And so I said, “I think I'm gonna do something else.”

I didn't really care for the new news guy that was there because the guy

that had hired me into the news department -- well, Gannett had moved him to another station. And so, when John said he was going to retire, I decided: “I'm gonna look for something else.”

And one of the things that used to bother me is not only the fact that people call you “the affirmative action,” you know, you were hired because of affirmative action. And then I owned up to it. Yes, yes, I was. So that's a good thing. That's not a bad thing and anything to be ashamed of. But one of the things that people used to say is people in television get hired because of their looks, not because of their ability; but I was able to prove them wrong because of the nomination of the Peabody and several other AP awards that I got. But that used to bother me -- that people think that you don't have a brain.

JE: Yeah, well you proved them wrong if they thought that. But I didn't ask you: When they first put you on the air at Channel 5 -- first black on the air -- did the station get a few phone calls?

JJ: A few?! (Laughing) Yes. Yes. They got “a few” phone calls and people coming out to the station to protest.

JE: Oh, really?

JJ: Yes. Oh yeah. “Take that blankety-blank off the air!” and “Why do you have her on there?!”

And I got some threatening phone calls. They even called in the FBI at one point because I was getting harassing and threatening calls that they would walk me to my car at the end of the day -- those kinds of things that I never really talked about. But, yeah. I got lots of threats and all kinds of things.

I got attacked out on a story one time. But we found out that guy had a foot fetish and I had on some sandals! (Laughing) That was a strange encounter!

JE: (Laughing) But, okay if he had a foot fetish -- but did he have a black foot fetish?

JJ: Yeah. Yeah he did! (Laughing) Yes! Yes!

My videographer was a young , young guy -- young white guy -- and he picked him up and threw him away from me. We were getting ready to do a news story and this guy just comes out of the sideline and gets down on my -- and starts hugging my legs -- I'm screaming and my videographer just picked him up! (Laughing)

JE: Was that man black or white?

JJ: He was white.

JE: Oh! (Laughing)

JJ: (Laughing) Yes! But, yeah. I had a lot of disturbing calls and protests at the station.

JE: Did that make you not want to be on the air? Or do you know you needed to be there?

JJ: No, I needed to be there then. It was then I realized that. And the community had embraced me because it was the first time -- and I would fight for them to make sure that they did some balanced stories-- because when I got in the news department, all the stories to me about black folks was about something negative.

JE: Mhmm (In agreement)

JJ: They were going to prison, they got arrested, they got shot, they were in a fight. We have other people in the community that's not going to prison and didn't get in fights that might be going to church, or going to school, or doing something wonderful.

And so I became -- probably a force to make sure that we had some balanced stories about the black community and that we put the spotlight on people that were in the community doing things.

JE: I'm a little surprised it was such a reaction to you because you said there were black males on other stations. They were on before you weren't they?

JJ: They were on. Channel 9 had McDaniels. Well, yeah, they were on before me.

JE: They'd been on before you.

JJ: Right. I don't know if they had problems or not.

JE: I'm sure they did.

JJ: I'm sure they did. We were in the group together, and we always worked together for community, you know, projects and things. But, yeah.

JE: So do you think that died down within a month or two after you've been on or ... ?

JJ: It died down. I'd say after several months. it died down. The worst was when I was getting the threats and the FBI started checking everything and making sure I was safe. And that was, to me, the worst. Because it was scary. Because, first, I just kind of blew it off, you know? And it was about a couple of months and then it began to die down.

JE: So you're in your early twenties?

JJ: Yeah.

JE: And you have a son.

JJ: Mhmm (In agreement)

JE: And so you have to be nervous about him.

JJ: Yes, yes.

JE: And where he went to school and all that kind of thing.

JJ: Right.

JE: So this was not fun being a TV star.

JJ: No, no, and when I decided to go to school -- after that, after things settled down and I had been out there a while and decided to go to school -- I still was worried about when the kids came home because, like I said, my husband was practicing law, I was in television, and sometimes I'd be working days and sometimes I'll be working the evening shift; and that's when I went to school. So everything was happening at the same time. Yeah. So that was a little crazy.

JE: You mean these threats?

JJ: Mhmm (In agreement).

JE: Okay. So you went to school fairly early then after Channel 5.

JJ: Yeah.

JE: Okay. Alright.

JJ: But it was always part time, you know, take some hours here, hours there, hours there. But I didn't graduate until '81.

JE: Okay. So you did graduate.

JJ: Yeah.

JE: Your degree was in?

JJ: Communications. Broadcast Communications.

JE: Very good.

JJ: Yeah.

JE: Very good. So, you tell John Harrison you're gonna leave; but just think of what a wonderful man, John Harrison.

JJ: Yeah. But John was a mentor to me.

JE: He was a great man. That's for sure.

JJ: He was; he was my protector for sure.

JE: Yep.

JJ: Yeah.

JE: I'm just learning about him now. That's great.

Chapter 11 – 8:15
Department of Corrections

John Erling (JE): Alright, so you leave Channel 5. What happened? What do you do?

Joyce Jackson (JJ): Well, I was trying to determine what I wanted to do and I couldn't figure out what I wanted to do. So a couple of my friends said they had heard about a job being a public information officer for the department of corrections. And I thought “What do they do? And don't they just hire law enforcement people, you know?”

And they said, “No, they hire people that have been in radio and television -- people that know how to operate in the media.”

And I thought, “I don't want to work for the Department of Corrections.”

And so I thought about it. I mentioned it to a friend of mine that was a state legislator at that time and he said, “That's probably the biggest redneck agency in the state” (Laughing). And he said, “No. Apply somewhere else. Look somewhere else, they wouldn't hire a black to be

the face because that's what you would do. You would talk to the media about whatever happens there."

And it just kind of stuck in my mind that: "Huh. I'll just go and see."

I hadn't applied for a job in 12 years, you know. So I went out there and filled out the form and everything, and then got a call back from their person that handles personnel. Said that I had been selected to be interviewed but please be aware that you go through the interview process with administrators and it could be 3-5 people. The director would determine what three he would interview and they hadn't seen my face. So when they set up the interview and I showed up, they had one black on the panel and four whites.

And they all said, "We've seen you on television!"

And I said, "Okay."

"You're gonna leave the television station?"

And I said, "Yeah, I want to do something else."

They said, "Okay."

And I thought they were gonna ask me questions about corrections, which I didn't know. And I said, "I don't know anything about corrections, but I was interested in the position because I'd be the person that you have to deal with the media"

And they said, "Okay."

So they interviewed me, asked me mostly questions about television (laughing), and I thought "Okay, this was easy."

And I left, and I really didn't expect the call, and then I got a call about a week later and said I have been selected as one of the ones that interview with the director. The director at that time was Larry Meacham and Larry Meachum was well known. And Larry Meechum was not from Oklahoma

and I didn't realize -- I thought he had a good relationship with every ... you know, when I got the job, and I found out quickly that he did not because he was from the east coast and our legislators apparently didn't like his style.

But Larry was a very straight shooter. Larry was very religious. When we did the interview, I didn't like the interview, and I had decided “I don't need this job.”

The interview -- he scheduled me for an interview -- and the interview went from one hour to three hours, and I decided: “He must be trying to pick everything out of my brain.” And I said, “Are we finished?

And he said, “Yes.” And he said -- he asked me one question that really stuck in my mind: “Are you afraid of legislators?”

Am I afraid of legislators? I said, “No.”

And he said, “Well, I think everybody in this state is afraid of legislators. I'm not afraid of ‘em either.” You know? (Laughing)

And he said, “Well, interview’s over. They'll let you know.”

I said, “Okay.”

So my thought is I don't want to work with this guy because I don't know what he was trying to pick out of my brain. You know, it was just my opinion about things mostly: “Do you believe in the death penalty?”

“No, I don't I. don't believe that man has the right; I don't care what the person does wrong.”

And he said, “Even if it's your family?”

And I said, “Even if it's my family; that's not man's right.”

“You know, we have the death penalty here in the state?”

I said “Yes, sir.”

“If you were to get this job, that's part of your job is to be there.”

I said, “Not there where the execution...?”

He said, “Yes, to be at the prison,” he said, “because you would have to talk to the reporters.”

I said, “I can talk to the reporters, but I wouldn't want to be in that room.”

And he said, “Well, no, you wouldn't be right in the room but you would be at the facility.”

I said, “Okay.”

So we ended the interview and I went home and I told my husband, “No. I don't want that job. I need to look for something else.”

And it was another week, and I get a phone call, and it was from his secretary and she said I had been selected -- and she was just all -- she's just all excited.

She said, “Mrs. Jackson, you've been selected to be the public information officer for the Department of Corrections. Mr. Meachum was wondering if he could get you to come in tomorrow morning and talk to him and you set up your schedule.”

And I said, “Please tell Mr. Meacham that I've decided that I’ll continue to look for a job because I don't think that job is quite for me.”

And she said, “Oh! Oh. You're not gonna even attempt to come?”

I said, “No. No, but thank you. Thank you. I appreciate that.”

And I hung up the phone and I thought “Whew!”

And then, about an hour later, I get a phone call from Mr. Meachum and he

said, “Miss Jackson, why is it you decided you don't want to?”

I said, “I just don't feel like I'd be a good fit for your agency.” I said, “When things don't please me, I'm very outspoken and I don't know if I would fit.”

And he said, “Do me one favor. Would you do me one favor?”

I said, “What's that?”

He said, “Would you come in tomorrow? And I won't keep you like I did before,” he said, “so we could talk.”

I said, “Okay.”

So I told my husband. I had told him I had turned it down and he said, “Okay, well, that's the end of that. What are you gonna … ?

And I said “No. I told him I would come in and talk to him because he asked me would I do that.”

And so I went. That's when he said, “Did I do something to offend you?”

And I said “No. I just didn't quite feel comfortable with you constantly trying to get my opinion on something when I know that you already have policies that have to be followed. And from the conversation that we had about the death penalty. I did not believe in the death penalty.”

He said, “Well, like I said, you would not be in the room, but it's part of the job for you to talk to the media.”

I said, “Well, I can do that.”

He said, “What other things made you uncomfortable?”

I said, “Just the intense interrogation.”

And he said, “Well, no; I was just trying to find out why you would even apply for this job.”

And I said, “Well, I don't know.” (Laughing) So, I took the job. I'm glad I did. Larry Meachum was hardcore director, very straight shooter, but he was the one that created so many innovative things in corrections that some of those things are still in place. He started training -- a national training -- for all of our employees, and brought in the National Institute of Corrections and did that. And that reminded me of John just kind of nudging me to go to school, but never really pushing, you know? And so I stayed at Corrections till ‘97 and then I went to Illinois and worked for the Department of Corrections as the communications director.

Chapter 12 – 6:15
Illinois

John Erling (JE): Okay, I gotta ask you: Why? Why did you go to Illinois?

Joyce Jackson: (JJ): Because I started after Meachum brought in the National Institute of Corrections to do training for us -- they would come in and do training in different areas, probation, parole here, corrections here, at medium and maximum facility. Then they would have a national training that a lot of our people would go to. I attended one of the national trainings for the public information officers all over the country.

When I attended, what they did is they said, “You should be one of our trainers.” Because I had been working in television, and so they asked me could they work with me to be one of the consultants and trainers that went all over the country.

I said, “You're talking about me quitting my job to come and work for you.”

And they said, “No. What we do is we work it out with the director that you may be out for a week during the training for us across the country and we pay you federal salary for doing that week.”

And so I started in ‘88, and worked, did training probably 2 to 3 times a year in different states that would fly as a group of three of us: one lady from

San Francisco worked for ABC 2 and we're still close-close friends and a guy from Los Angeles that had worked in television there. And we became the group. And then we added a guy from the state of Washington that had worked in radio and he was the public information officer there and the lady from San Francisco and the guy from California, they had never worked in corrections, but we were we became a team and we would fly all over the country wherever the National Institute of Corrections sent us.

And I left; I was doing a training on communications for wardens and directors. We had wardens and directors to come to Denver, Colorado where they have a national institute office there. The new director of corrections from Illinois was there in that class and, after the class was over and they were supposed to go home and we were supposed to come home, he talked to me the day before he left and he said, “You ever for thought about moving from Oklahoma and working in Illinois?”

I said, “Why would I move to Illinois?”

And he said, “I'd like you to come to work for me as my communications person.

And I said “Oh, no, I don't want to go anywhere, thank you.” And so we left.

For one year -- he called me every month for one year -- to ask me: “Miss Jackson, would you just come out and check it out? Think about it.”

I said, “I thought about it.”

Even my staff would laugh because they would say, “That director is calling you again.”

Finally, one day, I guess he got me on a good day, he called and he said, “Would you just come out? Because I really need somebody to take over the communication because the PIO is giving me headaches -- heartaches and headaches.”

I said, “I'll come out on a weekend or something.”

And he said, “No, if you'll come out on a Thursday and then stay Friday just so I can show you around and see what you think then.”

So I told my boss in Oklahoma, who was the director, I said -- well at that time the director had changed -- it was Gary Maynard who ultimately became the adjutant general after he left corrections. But he was the director at that time and I said, “I'd been courted by the director in Illinois.”

And so he said, “Well, I certainly wouldn't want you to go, but at least at least you are honest enough to tell me, you know, why you were taking off.”

And I said, “Yeah.”

So I went out there. That was huge compared to Oklahoma.

JE: And what town is that in?

JJ: Springfield, Illinois is their state capital. And that's where the main office was -- I guess it's still there. But we worked out of Chicago a lot and the state office in the Thompson Building in Chicago. And so that was the first job I ever took where they fly you from Springfield to Chicago everyday.

JE: Everyday?

JJ: Everyday, unless you spent the night -- if you spent the night.

JE: But, okay. Alright.

JJ: But I lived in Springfield.

JE: The main prison was in Springfield?

JJ: No. The prisons were all over the state but there was only a minimum security trustee placed there at the central office that was there in Springfield, and an administration building, and training building. And that's where all of the prisons were: outside of the city of Springfield. And, Chicago, we had offices in the state building and that's basically where we operated out of. I didn't realize that they had a government plane that all

we have to do is sign up and sometimes we would spend the night and a lot of times I'd come back on the train. The train takes you four hours like it takes you four hours to drive. To fly was 30 minutes. So, yeah, and I ended up going up there in 1997.

JE: And Melvin was okay with that?

JJ: We had gotten a divorce.

JE: Oh! Okay.

JJ: Yeah, yeah, we had gotten a divorce.

JE: Alright.

JJ: But we were always close. And he teased me about taking this job after I turned down all the others. And I said, “Well, just to try something new.”

JE: And then you came back. I came back in 2005.

JE: To?

JJ: To Oklahoma and ended up working back at the Department of Corrections, because when I came back, I was remarried and I came back home because my husband and I both had graduated from Douglas and he was very, very ill and wanted to come home and so I came back, not even thinking about getting another job.

I was really thinking about, “Well, maybe I should just retire.”

JE: Did you get married in Illinois?

JJ: Mhmm. (In agreement)

JE: Oh!

JJ: Well, I got married here before I went to Illinois.

JE: But you met him in Illinois?

JJ: No, I met him here.

JE: Oh, I'm sorry. His name?

JJ: His name is Don Coleman and he's passed away.

JE: Okay.

JJ: Yeah.

Chapter 13 – 8:05
Opinions

John Erling (JE): So what position did you come back to?

Joyce Jackson (JJ): Well, when I came back to town I ran into some of the people -- when I went to the grocery store of all places -- and ran into some of the people that I used to work with in corrections and they said, "We didn't know you were back in town!"

And I said, "Well, we moved back because my husband is very ill and I haven't even thought about looking for a job."

And they said, "We're getting ready to have a new director. And it's somebody that worked in probation and parole, that you knew, so you might apply for that job."

And I said, "Huh. Okay." You know, because I hadn't hadn't even processed where I would be working or what would be happening. I was mostly concerned about my husband.

I found out that person was Justin Jones, and he had just been hired by the board to be the director of corrections. So I applied for the job.

JE: Of what?

JJ: Public information.

JE: Your same job?

JJ: The same job. Yeah. But it had been raised to communications director, which was the job that I had in Illinois, communications director, because in that capacity in Illinois, I was over the chaplaincy program. I was over the volunteer program. They all reported to my office and the training was under our office also. And so I had quite a list of different organizations, positions under the communications office in Illinois when I came back to Oklahoma.

And when Justin and I talked, and I applied for the position, he said, “That's exactly what we're doing; we're going to change the whole because that position needs to have more involvement instead of the wardens.” I went to work.

JE: So how long were you there? You retired from there, then?

JJ: I retired from there in 2014.

JE: In 2014. From 2005 to 2014 is what you worked there. Alright. So then you have some opinions about corrections and let me just kind of throw out softball questions. I don't know how close you ever became, if you did, to these people who are incarcerated. Are people there that shouldn't be there? Are we arresting too many people and putting them in prison? Is the population too high? Could be reduced? All those kinds of things that you would have an opinion on.

JJ: Yes. Yes, absolutely. The very first time that I had an opportunity, I toured. One of the first things that Meachum did when I was hired is that, instead of having someone, he assigned different people to give me a tour of each prison.

But he gave me a car, a map, and told me I needed to report to this prison this day, this prison this day, like that. I thought I was going to have

somebody to go with me. So he said, “They're expecting you.”

He did a whole chart and that's how I was introduced, basically, to each of the wardens. Some were not very friendly. So it was quite a journey when I started in corrections.

And, so, yes, I do have some opinions. And my opinion is that we do lock up too many people in Oklahoma that are innocent. There are too many people that they've had exonerated and released because they didn't have the funds to have a good lawyer to help them.

I still don't believe in the death penalty. During the period of time that I worked for corrections, I only went to McAllister to be there to make an announcement once, because they did a moratorium during a period of time and then when they opened it back up, I think I was leaving. That only happened when I came back. I had not been involved in a a death penalty execution until after I came back. And that was the one time.

In Illinois, when I got hired, I was only there a year when they had an execution. And I told the director of mine, I told him when he hired me, and he said, “Well, one of the things that I always do is I go and sit with the offenders the day before and I talk to them.”

And I said, “One of the things that they didn't do in Oklahoma, that I would like to establish here in Illinois, is the fact that, at the time, when I was first here in Oklahoma, they didn't allow the media to talk to the offenders to interview them before their execution.

And so, each time that they would have one planned, I would allow the media to come and talk to the ones in Illinois, he said he thought that was only humane because he had felt that corrections needed to be much more transparent and it needs to be today -- much more transparent -- than it is now.

It closed down, to me, after Justin left. Justin retired. He was the one that hired me when I came back in 2005 and Justin resigned his position because he and the governor, Fallin, didn't quite see eye to eye. He was working with the gentleman that was the gentleman that's involved in

criminal justice reform, Chris Steele, that had been speaker of the house, and so he resigned.

This department has, to me, not been very transparent since he left because he was very open and he was the one that wrote a history book about corrections. Justin was a wonderful director, as was Meacham, Gary Maynard -- are the ones that I worked under.

JE: You say transparency and you don't feel they are as transparent. What does that mean, transparency, when it comes to corrections?

JJ: What I mean is the programs have -- they will probably say COVID shut down a lot of the programs, now it has -- but the programs disappeared: programs for bringing in employers that were training offenders; that got diminished for a period of time before the COVID. They took that away. The transparency with having the media: we used to allow the media to come in and follow the inmates if they wanted to do a story about something. You know, if the inmate was willing. But we were much more open with the media to allow them to come in and do stories and all of that kind of shut down after Justin left.

And so now, I don't know, they may be more so but from sitting on the outside, I don't think they have reestablished the programs they had for the offenders: the employment programs, nor the art programs. We had art programs, we had a television station, we had a radio station, we had all kinds of -- and they interviewed people from the outside.

We had a lot of things going.

JE: That was in Illinois.

JJ: Yes! Oh -- no, no! That was here!

JE: Oh, I'm sorry.

JJ: Yeah. That was here and I did those things in Illinois also but those things were here. Yeah and they're no longer here.

JE: So are we really now preparing inmates for the outside world?

JJ: They say that they are now that, since the COVID, I've been told that they started allowing inmates to learn on -- they were taking classes on the computers when I left, but they weren't allowed to go into the website and they probably still aren't. you know to pull up all kinds of nonsense. They had closed down the G. E. D. classes and stuff like that after Justin left. I've been told that the G. E. D. classes are back and that the inmates are now getting more training to be prepared. But that had shut down after Justin left. It shut down probably up until this director; this director I'm familiar with and he's a good director because he worked for the department when I was working.

JE: And his name is?

JJ: Scott Crow.

Chapter 14 – 10:15
Interaction with Inmates

John Erling (JE): Did you ever visit an inmate, or get onto his story, or her story, or anything like that?

Joyce Jackson (JJ): Yeah.

JE: You did?

JJ: Yeah. When I started in corrections -- interesting thing -- I only thought the state had three prisons: Big Mac, Granite, and Mabel Bassett; and I knew they had a little Cape Bernard right next to the -- no, Mabel Bassett was there. That was Mabel Bassett. But Cape Bernard was a community center. So that's all the prisons I thought they had and when I went to work for them and realized they had what, 17? 18 prisons?

JE: I didn’t know that.

JJ: Yeah, at that time. And when I went to Illinois, they had over 40 prisons and their prisons had been in existence way before Oklahoma was a state, because they had Joliet, Statesville and all of those prisons that you see in the movies. So, yeah, it was an eye-opener, and I got a chance to interview some of the women at Mabel Bassett before I got into corrections.

JE: Oh!

JJ: I interviewed some of the women, and when I interviewed, the women have been put in prison for killing their mate. That was domestic violence. We did a story about domestic violence. And those women had killed their mates because of domestic violence. And that was before they passed this bill, that had something to do with the bill that protects people from being harassed by your domestic mate or whatever. Yeah. So I got a chance to interview some of the women at Mabel Bassett, and I had been out to the state prison -- and that's why I knew about the death penalty thing where we weren't allowed to interview anybody that was scheduled for the death penalty.

But I interviewed a person that was at the state prison when I was in the news department and that was because it was the kid that was involved with the steakhouse. The steakhouse murders was a big thing here in Oklahoma City and I interviewed that person.

JE: Did you stay in touch with them?

JJ: No.

JE: Okay.

JJ: No.

JE: I didn't know if you followed any story...

JJ: No. The only one that I kind of checked on all the time was from the steakhouse. It was the female that was Roger Stafford's wife. She's still in prison and she was -- Coates, Andy Coates -- who was the prosecutor, spoke up to have her released because she was a victim as well and never

should have been put in prison, and she was and she said still there all these years because the family's protests every time she comes up for parole.

JE: I'd forgotten the name Roger Stafford.

JJ: Roger Stafford was --

JE: And he became famous -- infamous -- in our state ...

JJ: ... for killing the -- yeah, for the steakhouse killing.

JE: He was involved in that. And why did his wife get implicated on that?

JJ: Because she was with him at the time. They were in the car together. His brother ended up getting killed on a motorcycle or something after the case. But Roger went to prison and Roger was eventually executed, but his wife had -- several of the attorneys had spoke about the fact that she should be released on parole and she has come up for parole. And now, even though she comes up, she doesn't come to any of the hearings; she just says she knows the family will protest it and so she's still there.

JE: You may find this hard to believe. 'Course I was on radio, KRMG in Tulsa, and I was always fascinated with the prison system. And one day, I called them, and I said, "I'd like to interview somebody on death row."

And they said yes. And, so, this is when you could walk right up to their cell; and of course you can't do that anymore. I could walk up to their cell...

JJ: ... and talk to them.

JE: And the lady who probably had that position -- she was walking me through -- and I'm sure she said, "There's Roger Stafford; he's sitting way back there, and he said he often yells at me every time I walk by." And then -- I've told this story hundreds of times. This is not my interview about me, it's about you. But I thought you'd relate to this. I walked up to this cell and there was a short guy and he had blond hair and blue eyes.

I said, “Why are you here?”

He says, “Well, I was traveling from California. Came to Tulsa -- or some place in Oklahoma -- and they were after me, and I shot a trooper, and I never made it out of Oklahoma. And I always tell people, you can't tell what a murderer was going to look like. A blond, blue-eyed kid that you thought was sitting right next door to you. I've never forgotten that.

JJ: Yeah.

JE: And so I interviewed a man and he gave me and he sat in front of me in shackles. That's how the media was treated back then.

JJ: Yes.

JE: We could do that. They came in in the chains and he was shackled and he sat in the ...

JJ: And the security guy stood --

JE: Right, right, right. And they let me talk to him and I'll never forget. He said, “I have a pet mouse in my cell.” He says, “They don't know about that.” I can't think of the man’s name because it was so well known to me. And he had murdered family members over in Arkansas. And I put this on the air and he talked to they and they were offended that I put him on the air, and they probably had a right to, but that's the way -- I can still see him sitting in front of me back then. And so I came in ‘76. This could have been late ‘70s, early ‘80s that I went there.

And then I interviewed the young man who was 18 to 20 years old and he killed his parents -- Sellars,

JJ: Yes, yes. Uh-huh.

JE: Sellars. And I interviewed him as well. But then it was changed; you couldn't go back to their cells and see them.

JJ: They put you in a room, you could talk to him through the glass.

JE: Through the glass -- right, right.

JJ: Through the glass, yes.

JE: He had an artwork and he wanted to sell some artwork and so forth. So I guess I talk about my experience, how different it was. You could walk up to the death row cells.

JJ: Right, right. Well, at each of the prisons, when they took me on a tour, they took me through all the different areas. And that was the first time that I had walked down where all the death row inmates were.

And there was a guy that had gone to Douglas High School and he said, “I saw you on television.”

And I said “Okay.”

They were kind of talking to each other, you know, through their bars and it was -- it was scary for me, but I ended up talking to young people that was in prison at different facilities and they would say, “Would you, if I wrote a letter to my mother, would you see that It gets to her? Because I've written letters and I don't think they mail them.”

And I said, “Yes.”

And so my boss told me -- Meacham told me -- he said, “Now all the inmates think that all they have to do is when Joyce Jackson comes out to the prison, just give her their letters, and give them … “

And I said, “No, I'm not doing that much.” But some of them just felt like people weren't -- they didn't pay them any attention. They were an object, not a person. And I would sit and talk with them sometimes. And I ran into one of my classmates -- that kind of blew my mind.

And I remember allowing -- I can't remember what station it was -- allowing some television station to interview one of the women that had killed -- or made a story, once I was there -- for a story about that same

thing that I had done a story on.

And he said to me, “There's some beautiful women in prison. I never thought good-looking people would...

I said, “So you think everybody that's in prison is ugly?” I said, “They’re just your neighbors, your mother, your father, your sister, your brother.” I thought, when he left, I thought, “I probably thought those same things when I started working for corrections.” So I learned a lot. I learned a lot. So, yes.

JE: And I feel I should tell you one more story. For some reason, I it got into my head that these prisoners needed books and so, on the air, I said, I want to collect books -- your paperbacks and all that kind of stuff.

JJ: Yes! Because all they had was donated books. But they were all old-old-old.

JE: Okay. Well, the community came out, and you wonder what the community thinks about them. No, they were very supportive of that and I don't know how many boxes and boxes of books that we delivered to McAllister.

JJ: Right, right. And they started a library there and they have a library there today and they get newer books all the time. And so they have a library and usually it's one of the offenders that's a trustee that works in the, you know, to deliver books to offenders because they're locked down at McAllister.

JE: That could be a public drive today.

JJ: Yes!

JE: To collect books.

JJ: Yes.

JE: A lot of people don't know what to do with their books and all that.

JJ: Right.

JE: Some schools will have book sales.

JJ: Right.

JE: But I haven't heard a public call.

JJ: Well, probably the reason they haven't called for it is because there are different organizations now that have taken on projects by this prison, that prison. And they just did a story last night about a women's organization that are now taking people -- women or men -- once they leave prison, into cosmetology school because they can become their own bosses and make plenty of money. And different churches have adopted different prisons. And so they deliver books, hygiene articles to them and so they take on that.

JE: Well, then that's being taken care of.

JJ: Yeah, yeah.

Chapter 15 – 7:20
Black News Channel

John Erling (JE): You know, when we go to Dallas, the route we take, we go by -- that's Stringtown

Joyce Jackson (JJ): Yes. In Mack Alford.

JE: And I always look at that and I think I always say out loud to my wife, or whatever, "All the stories that are in Stringtown"

JJ: Yes. Yes.

JE: I'm curious about Stringtown. Who is there? What is that a medium?

JJ: That's a medium security.

JE: Okay.

JJ: Yeah, It was run by the guy, Stringtown is, -- the official name is the Mack Alford Correctional Center. I was hired when Mack Alford was the warden there and it was called Stringtown at that time and people still call it Stringtown because it was an auxiliary to the Oklahoma state penitentiary when it started, when it was first built, and it was put there for trustees when they first started. But eventually it became a medium security. But Mac treated it like a maximum and Mac was quite a character. And they named the prison after him. Probably the Oakland state penitentiary, the reformatory, and Stringtown are probably the most well-known facilities that we have in the state.

JE: What kind of crimes would have been committed to get into Stringtown?

JJ: The same kind of crimes that you would have going to the state penitentiary. The most severe: the murders and those kind of things. The difference with a state penitentiary, of course, is that they have a death row and those people are on the death row, but they still have other offenders there that have committed the most horrendous crimes and they classify down because they haven't been placed on death row. They're placed at the state penitentiary when they first come in and they classified down and get to a medium.

JE: I'm seeing in my mind, when we drive by, those fences -- the curled, barbed wire.

JJ: They used to have farms out there, also, right behind them, because the offenders used to raise all the food. I don't know if they still have farms because, when I worked for corrections, we had beef cattle -- we raised the beef, we raised chickens, and we had eggs and chickens and so all the food and all the vegetables were raised on the farms and the various prisons. And I think they got, before I retired, they closed down the cattle business where we raised the cattle and fed people, and it started getting food from the big grocers or whatever.

They also taught inmates how to butcher. So that was done by the USDA. So we had that and then that was a shock to me when I first started that they would have inmates at the state penitentiary with knives this big and they were butchering. Yes. Yes, that was one of their jobs.

And they got certified so that if they classified out of prison, then they got a job.

JE: You have so many expert in civil rights prison system. You are a founder of the National Association of Black Journalists -- a founder of that. How many black journalists do you think we have in Oklahoma?

JJ: Well, right now, that organization is no longer in existence. But they are all a part of it -- is the National Association of Black Journalists. The national. They're a part of that now. And I would say quite a few, I don't know. I haven't been active really -- probably 2009.

JE: Living in Tulsa, I don't think we have a black on television now. We have had

JJ: Well, you have one at channel... Her name is Jackson.

JE: Oh, yes. She's been there for many years.

JJ: Yes. Right.

JE: Channel 6.

JJ: And she came from...

JE: KOTV.

JJ: Yes.

JE: No.

JJ: She came from the educational station.

JE: Okay.

JJ: Yeah. And I met her because I was part of a forum. We put together a forum for the people running for governor when Stitt was running.

JE: Governor Stitt, right.

JJ: Yeah, we had a forum over in Tulsa and that's when I met her.

JE: Oh, okay.

JJ: Yeah. But, yeah, you probably -- you don't have very many over there. We had more here in Oklahoma City. But 4 started with a photographer.

JE: Channel 4

JJ: Yes. Channel 4. Oliver Murray. And he became management and he graduated from Douglas High School. He was over there; started as a videographer -- well, photographer first -- videographer, and moved up to management when he retired from there.

JE: You know, this was in the newspaper -- Wall Street Journal. I read it the other day: The Black News Channel

JJ: Owned J. C. Watts.

JE: Owned by, co-founded by J. C. Watts. Former OU quarterback and former congressman. And after two years it went off the air. They just couldn't make it financially.

JJ: Well, you still see them on the air. So, I don't know -- I know that they've been talking about that. It's gone off the air but it's still on the air right now.

JE: Maybe something, you know.

JJ: So I don't know what happened there.

JJ: And how important is it to have a black news channel? Because I still believe in this day and time that the stations are still not paying attention to a lot of things in the community that are of importance now. What this COVID has done is because -- I won't say it's because of the COVID -- it's because the Black Lives Matter have been so vocal about all of the discrimination and the fact that blacks weren't included in productions and included in news departments, in management, included in all of the things that impact your community -- and you don't have a voice and your voice is coming from the outside and the outside is making decisions for your community. But you have no voice in the in the making of that because of the Black Lives Matter have spoken up and because of the things that happened to George Floyd and, now, I noticed that commercials are now filled with -- they now have people of color people with disabilities people that are from the gay community -- doors are opening now, just like the Academy Award the other day. (laughing)

JE: And the slap heard around the world.

JJ: Yes, right, right, so doors are opening now. But yeah, that was -- I felt that there was a real need for something like a black station, but that was way, way, way before this happened and I'm sorry to hear that they didn't make it. There are a lot of stories that they tell from our perspective, just like the hispanic station and just like the asian stations, you know.

Chapter 16 – 10:43
Reflecting on Race

John Erling (JE): Let's reflect on what you did as a child and the sit-in demonstrations and all. And you were the first black and and then, back last, you received that -- maybe you would have thought back there in the 60s that maybe this thing is getting better. I don't know, did you? And then if somebody -- if I would have asked you then, “Well, let's look out to 30 years later. Let's look out to 2022.” What would you think race relations would be like then? What do you think? Could you answer that question back then? Answer as a 25 year old then. Answer the question.

Joyce Jackson (JJ): I thought things were getting better and we're going to be much better. And here we are behind what was happening at that time. We were trying to open the doors of accommodation, things. And here we are at a point where they're trying to squash and close down the right to vote, the right to learn your own history. So I thought things would be better.

JE: So you think we've fallen back.

JJ: Yes.

JE: In 2020, we had many riots. Obviously, much it was triggered by the murder of George Floyd. And then I saw polls estimated that between 15 million and 26 million people participated at some point in demonstrations in the United States. The largest protests in United States history took part in 2020.

JJ: But people of all colors. That's what made the difference.

JE: But then we should also mention that between May 26th and August 22nd. Around 93% of protests were peaceful and non-destructive.

JJ: Yes.

JE: But they were still feeling the need to demonstrate, to protest in a peaceful manner, for things that you thought maybe would be corrected right back in the ‘60s.

JJ: Right. And I believe -- and because I was a part of it -- I believe that the nonviolent protest is the most effective and it has the most stability. I really don't think you can fight your way out of any situation.

JE: Nope.

JJ: I think you need to use your heart and your mind. People need to be more civil to each other. And I guess I thought things would be much better, things would be much better. And today, sitting here today, I think we have gone backwards.

JE: But maybe, you know, we've had all those feelings all along and then the civil rights movement came along in 1964 and then, so we had to -- we had to, we had to, not because we wanted to -- we had to be more accepting in positions and all that kind of thing. But underneath, it didn't mean that we changed the person. Laws cannot change the people.

JJ: Absolutely.

JE: And so as we've gone along all those years, and now we come out, and maybe some of it is finally...

JJ: Coming to the surface.

JE: Because I was going to use an ugly term: The pus head was burst. It was always sitting there and now it's become even more open maybe.

JJ: But I found -- I think the people like you said, it's come to a head, it's because they don't know the other people, they don't know. It's hard to, I believe, that it's harder to be ugly to somebody you don't know. And when we were little kids, they didn't know us. They reacted because of the color of our skin and reacted to everything because of the color.

JE: I'm gonna stop you. You said it's harder to be ugly to somebody you don't know. Isn't it easier to be ugly to somebody you don't know?

JJ: No, no, you're right. It's easier -- that's what I meant -- it's easier to be ugly to someone you don't know. But when you get to know that person, then it's pretty difficult. Because you realize that person has the same dreams you have, grew up, sometimes, in the same way, had parents saying the same things.

JE: Praying to the same god.

JJ: Praying to the same God. Yes, absolutely. And it's because they don't know or they haven't bothered to know that person -- to know that person -- that makes all the difference in the world. How do you just decide you don't like me just because I'm another color?

JE: And, for history's sake, we're just going through the nomination of a new Supreme Court judge. She's a female black -- Jackson. And she was actually asked if she thought babies were racist and that's because of the critical race theories, and she was asked that question. And so here we have, in front of God and mankind, these kinds of questions. And “do you go to church?” And “how often do you go to church?” And you wonder if some of these questions were asked because the person was black -- some of it was asked because for political reasons they wanted to do what they said. You would have thought that maybe this would not, when you were 25, that would not be dealt with then. However, it's wonderful to have a female black on the Supreme Court. I mean she will be confirmed this coming...

JJ: I pray she does. Yes, absolutely. But yeah, some of those questions just really just blew me away.

JE: There's so much of Martin Luther King's dream that probably -- do you think it will ever be realized? We are...

JJ: In pockets. It's being realized every day. All over the world. In pockets. I don't know. I pray we get to a point where, when you meet a person, you don't automatically react to -- they're so different because of the color of the skin, which is to me...

JE: Right. But then we have other races. We have the Jews.

JJ: Yes, yes.

JE: The Syrians.

JJ: Right, right.

JE: And, so, they can't meet each other without having preconceived notions of the same thing.

JJ: Yes.

JE: It's the same thing. And there, it’s not the color of the skin.

JJ: No, it's not color of the skin.

JE: So that will always be there.

JJ: Yes.

JE: I think this race issue will be here to the end of time. It can only get better. I don't know if you agree with that.

JJ: Yes, I agree. I hope and pray that it gets better and you're right with these. I do. I believe that it will. I would hope that it would happen in my lifetime. I don't think it will in my lifetime. But if you look at the young people today, they're friends with everyone. They have all kinds of friends.

JE: Yep.

JJ: The people that are gay, the people that are disabled, the people -- because there were a time where people didn't really communicate with people if you had a disability, if you are different, I think it happened ultimately. But I don't believe that happened in my lifetime.

JE: I think we are giving our young people opportunities to mix more than we did before. I have a 13 year old grandson who's in a school where there's a nice diversity and I can tell he doesn't see -- he doesn’t see the color.

JJ: No.

JE: He doesn’t see that color.

JJ: That’s beautiful.

JJ: Yeah, and I have some great grandkids and they don't see color. They just have friends.

JE: And I should say the granddaughter --

JJ: “That's my friend!”

JE: -- who goes to the University of Mississippi and she doesn't see that either.

JJ: Yeah. “That’s my friend!”

JE: So it's what we're teaching our children right now. Right. I've been fascinated by World War II and I've been reading a book -- the fall of Berlin and the allied forces and all took it over.

And they discovered that when Hitler's War was on, He rounded up 25 million children to indoctrinate them into respecting him and his theories of a white race...

JJ: Being superior.

JE: ... and being superior -- Aryan race, right. And anything to do with Nazism. And he was -- the only good thing came out of it. It actually ended up protecting them from war. But they became orphans and all that kind of thing. But he knew how important it was to indoctrinate them.

JJ: Right -- that they were superior to the rest of the people.

JE: Right, right, right. And so I don't want to give him credit for anything, but he did do that -- rounded up 25 million children. I'd never heard that before. And so we need to be indoctrinating our kids is the only point I’m making here.

JJ: Yeah, well, with the critical race thing -- that, to me, is the most ridiculous. And here we are with a law that says, teachers shouldn’t be teaching. Teachers were never teaching “Critical Race Theory” to kids. They were teaching history and they were not placing somebody to be more superior, or to be frightened of that person, or to say negative things about “this is what happened.” It wasn't like that. History wasn't taught like that and it's still not taught like that. But just the idea that people are going to, that you're gonna get fired if you say the wrong thing about history

JE: Do you think that we we can come up -- sometimes people are confused: What is Critical Race Theory? And it's kind of tough to deal with and to explain it, I think.

JJ: Right.

JE: Do you have a quick explanation?

JJ: No, I don't have a quick explanation. I know that it was It's a theory that's taught in law school, but it has to do with the manner in which you teach the subject matter where you would make a person feel like they have that one person is the bully and the other person is the victim.

And that's not the way history has ever been taught -- the history teachers that I had. And I don't think teachers are doing that today. I think they are now so uptight about “What can I say? What can I do?” that they don't want to touch it. Kids need to know their history. And so in our community, you will know your history because your parents will tell you, we need to do more people in the church telling you, in the different organizations -- you need to know your history.

And because they passed this law does not mean that you don't have a right to know your history.

JE: I read this morning in the paper and this was in Tulsa. The school board elections are going to be held and one of them running for school board was asked: “Well, what do you think about critical race theory?”

And she said, “Well, I don't know, but I do know that from K through 12, we're not teaching it at all -- not teaching it.”

JJ: No, no.

JE: It's not there.

JJ: No.

JE: Right. So, anyway.

Chapter 17 – 2:13
Advice to the Young

John Erling (JE): About advice. Advice to the young -- maybe advice to the blacks. What advice do you give out? Because you speak now, don't you? To young people?

Joyce Jackson (JJ): Oh, yes.

JE: What advice are you giving them?

JJ: My advice is to dream big and to know that the world is open to you today -- like it's never been open to you before. And you have the right, and you have all of the resources available to you.

JE: And I'm thinking blacks -- the opportunities to blacks. Now we've been kind of, we've been telling the negative, the nasty side of it and so forth. It's far more open today than it's ever been.

JJ: Yes, absolutely.

JE: And they're standing on the shoulders of people like you, as a matter of fact.

JJ: And, of course, I had no idea at the time that I was making a difference.

JE: No, you didn't, but you did. And all these people in all professions are getting doors open to them because of what people like you have done. So, to blacks listening, you need to hear the history because it'll cause you to respect more the position when you become the first black president of IBM or whatever. You know?

JJ: Right.

JE: And that these people helped you get there.

JJ: Absolutely.

JE: That’s what the history is about.

JJ: Absolutely. And it was folks like my boss, John Harrison, that opened doors for a lot of folks all around.

JE: Right. A white man.

JJ: A white man became my mentor. Yeah. After having been one of those kids involved in the city.

JE: How would you like to be remembered?

JJ: I'd like to be remembered as someone that cared about my community and wanted to do everything possible for us to applaud our history.

JE: Perfect.

JJ: And that's why I wanted to let people know about history.

JE: Yeah. Perfect. That's great. Well, I've enjoyed this. We've had 2 hours, 47 minutes.

JJ: I didn't realize that. Yeah. Talking. I've enjoyed it.

JE: I’ve enjoyed it, too, and thank you for sharing this story. This will be on our website now forever and ever for kids to be -- know about history, but also inspired by your story. And I want to thank you for it.

JJ: Thank you.