

**Oral History Interview of
Connie Alexander**

**Interviewed by: William Tydeman
December 8, 2015
Albuquerque, New Mexico**

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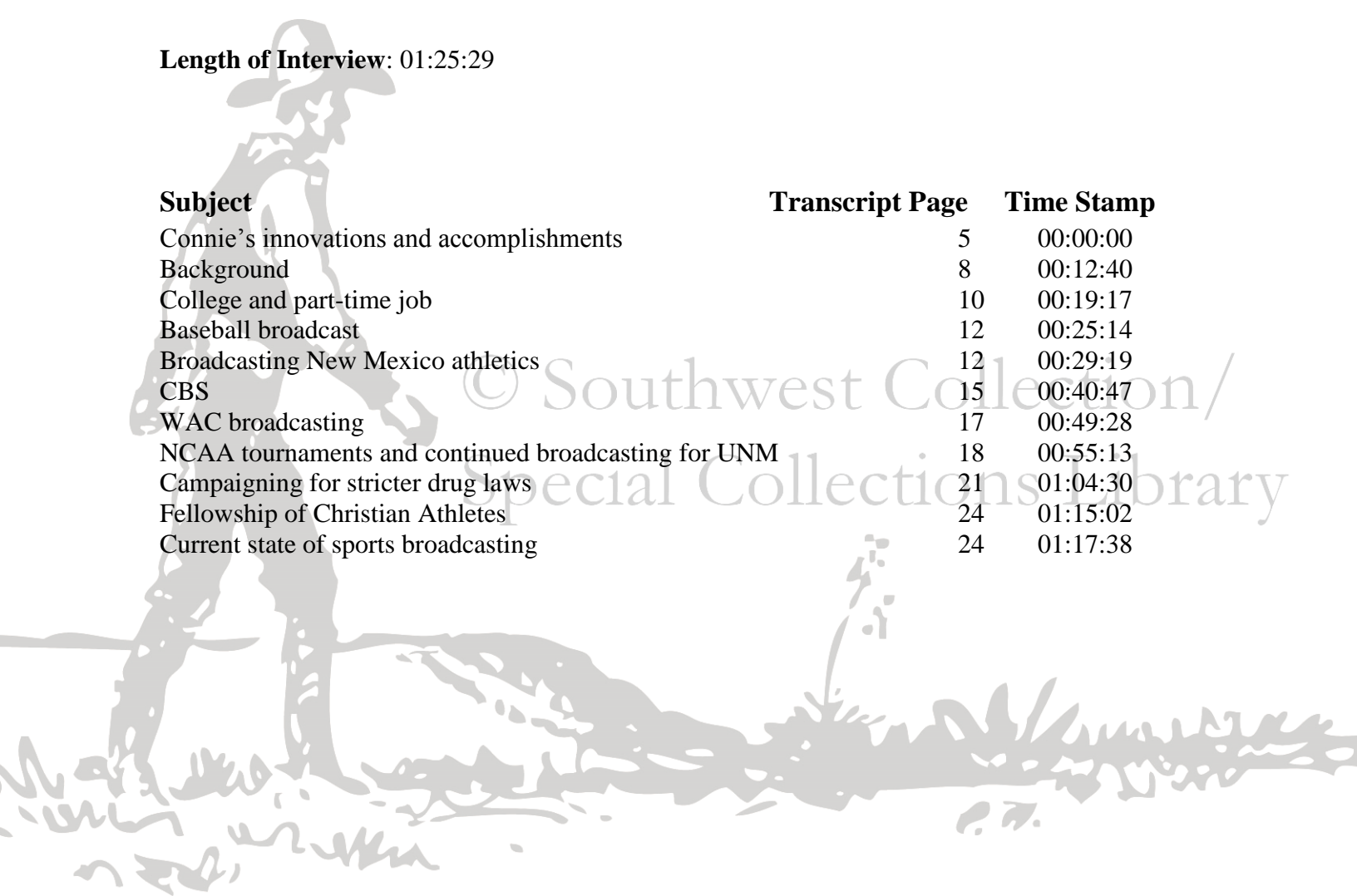
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Transcript Overview:

This interview features former sportscaster Connie Alexander. Alexander discusses attending college in New Mexico and beginning his career in broadcasting. Alexander did play by play for University of New Mexico athletics, the Western Athletic Conference, and several bowl games. Alexander reflects upon his career and talks about how sportscasting has changed.

Length of Interview: 01:25:29



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William Tydeman (WT):

This is an interview with Connie Alexander recorded at his home in Albuquerque on the eighth of December. Again, working probably around ten thirty or so.

Connie Alexander (CA):

Okay, my notes are kind of miniscule here, but they'll get the job done. This is one thing that was done about a couple of years ago if you want to just flip through it real fast.

WT:

Oh yeah, this is terrific. Who did this? Did you compile it all?

CA:

Yeah, I think there's fifteen pages.

WT:

Yeah, this is a terrific compilation, Connie.

CA:

You can have that.

Unknown:

Oh yeah, we'd love to have that.

CA:

Well, whenever you're ready.

WT:

We're ready to roll, Connie. You said you were going to read to us from some of the key skeleton notes?

CA:

These are just key little notes. I didn't have time to go through them again to enlarge them, but I can make them out here. Let me show you something in here. This is a very good summary like from the time I was born and one, two, three—here's a picture at the Cotton Bowl. Here you can see all of my tags there. I have a huge exciting collection of Southwest Conference memorabilia from a long SWC career. Here's one little note, one of my most treasured comments was from legendary coach Frank Broyles, who told me in his southern drawl, "I listened to you broadcast the Texas-Oklahoma game and I could tell everything that was going on." I just got a cold chill reading that. A famous coach, he could tell everything. "I listened to you broadcast Texas and

OU, I could tell everything that was going on.” He is a great man. And here you can see my little tag system here. I have deep innovations in play by play. Could I take a quick read of that?

WT:

Sure.

CA:

Connie Alexander’s innovations in sports play by play announcing. He developed advanced methods. His broadcast contained more information than typical broadcasts. He developed an art and science of play by play, a science of preparation and an art of delivery. One, manual of preparation procedures that covered pre-season, pre-game, at the game sight, and in the booth. Two, created a unique magnetic spotting system with information tag for each player, including offence and defense units. Three, expanded spotter’s duties and hand signals to include more actions of players. I had hand signals for different things. These guys loved it. Oh, they loved it. Four, became an allied member of the American Football Coaches Association and the National Association of Basketball Coaches to annually receive a manual with up to date articles and diagrams from various top coaches. To my knowledge, I was the only announcer whoever did that.

WT:

Really? You asked for them and they gave them to you?

CA:

Yeah, I became what was called an allied member of the American Football Coaches Association. They list the active members and the allied members and that’s what I was. And I’d get that, I’ve got them, big stacks of them over there. Then you can take some of them if you want, or all of them if you want.

WT:

Sure.

CA:

Five, at the game sight I studied game film with one of the coaches, one of the assistants. That was part of our routine.

WT:

Is that right?

CA:

And I was doing that the first Southwest Conference game I did in '62. It was Southern Cal and SMU at the Cotton Bowl Stadium. On Saturday it was a night game and on Saturday morning I was out at SMU looking over film with one of the SMU assistants and this big time announcer from LA, his name was Tom Kelly. I think that's right, but this is 1962. I'm out there looking at film and I see these two guys. There was nobody in the athletic building. I see these two guys walking by and they stop and stood in the doorway and watched for a few minutes. Then I recognized this guy. He's the top play by play guy on the entire west coast. And they were just watching and then I heard him say to his buddy as they walked away, he said, "You know, that's a hell of a good idea." He's supposed to be the stud.

WT:

Now did you run into any resistance from coaches who watch film?

CA:

No, I would always set it up with the sports information director ahead of time. And they spent about a half hour.

WT:

And you made a decision which team you were going to watch film on?

CA:

Well I would do it at the home team because likely they would not have—the traveling team—they might have had somewhere I could have seen.

WT:

Right, makes sense.

CA:

Six, studied rules, rules interpretation book, illustrated rules, referee's handbook, sometimes visited officials in their dressing room pre-game. I remember going down at the University of Texas. It was after the 1969 100th anniversary big shoot out. The referee of that game was refereeing the game at Texas that I was doing that day. I just dropped by to say hi to the officials. I said, "Carl, you know, I studied the rules and on a punt situation, there is a situation where one signal covers about nine different things. He said, "Yeah." What it was usually was if a fowl occurred after the ball had crossed the line of scrimmage, the neutral zone, that's when it usually would come into play and be used. So we're in the third quarter at the University of Texas packed stadium, there's a punt, a flag. One of the officials comes over and they have a three second chat. Carl picks up the ball, he steps off the penalty, and then he looks up toward the press box. He had already told me he would do this if that occurred during the game. He steps it

off, he looks up toward the press box, he tips his cap and does this, exactly the way he told me in the dressing room that he would do it. Now I'm getting a cold chill thinking about the respect that the officials had for me and I never once criticized an official.

AW:

Yeah, which is why they had the respect.

CA:

Yeah. Let's see, I developed a library of descriptions, twenty-five categories to add variety and unique trademark expressions. His radio broadcasts were in color. From time to time striving for excellence on the day after the broadcast, listened to recording to critique performance and build a list of do's and don'ts. By kickoff or tipoff time, he was ready to explode with the excitement and information. The difference between good and great is extra effort. So I have that thing, and I don't think any other announcer ever even dreamed of it. That's when I won some awards in Texas Interscholastic League when I was ten and eleven. Here's from some of the bowl games. Burt Reynolds had won. We were going from the Sun Bowl to the Cotton Bowl right after the game, and I had my eleven year old daughter with me. We were in the parking lot, a lot of cars leaving and she's a real calm kid. All of a sudden she just went wild. She went, "Dad, there he is. There's Burt Reynolds right there, look, look!" She just went off her rocker, I'll tell you. There was Lindsey Nelson, Pat Summerall, Lindsey and I were friends, a great guy, NCAA telecast I did for him, basketball, NCAA tournament. That was a letter from the director of NCAA productions. This is the National Sports Caster's Award. I won New Mexico and Kern Tips won Texas the same year. That was just the cover we did. We did games of the week on NBC television and then the NCAA tournaments. That's Kern's picture, Texas Sports Hall of Fame sells highlight films. He did them up through '66, and I did them up through—starting in '67. And that's our list of humble announcers, play by play and color. Here's Jack Dale and, here's me, I had fourteen assignments, Jack had nine. Jack got to be really good and a wonderful man, terrific. Then here's a little sketch. I think this is a really professional thing here, really pro. So that's that. All right, let's get on over to my little—I made my notes so small, I can read them, but—okay, my mom and dad would really be proud of this collection. Oh boy. I told you when my dad was sixteen he drove a horse and wagon through the Palo Duro Canyon and his eleven year old brother was with him. Then I came along and when I was eight he gave me a football and he taught me how to pass, punt, place kick, and drop kick. Then when I was ten and eleven, my mom encouraged me to get in the Texas Interscholastic League declamations, that's poetry reciting contest. And I won, I think, two ribbons when I was ten and one when I was eleven. My mom and my dad, those two things, I think that kind of set a little stage for me that got me directed toward wanting to be a playbook play announcer. I was born in Dallas in the same hospital that President Kennedy was taken, Parkland Hospital. By some strange coincidence, I was going to broadcast in '63, the TCU game in Fort Worth. And our crews always stayed at the Hotel Texas in Fort Worth. I was going to stay there on Friday night, on Friday afternoon he was

shot and they took him to Parkland Hospital. Parkland Hospital is where I was born thirty-four years before. He had spent Thursday night in the Hotel Texas, and I spent Friday night there. He gave a speech on Friday morning in the Hotel Texas in Fort Worth before 2,500 people. And then a few hours later he was shot. To me, that was a fascinating thing. It's probably not to other people. When I was going up on the elevator on Friday night at the Hotel Texas, we stopped on the third floor and the elevator operator was just jammed with cardboard boxes, the hallway. He said, "This is where Kennedy's staff stayed, this floor. And those boxes are filled with telephones." So moving on, when I was about twelve, we moved to a little town of 700 in West Texas called Moran, population 700. In a little town like that you do everything, junior class play, football team, all of it. When I was seventeen my family moved to Albuquerque. We had a relative who moved here and we came to visit and my folks decided to move here. That was just before my senior year at Albuquerque High. I had a book keeping teacher who one day a couple months into the fall said, "What would you like to do for a career?" I thought a minute and I said, "I think I'd like to be a sports announcer."

WT:

Really?

CA:

And about two or three weeks later, one of the teachers who was in charge, he was a science teacher—he was in charge of things like the PA system. And he had me come over to his office and he said, "We need somebody to be the PA announcer on our last Albuquerque High football game of the year. Do you want to do it?" I said, "Yes sir." And so we sat on the sideline in chairs, a guy on each side of me, and that's the first time I ever held a microphone. And then in the spring, a few months later, somehow I ended up working out with Albuquerque's class C professional baseball team a couple days before their opening game. I was a pretty good ball player, and they were teaching me fine points of the game. This one guy, Alex Delagarza, a shortstop from San Antonio. He was showing me fine points of the game. I don't know how it happened, but about two, three, or four weeks later, I was the public address announcer on the professional team's home games, \$2 a game. And oh, I thought it was a big deal. I'd come on and say, "Good evening, this is Connie Alexander, your Tingley Field Announcer." I just got a cold chill saying that. I was seventeen.

WT:

Now Connie, where did they play, the Dukes then?

CA:

They played down by the zoo.

WT:

Near Tingley Beach?

CA:

The old Tingley Field. By the time you came here, they were probably already moved to the sports stadium.

WT:

That's correct.

CA:

And then about ten years later they built a new stadium on the same site. It's one of the most fantastic places you can go.

WT:

Yeah, that's what everybody says. I have not seen any game from the new stadium.

CA:

So anyway, I did the PA for \$2 a game for two summers, and in the second summer I walked into a—well, I started in the university to major in speech and journalism because I wanted to be a sports announcer. And so after my freshman year at the university and still my second year on the Duke's PA, one day I walked into this little two hundred and fifty watt station and asked to see the manager and I went in and introduced myself and I said, "I'm a sports announcer." All I'd done was PA. He said, "Well, I told them I was going to university to study speech and journalism." I said, "I'd like a part time job." And he said, "Well, I already got a guy who's going to do play by play, but you can do the halftime or the pregame." Well, the first game this fellow who's an osteopath, he was in his fifties, great guy, but he kind of made a blunder on the air. So before the second week the manager said, "We're going to do a game at Roswell at New Mexico Military Institute Friday night and I want you to try out for half of the game, let's see if you can do play by play." So that was Friday night in Roswell. So Monday, he says, "Well, you're the fulltime play by play man now." He said, "Joe doesn't really want to do it anyway." He just wanted to interview guys on a six o'clock show, you know?" And he was a super guy. So anyway, that's how I got into play by play. I did high school football. We only had two local high school teams then, the public and a parochial school. Let's see, getting back to my notes here. And then I was already in the University of New Mexico, speech and journalism, and I played on the lobo baseball team, and I was on the University of New Mexico debate team and debated against Notre Dame. Oh, I had two years of voice training at UNM, like sophomore, junior and had a great professor. He had been a big time announcer at Los Angeles and then he got his PhD and came to UNM, and so I had that voice training and I could see an incredible difference. On recordings like after the second year, almost totally change in voice.

AW:

What sort of things did he show you that made that difference in your voice?

CA:

One of the things he made me do was lie on my back on the floor and inhale, and I haven't practiced this for a while, I'm a little horse right now, some little allergy. He had me lie on my back and then you'd inhale and you could see how much air you could get down there. Then you'd learn to slowly release that and he'd say, "Blue is the moon." But I could go a lot longer than that. And the other one was, "Deep is the sea." And it made a huge difference. You can hear it on some of the recordings. The first year that I did—I was twenty and turning twenty-one and that's the first year I did the pro baseball on the radio. And some of those recordings of the Albuquerque Dukes in 1950, I can tell a huge difference from recordings say two years earlier. And when I did the high school basketball, football and basketball when I was nineteen, one day I said to our manager, I said, "You know, nobody's broadcasting the University of New Mexico basketball, what do you think?" He said, "You know anybody up there?" I said, "Yes sir, I know the athletic director." He's been there twenty-nine years. I'd had a class with him. I called Coach Johnson and asked if I could come talk with him, and he said, "Sure." He said, "Come to my office. No, come by my house about 6 tonight." And so I go by his house and we chatted a minute or two and he said, "What did you want to talk about?" I said, "I'd like to get permission for our radio station to broadcast the University of New Mexico Basketball on our station." Now he's been there twenty-nine years. He said, "Go right ahead, do it." He didn't say let me think about it even. "Go right ahead, do it." So I was doing play by play on University of New Mexico basketball in the old Carlisle gym in 1949. It had been built in 1920. And where you broadcast the basketball I was kind of in a little perch. There were steel girders for the roof. And I was on something that was kind of built right under that, it's like a little crow's nest, and I was broadcasting the University of New Mexico basketball. I was nineteen and I recently read about some other guy who was nineteen, and he was one of the youngest college basketball announcers of all time, which made me the same, I was one of the youngest college basketball announcers of all time, and the biggest game I did was Arizona played New Mexico at our old Carlisle gym, 1949.

WT:

Wow, so Johnson Gym is named after—

CA:

Roy Johnson.

WT:

Roy Johnson, okay.

CA:

All right moving on, starting at age twenty, the beginning of the season I broadcast Albuquerque professional baseball team, the Albuquerque Dukes, they were in the West Texas-New Mexico League. It included Lubbock and Amarillo. And the road games in those days, you didn't travel with the team, you'd stay in the studio in Albuquerque, and Western Union would send in a ticker tape report. There would be a western union operator at wherever the game, say if it was in Lubbock. And then we had a Western Union operator sitting right outside the studio. And the ticker tape would come in and he would paste this on, and all it would say would be, "Albuquerque at bat. Jackson," the name of the player, "B-1," ball one, "S-1," strike one, "pop out, right field." That's all it would say. That's all you'd get on the ticker tape. And so then you had to sit there and make up all the stuff about the pitcher who's got the rosin bag.

WT:

And steps off the rubber.

CA:

Yeah, all that, you had to make it all up. Can you imagine a twenty year old kid getting to do that? Like he was in heaven, you know. So one night—and then I started dreaming up sound effects. One night I took the janitor's bucket—I was going down the hall to go on the air—and took the janitor's bucket, and I had a baseball in there, and so about the second inning I said, "Here's the pitch." All of the roofs and all of the towns had tin baseball roofs, the minor leagues. I said, "Here's the pitch, he fouls it away, dropped the ball on the bucket." I had it sitting upside down by me. I said, "You may have heard the ball hit the roof just over our heads." Can you imagine at twenty, twenty-one getting to do that? It was such a blessing. Ronald Reagan, by the way, did that in De Moines when he was about thirty-five, just before we went to Hollywood. He did the Chicago Cubs games. So I continued broadcasting high school and lobo basketball play by play while I was twenty and twenty-one. Then January of '51 I had joined the U.S Airforce, the Korean War just started. I was in four years, was discharged in 1955. By some act of God, I think, I came back home and in the summer after I was discharged, I was buying some shoes at the most prominent shoe store in Albuquerque and the owner was a guy named Pete Matose who was head of the Lobo Booster Club and he said, "Hey, let me give you a tip." He said, "Humble Oil Company, which has been broadcasting Southwest Conference for over twenty years, they're going to start opening stations in New Mexico and they want to sponsor University of New Mexico games on the radio." He said, you ought to go up to the university, told me who I needed to talk with. I jumped in my car and raced. I knew the guy, George McFadden. George said, "Yeah, Humble Oil." He said, "Here's the name of the advertising agency in Houston, world's largest advertising agency, and here's the man you need to talk with." He was one of the three partners, a partner of Kern Tips The next thing I did, I jumped in my car, went to KOB radio, fifty thousand watts. They had been doing lobo football for years. I talked to the program director and I said, "If I can get a sponsor, can I do the play by play?" And he was kind of an

aloof kind of a guy, but he thought I'd say for probably between four and five seconds and he said, "Yeah, we'll do that." So then I raced to my house, this was before cell phones and stuff. I called the advertising agency in Houston, talked with a man named Joe Wilkinson, and had a southern drawl, and I explained—made the little pitch. He was really friendly and I was nervous, really nervous. He said, "Well how much would this cost?" I said, "\$1,500 dollars." Can you imagine \$1,500 for ten games on a fifty thousand watt station that covered the western half of the U.S. all the way to Hawaii. He says, "Fifteen hundred dollars? You mean feathers, fur, and all?" I said, "Yes sir." He said, "We'll take it." I got cold chills all over as I tell you that. And so I did University of New Mexico football for eight years. It was in the seventh year that Kern had me do the Southern Cal, SMU game at the Cotton Bowl. Once I did a full season of Southwest Conference, that was '63. It was the same year that President Kennedy was assassinated. I could tell, like about the second or the third week of '63 that Kern had me doing what would be about the number two most listened to game and he always did the first most listened to. And so that kind of gives a story up to the Southwest Conference. Let me get back to my skeleton here. Okay, I was voted New Mexico sportscaster of the year three times while doing New Mexico. That was the National Sportscasters and Sports Writers Association. That all led to broadcasting Southwest Conference, eventually the game of the week. I was on Southwest Conference a total of sixteen years. The last eleven I was the lead announcer out of fourteen after Kern Tips passed away. Probably one of the greatest games I ever got to do was the one hundredth anniversary of college football between Texas and Arkansas at Fayetteville. One hundredth anniversary, they called it the big shoot out.

AW:

I just watched a documentary, a brand new documentary that's about to be released of that game.

CA:

Really?

AW:

It's terrific.

CA:

Is it? You saw it, huh? How long is it?

AW:

It's feature length; it's an hour and something. Let me talk to the guy that put it together, and I'll see if I can get you a copy. It hasn't been released yet, but I think they're going to bring it out on like ESPN or one of those. It's really well done. I think it's interviews with the players that are still surviving and it goes through the game play by play, which you would appreciate.

CA:

Wow, who's producing it?

AW:

Mike Looney, it's a fellow who lives in Texas. He's in the advertising business and he's a Texas Tech graduate which is how I came onto the film. He sent me a copy of it, he's doing a book also about the game. It's really—it's a nice piece. You'd appreciate it.

CA:

Well good, I want to see it.

AW:

I'll see what I can do to get you a copy.

CA:

Yeah, I'd like that.

AW:

I'll just get a DVD and see if I can get one mailed here to you.

CA:

That'd be great, I'd love it. Nixon came to that game and I had done all my usual preparation and I had learned through the years that instead of adlibbing my opening when I'd come on, they'd usually put me on about forty-five seconds before kickoff and I'd kind of summarize everything, weather, crowd. So I would write it and that way I could get it more colorful language than just adlibbing. So I had that written, it was about forty-five seconds, and I'm going through all of it, the weather, the cascade of cheers and blah, blah, blah. I get down through all that and the pregame and the national championship, the hundredth anniversary, but Nixon hadn't shown up yet. And now the teams were going out on the field.

WT:

Yeah, because the weather was bad that day, wasn't it?

CA:

It was cloudy, dreary, maybe a little bit of mist, just damp. And don't let me forget what happened on the way home that night. So I'm describing all this and I'm going through my notes. I said, "Now the teams are going out onto the field and they're lining up for the kickoff." I can't remember the place kicker's name for Arkansas, I gave his name, and he's teeing the ball up and still no president. I'm down to the end of my prewritten stuff and I said, "They're about ready to kick off?" And suddenly two helicopters out of nowhere, they come right down and land

just south of the field, two helicopters. So I'm saying, "The teams are lined up." I don't remember the kicker's name, but I said, "Johnson, he advances on the ball as the president of the United States arrives." It was unbelievable. It just blended together, and it was a great game and Texas won. That night we were flying home. We were on a charter flight from Dallas that had flown to Fayetteville, Rogers, just at the edge of Fayetteville. And we were flying back home. We had four guys in our crew and the pilot. It had been a cloudy, dreary day all day. So we're flying and all we can see is clouds, we're in clouds. And so after a while, the pilot says, "I can't get above this stuff." And we could hear the tower in FAA in Memphis, the Memphis operator. And he was talking back and forth with our pilot and the pilot—well the first thing he did was he shined a flashlight out on the wing. We said, "What are you doing?" He said, "We're getting ice on the wings." He said, "I'm checking the ice." You know, people laugh, and boy it got real serious. And so we're flying along and we could still hear the Memphis operator and he's flying and shines the flashlight out, and finally the operator says, "Well you can continue, or you can turn back. It's your choice." We're all sitting there real quiet, you know. And then about a minute this pilot says, "I'm turning back. We're going back where we took off from." We flew back; I don't remember how long, it wasn't a long time. But he said, "I want you guys to see if you can see any lights on the ground." I was on the left side, and within seconds after you said that I said, "Lights at nine o'clock." And then we broke out of this soup and he had that plane zeroed in on the runway. I think the clouds came down to maybe a hundred feet above the runway, we landed, I got out and actually wiped ice off the top of the wings. So we spent the night there. Years later, it occurred to me, we were flying over the Ozark Mountains when all this happened. Years later it came into my mind, my memory, that my great grandfather on my mother's side was a Methodist minister and he was a circuit rider, riding over the Ozarks to the little churches, mountain churches, preaching on Sundays. I didn't think of that while we were in that emergency. I do remember I did some pretty serious praying and got closer and closer to the lord and eventually—well, let's see, before that I had been the co-founder and first president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes in Albuquerque. That was in '66. So let me get back to my skeleton notes here. I don't think I needed a skeleton, but I am staying in a lineup here that goes from my beginning to the latest and should help you with what you're doing. Back to the notes. So the last eleven years on the Exon network, I was with them a total of twenty-three years including University of Mexico before doing the Southwest Conference. All that lead to—I won the National Sportscaster Texas of the Year Award in '69. I think I already told you that, didn't I? Okay, but the role with the Southwest Conference lead announcer led doing play by play on CBS Radio for ten years on the Cotton Bowl, the Sun Bowl, and the NFL Bro Bowl and the NFL playoffs. And I worked with Jack Buck. Do you guys remember Jack Buck? The first Cotton Bowl game I did on CBS on January 1, 1970, Jack Buck and I shared the play by play. And I met him the night before. I had done about sixty hours of preparation. Normally I would do about twenty, but this might be my one shot national. So I did triple the preparation, and so I meet Jack the night before at this huge dinner dance, huge hotel. He's sitting at a table with the owners of

the New York Yankees, and I meet him at about a quarter till midnight. He's getting ready to launch a cork on this monstrous—what am I trying to remember? It's a big—

WT:

A big screen?

CA:

No, it was a big huge light fixture. Anyway, he launches the cork at midnight and then there's all the cheering and stuff for about ten minutes and it calms down. Then it gets where we can talk. He was a friendly guy, nice. He says, "Well how the hell are we going to do this tomorrow?" I knew what I was going to do. I had already talked with the producer that afternoon, I knew exactly what I was going to do. So we had this nice little visit, and I go out, the next day I set up three hours before kickoff, and that shows you some of the equipment and stuff I used. I had all that stuff lined up and I got there three hours early and was ready. Jack Buck comes in about an hour and a half before kickoff, really nice guy, and super. All I saw that he was carrying was a yellow legal tablet. I never saw anything else but a yellow legal tablet. I noticed we were talking and it was kind of the top of the broadcast booth and field out there. I noticed he was looking at all this stuff I had. You know, looking up at all these magnetic tags and so on and he said, "Connie, can I use your system on my half?" I said, "Sure, that'll be fine." I thought to myself, "If you can decode it, you'll do just fine." So I did the first half because I had to make a guess, you know, I was talking to the producer the day before. I had to make a guess which half. I would have liked to have done the second half, but I thought if it's a one-sided game, a lot of people will be tuning out. So I said I'd do the first half. It turned out it was a fantastic second half. So then we get through the broadcast, and Jack gets up to leave, a friendly guy, wonderful. We chatted a few minutes and he says, "Well guys, I'm on my way to Alcopoco, I'll see you later." A little over a year later—now he has heard me, by that time, he's heard me broadcast the Pro Bowl on CBS at the LA Coliseum, he's heard me do the NFL playoffs in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with the 49ers, and a couple other games he's heard me. The Cotton Bowl, Sun Bowl, and one day after that second year I was on CBS, one morning I get a phone call and he says, "Connie, this is Jack Buck. We'd like you to move to Saint Louis and by on KMOX." Now most guys would have given their right arm to get that offer. So I listen to it, and I said, "Let me think about it, Jack." Almost instantly I knew it would not work for me. As big an offer as it was, and KMOX is owned by CBS, as well as a San Francisco station. So I called him back in a couple days and thanked him and said, I thought I'd stay with what I had going at the Southwest Conference. I was vice president of a bank in Albuquerque and I was doing basketball on TV, you know, a lot of basketball and other things, my family situation was a big factor. So I called him and thanked him. And now his son Joe is big time, Joe Buck. Joe was probably about five years old at that time, I don't know. But Jack made one of the great calls of all time in the World Series, a homerun, Dodgers late in the game. Then he described it, and then in a recap he said, "I

don't believe what I just saw." And, God he was good. His son's not quite as good, but he's good.

WT:

Joe, I guess, right? Joe Buck?

CA:

Joe Buck. All right, the Cowboys also approached me during 1976. We had discussions about me doing the cowboy games, but I was so connected with the Southwest Conference, that was a factor. The Cowboy thing never did come to fruition, but it was a possibility there.

WT:

Connie, how did you balance your work with the bank as a vice president with your announcing duties?

CA:

It was amazing how it worked because all the games were on Saturdays and I worked five days a week at the bank. The chairman of the board, the founder of the bank loved for me to do it because I was well known. He was a fan, but he liked the fact that I was well known. He thought that would help attract customers and a great guy, he was a great guy. He started that institution in 1934 with a desk and \$6,000. He built it up to the third largest financial institution in New Mexico. Let's see, moving on. And then I was also, in the wintertime, I was doing basketball on TV. I even worked for SNI on the Southwest Conference Committee, that's Sports Network Inc. in '67, that network was owned by Howard Hughes. Then I did two years with that. And then two years into that, a young lawyer came up with an idea. He was from Philadelphia, I think, Eddie Einhorn. He came up with the idea of forming a regional network on TV for each conference. He had the Big 10 Network, the Southwest Conference Network, the SEC, all of them. He wanted me to do the Southwest Conference. I said, "Hey, I would sure like to do that." He said, "But you know, I'm really connected with Humble, and I understand your main sponsor is going to be Shell, and I'm concerned if I do that I might have some friction with Humble." I mean, I knew everybody by Humble at that time, all the marketing people and so on. And he said, "Well, you live in Albuquerque, why don't you just do the Western Athletic Conference games?" That would be like Haskin's team, UTEP, Arizona, Arizona State, BYU, Utah, Colorado State, and Wyoming. So yeah, that's good. I remember he wanted me to meet him on New Year's Eve in Denver for some reason, and I did. And I said, Eddie, he was a little short guy and he had this little pork pie hat, and I said, "Eddie, I'm wondering, could you advance me the money for my travel? I didn't know whether he had any money, and I had a family. He said, "Well, I would like to." But he patted his hip pocket and said, "I'm doing this whole operation out of my hip pocket." I said, "Well, that's fine." He always paid me every penny on time." And he ended up having about ten networks, ten conferences and that became a big, big operation and

NBC bought into it, and he took his money and bought into the Chicago White Sox. He and the White Sox owner had been law students at Pennsylvania University. He's now the vice chairman of the White Sox and here I was asking him to advance me for my plane tickets. That was in 1970? Or something way back there, yeah. Am I taking too much time?

WT:

No, I think we're okay.

CA:

Okay, I did the games of the week for many years on TVS and then NBC bought it. So then I was doing it on NBC for many years. We covered the game of the week for the conference and then all the NCAA tournaments, the big games. I got to do some incredible stuff. I was doing a telecast one time between Kentucky. I did three of the regionals, I did the Mideast, the Midwest, and the West on TV, that's TVS. I was doing a game where Kentucky played Marquette and Rupp was still coaching, Adolph Rupp. And so Marquette beat them, and I had talked with him just before we went on the air. I'm out there, I've got the mic, I'm ready. He comes over, and they finish warming up, Kentucky, he comes over and he's, "Hey boy." He said, "What time's the national anthem and when's my boys going to be introduced?" I said, "Well coach, I'll find out for you." So I got on the intercom and told him. Marquette upset him. It's thirty miles from Marquette to the University of Wisconsin, so there were a ton of Marquette fans. They stampeded the court at the end of the game. So I'm interviewing Rupp at the end of the game and I asked him something, and he said, "I don't know what is wrong with my boys. I just can't understand." And he must have said that four times. And then somebody in this mob, they disconnected something and the camera went off. I said, "Well Coach, if you'll stand by, I'm sure they'll have us back on." I'm watching for the tally light to come on and it comes on, "We're interviewing Coach Rupp—" and I turned, and he had just disappeared, he was gone.

WT:

This was Al McGuire's?

CA:

Al McGuire's team beat them. That's when Al McGuire was just getting started.

WT:

Rupp had quite the reputation, didn't he?

CA:

Oh boy, he was something. Okay, I did many NCAA tournaments for NBC. They bought the rights. I think the last five years of that college network, NBC had it and they did the NCAA tournament as well as the Saturday games. One of the big points in my entire career was after

Coach John Wooden had retired ten national championships in twelve years. The next year he did some analysis on TV. And I was doing a game that it was the West Regional at Pauley Pavilion in LA, and he did the analyst on that telecast with him. So I got to work with John Wooden. As you probably remember, he was later voted the Coach of the 20th Century. The entire century, all sports, all coaches. So I got to work with him that one game and I thought, I'm working with John Wooden. I got a really really focus on John Wooden. To the extent that I think I kind of subtracted some from what I would have routinely done, but I felt I gave the due honor to him. He was a really nice guy, just kind of quiet. But that was a great thrill. The coach of the twentieth century of all coaches, all sports. So I did play by play for fourteen years on TV, including NBC TV and basketball tournaments, games of the week. And then that contract ended about 1980 and then in the mid-eighties I did three years of University of New Mexico basketball on TV, football, and basketball on Albuquerque's station. And then in later years, we got a new baseball coach, Ray Birmingham. He's a tremendous baseball coach, and he and his dad had listened to me for years on Southwest Conference down in Hobbs where they're from. And so Ray Birmingham asked the University to put me on broadcast for local baseball, which I did for two years. Let's see, so my overall span of years, the overall span starting in 1947 when I was on the PA system on local pro baseball until the last college baseball game I did in 2011, that was a span of sixty-nine years. Now, it was not continuous through those years because I had quite a long gap after I did lobo football, basketball in the mid-eighties until the baseball came up. There was a guy named Mike Roberts who did the lobos. He came in here after I left and he ended up being the lobo football, basketball announcer for forty-one years.

WT:

Didn't he get kind of a raw deal? Wasn't there a controversy regarding that?

CA:

He did, he had his athletic director come in, Paul Krebs. And you could see what he was doing as soon as he came in. He started hiring different coaches in all the sports and pretty soon he managed to let go of Mike Roberts, and then he brought in another guy, Paul Krebs the athletic director at UNM. I think there's some outfit that started that's called—they're back somewhere in the Midwest, and I think they came up with an idea of serving all the universities' athletic departments and serving them where they would help them with their advertising. I think that's the main thing they did. I think they came up with the benefit of getting a lot more advertising on the air and then the athletic directors love that. And then somehow then this outfit would hire the announcer some way. And that's the way Mike Roberts, forty-one years, was no longer used. And boy, the local fans were really upset. I guess that pretty well summarizes that part of it. But Krebs is still here. Okay, well I had sixty-five years between my first paying announcing job, \$2 a game, and then the lobo baseball on a local radio station. And I tell people I could still be doing play by play. I tell them I still have the three Vs, voice, vision, and vitality. I could still be doing

that. I know how to do it, I know how to do it at a much more thorough level that—I won't use the word higher, it'd probably be true.

WT:

You'd be another Vince Scully, right?

CA:

Yeah, isn't he something?

WT:

Amazing, amazing career.

CA:

I think he announced that next year's going to be his last. He's one of my all-time favorites, he's so good. And he's about my age. I think he started about the same time. He started on the Dodgers in Brooklyn with Red Barber, was the announcer. Oh, he's good.

WT:

Connie Simmons, Red Barber, Gussy Moran, they had a female commentator.

CA:

Did they?

WT:

They did a program for every Dodgers home game called Warm Up Time.

CA:

Did they? And they had a lady doing it?

WT:

Yes they did. She was a tennis player.

CA:

Gussy Moran? I think I remember that name from tennis.

WT:

Yeah, she didn't stay too long with that crew, but for a couple years it was a novelty.

CA:

There was a guy named Connie, was it Desmond?

WT:

Connie Desmond, you got that right, Connie Desmond.

CA:

He was on for a while, but I loved to listen to Red Barber.

WT:

Yeah, he was terrific.

CA:

Now I loved listening to Mel Allen.

WT:

Holy cow.

CA:

Yeah, he was good. He did the game here on TV in 1961. That was my last year of lobos I think. So we went to dinner, and his brother came with him, and so he and his brother and my wife and I and Todean [?], the trainer, we all went out to dinner, but that was a big deal to meet him, get to go with Mel Allen.

WT:

For sure. So were you broadcasting in the Ellenberger Era?

CA:

No, well I did on TV. I was doing the conference game of the week, yeah. Yeah, he was on for several years on that. I used to call him the Electric Ellenberger. He was, man, he was a fireball.

WT:

Stormin' Norman.

CA:

Stormin' Norman. And he and Don Haskins were buddies. They would always be trying to pull something on each other, and we were doing a game at El Paso, and you know, they acted like they were in an argument or something, and Ellenberger picks up this bucket and he runs down to Haskins and throws it and it had saw dust. Haskins was a great guy, too. I got well acquainted with him. Well, let's see, here is a big key. My key to a wonderful, exciting career is loving my listeners as individuals and as a mass audience and broadcasting for them. Not for me, but for the listeners. Another of my keys has been striving for perfection every game, every minute. Our broadcasts were carried around the world many times on American Forces Radio. It was always

a big thrill to say, "Our broadcast today brought to you around the world on American Forces Radio, 350 stations and 70 ships at sea." And I would think about how I used to live in this little town of 700 in West Texas. A couple of things that are of interest that I did just as a citizen, at age 67, I led fifty marches on crack houses, drug houses. We had gunfire on the third march and we had fifteen or twenty people. The Albuquerque Police Department accompanied us. We wouldn't have gone out there, we would have been shot. That was when I was sixty-seven. At the same time, I owned an apartment complex in an area where there was tremendous street drug dealing. And it was all over town, like twenty neighborhoods. And from seeing that and leading the marches, I got an idea for a new state law called Drug Free Residential Zones to make it a first degree felony for trafficking drugs within a thousand feet of a residence. I just was a citizen, I wasn't elected. And so I got the support of the State District Attorney's Association and the State Sheriffs and Police Association. I got a legislator and state representative to carry the bill. I got it introduced in the legislator, went up there, and appeared before various committees. It passed the house sixty to one. I thought, Wow, this will breeze through the senate and the government will sign. I had statistics that would show it would help 500,000 people in New Mexico who had drug dealing in their neighborhoods, reports of the mothers putting their kids in the bathtub, gunfire and stuff. Well, got through the house, but the state senate was run by a guy who didn't want to do anything about it and nothing happened in the state senate. Therefore, nothing could happen in the governor's office.

AW:

What year was that?

CA:

The first year I did that was '97, which was a few months after I led those marches in '96, and so it just passed the house, but not the senate. Then two years later I got it reintroduced and that entire legislator was waiting to block it. I went up there with the district attorney from Albuquerque and we were going around just making calls on legislators. Boy, they didn't like him. He was a democrat, but they didn't like him, they didn't like him. So even with his help, we couldn't get it before committees. Finally, two weeks before the session ended we got it before the senate committee in the state senate. There were guys on that and they blocked it, they tabled it.

AW:

What was their motivation? Were these people on the tape from the drug dealers?

CA:

I couldn't say that, prove it myself, but that was pretty well considered to be common knowledge. I'm not giving you any names.

AW:

No, I'm just curious as to what their opposition was. Now would you describe what a march on crack house—?

CA:

Well, we were accompanied by Albuquerque Police Department.

AW:

And so a group of citizens would—it was mainly for attracting attention to the problem.

CA:

Well, trying to harass those drug dealers. We did it mostly—well, we did it eventually in five neighborhoods, but it started in one neighborhood. We were accompanied by police, but the third march, there was gunfire. I kind of thought, “Gee, is this a good idea?” But we stayed with it and I led fifty marches for six months. And then I could kind of see—I didn't think it was really getting the results we thought it would get. By that time, then I got into getting the bill in the House of Representatives called Drug Free Residential Zones. But that was a great experience getting out there and doing that.

AW:

What inspired you to take that action? That's a big deal to do.

CA:

Well, I had some apartments, I had developed a nice apartment complex over a period of time and in this neighborhood where it was, a lot of drug dealing came in, as there was in twenty neighborhoods according to police in Albuquerque. And that's what—I was active in the neighborhood association where my apartments were. A guy from Philadelphia came in and Albuquerque Police Department let him—he came and showed us how to do this. So we did and we started in this neighborhood where my property was. And that's how I became involved in it. It was a great experience. I ran off about 2,500 drug dealers off of my property or the streets by it in a period of a couple of years. I couldn't keep resident managers, so I would have to go over there and then all these drug dealers were just running all over the streets. The first couple of days I was really leery. You hear stories about, and they'd say things like, “You going to get shot.” Well after about two days, I really got ticked off. They weren't going to reap ruin on my property. And I just started just going right into them. And I found out right away, I heard a lady cop tell a hooker one day, “Now you get your blank out of here.” And that blank word seemed to be real effective. So I started using it. I'm a Christian, but I started using it on drug dealers and boy, they be out hanging around, they'd be out on my property. I'd go out and I'd usually start off just with a calm sentence and then they would feed me bull and they'd say something like, “You're going to get shot.” And I'd say, “Get your blank out of here.” And they would leave.

WT:

Really?

CA:

Yeah, they left because I said it with real conviction.

WT:

Well that's pretty interesting.

CA:

Yeah, it was a great experience. Let me see, I think I've pretty well covered everything. I was a cofounder and first president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes in Albuquerque. It became the nation's largest chapter. We had a fellow in Albuquerque named Frank Bridgers who was the twin brother of John Bridgers who was the Baylor coach. And John became the national president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes while he was the Baylor coach. And his brother, Frank, a tremendous guy, called me one day and said, "Let's start an Albuquerque chapter of the FCA." So we did. We got several other guys together, we became the nation's largest chapter. We took thirty-seven boys, athletes, high school and a few college to Estes Park, Colorado, a couple months later for a summer conference. Within fifteen months, four of those thirty-seven boys died one way or another. A couple of them had some kind of medical emergencies in school. One went to Vietnam and died, another one died in a car accident. Four out of thirty-seven, but that's a great organization, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Frank Bridgers, John Bridger's twin brother, was an incredible guy, absolutely incredible guy. We became good friends. He owned an engineering firm here at Albuquerque. He did some huge contracts. It was air conditioning and he was the national president of that organization. He'd do big universities like Arizona, BYU, just a great guy. I think, let me look real quick, I think I've covered everything. I think I told you I was voted New Mexico sportscaster of the year three times and Texas sportscaster of the year once. That was the Sportscasters and Sports Writers Association nationally.

WT:

I got, I guess it could be a final question, a wrap-up kind of question. But as you look at the world of sports broadcasting today and the dominance of ESPN and the advent of computerization and special effects, what impressions do you come away with? Are you optimistic that we're moving forward in a positive direction? Do you have good feelings about what you see? Like many others, do you have some reservations about what might be called the constant chatter.

CA:

Constant chatter, you nailed it, you nailed it. Well, you know, technically the camera work and all of that stuff is fantastic. And I hate to be negative, but I'm going to be blunt. The way they're having announcers do it nowadays, it is a disaster, it's a disaster. First of all, you only really need one guy, but they got off on this tangent how many years ago? In 1970, ABC TV started it, and they started emphasizing the second guy, analyzing, be an analyst. They got Dandy Don who was really good, I loved him, and they got Howard Cosell who was really good. Frank Gifford was the play by play guy, and I thought it was excellent. But then they got off on this tangent that they're going to have the play by play guy, and then they're going to have the second guy's going to analyze. And that's where they've gotten off into Never Never Land. Curt Gowdy told me one time—I used to bump into him at places I would be doing basketball telecasts—and he said, how did he say it? He said, "Nowadays, they've made a TV play by play man just a glorified PA announcer." That's the way Curt Gowdy, who was one of the all-time best. That's the way I heard him say that. So what they've done, if I can just summarize it pretty briefly, you do not need a second guy if you have a professional play by play guy. You could get by with one announcer, you don't need two. Now if you wanted to insist on something of analysis, maybe the second guy would just come in occasionally, not every play. It's gotten now where that second guy, as soon as a tackle is made, he's on that microphone like a mad dog on a bone. I mean, just diving in there.

AW:

And most of the time, trying to offer his advice to the coaches. You know, I was just thinking this when Bill asked that question that when I was watching this film, the great shoot out game, that you can close your eyes and know what was going on. In today's world, if you close your eyes and aren't watching the game on television, you really don't know what's going on.

CA:

Are you talking about on the radio, if you're listening to the radio?

WT:

No, if you're watching TV and you're closing your eyes in today's world, just with what you've said with the conversations going on between these two people, but it's not necessarily the play by play. You have to be watching the TV and listening to them. If you just listen to them you don't get it.

CA:

They're a sideshow now. That sums it up, they are a sideshow and it interferes with watching the game on TV, or if you're listening on radio, the second guy can be a sideshow. We've got on local radio here, we've got a guy who was a coach, so he does the color or the analysis, he's talking more than the play by play guy. He is very good, he's very good at it because he was a

coach, but when you get back to it—it's just when I'm watching, what I do is I turn the sound down to where I can only hear a little bit of audio. I can't really hear what they're saying, but if I just mute it totally, then something's missing.

AW:

My wife and I turn the sound off of the TV and listen to the radio.

CA:

Yeah, I know a lot of people who do that.

AW:

That's what we do.

CA:

Yeah, and I try to do that, and I loved it when people were doing that when I was announcing play by play. And I always tried to be right on top of the play because I knew that people were doing that. First of all, I had to be accurate. I got to be accurate, but I developed it where I could almost be right on top of the play by play, and I had developed my spotting system so well and that's all a full page that I would go through before we went on the air, every game. Did I tell you about the kid from Texas Tech?

WT:

Yeah.

CA:

That got sick.

WT:

And he never missed a spot.

CA:

He never missed a play, incredible.

AW:

We've got to do this other appointment at about one thirty so we've got a little time left. Would you like to stop now and let's box up some of these things to take?

CA:

That'd be fine.

AW:

Would that work to do today?

CA:

Sure, yeah.

AW:

Is that good with you, Bill?

WT:

Yeah.

AW:

And we're going to want to, if we take that spiral.

CA:

Yeah, you can have that.

WT:

And we'll listen to this that you just gave us, and then we would like to come up with some questions based on what you just told us and then come back and do another interview. Would that be—?

CA:

It'd be fine—anything—anything you want.

AW:

Good, I think that's what we'd—s that good with you?

WT:

Sounds good.

AW:

This is a lot to digest.

CA:

Well it is. And follow these skeleton notes, but what it did, it started at the beginning and comes to the present and it gives you an idea, a summary of the whole career. You can go ahead and take that.

WT:

Now don' throw that away. That's the kind of thing that we like to have in the archive, too.

CA:

Do you?

WT:

Oh you bet.

CA:

Okay, do you want it now?

WT:

Yeah, we'd love to have it, if you don't mind.

CA:

Sure.

WT:

I'll go ahead and shut down.

End of interview

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