



Don Essig Oral History Interview, May 19, 2014

Title

“Beaver Become Duck”

Date

May 19, 2014

Location

Essig residence, Eugene, Oregon.

Summary

In the interview, Essig discusses his upbringing on a farm outside of Oregon City, his decision to attend Oregon State College and his undergraduate experience at OSC. In so doing, Essig notes his academic progression, his living circumstances and the numerous campus groups and extracurricular activities in which he engaged while on campus. Of particular interest are Essig's reflections on his years as a member of the OSC rally squad and his co-creation of the "Fridays at Five" talent shows.

From there, Essig describes the development of his career as a public school teacher and administrator, primarily in the Eugene school district. He also recounts his own continued education, first as a master's candidate and later in a Ph.D. program at the University of Oregon. He likewise discusses the formation and activities of the Don M. Essig & Associates consulting firm that he founded in 1985.

The final third of the session is devoted to Essig's tenure as public address voice of Ducks football and men's basketball. Essig shares his memories of the circumstances by which he was offered the position in 1967, lends a glimpse into life in the press box and relays the story of his famous catchphrase, "It never rains in Autzen Stadium." He concludes the interview by stressing his admiration for former Oregon State PA announcer Ted Carlson and lending his own personal perspective on the pitched athletics rivalry that continues to exist between Oregon State University and the University of Oregon.

Interviewee

Don Essig

Interviewer

Mike Dicianna

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/essig/>

Transcript

Mike Dicianna: Well, today is Monday, May 19th, 2014. It is 1:30, and today we are interviewing a very famous Beaver, Don M. Essig, in his home in Eugene, Oregon. And we're real pleased to have a Beaver that has the heart of a Beaver, and turned out to be the voice of the Ducks. How about just a little brief biographical information, where you were born, and that type of thing?

Don Essig: I was actually born in Dallas, Oregon. Just a little side story right away, my dad worked for Shell Oil Company, and so I was born in Dallas. And John Bowlman, who his folks had a mortuary in Dallas, but they were big card players with my folks; they were part of this group. And they were all young kids. They were all in their 20s then. Anyhow, and John and I went to kindergarten together, okay? And then the folks moved from Dallas, and later John and I went to Oregon State together. [Laughs] So, we used to laugh about that. Yes, well we put twelve years in between when we didn't see each other. We did, but not in school.

MD: Yeah. And so what high school did you go to?

DE: Well, then my folks—my dad stayed with Shell Oil Company until I was eight, and they bought the farm outside of Oregon City. So essentially, that's where I really was raised, that I can remember, and went to Oregon City High School, and graduated there in 1956.

MD: Were you a good student?

DE: I was President of the Honor Society my senior year.

MD: Ah.

DE: So, could have probably always been a better student, but.

MD: Yeah. [Laughs]

DE: I was a farm kid, so you came home; you did your chores. Ate dinner, you milked the cows, and studied, and went to bed. That was kind of the routine. [Laughs]

MD: [Laughs] Well, you're a graduate of Oregon State College.

DE: Right.

MD: In 1960, and I always ask alumni this question: why Oregon State?

DE: Coming out of high school, I really wanted to be an architect. And to get into the University of Oregon, which had the School of Architecture at that time, you had to have two years of foreign language. I only had one year in high school, so I couldn't get into the university. And my cousin, two years older, was at Oregon State. So I said, "Okay, I'll just go to Oregon State. I'll get into engineering, and then at some point in time switch, maybe to architecture." But, so that's kind of—my cousin Bob had a big influence on me going to Oregon State.

It was my senior year in high school; it was Tommy Prothro's first year. And my cousin Bob took me to the first game that Prothro coached against Stanford, in Multnomah Stadium in Portland. And the Beavers won. So, you know, that just kind of changed the whole culture of Oregon State for football, because they had been so lousy for a few years.

MD: Yeah.

DE: So, and that had some influence. So through that, my senior year in high school, I kind of figured I'm going to—I'll go to Oregon State.

MD: Now, what was your final major? I think you show as an education major?

DE: Well I did, because when I got to Oregon State, spent two terms in engineering, and I really didn't like it, okay? I'm pretty good at math, but it wasn't my thing, all right? It was a whole different world. And so I went over to the counseling center and took a battery of tests. And the gal that gave me all of the tests, one of the counselors there, said, "You know, you don't belong in engineering." She said, "Everything that you have done here, all of these papers, you are a people person." You know, engineering—and of course, then engineering was draft boards, and, you know.

MD: Yeah, slide rules. [Laughs]

DE: Yeah, right. And so she said, "We're going to look at you going into something that's a people profession." So that spring my freshman year, I just took some general classes, all right? [0:05:01] And then in the fall, went back and we talked again, and she said, "Have you ever thought about being a teacher?" And I said, "Not really." At one point in time I had thought about being a minister, because my grandfather was a minister for 52 years, and you know, thought about doing that, but. So she said, "Well, you know what? Let's just put you in a couple of education classes," which I did, in elementary ed. And so that's where I stayed. So yeah, as it turned out, 30 years in the education profession, so. It was fun, too.

MD: Yeah. What were some of your favorite classes? How about favorite faculty?

DE: Well, you know what? The ironic thing about that—Jan and I were talking about that last night. I don't really remember a whole lot of the faculty that I had in education. Probably my all-time favorite prof was Bob Walls, who was director of the music programs there. And I spent one year in the Concert Choir, three years in the Choralaires, and to this day our donations at Oregon State go to the Bob Walls Scholarship Fund, which is really neat, because every year we do that, I get a personally handwritten note from his daughter.

MD: Mm, mm-hm.

DE: And it's one of the things I really remember, because when I found out he had cancer, I called up and we talked for probably an hour, and then about three months later he passed away, but.

MD: Oh, wow.

DE: Anyhow, he was a genius musician, and so I mean, I had some, I think, what I would think are pretty good profs. The one Art for Elementary Teachers class is where I really got to know Janet, my wife.

MD: Ah.

DE: We took it. The great irony is Dr. Trojan was the art teacher.

MD: [Laughs]

DE: So you can imagine all kinds of things about that class, but that's where Janet and I really got to know each other, so.

MD: Mm-hm. Now, did you get married in school, or after?

DE: Right after, after I graduated in 1960, yeah. And you mention that. You know, that was the last class of Oregon State College, so.

MD: Now, were you involved at all with Harley Smith, and the whole process to petition to create Oregon State University?

DE: Yes and no. I was involved only because the board of the University Co-op was kind of involved, and I was president of the Co-op that year. But Harley Smith and I were—

MD: Housemates.

DE: Yeah. Lived in Heckart Lodge together.

MD: Yeah.

DE: So that's how Harley and I kind of got connected, so.

MD: Well, he's another one of our famous alumni that we have an interview with.

DE: We just had dinner with him.

MD: Oh, great!

DE: In March. We visited some friends in Stockton with cancer, and I called Harley, and said, "We're going to be in Stockton. Do you want to have dinner?" So.

MD: Yeah.

DE: It was fun.

MD: So do you have ties still with a lot of your other fellow Beaver alumni?

DE: Yeah.

MD: And you know, house mates?

DE: I have ties with actually two of them. Rick Closely, okay, and Larry Hogel, and Ted Stevens, and I roomed together each winter term for three years in a row at Heckart. And so, we've kept track. And one of them is now dealing with cancer, also, so. But Ted comes up here on occasion just to come, stay and visit, and we have a good time visiting.

MD: Oh, great. I know that Harley had talked about this. Do you have any memories of Earnel Durden, one of the famous African American football players, one of the first?

DE: I have a memory of the first year I was a freshman, we go to the Rose Bowl.

MD: Yes.

DE: And Earnel, of course, lived in Heckart Lodge. You know, in those days black kids were not allowed to be in fraternities. There weren't a lot of apartments in Corvallis. In fact, most of us were for the most part required to live on campus, either fraternity dormitories or the co-ops, because there weren't a lot of places off campus, like now.

MD: Yeah.

DE: A lot of kids live off campus now. There weren't that many, so. Yeah, Earnel, he was one of the fun guys in the house, he and Ted Bates. You know, because they were a year ahead of me; they were sophomores when I was a freshman, and that was a really good year for Oregon State, went to the Rose Bowl. So what I remember, not around Earnel as much as Ted, because Ted was so big! And of course freshmen had to wear those green [laughs], Duck-colored rook lids.

MD: Yes.

DE: Fall-term, every day.

MD: Right.

DE: And then every Wednesday for Winter and Spring terms. And so, Wednesday at Heckart, Mother Smith we called her, our housemother—that was her day off. So dinners on Wednesday was no manners, and noise. And the year I was a freshman, we had a lot. There were like 15 or 16 of us freshman in the house, and we all decided we weren't going to wear our rook lids that day. And I remember after dinner, Ted Bates taking two of us, one under each arm. We went upstairs into the cold showers—

MD: [Laughs]

DE: —while he just moved us from one side to the other under that showerhead! But they were great kids, you know. And I don't know what's become of Earnel.

MD: He is still with us. There's been a recent work being done on the early African American athletes at Oregon State.

DE: Oh, good.

MD: And he was part of a panel discussion.

DE: Oh, good.

MD: I'll send you the link to it. It's online.

DE: Okay.

MD: You can see him again.

DE: Because Ted Bates, I know, just retired a couple of years ago. He was with the Los Angeles Recreation Department for years and years.

MD: Yeah, we're trying to track him down for an interview as well. Let's get into some of your extracurricular or extra activities while you were at OSC. I see that you were elected as the 1960 Rally King, Yell King. Tell us about your rally squad, and how that—

DE: Well prior to that, first couple of years at Oregon State, I played intramural sports with the house. You know, the house had a team in every sport. And so that was kind of my activity thing, other than music, because the Choralaires did a lot of stuff, performing. And so the end of my sophomore year, there was a spot open on the College Bookstore Board of Directors, which I got elected to, and then the next year served as president.

And then that spring—I don't know how it happened. I got talked into running—because then, Rally King was an elected position. And Howie Smith, who had been a friend of mine, was also going to run. Okay, I've never done that before, but the year prior, the Rally Squad had a lot of problems. The kids smoked down on the field during games. They would show up to some games semi-inebriated. One of the kids got killed in a car accident coming home, or going to home in Bend. And so anyhow, when I got elected, Dan Pohling called me and said, "Okay, Don." He said, "Here's what I expect from this group this year."

So we didn't really—we had no problem kids at all. We had the six girls that danced; they were just tremendous, and they were really great dancers. And none of the six guys, you know, none of us were real athletic. It wasn't the thing where you threw the girls up in the air, and all of that stuff like they do now. We'd do a few round-offs and that kind of thing, but. That was a fun time. It really was a fun time for me. Well, and I thought we did a pretty good job, but we pretty much followed the expectations that Dan Pohling had for us, which was essentially: behave yourself.

MD: [Laughs]

DE: Do your thing, which is to get the kids fired up at football and basketball, and look like you're enjoying it.

MD: Now, you worked closely with one of the early incarnations of Benny the Beaver.

DE: Yeah.

MD: Not long after he began, really, as a mascot.

DE: Yeah. Yeah. The old Benny.

MD: The old Benny, with the big, huge, cast head.

DE: Yeah.

MD: Did you have to lead him around a little bit, or was he fairly comfortable with—?

DE: Well actually, we didn't do a whole lot, not like now. The cheerleaders now spend a lot of time with the mascot. In fact, they have him built into routines and stuff.

MD: Yeah.

DE: And we didn't do that. [0:15:00] I mean, it was kind of a brand new thing, and Benny ran around jumping up and down.

MD: Yeah. [Laughs]

DE: You asked about activities. I think one of the activities I'm most proud of, and probably had a lot to do with my getting elected to Rally King, was my junior year, Bob Richardson and I created the Friday at Four Talent Shows, which we had in the ballroom. And so once a month on Friday afternoon at four—and we'd had tryouts prior to that—there'd probably be, I couldn't tell you, 5- or 600 kids in there sitting on the floor, and we called them to Fridays at Four. And so, we auditioned groups and individuals, and they came and performed. Bob and I emceed it, and we did that for two years, even the second year when I was busy with Rally. But that was great, because there was a lot of talent on campus.

MD: Yeah.

DE: And so kids would sing, dance, and tell jokes.

MD: Well, it does show up in the 1959 Yearbook, what they called the "Fever '58?"

DE: Yeah. Yeah, well.

MD: And you put that on. That was your version of that?

DE: Yeah, Bob and I put that show together for Mother's Weekend, and Kathy Bue was one of them, too. We rewrote the songs to "Fever," and called it "Beaver Fever." And Henry Deets was one of the guys in the marching band who was in Heckart Lodge. And I went to Henry, and I said, "Henry, can you put a combo together?" So he did, so we had a live band, background music for everybody. And essentially that was a big talent show. We probably had 3 or 4,000 people, because it was Mom's Weekend at Gill Coliseum, and so.

MD: Yeah.

DE: Yeah, I've got to be reminded of those.

MD: [Laughs]

DE: I forget about them, but.

MD: Well, we have photographic evidence of a lot of you in the Beaver Yearbooks from the era.

DE: One of the great ironies, of course, is that Heckart Lodge was a great place for what I call the poor kids. All right? Most of us lived in Heckart Lodge. The University owned the co-op. A lot of us came off of farms; we had a lot of eastern Oregon kids. And I think a lot of it was, you know, parents were working hard so their kids could go to school, and we could afford it. Most of us had summer jobs. All of that money we earned went to going to school. And so, just that whole aura, that Heckart Lodge was, I think, the reason that 60 of us got along. I don't remember ever seeing conflict in four years among all of those kids living there. But I think that was just because the culture was most of the kids there were from families that, you know, they wanted their kids to go to college, and so that was an opportunity they didn't have somewhere else. And then the great irony that—because I got recruited to join a few of the fraternities. Well, it was a huge difference in terms of cost, so I didn't do it.

MD: Mm.

DE: But my junior year, I got asked to emcee the Inter-Fraternity Sing. I thought, "That's a great irony. We call ourselves the Gamma Delta Iotas, the GDIs."

MD: [Laughs]

DE: But that was pretty funny.

MD: Yeah, because that whole era, the late '50s, early '60s, it was the time of change in the United States, beginning to change. But still, Oregon State was—

DE: A safe place to go to school.

MD: America, yeah.

DE: Yeah. It was. Very patriotic, you know. And of course, I couldn't tell you exactly; I think campus was probably around 6- or 7000 when I graduated. [Telephone rings]

MD: Yeah.

DE: Somewhere in that range.

MD: Yeah. Now, at that time all male students were part of military?

DE: Yes, you did two years of ROTC

MD: Two years of that.

DE: Yeah, I did Air Force ROTC, two years.

MD: And you didn't go on with it?

DE: No.

MD: Yeah.

DE: I decided that the military wasn't something I wanted to do.

MD: We have people calling us. You're a popular guy.

DE: Yeah, right.

MD: So, let's talk about your graduation, and the beginning of your career as an educator in the Eugene School District. [0:20:01]

DE: Okay. Well, graduated in June of '60. Two weeks later, Jan and I got married. We actually moved back to Oregon City. The first three years, I taught in Oregon City; it was my home town. I had actually signed a teaching contract in March, and then I student-taught spring term, so I had already had a job in Oregon City. So we moved back to Oregon City and that first year I taught, and Janet went to school at Portland State, and took hours. That spring, our son Scott was born.

Then that summer we moved to Corvallis for the summer, in Professor Adolf's home, and she finished, okay? I worked at Bob's Superette Market from four to midnight. [Laughs] And Janet went to school. Her sister lived with us, so it was great because we had Scott, and she helped take care of him, and so. And it worked great, because I was working that night shift then, so. And then we moved back to Oregon City, and Janet got a teaching job at Gladstone, in the same elementary school with her mom.

And we were there for two years, and I started a master's program in School Administration at Portland State. And for two years, a couple of us would go in and take, like, one class a week at night. And then when I found out you could not go back to Oregon State to get a master's degree with an administrative certificate—at that time you could take classes at Portland State, but you couldn't get your degree there. You had to go to the University of Oregon to finish it. And so, it was either come down to Eugene for two summers, consecutive summers, or think about just moving down there.

So we had some friends down here. I went to a workshop at Benson High School, in, it would have been about February or January of that third year of teaching in Oregon City. And a gal named Vera Muma was from Eugene, and she was doing a presentation on a program she was running in Eugene School District. And I went and talked to her, and she said, "Yeah, why don't you just apply for a job? They're always looking for men to teach elementary, especially men that taught music, okay, in elementary."

MD: We're good.

DE: And so I thought, okay. So I wrote them a note, got the application and turned it in, and thought, if I've got to go to the university to finish this degree, we might as well move down there and find a teaching job for a year. That would be great, because then I could teach. You know, if we want, we can come back to Oregon City. Well, came down here and interviewed, and I got the job at Willagillespie Elementary, which then was out in the country, in the boonies.

MD: Yeah.

DE: Now it's across the street from Valley River Center.

MD: Way before Valley River was built, yeah.

DE: And we stayed. And then what happened, at the end of that year, Vera Muma—okay, she remembered me because when we moved down here and I got the job, I went in right away and said hello to her. Well, she was running what was called the Resource Teacher Program, and each of the elementary schools had one of these people, and they taught gifted kids, all right, and other stuff. And they ran libraries and whatever. She came out toward the end of that first year, and said, "We'd like you to be a Resource teacher." So, I'd only been at Willagillespie one year, and I said, "Well, I've only been here that short time." She said, "Well, we're opening a new school, Spring Creek Elementary out in River Road area. Russ Tompkins is going to be the principal, and so I'd like you to be a resource teacher." So, out to Spring Creek!
[Laughs]

MD: What year was that?

DE: 1964.

MD: I was there.

DE: Were you really? '64, I was there in '64 and '65, when the school opened.

MD: That was my second and third grade year.

DE: I'll be darned! Small world.

MD: [Laughs]

DE: Russ Tompkins was one of my total mentors, because he said, "I know you've got your degree. You got your certificate. I know you're going to be a principal someday." So, he would call me in if he had some issue going with a kid, or whatever. [0:25:03] And he said, "Just come in and watch, and see what I do, and we can talk about it." But he was great.

MD: I remember him. I actually remember him, even as a small child.

DE: He was there—I was there two years, and then Don Eckenrode, who was at Willagillespie as the principal, got transferred over to Willard school in south area, Francis Willard. And he called me, and he said, "You know, I'm going to

Francis Willard." He said, "Would you think about maybe coming and being my resource teacher?" So, I did that, okay, because I liked Don, and we had a great year together. So I went to Willard for three years, and for the most part I taught some gifted kids classes in math and language arts, but for the most part I taught the entire school in PE and music. And they had a great gymnasium. I could put 75 or 80 kids spread out on spots in the gym for PE, you know. And Willard was a pretty good—it was a big school then. It was almost 450, 500 kids. Since then, it's essentially died. It's a charter school now.

MD: Oh, hm.

DE: But, so that's where I was for three years. Then this good friend of mine, Lon Fellenberger, said, "I'm going to go back and get my doctorate." And I said, "You're crazy!" I said, "No, I want you to come and take the Saturday morning statistics class, because I don't want to take it alone." And I had no thoughts of ever getting a doctorate. And then I talked to my advisor, Dick Schmitke, and he said, "Well, all of your work in your masters applies to your doctoral program." So what I had in mind, of three years of classes and a dissertation, ended up being about one and a half years of classes and a dissertation. And so Lon and I went through the program together and got our doctorates. And that was August of '71.

I spent a year as a research associate with this program that I was connected to at the university, and the school district, because I ended up working half-time in the school district on that project. So it was a great deal. Janet went back to teaching. I'm working half-time. We made a little bit more money than I was making just teaching. And I got my degree, and then comes the fun part of my life, one of those things that happens, you know. In the spring of '72, I decided I'm not going to stay on and do this research thing, because it's not my bag. And I had been going out and doing some training sessions with school staffs, because that was part of my doctoral program in Organizational Development. And there was this job opening back at Des Moines, Iowa, for a person to be the coordinator of all student teachers coming out of Drake University and into the Des Moines school district. So I applied. They called and said, "Yeah, we'd like to interview you." So I flew back. It was the strangest interview you could ever—it was like 20 people sitting in a big circle, and I'm right here. [Laughs]

MD: [Laughs]

DE: And they're all asking questions. And so the guy told me, before I left he said, "We really liked your interview, and I think for sure you're going to get this job offer." I get home. I'm at the airport; I get off the airplane. Roy Rudder, who's the regional director for the North Eugene Region, is at the airport. He's got a contract, and he said, "Where you been?" I said, "I was back in Iowa, and it looks like I'm going to probably get this job back there." And he said, "No you're not." He said, "I have a principal's job open at Howard School and you're going to go there. So just sign the paper."

MD: [Laughs]

DE: He had the contract right there! I said, "You're kidding." He said, "No. I want you to stay here and be one of my principals in the region." So we stayed. The difficult thing then for me would have been probably giving up the Duck job. But I had only done it four years or so, five years. But as it turned out, fate deals us a card sometimes.

MD: Yeah.

DE: And fortunately I followed a principal who had been having some difficulties with the staff, and everything. And of course, a lot of my organizational development training was in communication skills [0:30:02], problem solving, decision-making, getting people to work together as teams, and so it turned out to be a really great experience.

MD: Kind of turned the school around, yeah.

DE: It did. And our secretary, Edith Trainer, just passed away, at 97. So I got online, and with the help of a couple of the other ladies that had taught there with me, who were in their 80s, we located almost every staff member, and so last month—her daughter lives across the street, so they had a memorial service, and that evening we had Howard staff reunion. We had 25 people showed up. A lot of them hadn't seen each other for 20 years.

MD: Yeah. Oh, that's great.

DE: And that was kind of just saying, okay, that's the culture we created there. We had a great time.

MD: Yeah, that's a slog.

DE: Everybody cared about everybody else, and you know, and we had very little conflict and a lot of cooperation. And we had a fun; you could have a little fun then, too; you could pull stuff on people. Now, you'd probably get sued for it.

MD: [Laughs] Well, in 1985, you formed Don M. Essig and Associates, a human relations firm, and I remember on KPMW, the "Motivational Moments by Don Essig."

DE: Yeah. They're still on.

MD: I know.

DE: Yeah.

MD: And I remember hearing those too. What was a little bit about that endeavor?

DE: Well again, part of the organization development program—a number of the people that were in that program went out and became organizational consultants. And we kept in contact. I was at North Eugene, and after six years of being a high school principal? I'll tell you what. It's a draining job then. I can't even imagine what it is now. Because I was the principal before cell phones, before laptops, you know, before any of the technical stuff. We didn't have PCs on desks until, like, the last year I was there.

And so, I went to Margaret Nichols, the superintendent, and said, "You know, how about if I come downtown in central office and work part-time? I'll work half-time, and I'm going to start my consulting business. I want to see what can happen with this." And she was agreeable to that. So within the district, what I did for that half-time was, I went around and worked with school staffs, same thing we did at Howard, same thing I did when I went to North Eugene, and started my business in the spring of '85. I did that for a few years, and then when my 30 years in education were up, I said, "Okay. Well, see you. Thank you very much. I'm going to do this."

And by then I had been fortunate to have gone for 13 summers to this conference called the Idea Conference in Claremont, California: one week in July, 200 school administrators from all over the country, and most of us were repeats. And we spent a week listening to consultants and speakers come in. So I had a chance to steal a lot of great ideas, and a lot of watching how people did their actual presentations, and saying, "I can do that." Or, "I would never do it that way."

And so those people, probably at least 20 of those people, found out I was going to do this, and hired me. So I went to their school districts through those years and spoke to staffs, and did keynote addresses. I had my consulting, which you go in and work with a group over time; help them get better at what they're doing in terms of communications. Then I have my song and dance, okay, which was my one-hour keynote, overhead projector, a lot of cartoons, and stories. And so that, it just grew, and then all of a sudden, I wrote a book for support staff people in schools, the classified people, called Personal Excellence for Key People. [0:35:00] And somewhere, by the way, I think in the Alumni Center, there's a copy of that book.

MD: Mm.

DE: And in fact, I'm going to give you a copy of my other two, because I don't think that they're in there. I know there's a place in the Alumni Center where they have books written by alumni of Oregon State.

MD: They do. And also, we'll have a home for it in our Special Collections and Archives Research Center as well, so.

DE: Okay. So that's kind of what happened. Then I joined this business leads group in town called the Emerald Executive Association, and it was about 150 people, and one person from each profession. And so I'm a consultant now, so now I'm doing business people.

MD: Oh, yeah.

DE: And of course, originally, I think a lot of people said, "Yeah, we'd like to have the voice of the Ducks come and talk." Well, they didn't realize that I wasn't going to talk sports. I'm talking how you work together better.

MD: Yeah.

DE: And I rewrote the personal excellence books so it was generic over all professions. The first edition was education.

MD: Mm.

DE: So, and then all of the sudden it just, for about 10, 15 years, blossomed.

MD: Huh.

DE: And I'm still doing a little bit. People call.

MD: Yeah.

DE: And say, "Are you still doing that?" And I say, "Yeah, a little." And I do get a lot of gigs, speaking gigs. Like, tomorrow morning I'm doing a 12-minute thing for, it's the fundraiser for the Speech and Hearing Center here in Eugene. I'm going to talk about two things, because it's they're building for the future; that's their thing. And so I just pluck stuff out of my itinerary, and say, "Okay, I'm going to talk about two things: having a positive attitude, and making sure you've got a lot of laughter in your life. That's how you build your future, okay?" And so, that's it, my 12-minute gig.

MD: [Laughs]

DE: And typically what happens with those, somebody will come up and say, "Are you still doing workshops?" And I say, "Well, technically I'm not. But, what have you got in mind?" And I don't turn them down.

MD: Yeah. Well, okay. Let's talk about the elephant, or the duck, in the room.

DE: The transition.

MD: You have been the voice of the Ducks for over 46 years.

DE: Yup.

MD: Starting in 1967, you began a second career as the public address announcer for the U of O Athletics. How did you get that job, and what's some of your early memories of announcing games?

DE: It's a couple of things that have to do with fate again. Okay? When I was teaching at Oregon City, the second year that I was teaching, Bill Farquhar was one of the teachers on our staff at Park Place School, and he came and said, "You know Don, I just, I went to the Oregon City Booster Club meeting last night, and they're putting a new sound system into the high school basketball gym, and they're looking for an announcer. You've got kind of a neat voice, so why don't you think about doing that?"

So Dan Jones was the athletic director. I knew him when I was in high school. So, I called, and he said, "Yeah, I'd love to have you do it." So for two years, I did Oregon City basketball. Then we moved to Eugene. More fate. Tom Keel was the football coach at Oregon City, and they moved back here so he could be the head coach at Sheldon High School. We're at their house for dinner one night, and he said, "You know, I've got to go over to Mel Krause's and look at this fishing boat. Do you want to ride along after dinner?" And I said, "Great. Mel Krause? He's an icon at the University of Oregon." So we go over, introducing, you know. And Tom says, "You know, Don was announcing basketball games at Oregon City." He said, "Really?" He said, "How would you like to do Sheldon? I don't have—." He was coaching at North Eugene, and then he went to Sheldon as the athletic director when it opened. So he said, "Come do the games for me." So I did Sheldon High School that fall of '63-4, when it opened. Ironically, in the paper yesterday was the obituary for Bob Curtis, who was the center for that first basketball team.

MD: Oh, wow.

DE: Went to North, and those kids all went to North, and when Sheldon opened, half—all the kids on this side of town went to Sheldon.

MD: Mm-hm.

DE: But, so I did Sheldon for that first year. [0:40:00] And then in the fall, I'm teaching the spring curriculum. I got a call from Mel, and he said, "They're putting a new sound system down at Civic Stadium, and so the three high schools in Churchill had opened, and so the four high schools are going to play football there every weekend." So he said, "And so you're going to do the football games for them." He said, "Get your ass down there at 6 o'clock on Friday night, and I'll have a couple of kids spot for you." That's how I got into football, because I had never done a football game.

And I did that until '67, and then now I'm teaching at Willard. I get a call from Mel in about the end of October, and he said, "Virge Parker, the announcer for the Ducks, is leaving." And he said, "I got an appointment at 3:30 for you. You get over to the Athletic Department, talk to Norv Richie," the athletic director, assistant I think, so. Anyhow, I go over and talk to him. And so they had three of us do basketball games, and after the third game, Norv called and said, "We want you to do the games for us." So, all of a sudden now I'm moving all of my orange and black clothing to the end of the closet, and we became green and yellow. But I thought, "Okay, well." I'd been to many games on Mac Court. In high school I used to go down here and go to the tournament with my good friend Chuck Hegel. And so, I thought, okay, well, it was fun doing games. And I did that, and after a couple of years, you know, thought, well, who knows.? Forty-six years later, here we are. [Laughs]

MD: Yeah. Well, my dad would take me to those games at MacArthur Court, and—

DE: The crowds were crazy.

MD: I can remember your voice! You know, it's crazy!

DE: Because, you know, well, the first year I did games was the year Stan Love and those kids were all freshmen, and they had freshman games, okay? And so, you know, the Ducks were, I don't know 15-and-15, or something, that first year. There would be 8,000 people for the freshman game, and then half of them would go home for the varsity game.

MD: [Laughs]

DE: And the next year was when Love and Drozdiak and all of those guys showed up, and all of a sudden Mac Court changed. They were crazy in there.

MD: Yeah. Well, you've been, have you been the announcer for all of the Duck games that have been held in Autzen Stadium since it was built?

DE: No, I did not do the first year; '67 was the year Autzen opened.

MD: Okay, that's right, yeah, because I can remember when they were building it, I couldn't figure out what that big pile of dirt was going to be.

DE: I didn't do the first year.

MD: So how's the view from the press box?

DE: It's a long ways, and I'll tell you what's—with the new, because of the remodel—

MD: Yeah.

DE: We figured we're probably about eight or ten stories up. You know, if you were sitting downtown in a building, looking down at people walking on the street, and then you've got to identify a number on their back. Well, when Chip Kelly came, and of course with Nike's marketing group, all the Oregon uniforms, they've just become so crazy. And I love all of the different colors, except grey, because they're ugly. But the numbers are also not very good. If you're up close, you can see them.

MD: Yeah.

DE: If you're watching on TV, they look great! But from eight stories up, they're pretty unclear. And Jack Pines has spotted for me all but two games since we started, and he does the field glasses. And if he didn't do them, we couldn't do the game.

MD: Yeah.

DE: Because you can't—essentially, you can't read the numbers with the naked eye.

MD: You can kind of halfway tell what's going on.

DE: I mean, in terms of viewing the game, it's a beautiful place to do it.

MD: Yeah.

DE: But in terms of that, it's very difficult. And then of course when Chip Kelly came, right after the remodel, when Chip showed up, now we're running the plays every 10 seconds, so you don't have a lot of time. I tell people, "Football is a job," okay? Basketball's fun, because it's not—not as hectic. But I also have to say that part of—when I was doing the high school games, for two years I was fortunate enough to be invited to go up and spot for Ted Carlson, who was one of my idols. [0:44:59] And then the third year, the year before I started the Duck games, okay, that first year of Autzen here, Johnny Yeagers was the SID at Oregon State, and he called me and said, "You know, I'd like you to do the inside the press box PA." So I did that for a year.

MD: Oh.

DE: Okay, and then got the job at Oregon, so. And Chuck Wenstrom was my spotter for that task, who wrote in my book about memories in Autzen.

MD: Yeah. Well, at a 1970 Oregon versus Idaho game—

DE: Yeah. Idaho passing attack—

MD: Yup!

DE: —today. [Laughs]

MD: Uh-huh.

DE: You said you were sitting in the stands?

MD: I was in the stands, underneath one of the PA systems with my father.

DE: Yeah.

MD: And I can remember my father leaning over to me, and he says, "I don't think he knows that the microphone is on." And so, it was a learning experience, I suppose. Have you ever had any other—?

DE: And do you know how I found out about it? Because Hal Wehmeyer, who was then doing sports on KEZI in Eugene, who later ended up doing sports somewhere in Corvallis for years, came up at halftime and said, "Do you know you have a live mic?" And I said, "No, I've been turning the switch off." I had it on a stand, so I'd been turning it off and on. Well, I didn't turn it on; I just blew into it, and it goes, [loud breath noises] over the sound system. And I took it off, and I never used a standup stand ever since. That was the first year, okay; never used one since. [Laughs] That was weird.

MD: [Laughs] I can still remember that! It was one of the things when we set up this interview, I said, "I was there!" [Laughs]

DE: Yeah.

MD: I was thirteen, but. Okay, your famous quote, "It never rains in Autzen Stadium before each home game," has become kind of an institution.

DE: Uh-huh, yeah.

MD: And I've looked at that. You're an icon at the University of Oregon. What's the story behind that?

DE: It all started when Bill Byrne, the athletic director, made a decision that there would be no smoking in the stands at Autzen during games, and no umbrellas, okay? Umbrellas were fine for the person sitting under it, but if you're sitting behind them, it's all running off onto your feet. So with that decision, now I'm making the announcement, "No smoking, no umbrellas." And of course, at the beginning of the football season, it's 90 degrees, so. Over the next couple of years, it just kind of transpired into, well, never rains here anyhow. And then I just kind of put it into the weather report, which is what I do now, okay. And then we went 11 years without a rainy game. So now, it becomes everybody joining in.

MD: Joining in, yeah.

DE: Here's the weather report. Now it looks a pretty nice football day, okay. But 68 degrees, a little breeze from the north, but you know the real weather report. And now it's—

MD: The crowd, yeah.

DE: Now it's 60,000 people all doing—the kids can hardly wait! I've had so many people go, "My kids love to go to the game because that's their favorite part of the game, yelling that out." [Laughs] And of course the last half dozen years or so, we've had some games, you know.

MD: Yeah.

DE: One of the Oregon State games it rained pretty good the whole game, but it didn't matter.

MD: Yeah.

DE: You know, people are still yelling it. And the Cal game this year, it was, we had a monsoon.

MD: Yes, I remember watching that game.

DE: The entire game. Two-thirds of the people were gone at the end of the first quarter. And so I just said—because it was that way when I'm starting the game. And I said, "Well you know, sometimes we get a sprinkle here, and sometimes we get a monsoon, like today. But, it never rains on—[laughs]

MD: [Laughs]

DE: And then I was going to, about—oh, it was after that Oregon State game, four or five years ago, and I told Dave Heekey, the assistant athletic director, I said, "Dave, that's it. Okay, it's run its course. We're not doing this anymore." He said, "No way." He said, "Your rain announcement has nothing to do with the weather."

MD: Yeah.

DE: "So when people walk into Autzen Stadium, with the success the football's had," he said, "it has nothing to do with the weather. It is sun-shining football in there." So we just keep it going.

MD: Yeah. [0:50:00]

DE: And then I got permission, when Chuck said, "Yeah, we're going to do your biography," I got permission from the athletic department to let me use that for the book title.

MD: Oh, okay. So you've been the voice for Autzen Stadium for 46 years now. Are you going to continue with this venue, and try to break Ted Carlson's record of 49 years he had? It was through the Beavers baseball and basketball.

DE: Yeah, I'd like to do 50. I really would. That would be fun to be able to say, "Okay, you did 50 years of that." And actually, since I started doing high school games, it's well over 50.

MD: Yeah.

DE: Because I started in '62, so it's already 52 years. But it would be fun to do 50. And then I'll think about retiring, maybe.

MD: [Laughs]

DE: But as long as it's still fun. The sports information director told me a couple of years ago—I said, "I'll get to 50 and then maybe retire." He said, "No you're not." He said, "As long as we can get the wheelchair into the press box."

MD: [Laughs] Yeah, we'll put it in the elevator, yeah.

DE: Ted Carlson was—he was an icon at Oregon State, but what has always bothered me is they called him in in the Fall, like two weeks before the football game, and said, "Ted, okay, we have somebody else now who's going to announce." That's when they hired Mike Stone, who was a Duck, you know. He did Oregon, like Mike Parker.

MD: Yeah.

DE: All right? And that's how they let him go. All right? And then the other thing that bothered me was when he passed away, which was about four or five years ago, and they had a celebration at—oh, what is it? Creekside, I think, Golf Course, or whatever they—he and his wife were members there, social members. And I went to that, and there were a lot of people there. There was nobody from the Oregon State Athletic Department there.

So, I got up and I said, "I'm here for one reason, to thank Mrs. Carlson and all of Ted's friends," because I had a great chance for three years to work directly with Ted in the booth, and I learned a lot from him, because he was a classy announcer. And I hope people think—you know, I don't try to do fancy stuff. It's not a cheerleading job; it's an information job. The fans want to know who carried the ball if they're not watching, or whatever. Now, with so many marketing announcements, it's not a lot of fun sometimes. But I said, "He was a class act, and I've tried to emulate a lot of the things that he did."

I got home and I wrote a letter to the athletic director at Oregon State, and finally got an answer because somebody blew it. They were supposed to have someone there, and it got overlooked.

MD: Mm.

DE: And I said, "If anybody needs to be posthumously into the Oregon State Athletic Hall of Fame, it's Ted Carlson."

MD: Yeah.

DE: So when you give 49 years of your life? And I'm sure they didn't pay him a whole lot either.

MD: Now, he was an advisor for the Co-op Committee? Or the Student Loan Committee?

DE: It might have been the Student Loan.

MD: Student Loan, yeah. So you had that contact from him?

DE: I wasn't on that committee, though. I think he was.

MD: Yeah.

DE: So, because if I remember, he was involved in the financial aspect of life. I think he was a financial advisor of some kind, or insurance person.

MD: Mm, mm-hm. So, I suppose over the years here at U of O, you've run into some interesting figures—

DE: Oh, yeah!

MD: —and famous, famous people?

DE: That's been nice. That's been nice.

MD: I mean, you're in the forefront because you're an icon.

DE: It's been a lot of fun. I've never been an autograph hound, so that's not something that's ever really interested me. A lot of people do it, and I get asked if I'd sign stuff, and I say sure. I think actually one of my favorite people is Phil Knight. There's been a lot of stuff written about Phil Knight, and of course, the academic world over here sometimes criticized athletics because they get too damn much money, and some of them don't think about the amount of money he's given to the academic side—essentially built the new library addition.

MD: Yes.

DE: Built the law school. [0:54:59] He pays for a academic chair for almost all the departments every year, which is millions of dollars!

MD: Oh, yeah. But that's not the sexy, showy stuff.

DE: Right.

MD: Yeah.

DE: And he's just kind of a regular person, you know. And I've never really been around him very much, but whenever I see him, he calls me by name, "How are you doing." And so, there have been some really great people who have come through this program that I've got to rub elbows with, and some of them that I see that I know other people think, "Oh man, it'd be nice." It'd be fun to meet Rich Brooks someday. You know, [phht] we play golf once in a while, and we laugh and have a drink at the club, and it's like, okay, so?

MD: Right. [Laughs]

DE: But that's just life, and you don't think about—to me, the glory is the fact that I get to do it.

MD: Yeah.

DE: I call it my hobby. I call it the greatest hobby in the world. And not many people get to do it. That's the uniqueness of it.

MD: Yeah.

DE: And it's still fun, and you get to be a part of athletics. I was no athlete high school, or not much in college. And when you live on the farm you don't have a lot of time to be in athletics. We had stuff to do, and I did, I worked, during high school, at home. So being around it is fun, and being able to have people tell you that you do a good job. What else can you ask for?

MD: Yeah, especially for that long.

DE: And I take a lot of crap from my Beaver friends, and so we give it right back. And I always get asked. I said, "When the Beavers are playing the Ducks, I'm a Duck. When the Beavers are playing anybody else, then we root for the Beavers." What was it, three years, four years ago when the Beaver Baseball—Janet and I sat here and watched

every Beaver baseball game in the World Series, plus a couple of games in the playoffs going up to it. And we're not big baseball fans, but that was fun.

MD: Yeah.

DE: I'm thinking, State of Oregon.

MD: That's one of the things that inquiring Beavers want to know.

DE: Yeah.

MD: When you announce that Civil War game, I mean, isn't there a little bit of pride in your alma mater?

DE: Oh yeah, but that's all. Just a little bit of pride.

MD: [Laughs]

DE: There's no need to want to win.

MD: Yeah. Well, this has been wonderful. Is there anything you want to add, and want to tell your Beavers and your alma mater?

DE: Well, if they ever watch it—excuse me, my allergies—but the rally squad at Oregon State was a great experience for me, because essentially it was my first experience of being in front of lots of people, okay? I mean, we're talking thousands. And we had such a great group. Don Wirth and I have gone around and around over the years when he was the alumni director, and we've just maintained that friendship, and the same with Howie. Howie and I have played golf for years and years, and we've been to all of the Oregon State reunions. In fact, the 50th for me, the class, the group that put the reunion together called and said, "Don, we'd like you to emcee our dinner, all right? You just can't wear any green and yellow." [Laughs] So.

MD: So you dusted off the old Orange and Black.

DE: So I got my 50 year medallion, and it's hanging in my office upstairs. So like I said, except for when the Ducks are playing the Beavers. And I have a little theory about that. I think that you hear people talk about, "Oh, the so-and-so Ducks," or, "The so-and-so Beavers." A lot of those people are ones that were people who came in to Oregon. Those of us—I grew up on the farm, Saturday afternoon, listening to the radio, and switching back and forth between the Ducks and the Beaver games. Okay? So you kind of rooted for Oregon teams. Okay? My dad and I used to candle eggs in the evening on Saturday night [0:59:59], and listen to Oregon and Oregon State basketball. In fact, that's when Mel Krause became an icon for me, because I was in junior high and early high school, and he was playing for the University of Oregon, an All-American in everything.

MD: Mm-hm.

DE: And I then I got to meet him, and I thought, wow! Then he wants me to do something! So, it's been a great ride, and I'm just proud of the fact that I've been able to do it this long. I look at all of my friends with diseases right now. I don't take any pills, and feel really healthy, except for a few allergies during the flower season. Life's really a good thing. And we have so many friends, you know, both Ducks and Beavers.

MD: Well, I still hold that you're a Beaver at heart, with the voice of the Ducks.

DE: Well, thank you.

MD: Thank you. [1:00:59]