

TOM JOYNER



CLEARING THE AIR

The Making of a Radio Personality



You've heard him sound off on the issues of the day on talk radio, WPTF in Raleigh-Durham. Now he sounds off on his life in *Clearing The Air*.

Tom Joyner's roots lie in rural North Carolina towns where he learned lessons that served him well in his careers as a radio host and tycoon.

Joyner rose from poverty to buy his first station in 1977 in Petersburg Virginia. He defied conventional wisdom by starting a morning talk show on a country music station. And that was just the beginning. He eventually earned millions from his many radio properties. And he had fun along the way.

So will readers of the book, thanks to Joyner's droll asides. "It's hard to be creative with a knife," Joyner observes at one point, "unless you are a rabbi, Lorena Bobbitt or a chef at Benihana."

"From rags to riches...Joyner truly personifies the 'American Dream.'"

George Beasley
Beasley Broadcast Group

\$10.95



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From humble beginnings to great wealth, Tom Joyner's story of the journey is touching and soulful. Self-made, Joyner's story is a testimonial to the American promise: Work hard and apply your God-given abilities, and there's a Howard Johnsons at the end of the road.

Mark Fowler
Former FCC Chairman

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THE BEGINNING

My European ancestors could not have foreseen that one of their own would one day make a decent living through something called “Radio.” The very idea that somebody could simply talk for a living would have blown them away.

There came a time when I decided that I wanted to emulate Alex Haley and trace my family “Roots.” I found that there are several companies in Salt Lake City that will undertake the job and who have access to the Mormon archives. It is not inexpensive to do it this way, but I knew nothing about the process myself and if left to trace my family’s heritage on my own, it would not happen.

The initial work was mine. I took the forms to begin writing down all that I could find out about our family so that the Mormons could then trace back to who knows where. It’s easy at first—your name, your parents’ and grandparents’ names—but then as you expand into brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles and cousins, the process is overwhelming. Those people bred like rabbits. Along the way you inevitably find that your family tree has been visited upon by various “dogs” through the years. It’s best to start gathering information as soon as possible because the older members of a family begin dying out and a treasure trove of information dies with them. Within three years after gathering information, more than five of my sources had passed away. I delivered my research to Salt Lake City and waited patiently for the past to open for me.

The Joyner family and the Wallace family (my mother’s branch of the tree) all hailed from England. My ancestors

were traced back to Charlemagne. It is fascinating to recapture history over hundreds of years. We found that my mother is a direct descendant of King Edward I, "Longshanks." King Edward was born in 1239 and died in 1307. His daughter, Princess Elizabeth, was born in 1282 and died in 1316. It was the daughter of King Edward I who bore a child, Margaret De Bohun, from whom my mother and I are directly descended. Eventually the Wallace family arrived in Johnston County, North Carolina. Since the search for my roots centered primarily on the Joyner line, there is a great deal about my mother's side of the tree that I do not know outside of direct lineage.

Thomas Joyner I was born in 1595 in Bere Regis, Dorsetshire, about 125 miles southeast of present day London. Bere Regis is a small English village that today has some 1,500 inhabitants. It is a land of gently rolling hills and farmland. A son, Thomas Joyner II, was born in Bere Regis in 1619, and it was this young man who would later leave Dorset County England to make a new life in a still uncharted America. In 1635 Thomas sailed from Isle of Wight, very near his home of Bere Regis, as an indentured servant of a man named Edward Robins.

In those days, white as well as black people came to this country as indentured servants rather than slaves. It was not until later in the century that the practice of enslaving black people came into acceptance. The record does not show why Thomas made the decision to make this perilous journey, but it is clear that he came here with a debt to pay and he worked off that debt with his personal services. Whether he was indebted to Edward Robins for a period of five or for seven years is lost in time. The ship carrying Thomas Joyner II landed at Isle of Wight, Virginia, and the Joyner saga in America began.

The first of the Joyner clan in America settled with Robins on the eastern shore of Virginia in Accomack County (today's Northampton County) and when his term of indenture ended Thomas settled in Isle of Wight County, near the present day courthouse. He died and was buried there in 1695.

THE JOYNER'S IN NORTH CAROLINA

In 1744, Thomas Joyner II's great-grandson William became the first Joyner in four generations to leave Isle of Wight County. He moved into Edgecombe County, North Carolina, which was organized from Bertie County in 1741.

Edgecombe County was the area immediately south of the Roanoke River. It was a logical attraction for Virginia pioneers who made some of the earliest settlements in the area that would later become North Carolina. Edgecombe then included all portions of the present counties of Halifax (1758), Nash (1777), Franklin, Warren and Martin.

In 1749, Southampton County was created across the Virginia border from Isle of Wight County. By 1790 when the first federal census was enumerated, only thirty Joyner families were living in Virginia while fifty-eight Joyner households had been established in North Carolina.

The Joyner branch of my family tree extends over some 350 years in America. Joyner men fought in all of the major wars of this country from the Revolutionary War and the Civil War through Korea, two World Wars and Viet Nam. There is no record of wealth on my father's side of the family, just hard-working people who helped carve out the wilderness which confronted them and who remained mostly farmers until the mid-1900s.

My grandfather, Burrell Joyner, had a grain mill in an area called Dunn's Crossroads in Wilson County and he and my grandmother, Sallie Martha Batts Joyner, raised three boys and five girls. One of those boys was my father, John Thomas Joyner, born in March of 1922. My time was drawing near.

MY WILSON COUNTY ROOTS

In September of 1942 the headlines all centered on the great war raging across the ocean. Scant attention was paid to Wilson, North Carolina, or to a very pregnant woman who was about to deliver her first child.

Wilson was a dusty tobacco town located some forty miles from the capital city of Raleigh. This was the self-proclaimed "World's Greatest Tobacco Market" and row after row of tin-roofed warehouses stood glistening in the sun each year awaiting the call of the auctioneer. A full year's labor and a mountain of tenant farmer debt converged in front of stacks of newly cured and tied tobacco anxiously awaiting the first cigarette company bid. A high beginning bid meant new shoes for the children, a set of recapped tires for the old Ford truck and a sizable reduction of the debt owed to the landowner and the country grocery store. A low opening bid brought an audible response from the assembled farmers and merchants because in this part of eastern North Carolina tobacco either made you or broke you. Sometimes the line between the two was too thin to measure.

John Thomas Joyner was not yet twenty years old when the news came across the old family Philco radio that Pearl Harbor had been attacked by the Japanese in a sudden early morning air strike. The fact that the attack had come on a Sunday morning was all the more galling to citizens of this God-fearing farm community. The big question on everyone's mind was whether or not the Japanese would bring the war to America's doorstep.

President Roosevelt made a stirring speech in which he made clear that war was no longer a possibility but a reality. Every able-bodied man was needed for the armed services and draft notices were thick in the post office on Nash street, pushing aside the usual rush of Christmas cards.

Having left school in the early elementary grades to help support his family, John Joyner, or "J.T." as he was called, had no real formal education. J.T. worked as a body and fender repairman and his weekly paycheck was the one steady source of income at 1310 Goldsboro Street. J.T. lived in a house which included his mother and father, several brothers and sisters and a more recent arrival, Eva Elizabeth Wallace, who had recently become Mrs. John Thomas Joyner.

By the end of December, J.T. answered his draft notice and reported for duty in the U.S. Navy. In February, Eva wrote to J.T. with news from home. "All is well in Wilson," she said, "and I sure hope they do not send you overseas. Oh, by the way," she said, "we are with child."

In 1942 the average income in the United States was \$1,709. At 1310 Goldsboro Street in Wilson that average was just under \$1,000 from all sources, including J.T.'s allotment check from the service. Prices were low by today's standards with a pound of butter selling for forty-seven cents and a loaf of bread costing less than a dime. Yet, when everything was considered, it was a full-time job just to keep food on the table.

World War II raged on in Europe, the Philippines and Africa while at home sugar, coffee and gasoline were beginning to be rationed. In the battle of Midway, the Japanese suffered their first real defeat of the war and the FBI captured eight German saboteurs who had landed in Florida and New York to wreak havoc on American targets.

A SON IS BORN

In Wilson, life continued as normally as possible under the circumstances. At night people gathered by the radio to listen to the news of the war. The Lindy Hop had become the favorite dance and the most popular records of 1942 were "Paper Doll" and "That Old Black Magic." A new song had been published late in the year, but it would be December of 1942 before most of America fully embraced "White Christmas."

These were not the best of times for Eva Joyner. Her husband was away in the service during a great war and she was living in a house with her in-laws. At eighteen years of age she was soon to give birth to her first child. Eva's parents, Ashley P. and Eva Wallace, lived some fifty-five miles away in Johnston County, but it seemed a million miles away to a lonely, frightened mother to be. Neither family owned an automobile and with gas rationed as it was, it wouldn't have helped if they had owned one.

In the early morning hours of Monday, September 29, 1942, Eva Joyner gave birth to a son who was named Ashley Thomas Joyner. I was named for both my maternal grandfather, Ashley Wallace, and my father, John Thomas.

The navy had assigned J.T. Joyner to a minesweeper berthed out of Norfolk, Virginia, and as soon as mother and son were able to travel, the family was reunited to set up house-keeping in Norfolk. A second son, Grady Burrell, was born on December 1, 1943, some eleven months after his older brother. Grady was nicknamed "Buddy" and over the years there would follow four more children: a daughter, Elizabeth, and three sons, William Thomas, Billy Ray and John Hildsman.

In 1945 J.T. was discharged from the navy to care for his growing family and returned to Wilson where he was employed as a body and fender repairman for Bob Smith's auto shop. Today, a good body and fender man can make \$600 to \$1,000 per week through the commission structure, but in 1945 J.T.'s salary was \$35 per week.

J.T.'s brother William moved in with the family and never moved out. So the Joyners located in Wilson as tenant farmers with J.T. continuing to work in town at the body shop. Raising pigs, chickens and garden crops helped the family survive. Still, housing consisted of a typical tenant structure of that day. The windows were filled with cardboard, the steps were falling away from the porch and heat was supplied by a potbellied stove in the "living room." This was a hard scrabble existence whose memories would stay with me for the rest of my life, making me ever fearful of having to return to that way of life.

BUCKLING DOWN IN THE LATE '40s

I began Buckhorn elementary school in 1948. This small brick country schoolhouse was located at an intersection of two rural roads near Rock Ridge, North Carolina.

We lived far back in the woods and a simple dirt path led to the road where I caught the school bus. The house had no running water or electricity. Water was drawn from a well at the rear of the house and the "bathroom" was a country outhouse. The Sears catalog was the reading material of choice until all of its pages disappeared.

The distance from the house to the road meant that on days when I was running late, my cousin Wesley would have to ride me to the bus stop on an old farm mule. Imagine the razzing I got from the other kids as I arrived at the bus on the back of a mule.

Until that time I had never thought about our family being poor or different from anyone else. Those around us had been as poor as we were. Suddenly I saw that many of the kids in school had new shoes, nice clothes and fancy store-bought lunch boxes which stood in stark contrast to my brown paper bag with its bologna sandwich. Because our family was large, daddy bought bologna by the stick and we sliced it ourselves. The idea of money to eat in the lunchroom was totally alien to me.

The winter of 1948 was bitter and cold in North Carolina and in December we had one of the deepest snows in memory. We slept three to a bed which helped us keep warm. The old potbellied stove was in the front of the house and the bedrooms were in the very back. There was no heat at all and the

cracks in windows and walls allowed freezing wind to find its way to us. Most nights we slept in dungarees, socks and sweatshirts since it was simply too cold to undress.

As dawn approached on that cold morning in 1948, we found a snowfall too deep to allow access to the road. There was little food in the house and so Daddy and Uncle William made their way through the snow to an old barn out back. I stumbled along in their tracks but the snow was literally chest high for me. They took an old heavy barn door and cleared a place in the snow for it. A stake about eighteen inches long was propped under one end of the door and a line was tied to the stake which ran back into the barn. Cold biscuit crumbs were sprinkled on the cleared ground under the door and as snow birds came to get the crumbs, the stake would be yanked down with the door trapping the birds. Plucked and cleaned the birds became meat for a huge pot of pastry (stew) that kept us eating while the snow melted.

The staples available to us in those times were flower, lard, fatback, wieners, bologna, rice, milk, eggs and potatoes. The "egg man" visited our house every week on his usual route and Daddy would buy twelve dozen eggs. He always bought cracked eggs because they were cheaper. We always had food on our table by buying cracked eggs at twenty cents a dozen and cheap potatoes in 100 pound bags and by raising our own chickens and hogs.

Cholesterol, blood pressure and calories were not words that were on the tips of our tongues in those days. Fortunately we were also active and hard-working people who burned off the inevitable fat. In later years we would pay the consequences but that's another story.

The houses that we lived in as I grew up ranged from bad to worse. It seemed that every time the rent was raised, we moved. The rent was raised often. Uncle William had finally

given up trying to make it as a farmer and had taken a job working with my father.

Uncle William had no real skill in a body shop and worked as a “prep” man. He sanded and taped off cars for painting and did other odd jobs. William was a very talented carpenter but the opportunity never came for him to realize his talents. He made pieces of furniture around the house but, sadly, he was destined to spend his life in a dead-end position with little pay.

COPING WITH REALITY

We finally moved to town from the country tenant houses but, if anything, the housing got worse. By far the absolute bottom came when we moved into a small wood frame house near Elm City. We called it the “rat shack” because it was populated by an enormous number of rats. Poison did little to rid us of the rats and on Saturday nights Buddy and I stayed up with BB guns shooting rats. These were shacks we lived in and we children were old enough now to know it.

It was inevitable, I suppose, that the tedium and poverty of their lives would cause a rift among the adults of our household. Daddy had always liked to “take a drink” now and then and Mama began to drink as well. Uncle William was a hard drinker too. They began to argue and the arguing got out of control. Every Friday night the battle began to brew. The men worked a half day on Saturday and afterwards Mama and Daddy made the trip into town to buy groceries. After the groceries were in hand, they stopped by the ABC store for “Four Roses.” A friendly bootlegger could always fill in any gaps.

By nightfall the arguing began and by the time I was about ten or so the arguing grew physical. Mostly it was the two men, but it eventually grew to include all three adults. It was traumatic for the children who helplessly watched. We watched lamps fly, bones break and blood flow. The smaller ones would scream and cry which alerted the neighbors and sometimes the police. This went on from the time I was about ten until I was about fourteen.

I could sense even then the reason for the trouble. Life wasn't getting any better, there was a house full of kids to feed and frustrations just overwhelmed my parents. We children never doubted that our parents loved us, but it was difficult to face the weekends knowing full well that history was doomed to repeat itself.

As I look back on those times, I guess that I was beginning to learn to take charge of situations I found myself in. As the arguing escalated, I knew to keep my younger siblings under as much control as possible, keep the screaming down so that the neighbors would not be so hard to face on Monday morning and try my best to minimize the damage that my parents and uncle would do to our meager furnishings and themselves. The fracas always occurred on weekends and on Monday life would return to "normal."

Today the accepted psychobabble would excuse me even if I had shot my parents in their sleep. Today's conventional wisdom says that we were abused both mentally and physically since corporal punishment was the court of last resort in our home. That line of thinking conveniently would excuse me from having to make any decision on my own or to balance my thinking between the good that my parents did and the bad.

Life at that time was hell in many ways, but such experiences can lead us to make something positive out of our life or dwell on the negatives. I do not subscribe to the simplistic approach, underwritten by the learned among us, that any action that I took against my parents, no matter how gruesome, should be excused under the broad banner of "abuse" or "rage." Few of us, if any, live as did Beaver and Wally Cleaver. In this arena, a little knowledge is indeed a dangerous thing.

ELM CITY TIES

Elm City is a small town in North Carolina located between Wilson and Rocky Mount. I moved a great deal, but mostly around the edges of Elm City or Wilson so I continued to attend school in Elm City.

In 1956 we moved to Waterworks Road near Speight's store; it was closer to Wilson than Elm City. I was determined to play sports and knew that if I had to attend school in the bigger city of Wilson, my chances of making a team would diminish.

The Elm City school bus stopped within one-and-a-half miles of my home before it made its turnaround. From that point I walked home on days when I was not involved in athletics. When I stayed over for practice or for games, I had to scramble for a ride home, thumb or walk. Sometimes Richard Walston gave me a ride home and I'd buy a quarter's worth of gas. He couldn't take me home very often and I seldom had a quarter, so I often walked home.

The distance from Elm City High School's gymnasium to my house on Waterworks Road was exactly seven-and-a-quarter miles. I know that because my daughter and I measured it one day in 1988. In the 1950s I only knew that it was "a helluva hike."

One bitter cold December night my Elm City basketball team played an Edgecombe county team in an "away game." The activity bus returned us to our gymnasium around 11:00 P.M. I was dressed in my warm-up jacket as I sat outside the gym and watched all of the individual cars depart. My father had said that he would pick us up and I had told Selby Outland

that he could ride home with us. Selby lived about three miles away but on our route home. We did not have a phone at home and, as the minutes turned past midnight, I accepted the fact that Daddy had drunk too much and would be asleep on the couch. Selby and I sat out to walk home.

The rural road was heavily wooded and dark on both sides. It was so cold that we had to trot most of the way to keep from freezing. When Selby turned in at his house I almost stayed with him. However, I was not quite fifteen years old and without a phone to call home, I did not want my folks to wake up and worry about me. That last four miles or so seemed to last forever and I was numb from the cold.

As I walked into the house, I could see Daddy asleep on the couch. I did not say a word but went straight up to bed. That experience almost led me to quit the team, but I stayed with it and learned to cover my butt with alternatives to get home. You learn to accept things as they are and make the best of them. It was a hard lesson, but one that prepared me for a life where things don't always turn out like the picture books suggest.

EARLY ROLE MODELS

On the subject of lessons, I would like to acknowledge people who gave me strength in these early school years.

A second grade teacher in Sharpsburg once slapped me in the face because I was overanxious to volunteer at our reading table instead of quietly raising my hand. It made such an impression on me that I still remember her name, but it would serve no purpose to mention it here. She is long since dead. I was not quite seven years old. I don't know what her excuse was.

A ninth-grade teacher at Elm City told me once that I had better learn to use my hands because I was not bright enough to make a living any other way. I remember her name as well. She never knew that I kept up with her progress. When she died, I had made more money in a few short years than she made her entire life and I never used a hammer or a tong.

We adults, and especially teachers, influence young lives every day whether we like it or not. We are a positive influence or a negative one and the consequences are long lasting. I know that teaching is a profession where monetary rewards are lacking. It is time consuming and many times must seem like an exercise in futility. But, oh, what a legacy to leave when you've given all you have and the lives of so many have been enriched. What a joy it is to give a young mind positive encouragement and watch that person go on to benefit society.

Anyone who has chosen the teaching profession has my gratitude and my appreciation. Yet, I sincerely hope that any teacher who cannot reach down within himself/herself to sup-

ply positive encouragement to young minds would quietly leave the profession.

As a young boy I looked into the eyes of these miracle workers seeking some assurance and balance in my life. Some were just doing a job and, like the two above, they rocked my foundation. Thank God for the ones who came through for me and gave me the strength and determination to reach for the stars. There are bright lights under the young bushels of our country that never shine because the flame is not fanned. The inquisitive eyes become clouded with doubt and insecurity and the flame dies. Great teachers are not necessarily the most learned, rather they are the most caring. I was blessed with several.

I first remember Louise Winstead giving me a kazoo in music class and helping me learn to play it. She never seemed to notice that I came from “that side of the tracks” and she always made me feel like I was important to her. My self-esteem could use a boost and she gave it. In the sixth grade she heard a spark in my singing voice, or told me she did, and encouraged me to enter the school talent contests. Louise Winstead played piano for me in those contests and practiced with me in her off time. I will never forget that lovely lady who taught me to believe in myself. She had a gift and she shared it with all of her students. I’m sure they all feel like they were her favorite just as I did. That is magic my friends and what a great world this would be if we had more magicians like Louise Winstead.

Charlie Batten had a different approach. He was Elm City’s Future Farmers of America (FFA) teacher and although he taught boys almost exclusively, he kept a well-managed classroom and shop. Why? Because his reputation through the years was well-known by all of us who entered his classroom.

Rumor had it that Mr. Batten had actually thrown one kid completely out of a window for mouthing back at him.

None of us doubted for a minute that Mr. Batten would hesitate to kick our ass if duty called. Has anybody considered that today's teachers are so afraid of their students that they can barely function? The "bad asses" saunter into class knowing that they need only scream "abuse" and a covey of learned scholars will descend upon the teacher with writs and warrants.

Mr. Batten suffered under no such constraints and, therefore, it was not necessary for him to take action. We believed that he would, we knew damn well that he could and therein lies a lesson for today's leaders.

It was Charlie Batten who made me examine my verbal skills that had been long hidden and who challenged me to know the thrill of victory—but not before introducing me to the agony of defeat.

In 1958 Mr. Batten singled me out for a conversation after class. I kept one eye on the window as I approached his desk. "Tommy," he said, "I want you to represent this chapter in the FFA public speaking contest in Saratoga. You've got two months to memorize your speech." The good news was that my friend, Harvey Sharpe, was allowed to coach me and we were excused from shop class while we polished the speech. Harvey and I had a great time swapping stories, playing football with a book of matches on the desk top and perfecting everything except a speech.

Suddenly it was time to perform. Harvey accompanied us to the speech. We knew we were dead. There were only five speakers that day and I went third. They named a winner, a runner up, a second place winner and a third place finisher. Four people were recognized out of five. One lone butt was left sitting on the stage when the dust cleared. The butt READ

his speech because he had not memorized it. It was awful. Yet, Mr. Batten did not say a negative word about it all the way home.

On Monday he called me in and told me that I would represent my school again the next year in Hookerton and he knew, he said, that I would be prepared. He was right. Harvey and I “smoked” that contest. I knew that speech so well that today, almost thirty-five years later, I can still recite most of it.

Charlie Batten was a good teacher. He could have yelled at me. He could have kicked my fanny or thrown me out of his window, but he knew that I had hurt myself more than he could ever hurt me. He had enough empathy to know that I learned a lesson much greater than he could have hoped for and that I would now use that lesson to grow. If not, then I was beyond his help anyway. Had he jumped on me for my failings, I would have instinctively retreated into a defensive shell and the lesson would be lost. I credit my ability to prepare to meet a challenge and to speak forcefully to Charlie Batten. If ever I lose another challenge in my life, it will not be because I was not prepared. Winners can accept losing but they cannot accept less than their best. Thank you Mr. Batten and may your window of life always be open.

Last I would be remiss if I did not offer credit to Mrs. Myra Whitley, my English teacher. It took me many years to realize that I owed her this credit because she did something that is taboo today. She held my feet to the fire.

I was a good baseball player. I lettered and was a starting player in basketball, football and baseball but, because of my size, baseball was my best sport. In my senior year, I was starting at second base.

At that time, it was necessary to pass three out of five subjects in order to remain eligible for sports. Nothing mattered however if English was not one of the subjects passed.

English was a must and I disliked it immensely. It wasn't that I could not do the work, school work was slow and it bored me. I did not want to study predicates; I had homers to hit.

Mrs. Whitley warned me that I was about to fail English. She even offered to give me extra credit if I would hand in an additional theme paper so that I might pass. I meant to get that done, I really did. I guess down deep I did not really believe that she would fail me. I had developed a gift of gab and she was such a nice lady. But in the end, she failed me. I was mortified, but there was no more room for excuses.

I turned in my uniform and began a siege of self-pity. Finally, I left school just before graduation and enlisted in the U.S. Navy. Myra Whitley did me a great favor notwithstanding all those things I said about her under my breath on the way to boot camp. She gave me every chance and then she cared enough to say NO! I am eternally grateful.

These are but three of the teachers who meant so much to my life. There were others on a lesser scale and I thank them all. I have forgiven those who allowed their negativism to hit me full force. Forgiven, but not forgotten.

CHILDHOOD ILLNESS, ADULT PAIN

Getting into the navy was not an easy task. I took a secret into the examining room that could have sunk my ship before it sailed.

I had been remarkably free of injury or illness in my life, other than the ordinary childhood diseases like mumps, measles and chicken pox. True, I almost ended life before it began in earnest by pulling a pan of boiling grease off the stove and onto my chest when I was three years old, but it left no lasting physical scars.

In the summer of 1950, I awakened with a stiffness in my left hip. I was less than eight years old and I can't honestly remember whether I had been aware of this condition coming on or whether it just exploded that morning. When we went outside to play I was unable to run. I started off but pulled up lame and it scared me to death. Nausea came over me and Mama sent word through a neighbor for Daddy to come home and take me to the doctor.

I was admitted to the same hospital in which I was born, Woodard Herring, in Wilson. Doctor Pittman was the orthopedic specialist and after a series of tests and X-rays he told us that I suffered from Coxa Vera of the left hip—in layman's terms, a "hammerhead" hip. The condition was with me since birth apparently and had worsened through the years. With this condition the hip joint actually erodes and the ball of the hip joint flattens out while trying to stay in the socket. I did not understand any of this at the time.

We did not have insurance and I was placed in a ward with a lot of older men who suffered from everything imagin-

able. Many talked out of their heads or screamed through the night. One patient, Junior Williams, had been in a serious car wreck that had broken many bones in his body and one leg had been removed. He seemed to be in excruciating pain, and at night I would listen to all of this and crawl further under the covers to hide. I was there for several months and spent Christmas in the ward. It was a terrifying time in my life.

Released from the hospital, I remained on crutches for several months. No surgery was ever done and I later learned that I had been on bed rest and penicillin. The problem was not “cured,” but the system let me slip through the cracks.

After several months on crutches, I regained the ability to run and we just quit going to the doctor. I always protected that hip, though, and knew that someday, sometime, it would give out. I face hip replacement surgery in the future, but my doctors tell me to wait as long as possible. Regardless of what Bo Jackson says, hip replacements have a shelf life when installed. I had hip surgery (a Valgus Osteotomy) in 1969 to reposition my hip and buy some time and I can tell you that it is painful and recovery is no cake walk.

In 1960 the Navy was looking for a few warm bodies and I made the cut by staying with the crowd through the physicals so that no limp was visible. From Raleigh-Durham airport to the recruit training center in San Diego I traveled and marveled.

Boot camp was a pain in the butt with nit-picking the order of the day. We graduated in January of 1961 with my assignment to USNAS Chase Field in Beeville, Texas. I had a friend from boot camp with me and Walter “Sonny” Galyon and I checked on board our permanent duty station. Sonny and I have remained friends through all these years. He recently traveled from his home in Sweetwater, Tennessee, to join me in a visit to our old base just before the navy dis-

mantled it. The memories were fresh and alive even though I had to remind him not to drink the water in San Antonio's riverwalk. Just kidding boot.

Life is like a mighty river with tributaries that branch off ever so often and it is mostly luck or happenstance that causes us to find our course. I had no idea what I would do in the navy since I was coming in with no firm educational background. I found that I was to be assigned to VT-25, a training squadron for navy flyers. My lot in life was to wash jet planes. But one of those tributaries flowed in front of me. Those who do not believe that God works in mysterious ways, read on.

THE NAVY YEARS

When I arrived on base, the squadron barracks were full so I was placed in the administration barracks until a bunk opened up at VT-25. My temporary roommates were yeomen and they wasted no time in telling me what a mistake I made when I chose green airman stripes over the white stripes of a seaman. They set about to get me transferred from VT-25 before I even got there and into the seaman ranks.

The military does work much like you saw it on *M.A.S.H.* and there are Radar O'Reillys at every base. They got me transferred and into a job as a writer with the base paper even though I could not type. It was a move that was to bring me closer in a roundabout way to a career in radio.

I learned to type with two fingers of each hand and knocked out thirty-five words per minute minus errors to pass my JO3 exam. The kid who fouled up English was now using it to make a living. I began as a sports writer, but soon graduated to covering hard news and feature stories. One of the tasks assigned to our office was to work with authorities notifying the next of kin when one of our training planes went down. That was a job I never want to be around again.

Ever the jock, I played flag football, basketball and fast pitch softball for base teams. During a basketball game I took a serious fall and was taken for X-rays at the infirmary. By morning I was on my way to NAS Corpus Christi Naval Hospital where for several days doctors came and went, reading the X-rays and clucking to themselves.

Finally I was told that I had two choices. I could make a career of the navy, in which case they would operate on me, or I could take an early discharge. My answer? "Hand me my hat please, I'm late for the bus."

LIFE AFTER THE MILITARY

Back home in North Carolina I made the rounds of the newspapers trying to get a job. The only one that showed me any real interest was the *Rocky Mount Evening Telegram*. Its Editor, Vernon Sechrist, told me that if he had an opening, he would call.

I had to have an income so I took a job with Burlington Mills on Herring Avenue in Wilson. I was a glorified mule towing huge steel spools of yarn from one loom to the other and back to the stockroom. The job paid just over minimum wage and had as much future as Ray Charles playing third base for the Cubs. A friend told me of an opening at Hackney Brothers Body Company and I got the job.

Hackney Brothers made refrigerated trucks, school buses and other metal things for which I had no aptitude and less attitude. They put me to work with a huge butcher knife, slicing Styrofoam to be placed between two layers of metal which would hold the truck's refrigeration. After six weeks there, I got a three-cent-per-hour raise. My heart beat fast for these people knew incentives.

I had begun to notice at Burlington Mills, and witnessed again at Hackney Brothers, the day-to-day existence of the workers. They came in, worked, ate lunch and left in the afternoon without changing expression for the most part. These people were once young and naive, "full of piss and vinegar" as my granddaddy used to say, but the tedium of life had taken its toll. These workers once had dreams and ambitions. Now, sadly, they were resigned to their fate in life. I began to study them closely and resolved to pull myself up from that place before I too began to accept this as my life's work. These were good, honest, hard-working people but they had put their

dreams and hopes into a corner of their memory and found themselves looking forlornly at the time clock that would signify one more day done.

I was an early graffiti artist. I could not rest without creativity and it's hard to be creative with a knife unless you are a rabbi, Lorena Bobbitt or a chef at Benihana. I relied on my trusty pencil and roamed the plant as a poet. My favorite easel was the restroom wall. It was a vast, flat expanse that was custom made for the work of the gifted.

Shortly after I left a restroom a line would form to see who or what was the latest subject. Management and I found ourselves with a difference of opinion. They seemed to feel that more trucks would get built were it not for the stop downs occasioned by my penmanship. I, on the other hand, felt strongly that three additional cents per hour for a man of my obvious literary talents was insufficient recognition. It was suggested that perhaps I was ill suited for the task of Styrofoam cutter and the plant management decreed that I should henceforth be free to seek my destiny.

I began to believe in miracles when Jimmy Dean started having hit records without being able to carry a tune, but Vernon Sechrist's phone call stunned even me. True to his word, he was calling about an opening with the *Rocky Mount Evening Telegram* and I was hired. While this new job with the paper would not turn out to be my life's calling, it did set into motion the events that led to my career in radio. Another of life's tributaries.

THE ROAD TO RADIO

There was so much to do and so little time. Bill would marry Cecelia tomorrow and when the ceremony was over I had a date with a train to Georgia. It was not the midnight train to Georgia, but come 7:00 P.M. tomorrow I'd be on my way to fame and riches. That was the story Bill Winters wove in our many talks since I met him in the Summer of 1962. It was now September and the die had been cast.

Bill Winters had one of the smoothest voices you'd ever want to hear. The Lord does work in mysterious ways because I might never have met Bill, or gotten into his line of work, except for a quirk of fate.

Bill had a sister, Jane, and I had a cousin, Rosa, who went to school with Jane. I was also just out of the navy and finding dates wherever I could. Rosa told me about Jane and suggested that we double date. What a concept. Two more people than you need to have a really good time when you are twenty years old, but since Rosa knew my date and I did not, I did the only reasonable thing, I groveled.

Jackie Carey was an old friend I had known through high school and he was free to form the second part of this ritual when Jackie and I arrived at Rosa's house in Rocky Mount at the appointed hour. Jackie had not been as eager to go as I would have liked and kept asking if this blind date was accompanied by the customary dog or was the date the dog. Couth comes with the aging process, so I cut Jackie as much slack as I could while promising him the moon. He and Rosa actually hit it off very well and now it was my turn to visit the tomb of the unknown date. I was so concerned with Jackie bailing out

on me that I did not have time to consider that I had never seen my date. I was delighted not to see a “no entry” flap on the lower portion of the Winters front door as we arrived.

Jane Winters was a beautiful girl and we found that we had much in common. We began to see each other regularly and one day she told me that her brother Bill was in the radio business and would be coming to visit soon. He was looking forward to meeting me she said, to which I replied, “rightttttt!”

The Ford Falcon of radio personalities, Bill Winters, was curbside at the Winters home when I arrived. I knew he was coming and that he worked “at a station in Virginia.” Jane introduced us and Bill asked me to take a ride with him. I had read of similar rides from which the passenger did not return, but Bill had a fondness for the grape and I figured I could outrun him if there was to be trouble.

The two of us hit it off pretty well and he was soon regaling me with tales of great riches for those in radio. I was a lowly writer for the *Rocky Mount Evening Telegram* and was somewhat short of riches. I listened intently as Bill led my gullible soul down the road of hot wax, bermuda shorts, six packs and voluptuous women with an insatiable appetite for baritones. I was too young yet to consider that this man was driving a Ford Falcon, wearing an H.I.S. suit and working at a daytime-only radio station in Hopewell, Virginia. He should have been in sales.

By September 1, 1962, I bit the hook, swallowed the bait and was ready to swim into radio if that was the only way. I knew nothing of how to be a radio announcer. Beginning at about age six and on through my teens, I had been on radio and later TV as a singer with a local band. I now found that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) required every radio station to have, on staff, a first class engineer. Actually the engineer himself could be no class, it was only impor-

tant that he had the FCC designation of “First Class” and you obtained that by passing their test. The easiest way then to get into radio was to possess a first class engineering license, which we affectionately referred to as a “first phone.”

GOVERNMENT 101

Life then, as now, was a chess match. The government came up with rules and regulations and somebody else figured out a way to get around the rules and make money because of them. Such was the case with the FCC's rule that each station have a first class engineer on staff.

A small daytime-only station in Goat Cheese, Arizona, (Pop.12) could not afford a full-time engineer (or need one). The owner usually traded his meager dinner of Spam with Henry's Grocery and Septic Service in return for advertising on the radio station. Several small stations could band together to hire one "contract engineer" who traveled between them. But the great white father in Washington did not have time to be concerned with people trying to save their butts and the decree came down to make each station have its very own "chief engineer."

Many people went to work on a way to give Uncle Sam what he wanted and make a ton of money for themselves. If the government wanted first class engineers, by God, Bill Elkins felt it was his civic duty to provide them and he could have them ready to disband Radio Free Europe's flame thrower transmitters in "about six weeks."

Bill Elkins was from Dallas and he thought big. Soon there were Elkins Institute of Electronics campuses near everyone. The whole idea was to memorize the government's test. In 1962 those administering the test went for months without changing the subject matter. Even though they had several tests made up and labeled A, B, C, etc. they gave the

current test many moons of observation before changing it. Elkins students simply memorized the test.

We knew nothing of electrodes and theory, but we knew that the answer to question one was “C” followed by question two whose answer was multiple choice “A.” When we got to the diagrams, we simply ignored them since none of us knew one line from the other. We went in with pencil and blank note cards and as soon as the test was over, we were instructed to go into the hallway and write down as many questions and answers as we could remember. That way, if they did finally change the test, Elkins knew which test they had used. He simply changed to that test in the classroom and it was business as usual.

I had been through the navy and had seen firsthand how silly the governmental system was. Now I was to get a massive dose of “dumb ass” by watching the FCC of the early 1960s. The commission ruled through fear. They wanted you to believe that they were everywhere and that they might descend upon you at any given moment to catch you in mid-violation. In fact, no one really feared the FCC. The grapevine seldom failed to warn you of their presence. When they did arrive we were forced to watch silently as they peeped into every facet of the operation—at least all of the facets that meant absolutely nothing.

These folks took picayune to a new level. At least when your proctologist reaches for his rubber glove, you know that it has a clear and distinct purpose. These “radio doctors” did not have the slightest clue as to what it took to perform a true community service at a radio station. They rode in, scared the crap out of the station’s license holder and rode off again.

I had already decided to get my sheepskin at Elkins Institute of Electronics in Atlanta. The trick was to get enough money to fund my higher education. It cost \$695 for tuition

and another \$120 for six weeks of room and board in the lap of luxury. Well, it smelled like something's lap anyway. I sold my 46 Plymouth, borrowed \$100 from Jane's father, who was only too glad by now to have me in Atlanta and his daughter in Rocky Mount, but still I was somewhat short. Hell, if I was any shorter I'd have had to part my hair to pee.

Enter now the North Carolina Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. You remember that I had a damaged left hip joint and would one day undergo a joint replacement. I found that this qualified me for assistance from Vocational Rehab. It is the only time in my life that I have had the government give me something of value and, in this instance, the system worked as it was supposed to work. I got the money for school and the state of North Carolina later got more tax revenue from me than I felt was reasonable—but they invested and won.

Form 1040

U.S. Individual Income Tax Return for the year January 1-December 31, 1967

1967

First name and initial (If joint return, use first names and middle initials of both) Last name Your social security number

Ashley T. Annett Joyner

Home address (Number and street or rural route) City, town or post office, and State ZIP code

Jacksonville, N.C. 28540

Your present employer and address Spouse's present employer and address, if joint return

Onslow Broadcasting Corp., Jacksonville, N.C.

Your Filing Status—check only one: 1a Single 1b Married filing joint return (even if only one had income) 1c Married filing separately, if spouse is also filing a return. 1d Unmarried Head of Household 1e Surviving widow(er) with dependent child

Table with 2 columns: Description (5-9) and Amount. Line 9: 9,169.25

Table with 2 columns: Description (11a-11d) and Amount. Line 11a: 1,465.43

Table with 2 columns: Description (12-21) and Amount. Line 17: 940.70

Table with 2 columns: Description (22-25) and Amount. Line 22: 53.41

Under penalty of perjury, I declare that I have examined this return, including accompanying schedules and statements, and to the best of my knowledge and belief it is true, correct, and complete.

Sign here Your signature Date Signature of preparer other than taxpayer Jacksonville, N.C. Date

ARE I A ENGINEER YET?

The issue at hand was to get Bill Winters and his new bride legal and see them off to their honeymoon haven at Pedro's South of the Border motel. I would then catch the train to Atlanta to embark on my engineering career. In the meantime I understood that my expertise in this area was limited to flashlights.

I boarded the train in Rocky Mount with Jane and her parents bidding me farewell. Jane was crying—her parents were tearful too but for a different reason.

My friend Frank Rice, who owned Rice's Men's Shop in my hometown of Wilson, had been kind enough to sell me a new suit and shoes on credit. I was spiffy as I settled back for the ride to Georgia. Being somewhat uncomfortable, I took off my new shoes and lay back against the seat. A sleeper car was out of the question. In fact, if it had cost extra to lean back, I would have had serious back pain from the rigid posture. It was nighttime and with nothing to peer at through the window, I drifted off to sleep.

The conductor was now coming through the car awakening everybody with news that we would soon be stopping in Augusta, Georgia, and that we would be there for two hours. "Disembark if you wish," he told us "but if you are not onboard when it pulls out, don't blame the railroad."

It was Sunday morning and I was pretty hungry. An early trip to the dining car and a look at the prices had shamed me back to my partially reclining seat. I looked around for my new shoes to get ready for breakfast. They were gone. Some SOB had stolen my new shoes—the same shoes that I had

bought on credit and not yet paid for and I was angry. I was also barefoot. I could, and did, remain angry, but I could not remain barefoot.

The kindly old black conductor must have known that I was naive and from hick city when I tugged his sleeve and showed him my socks. He was right. This was the third time I'd been on a train in my life. We were simple country folk from Wilson County, North Carolina, and had grown up so far back in the woods that we had to walk TOWARD town to hunt.

This nice man took me in tow and found an Army/Navy store right near the train station. I've long wished I had been thoughtful enough back then to have gotten his name, but his good deed lives after him. The inventory was slim to none. Shoes consisted of black lace-up military ones like those I wore in the navy. I bought a pair and cussed every lace.

The remainder of the ride to Atlanta was a humbling experience. I just knew that everybody on the train was looking at my military shoes and I was delighted to finally get off at the Atlanta station. A quick cab ride to the Southern Men's Club where I was to reside for the next six weeks and I was ready. The Southern Men's Club was in a house just a block from Churches School for Girls. Somebody from Elkins had obviously put great thought into a happy campus environment.

We spent the next six weeks chasing residents at the Churches School and memorizing the FCC test that was to come at the end of our "term." As we neared the end of our training, we received a visit from Bill Elkins himself, along with a vice president from his company. Our instructor was accused of mishandling funds and was gone so fast that most of us could not have picked him out of a lineup. Mr. Elkins assured us that while we would have to stay an extra week, it would be worth our time. Most of us figured that he must

have an in with the girls' school, but he simply meant that we would, in fact, graduate.

The day of the test was nerve racking. Surely somebody at the FCC would find us out and change tests on us. Surely the U.S. government was not as woeful as it appeared. I found my test face down on the desk and slowly turned it over. YES! It was test "C" as it had been for almost half a year, and it was a piece of cake. I marveled at my mastery of the science of engineering in just six short weeks, and found myself in the hallway making notes on my blank cards. Just six weeks ago I could not spell engineer and now I am one.

I caught a ride with a classmate who was driving back to North Carolina and arrived at my parents' home fully educated. The world would soon beat a path to my door and I wanted my parents to be prepared. My mom was glad to see me and my dad wanted to know how long it would be before the path beating began.

As it turned out, someone at Elkins who was in charge of post graduate placement apparently forgot to let the throngs of employers know that I was available because the phone at home had cobwebs surrounding its cradle. Everyone I talked with wanted a tape and resume and I had neither.

Elkins' job placement service finally ran out of better qualified candidates and recommended me to the station manager of WJAM in Marion, Alabama. He called to inquire whether I was still available.

His was a common dilemma that had been created when the FCC passed its rule requiring each station to keep a "first phone" on staff. WJAM was a small daytime-only AM station that barely remained afloat financially. Now they had to hire a chief and could only do so if that chief could also double as an announcer. If I had my "first phone," they didn't need a tape or resume, just my warm body. The pay was \$85 a week

and a major strain on this little station. I climbed back into my suit and laced up the military shoes for the trip to Alabama. This time I'd take the bus.

My mother and father, both working now, borrowed \$35 to help me get to Alabama. I bought a one way bus ticket and when I reached Marion I had \$2.47 left in my pocket. This was the seed money that I would use to fund my career in radio. To say that I was naive is an understatement.

I walked to work until I could afford an antique Oldsmobile. I lived in an upstairs room provided by an elderly couple who needed the extra income, and I dined at greasy spoons that provided lots of cheap eats.

What followed was my introduction to the wonderful world of show biz. I did work hard to become a pretty fair announcer and armed with my "first phone," I worked for a lot of stations from Alabama to Pennsylvania and from Colorado to Florida. The life of a single disk jockey in those days was as close to heaven as one gets in this life. Jobs were plentiful, responsibilities were few and there were always females on the phone or in the lobby wanting to meet the new jock. Times were different then and the fear of AIDS or the fear of violent behavior was not in our vocabulary. I would live to see this country unravel in alarming ways.

Most radio stations genuinely tried to live up to their responsibilities for public service. Most still do today, but not all. The administrative burdens placed upon licensees grew greater and greater. No one in Washington seemed aware that you cannot shuffle paperwork and do something meaningful in the community at the same time. The petty rules and requirements reached absurd levels, but in Washington the powers that be were totally oblivious to the real world outside the beltline.

“Ascertainment” was an exercise that came to be known among radio folk as “mental masturbation.” Someone in Washington came up with what seemed to them to be a great idea. Why not require broadcast management to periodically go into the community, with pad and pencil in hand, and interview community leaders? They should list the wants and needs of that community in descending order of importance and place the results in the station’s public file. It was felt in Washington that by doing this, the management of the station would become aware of these needs and wants for the first time and could program the station to those needs and wants.

Predictably the community leaders came to view these sessions as “bullshit badminton.” After all, in order for the station to be financially successful, the management was already one of those community leaders and knee deep in needs and wants. You could always count on drug abuse, unemployment, crime, environmental concerns and the ever popular street repairs as staples. No one in the community took these sessions seriously. The paperwork mounted at the FCC, and the commission continued to bemoan its lack of resources to handle the paperwork.

DON'T CUSS THE OWNER, IT'S ME

In the late '70s I had managed to enter ownership along with two financial partners. We bought a daytime-only AM and a 3,000 watt FM station in Petersburg, Virginia. I moved the FM license to Colonial Heights, a suburban community, with an eye to eventually moving a tower as close to Richmond as I could get it. We paid \$550,000 with seller financing for most of it, and at the time, the debt seemed like all the money in the world.

If I could only have foreseen that a few years later, in the madcap '80s, I would be taking on debt like a drunken sailor. For a Wilson County farm boy to go to sleep at night owing banks tens of millions of dollars takes some mental gymnastics.

I first officially met Mark S. Fowler in 1978 at a meeting of the Virginia Association of Broadcasters convention at the Mariner Inn in Virginia Beach.

Jack Delaney of the American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP), who was sitting by the pool with Mark and Jack, called me over for an introduction. Mark had a small D.C. communications firm called Fowler and Meyers, and he was at the convention to troll among those who might wish to keep the FCC off their fanny. In a word, Mark needed clients.

I had met him once before on an airplane, but neither of us spoke much or got to know the other. This was the first time that we had that opportunity. Mark and I got caught up in the conversation and stayed by the pool for hours. In fact, it was well into night before we realized that we were all alone. I found him to be genuine and warm with a great sense of hu-

mor. I confirmed my initial feelings when he laughed at all of my one-liners long after I had decided to engage his law firm.

We shared a love for radio and Mark regaled me with tales of his days in Gainesville, attending the University of Florida. He made his spending money by working as a nighttime DJ named “Madman Mark.”

We spoke that evening about the need for deregulation of the FCC. In fact, we talked about deregulation in many government agencies that had grown fat and lazy, but our background in radio gave us a special insight into the need for streamlining the mother church of the vinyl disc. Here was a man with ideas akin to my own and we forged a friendship that evening, around the Mariner’s pool, that has strengthened and grown through the years. I am proud to call him my trusted friend.

FORGING FRIENDSHIPS

Thanksgiving 1979, Mark and his family arrived midmorning at the Joyner home in Colonial Heights. His two kids, Mark Jr. and Claire, were still young enough to make a drive from Alexandria to Colonial Heights a true adventure.

Mark was a frustrated cook and quite good at it. He had baked some pumpkin pies that were the hit of the day, and while the ladies were making magic in the kitchen, Mark and I explored the wonders of the grape.

It's important to know that Mark Fowler is not a two-fisted drinking man. He seldom has more than a beer or a glass of wine, but in this instance he did need to keep his client happy. It was a time of thanksgiving and the client (moi) kept filling the glass. By lunch time, both of us very much wanted to go out and shoot a turkey and by midafternoon a serious nap was in order. I have never seen him repeat this faux faux. I understand that his medicine chest even today contains Roloids, Pepto Bismol and a hand-lettered admonition that asks "is the hourly rate worth dying for?"

The FCC never needed to remind me of the need for community involvement. In fact, their entire premise that broadcasters would not serve their communities unless Big Brother was watching was always fatally flawed. Broadcasters may or may not always be sincere in their community efforts but it really doesn't matter because they still have to perform that community service just to save their station. That's it—pure and simple. If you super-serve your community, it prevents a competitor from taking away your advertising revenue. It also prevents stations outside of your area, (those with a signal

broad enough to encompass your area) from knocking you out of business. Forget all of the grandiose bullshit that accompanies that fact. The reality is that we do it for selfish purposes, and not because the FCC says we should or because we have to do it.

THE WORLD OF RADIO

Throughout my career, I have been extremely proud of what we have accomplished through our stations. Citywide events that we began more than twenty-five years ago still thrive and grow in those communities. We built strong news departments, took controversial stands editorially and provided audience access through our talk show segments.

Broadcasting is a “monkey see, monkey do” business. If you’ve ever been on a fishing pier when somebody hooks a fish, you can understand what I’m talking about. As soon as somebody hooks one and demonstrates that there is a fish in that location, the entire pier tilts as all the other fishermen (women) rush to duplicate the feat. We tried many things that others said would not work. We went outside the formula and had great success. Only then did we find competitors, with hooks in hand, rushing to our side of the pier.

In Petersburg we programmed country music on our FM and simulcast it on our sister AM. When I bought the stations, I held a meeting at my home just before our first day of ownership and I told the staff that we were going to remain a good country music station. I also told the staff that the spine, the backbone of our success, would come from a talk show that we would be running from 9:00 until 10:30 A.M.

You could see their eyes roll back as they contemplated how anybody this stupid could come up with \$550,000. Everybody knew that a country station could not stop down and talk for an hour and a half in the middle of the day. If my intent was to impress the troops, then I had failed miserably.

Tapes and resumes were in the mail. What on earth would prompt a man to do what I proposed?

Consider what we had. Our facility was not the best in the market. The AM covered more ground than the FM, in what was now an FM world, and neither signal covered more than sixty percent of Richmond. That made us a Petersburg, Colonial Heights-Hopewell, Virginia, station. We were a local station as opposed to a regional one.

The Richmond stations covered us like a wet horse blanket. We covered Richmond like a petite evening gown covers Roseanne. We could not compete unless we localized our programming and became essential to the hearts and minds of our audience. To do that, we had to talk with them and make them part of the family. We could not simply play music.

The talk show was a major success. I enlisted the aid of Paul Bulluck who was also a salesman at the station. Paul was a great second banana and fed incredible straight lines without really thinking about what he was saying. The ease and warmth of our banter caught on with the audience, and soon we had a long waiting list for sponsorship at rates that were far higher than our regular commercial advertising. We galvanized our audience through this talk show. They trusted us to make a difference in the community and we did.

We knew that we had arrived when we began to get requests from advertisers to bring a nighttime version of our talk show to their remote locations. We devised the WPVA Traveling Road Show and went out twice a month for the nighttime version. There was a great demand for T-shirts with a caricature of Paul and me on them and the legend, "The talk of the town."

Soon politicians from Richmond began to ask to be on the show. We had celebrities from Nashville and Los Angeles as well as Lt. Governor Chuck Robb who had ambitions beyond

his current position. We were entertaining, thought provoking and many times controversial. We were also very successful. By providing the service that the community wanted, we became successful. FCC edicts had nothing to do with it.

Meanwhile my friend and erstwhile attorney, Mark Fowler, was engaged in the quest to get an aging politician into the White House. An actor for pete's sake.

Mark had been Ronald Reagan's communications attorney for some time and supported his first unsuccessful bid for the presidency. This time it looked like they might win one for the Gipper, and Mark had been busy cultivating me in case it came down to one vote. I had grown up as a Democrat—I knew not why. My folks had been Democrats, so I fell into line. I also grew up as a Baptist but had converted to the Methodist church. Fowler was fond of pointing out that Reagan did not mind being second to the Lord on my list of conversions. After determining that Republicans can dance and have a drink with dinner, I capitulated. I did not ask whether or not makeup is allowable. I figured that Barney Frank had already covered that one for democrats.

I need not tell you that Reagan won the presidency or that my one vote was not the deciding factor. The experience did set into play a series of events that gave me a unique insight into the FCC and to politics in general.

My phone rang one evening and, as soon as I heard Mark on the other end of the line, I knew that something big was brewing. He told me that he might be asked to become chairman of the FCC and asked what I thought about it. Well Duh! It was an easy call for me as I added it up. The FCC held my future in the sweaty palm of its hand. My best Goombah would head the agency and thus possibly be in a position to stay the hand or at least get me a fair and impartial hearing. I cast my one Republican vote in the "hell yes" column. Mark said it

was a major undertaking, but that he might like the challenge. I reminded him just how much he loathed schlepping to work in his attorney guise and having to get drunk with clients to keep bread on the table. I could hear his mind churn.

THE FCC YEARS

On Christmas Eve, I was at my wife's sister's home in Benson when Mark tracked me down by phone. He told me that it was decision time and that he was not quite sure whether he wanted all of the grief that came with political appointments. The jury was, as they say, still out. We talked for an hour or so and I urged him to take the position. At the same time, I told him that he was my friend and if he chose not to take the chairmanship, I would be there for his firm with my somewhat erratic payment schedule. Later that night he called back to say he had decided to go for it.

I had been in radio some seventeen years and the FCC had always been the enemy because of the way they approached us. That night I went to sleep secure in the knowledge that I need not fear the radio valley of the shadow of death—for verily—I now knew well the biggest SOB in the valley.

The foundation of a true friendship is the understanding that one friend never takes advantage of the other, and Mark and I never had to mention it. I would never ask him to do anything that was not completely aboveboard in any way, and I know that he would have been very hurt if I had done so, just as I would have been if the shoe were on the other foot.

In all the time that Mark was chairman, the only favors I ever asked for were requests to move something along in the pipeline that was growing moldy. Those who have dealt with the agency know that pipeline constipation is rampant. There is never enough government funding to supply the troops to manage the war.

I bought an apartment in the Saint George building at 21st & N Streets in Washington, which was just around the block from the FCC at 1919 M Street. My apartment was an end unit with a wraparound view of the city from the seventh floor. I did not feel the fear of violence in Washington to the degree that it offers today, but even then the security of my apartment building was a motivating factor in my decision to buy.

From this location, it was possible to walk to the commission or to the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) which was two blocks away. In a six-block area there were some of the best restaurants in the world. Elegant spots like the Prime Rib on K Street and unique little basement eateries run as Mom and Pop operations. Many of these smaller restaurants, while off the beaten path, offered exceptional food and service. I kept the apartment for about seven years and really enjoyed it. Later as I added up the nights that I actually spent in Washington, I found that I could have stayed at the Mayflower Hotel and bought a limo in lieu of buying an apartment.

From this new vantage point, it was possible to observe many of the inner workings of the commission, the NAB and politicians in general. Many nights I observed limos idling in the winter chill with heaters running while the big cheese enjoyed a leisurely dinner inside. Drivers were as snug as a bug in a rug with a full tank of gas paid for by taxpayers in Massachusetts or beyond who were, at that very moment, freezing their asses off back home. I remember Tip O'Neil (God rest his soul) with a huge table of guests and a rib on his plate the size of Ted Kennedy's ego. Mark introduced us and I told the Speaker that it was good to see him representing those common folk with a dinner check that resembled the national debt. When I became a Republican, I signed on for the whole enchilada.

It is best that we citizens of this country do not know what goes into making sausage or what goes on beneath the surface in Washington. I saw enough to know that more political deals are worked out in dingy cloakrooms and elegant eateries than all of the working hours at the Capitol. It's all done with pressure and leverage. When the parties meet in the office at the appointed hour to begin discussions on matters in contention, one side invariably finds that its legs were cut off hours before and the only thing left to do is explain why the charts and graphs won't be necessary.

I also found some members of Congress hopelessly void of common sense and some so full of warm horseshit that they could have laid down in a garden and caused daffodils to sprout eight inches overnight.

One day I was comfortably sitting in the bulkhead of a Delta flight out of Atlanta back to Washington wondering who my seatmate might be. The gentleman arrived with an impressive briefcase and took the seat next to mine. We exchanged hellos and I recognized him as Senator Howard Metzenbaum from Ohio. This would have been late 1981 or early 1982. We began to talk and the conversation turned to broadcasting.

I quizzed the senator on his knowledge of radio and found the level to be mediocre. The real difference between us became apparent when the good senator told me that more competition is good for everybody, and that many cities have a service station on every corner and they all survive. He could not, he told me, see why broadcasters needed more protection than those service station owners. He felt that allowing more radio stations to exist enables the better and stronger to survive.

Here was the one flight I had taken that had no barf bag. "Senator," I asked, "how much of that service station's time

does government require for 'public service?' How much of their inventory do you politicians demand at half price during election periods? How much time does the service station manager devote to community ascertainment and "make work" paperwork to justify some clerk's position in Washington?" Senator Metzenbaum may have been brilliant in some areas, but I was only happier to get off one other flight in my life and that one was on fire.

INSIDE WASHINGTON

I got a call at the Washington apartment late one afternoon and the lady told me to hold for the chairman of the FCC. Damn, this was heady stuff to move from the years when FCC officials put on poker faces and scared the hell out of all of us to a time when the chairman wishes to speak with moi.

Mark told me that he'd pick me up that evening and we'd get dinner. He did have one meeting but we'd go to that together.

Mark had a driver for awhile, but he retained the ugliest Volkswagen left in captivity and puttered around in it to remind himself that he was just one election away from outdoor plumbing in Remington. I did my part by addressing mail to him at home with the designation, "Temporary King of the Hill," on the outside of the envelope. The fact that I retained licenses during his tenure is a testament to his sense of humor.

The chairman's "rolling handy bag" was out front when I came down to the lobby. He apologized for the fact that portions of the paint job had disappeared (it had been for years and he always apologized). I crouched low and put on my shades just as some people use shrubbery to conceal an open ditch. We began the drive to his appointment and it was only then that I knew where we were going. Zigging and zagging, climbing hills we finally pulled up in front of an impressive home and walked to the door (yes, my shades were off).

Charles Wick was about as close to Ronald Reagan as boxer shorts to a keister. Their families dined together on

major holidays and it was well-known in Washington that Ronald Reagan heard Charles Wick even when he whispered.

He greeted us wearing a bathrobe and warmly invited us into his home. A TV set in the adjoining room featured a detective drama of the time with a dwarf in a starring role. The dwarf later committed suicide, but I swear our meeting had nothing to do with it.

Charley Wick had been instrumental in Mark's appointment to the commission, and this visit was to thank him. I turned my attention to the dwarf and the meeting ended in about an hour (as they say at Lens Crafters). All the time we were there, the phone kept ringing with people on the other end of the line who were badly in need of a dose of "brown-nosing."

INNER WORKINGS

Our industry then, as now, had problems that needed to be addressed. At the time, stations licensed for great power and located in small markets were destined to stay there. If they tried to move their towers or increase them to add service to a larger market, the stations in that larger market could stall permission from the FCC under two scenarios. One was the Re-allocation Issue and the other was called “the Berwick Doctrine.” Both restricted competition and were outdated. I was once caught in a crossfire trying to move my tower midway between Cleveland, and Chattanooga, Tennessee, in order to add Chattanooga to our service area.

A group broadcaster named Cy Bahakel filed to stop me citing both of the above issues. It was a delaying tactic, but in the past a competitor could do this and make it too costly to proceed. I had spent a great deal of money on lawyers before the commission repealed the rules. Once it was repealed and Cy had no other recourse, it obviously occurred to somebody in his organization that they may have crapped in their nightgown—my phone rang.

Cy Bahakel was based in Charlotte, North Carolina. He called to tell me that he had just now discovered that his organization had been filing against another Carolinian and, as soon as he discovered it, he put a stop to it. He wanted me to think that he had known nothing of the filings even though I had spent over \$70,000 fighting them. His cost had to be substantial as well. “Me thinks he doth protest too much,” I thought as Cy rambled on.

Either he knew and approved of the filings, or else he was exceedingly free with his money. I knew that Cy's reputation did not support the latter. It is rumored that Cy Bahakel emerged from his mother's womb and immediately grabbed the check from a nurse's hand payable to the doctor who delivered him. Cy had just found out that I was close to the chairman of the FCC and he was intent on saving his ass from some imagined retribution that I might be able to deliver. The filings were bad enough, but to compound it with a call laced with lies was even worse. Not being a proctologist, this was the closest I would come to the genuine article.

While I am on the subject, let me tell you that superficial people give me a pain in the lower region. I had gone to Washington and walked with Mark to his swearing in. We had been close friends for years and it was well-known. Thus I was prepared for a certain amount of hot air to flow in my direction due to my closeness with the chairman, but I was not prepared for the hurricane. Suddenly I was in demand.

In the early going, when the chairman was to be at the NAB convention, a state convention or general meeting and I was going to be in the area, he would accept the invitation, but make it clear to the host that he would like me to be invited and sit at his table. Word traveled like corn through a goose. Suddenly I had many friends with whom I had never spoken insisting that I join them.

I would hear nothing all year from the old NRBA, but come convention time, I knew that the chairman was attending a dinner with them because it became imperative that I be there. A lobbyist for NBC bought me elaborate dinners once or twice a year after insisting that we get together. Ironically the chairman was always there as well. I have heard nothing from NBC or the lobbyist since Mark left office. I can get

along fine without the stimulating conversation, but damn I miss those lobster dinners.

I could not count the number of people who came to see me or called to tell me their particular problems only to ask that I bring it to the chairman's attention. I nodded a lot and smiled, but it was a very rare occasion that something came to my attention that I felt the chairman should know about. Even then I'd check with current counsel to make sure I could bring it up and not violate *ex parte* rules.

One such problem that I brought to the commission's attention was one that prevented George Beasley's station from offering service to all of Philadelphia. WXTU had signal problems and General Cinema decided to cut their losses by selling to George for \$6,000,000. The signal could be corrected by moving to a hilltop very close at hand, but the commission was still viewing things in black and white without considering that, occasionally, gray is a valid hue. In time WXTU moved to what was classified as "an antenna farm" and the people of Philadelphia (all of them) now have service by the areas only power FM offering county music.

In an instance where I could see a valid problem and a solution to that problem, I felt comfortable bringing it to the commission's attention. Ninety-five percent of the time that I was approached by people, it was to circumvent the rules for no good reason except to line the licensee's pockets with silver and I never mentioned it to Mark or the staff.

It is important to keep a level head about you when you suddenly find yourself the center of attention, especially if you are there because of some other powerful person's shadow. You have to constantly remind yourself that the person turning the 300 megawatt smile on you is as full of crap as the inside of a goats gut.

LET'S GET TECHNICAL

With the removal of the Reallocation Issue and Berwick Doctrine, broadcasting changed in a fundamental way. It became a technical game. If you could engineer your station into a larger market, you were now free to do so. I could just feel Howard Metzenbaum tap dancing in his Port O Potty as the competition increased. Congress loves to get itself involved after the horse has left the barn and they jumped into this issue.

It was decided that all stations licensed to larger power and tower height must improve to minimum standards or be downgraded in class.

Many FM stations had been getting a free ride for years. There were basically three classes of FM stations labeled "Class A, B and C." The lowest class, Class A, was licensed for 3,000 watts at 300 feet of tower. A Class B was for 50,000 watts at 500 feet, and the largest stations were Class Cs licensed for 100,000 watts at a maximum of 2,000 feet. There was no "in between," you were either very big or very small, at least in theory. In reality, it was a nightmare of patchwork hodge podge.

A Class C station, licensed to Frozen Rope, North Dakota, would be in the FCC database as a 100,000 watt powerhouse at 2,000 feet of tower. The commission would then provide protection for that station over the vast area that it theoretically served, and thereby prevent any new station from being engineered into that area. In reality, this FM that enjoyed protection in the FCC database might well be running with 5,000 watts of power with its antenna hanging off the side of the village fire house. Some were on short AM towers,

others were on used telephone poles. It was a mess. Requiring the upgrading was a good idea coming just a decade late.

New classes of service were instituted and broadcasters were given three years to either meet minimum standards which would continue their technical protections in the FCC database, or the commission would downgrade them to the lower service they actually provided. Havoc reigned throughout the land. This new ruling meant that the licensee would have to actually invest money in the facility—a concept somewhat alien to many. Some could not afford to upgrade and many older broadcasters decided they would not go into further debt to meet the new standards. As the buzzards circled o’er the land, the station brokers began to proliferate.

I could see a feeding frenzy coming. The rules were new and most in the industry did not truly understand them. On the surface they were easy enough, but the nuances of the rules flew over tops of heads like a runaway balloon. A glut of stations were put up for sale. I began to get as many under contract as possible before other players caught on and it became a full-time job. With state maps, pencils, rulers and imagination, I began to research “move-ins,” stations that could move their towers to provide coverage to bigger cities. So much to do and so little time.

I had been in radio for seventeen years before I ever sold a radio station. In all of those years, I had made a good living letting my brilliant peers underestimate our capabilities. We’d come into a market, buy a station and start doing things that the industry said you can’t do. Fortunately I did not have a “consultant” to tell me I was about to fall on my ass. Since I did not know to fall down, and could not afford to even bend at the knee, I just went along totally ignorant of my limitations. Amazingly we won. Again and again we won. My competitors were stunned by how “lucky” we were. Mean-

while they just went along, doing the same old tried and true (and outmoded) things they'd always done.

There was no way I could continue managing stations and still have time to invest in engineering and buying stations during this period. With a three year dictate, I knew that in less than two years even the dumbest of my brethren in the business would figure out how this works. At that point, the opportunity would dry up as the latecomers drove the station values skyward. The fishing pier analogy would take effect in due time. Monkey see, monkey do.

We were able to purchase stations as far away as Santa Fe/Albuquerque, New Mexico, into the midwest and down to Louisiana. Six stations in the state of North Carolina were upgraded through our purchases. It became apparent that we would not have time to manage all of these properties and the FCC had repealed the rules that required an owner to keep a newly purchased station for three years before it could be sold. That rule had made little sense. Why insist that a financially strapped licensee remain in place for three years when they could not afford to perform community service?

In any event, we still looked at every property that we purchased with an eye to operating them ourselves. Not one station was bought that we were not prepared to operate. We found several opportunities that could have been turned over for a profit, but we passed on them because we would not be comfortable operating them if an owner were not found quickly. That is the one thing that separated us from those who later sprang into "move-in" activity. We were broadcasters and never purchased any station that we were not comfortable owning and operating. Therefore, any station that we resold was a good one.

The stations that we identified and purchased were sold to us by owners, without exception, who felt that they were

getting a premium for their stations. Most, if not all of them, felt that we were paying considerably more than the property was worth and several felt very smug about it. We did not bargain hard on the purchase because we knew the underlying value and we wanted to be able to justify to ourselves that the seller got the deal that he/she felt was fair.

Some might not care as long as the profits were high, but it was important to me that the seller was comfortable with the bargain they had struck. The risk going forward was mine. Even so, I was very vocal in industry trade magazines and on NAB and state association panels warning that the escalating resale prices for stations were insane and self-defeating. But if this was the wave of the future, we were going to be out front riding the crest.

Insanity reached new heights as we moved further into the magic three-year period of mandated upgrades. Suddenly bankers began flocking to broadcast investment with abandon.

At an NAB convention in Las Vegas, George Beasley and I were sharing a suite, as we often do. The calls and pressures from bankers wanting meetings became so heavy that we vowed not to attend the next year's convention without bringing a secretary to handle and schedule calls.

I had grown up exceedingly poor in rural North Carolina and I had always thought that bankers were learned individuals with most, if not all, of the answers to life's monetary questions. I came to find that greed and opportunism were watchwords in the profession. I also learned that bankers who had little or no knowledge of broadcasting were throwing money into it like drunken sailors.

If this was to be an investment wave for the banks to ride, then it would have made sense for the banks to either have broadcast expertise in-house or go outside and hire an expert

to advise the loan committee. Instead they formed broadcast arms of the bank using people with no broadcast expertise and experience. In some cases, they appointed loan officers who had gone bankrupt trying to operate broadcast stations.

It would have been comical, if so much money wasn't involved, to sit and watch these pompous asses pouring over a loan request from someone desiring to buy a broadcast station. If the reader feels that I might be a bit hard on the banking brethren, then I can only tell you that you had to be there.

It got to the point that if we were going to buy a radio station for \$3,000,000, we simply went to the bank and requested \$4,000,000. The extra \$1,000,000 was to upgrade the property and have operating funds available. If you see no equity in this equation, move to the front of the line. This was before the savings and loan scandal and none of us considered the consequences. We felt that if the banks were that hot to lend money, then they must know best. Still we were very diligent in doing our pre-purchase homework because it never occurred to us to consider this "just monopoly money" as a Mobile broadcaster once labeled it to me.

With this much money available, the pressure on radio inventory became intense and prices began to skyrocket. In a matter of days, a station that was sold for \$2,000,000 would resell for \$4,000,000. The bankers were merrily fueling an impending disaster but were not knowledgeable enough to know it. I was still being quoted as calling the whole process a "shell game," and in a March 19, 1990 *Radio Only* magazine article about my company, I pointed out the charade and said that truly "the emperor has no clothes." No one paid attention in banking circles. I was trying to be honest, but I was not stupid. If millions were going to be made this way, I determined to make as many of them as I could.

In the meantime, our industry was still saddled with an archaic rule enforced by the FCC. The FCC required that a station's main studio remain in its city of license even though the station had been upgraded to have a primary city-grade signal over a much larger city. For instance, if the station was licensed to Pee Wee, Washington, but moved its tower to within five miles of Seattle and twenty-five miles of Pee Wee, that station still had to keep its main studio in Pee Wee.

This placed the station at a disadvantage, from a competitive standpoint in the bigger city. There was no legitimate reason for the rule, rather it was a holdover from years past. It was possible to get a waiver of that rule (called an Arizona waiver based on case precedent). However, it was costly, time-consuming and the waiver was not always uniformly applied.

Through my new FCC counsel, Gregg Skall, I formed the Arizona Justice Committee and enlisted donations from a few other station owners to remove this rule from the FCC books. We successfully did so. All station owners today, who have studios in cities outside their city of license, owe a great debt of gratitude to those who helped foot that bill. I've never talked about how that rule came to pass in the night, but now you know.

HOW THE GAME WAS PLAYED

People with credentials of a one-semester stint with their college campus station were running around buying radio stations. Banks were throwing money at these folks. If you had worked for any length of time as a taxi cab dispatcher, you were considered a grizzled broadcast veteran for purposes of processing your loan.

The insanity reached a zenith for me in Austin, Texas. Austin had been one of America's golden markets for radio for many years due mainly to Lyndon Johnson. LBJ owned an AM-FM pair in Austin and there were only a handful of FMs in the entire city.

As president, Lyndon Johnson placed his assets in a blind trust (now about that Brooklyn Bridge I mentioned might be for sale) and during that time no additional FMs came on line in Austin. It was impossible not to make money with an FM in Austin, Texas. Lyndon's stations got theirs, and then you got yours but everybody made money. However when Lyndon died, the rules changed.

I identified a 3,000 watt FM station licensed to Georgetown, Texas, that we determined could be engineered to a new spot on the dial. With a new tower built closer to Austin, this station could become a 50,000 watter with primary coverage of Austin. The seller knew that his station could upgrade and his asking price for a small station with smaller billings in Georgetown was \$4,000,000. It was outrageous for what he had, but it was his and he felt that his price was not outrageous for what his station could become. He

was right, of course, but that was still a big risk. I decided to buy the station at his price because of the market's reputation.

In the meantime, I continued my engineering to see what else might be out there that could be upgraded and upset the balance of power in Austin. To my shock and surprise, I found that eventually as many as six new FMs could come into Austin through moves similar to the one I planned. I felt a lot like General Custer. On the one hand, this was a nice little hill to camp on, but on the other hand that is a helluva lot of Indians and they appear to be angry.

Enter stage left in the persona of Kenneth S. Johnson.

Johnson was out of Mobile, Alabama, and his daddy had been successful with a few stations which the son now owned. His stations were in Mobile, Birmingham, Louisville and Charleston, West Virginia, but he wanted to be a "move-in" player too.

Mr. Johnson had gotten big time funding from the Bank of New England and was purchasing move-in turnaround properties in Nashville, Charlotte, and Raleigh, North Carolina, all within months of each other. He wanted a station in Austin, Texas, in the worst way and he had a broker contact me. I had known and liked the broker, George Otwell, for years. I had heard of Ken Johnson but would not have known him from Brer Rabbit. In retrospect I wish I had dealt with Brer Rabbit instead of Ken Johnson, but I agreed to meet in Raleigh with George and Mr. Johnson.

Ken Johnson was a trip even then. He had attended Clemson University and I understand that he played football there. Mr. Johnson flew down in his private plane with dual pilots and swept into my office. He told me that Austin was his dream market and that, of all others, this was the market he simply had to have. We negotiated, but I told him that I had at least two other people making offers on Austin.

We had made no deal by the next day and Mr. Johnson rented a car and followed me down to Fayetteville, North Carolina, where I had meetings with my station there. He continued to pursue a deal for Austin. When I returned to Raleigh, Mr. Johnson also returned and finally we struck a deal. He would pay me \$10,200,000 for the station. There was also a small AM with the deal. The deal required \$6,000,000 cash at closing with a note for \$4,000,000 at ten-percent interest for three years, followed by a seven-year payout of principal and interest. The final \$200,000 was a lump-sum payment to be made five years after the initial closing.

After the deal was signed, Otwell, Johnson and I retired to a small Cary restaurant/bar for a drink. Ken Johnson thanked me profusely for enabling him to get into his “dream market.” I asked him how he and others could continue to pay these kind of prices for turnaround properties and he told me it was “just monopoly money.”

The Bank of New England subsequently was taken over by government regulators and the taxpaying public has been tied across the tracks of the Shortline railroad in Mr. Johnson’s monopoly game. We will return to this sorry saga later in our story.

I was back in my apartment in Washington and planned to have dinner that evening at the Prime Rib with Chairman Fowler. Since I was coming past 1919 M Street from an appointment around one o’clock, I decided to see if Mark had eaten lunch. If not, we could zip over to Duke Ziebert’s and perhaps get a look at Larry King admiring himself in the plate glass window.

Mark was on the phone and asked me to come in, motioning me to one of the chairs in front of his desk. I could tell that the chairman was receiving news that did not set well with him. Not possessed with an excess of hair follicles, those that

were in attendance on the top of his head were standing virtually straight up.

Dennis Patrick had been the chairman's choice to fill a recently vacated seat on the commission. Mark had fought the good fight on Dennis's behalf. Now he was learning that Dennis had just been summoned to the White House where Jim Baker had offered him a choice of another position, but told Dennis that he would not be joining the FCC. Baker had someone else in mind for the FCC seat.

To say that the chairman was angered is not to go out on a limb. He immediately swung into the battle mode and a flurry of phone calls came and went. I really think that Mark forgot I was there in the heat of battle. Dennis has been a law clerk of Judge Clark's and the judge, of course, had uncommon access to President Reagan. The chairman asked Dennis to visit with Judge Clark and ask for his help.

In the meantime, calls went out to other power brokers as the chairman burned his hard-earned credits on behalf of Dennis Patrick's appointment. I slipped out and told Mark's secretary Sandy that I'd be at the apartment and would meet Mark at the restaurant. I also jokingly suggested that she head off anybody with petty problems who might want to meander into the chairman's lair on this particular day.

At dinner Mark was still less than pleased with Potomac politics. He felt that he had been betrayed at the last minute. I suggested that he ease his burdens by doing research on a lamp shade project such as the one we had briefly touched on in my home that Thanksgiving in Colonial Heights.

Since he no longer needed me as a client and remembered the pain that followed that debacle, Mark nursed a lite beer. He had done all that could be done and now it was time to wait.

The next day Jim Baker summoned Dennis Patrick back to the White House to tell him that he had decided to give the appointment to Patrick after all. Dennis Patrick joined the FCC and later became chairman of the commission. When Mark S. Fowler is your friend, he never gives up on you.

One thing that the commission did that hurt our industry badly was to institute Docket 80-90, which created a flood of new stations into the market. Coastal markets were especially hard hit because there was no radio interference on one side of their market (just water) and it was easier to “shoehorn” in new frequencies. It seems that there is always somebody waiting to buy a radio station that is for sale or to apply for a new one just coming on-line. Apparently the rush to get into “show biz,” and the feeling that owning a radio station is like owning the key to Fort Knox, causes people not to look beneath the surface. The fact is that the majority of stations in America lose money every year.

IS THERE GOLD IN THEM THAR TRANSMITTERS?

I'm always surprised when I find people who don't know how radio stations pay their bills. Lecturing at schools and colleges, speaking at civic clubs or addressing the PTA, I am dumbfounded at the number of people who have always thought that radio and television stations are supported by government funding.

One of the first questions always deals with just how much cash we receive each year from Washington. The answer is "not a cent." Not only do they not fund us, but they charge us in a variety of ways and cause us to spend inordinate amounts on lawyers to keep abreast of their ever-changing rules. We are regulated to death by the government, but not funded by them. To compound our problems, we are a convenient volleyball for Congress to screw around with as they please.

Cigarettes are a legal product. We can argue all day about whether they are good or bad. I will tell you now that I do not smoke, never have and have spent many a moment contemplating shoving some clown's butt up his nose for blowing his cancer stench in my direction. Nevertheless, the product is legal. Yet, radio and television stations are no longer allowed to accept advertising from cigarette companies. All of that revenue went to newspapers, magazines and billboards when the government decided to ban the ads from the air-waves. If the product is legal, if the government in fact provides subsidies for tobacco, and if other media can advertise it, then why is it banned from radio and television? A double standard is at work here.

There has been, at this writing, a movement in Congress to ban beer and wine advertising on radio and television. The

argument above applies here as well. But as you can see, not only does the government not give to us, but they take from us at the drop of a hat.

The crowning blow came as a hypocritical cast of lawmakers gathered together to vote themselves a windfall. They decided that radio and television stations should have to help them fund their reelection campaigns.

There is no question that these candidates spend shameful amounts of money to get themselves into public office and to stay there. They created that problem themselves by increasingly engaging in longer and longer mudslinging contests against one another. Election campaigns have become a laughing stock and a very expensive way to pass gas in the guise of speech.

To make their burden lighter, Congress decided to make radio and television stations sell them their ad inventory at half price. What justification did they have? What justification do they give you, the public, everytime they take more bread off your table in the form of taxes to fund their pet projects? Well, they gave us the same justification.

It was an arrogant power grab. Lately, they have begun to circle us like vultures looking to reduce the amount they have to pay us for our inventory to less than one half. Congress is a huge parasite and an ugly boil on the butt of humanity.

On November 8, 1994, the voters of the United States finally did as they had threatened to do for decades. In mass they went into the polling booths and put the arrogant rascals out of office. It signaled a fundamental change in America. It will take some time to see whether the Republicans who benefited from the voter outrage will live up to their contract with the voter. If not, then I am confident that another sweeping change will take place. Talk Radio had a lot to do with the vote of 1994.

BROADCASTING AND ITS EFFECT ON SOCIETY

Increasingly we began to see the broadcast industry testing the boundaries of the FCC's power to contain them. "Shock jocks" began to make ratings waves by saying things on air that had never been said before. It would lead to the popularity of Howard Stern who we will dissect in more detail later in this book. Suffice it to say, I believe that this breakdown of values on radio and television mirrors the breakdown of values in society in general. I believe that this industry that I have loved and worked in for more than three decades bears some serious responsibility for where we see ourselves in America today.

There is no question that racism is a cancer in this country. There is also no question in my mind that the cancer is spread not only from white to black, but from black to white as well. I learned that lesson from the inside out when I moved from stations programmed predominantly to a white audience to those programming predominantly to a black constituency.

Beasley Broadcasting Company had a station in Mobile, Alabama, programmed primarily to a black constituency. While I worked at Beasley's home office in the mid-1970s I was up to my ass in alligators and never worked directly with WBLX. Its Manager, Larry Williams, was a very decent man who I enjoyed speaking with at our company get-togethers and I found Larry to be a pro. My first "real" experience with the format would come in Kinston, North Carolina.

In the early '80s, we embarked on a program of discovering stations in small markets whose towers could be moved a

sufficient distance to place a primary “city-grade” signal over a large market. As we were doing so, we received a request to consider buying WISP AM and WQDW FM, licensed to Kinston, North Carolina. The owner, Richard Surles, had been in the broadcast business for a long time, but had recently been diagnosed with cancer and knew that he was dying. His FM, WQDW, was programmed to the black community, and if you’ve never operated a station primarily aimed at the black market, then you will have trouble understanding how hard that station was going to be to sell to someone. It was a small market, it was only 3,000 watts of power and it had a black constituency in a rural eastern Carolina market. Your odds of escape were greater in a Tijuana jail.

We went on to buy and establish 100,000 watt FM stations in Raleigh, Fayetteville, and New Bern (Coastal Carolina), North Carolina, that were programmed primarily to a black audience. The average black listener was extremely nice to us and appreciated the station’s involvement in the community. The problems came from two directions, both driven by racism.

There was a decided bias against “black radio” in the advertising community. Today that bias is becoming less and less of a factor, although it is still a factor, especially among local time buyers. We encountered racism with soft edges and we ran into “Bubbas” with a serious attitude. From soft drink distributors to auto dealers, we continued to run into the same complaints. Our audience had no money we were told. It was hard not to feel badly for an entire race of people who were being painted with one wide brush of ignorance.

Just as we decided that white America needed an attitude adjustment, we were confronted with the profiteers of black America. Let no one tell you it does not exist. Their racism is just as blatant, just as ugly and their motive is personal profit.

The first approach is always soft peddled. The “community leader” tells you how difficult it is to be black and to survive under racism. They tell you that they’d like to work with you to make a difference in the community.

Just as you allow yourself to feel that here is a compatriot, a person of character who is only interested in putting something back into the community, the boom is lowered. The “leader” needs a payoff. It can be in the form of putting them on the payroll, making them a paid consultant or several other ruses, but the end result is that they win and you lose. To hell with all that grandiose pronouncement about community service. It’s all dollars and sense.

It happened in all of the markets, but I must say it happened less in Fayetteville where, because of Fort Bragg, I would have expected more of this attitude. These people with their hands out were every bit as racist in attitude as the “Bubbas” of the red neck set. The difference was that “Bubba” was honest about it. He did not like you period and said so early and often. The “community leader” was devious. He liked you very much—as long as the check cleared the bank.

Government is centered in Washington and very much out of touch with what goes on throughout the country. We send our representatives there, but they are quickly corralled by the seniority system and brought to heel. The seniority system is the worst thing that ever happened to this country because it rewards someone for growing old and senile. Key committee posts are doled out to those who survive the longest. With the appointment comes the ability to “buttonhole” legislation and dole out “pork” to those who toe the line.

The system is corrupt and those who linger in it cannot help but become tainted by it. In the Clarence Thomas hearings we saw something very sad. South Carolina’s Senior Senator Strom Thurmond could barely hold his head up and

mumble. The others around him were charged with keeping a straight face. The man had seniority and the post was his for that reason only. Today, in his 90s, Strom Thurmond is chairman of the Armed Services Committee. Talk about all hat and no cattle.

With this backdrop, our government creates problems for itself by pretending that it knows what it is doing. A minority preference was placed on the FCC's agenda and readily accepted as a panacea for past wrongs to black America. The idea was well-meaning, but as with everything else man designs, another man redesigns. What I'm telling you here, you will not hear from current licensees or from the National Association of Broadcasters. These folks are scared breathless to broach the subject. The minute the word BLACK is mentioned there is a mass of butts and elbows heading for the door. The word has become a club wielded for unfair monetary purposes rather than fairness. Broadcasters are afraid to resist because resistance to minority demands, even if unfair, will bring down upon the resistor a united front of black organizations. Truth does not enter into it.

I have worked within the system and treated people with respect regardless of skin color. Unfortunately, I have too often had someone trot out the race card and use it when the only question was one of finance, not race.

With the minority preference came national organizations eager to abuse the system for financial gain. "Protection" is offered for the payment of cash. It comes in many forms and mainly around license renewal time. Licensees are told that a transfer of license or a successful renewal can be attained without an adverse filing against the application at the FCC if the proper procedure is followed.

The payoff comes in several disguises. A popular scam is for the broadcaster to "hire" the threatening party to recruit

minorities for them. Check and see how many recruits people have presented over the years. Once the money is paid, contact is lost. The ever-observant broadcaster can also make a lump-sum payoff, buy furniture or other goods for the potential protester or fulfill their dreams in a myriad of other ways. What a country.

If a licensee has not fulfilled the requirements at renewal time, then I believe that the license should be forfeited.

The broadcaster has to perform in the real world, but the filer can operate in a world of make believe and promises. The end result is usually the same—a payoff. How does a payoff make it better? How were wrongs corrected by the transfer of money from the licensee to the organization?

When the minority preference was announced, it became commonplace for many, if not most, applications for new “drop-in” stations to find several minority applicants in opposition. The scam was designed to make those who were serious about being in broadcasting offer a payoff to the applicant who had applied only to drop out with a cash incentive. The minority applicant knew that he/she was in a better position with the FCC than some non-minority with two AM stations in North Dakota.

The payoffs were legendary and prolonged. I can't count the times that I have been approached by minorities and told that they were just an applicant now, but wanted to sell me the station because they knew the FCC would give it to them under the preference rule. Meanwhile they were promising the FCC that they were serious and dealing in good faith.

GETTING PERSONAL

I told you that my father had warned me about banks and bankers. To hear him tell it, these folks would steal their mother's false teeth right out of the glass by her bed and, if it was in their self-interest, they would gladly bite the old lady in the butt with her own choppers. I was from a younger generation and the warnings fell on somewhat deaf ears. After all, bankers were wining and dining me all over the country. I had read about the crash of '29 and the great depression but I had no real frame of reference to relate to my own circumstance in life. As they say in Jamaica, "soon come Mon."

Thankfully, my parents were able to stop drinking and smoking many years ago. My Uncle William died of cancer. My parents had always insisted that their children go to Sunday school and it was my mother who first embraced the church in the early 1960s. My father followed her and they have both led inspirational lives since that time.

I understood their frustrations when I was growing up and I respect them greatly for having had the courage to change their lives. Both became devoted to the church and supportive of their children.

My dad retired after a massive heart attack felled him in his mid fifties. He retired on disability, suffered through a heart bypass operation and an operation on his aorta and still gets around pretty well. Lately when I visit, we enjoy going for a ride through the Wilson and Nash County countryside that he loves so well. He was born there and has never cared to stray much from those roots.

My mother was born “up the road” in Johnston County. Mom died of cancer on July 8, 1990 and a huge chunk of my zest for life died with her. She gave us the best that she had and I always knew that I had a listening post when I needed one. I could dwell on the few years of despair that my parents went through or I can remember how they pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and showed us true strength and dignity. It’s no contest.

I am thankful for many things that I have received in my lifetime, but at the top of that list is my thanks that I was able to make life financially easy for my parents when they retired. My dad will not fly but my mom loved to travel and she visited throughout this country on tours. She spent time in Hawaii and Mexico and loved visiting with us at our Naples, Florida, home. Anyone in heaven who meets her will love her. She was a very special lady and I think of her every day of my life.

In the drives with my dad, he has begun to open up about his life as a young man and I am amazed each time he points out something new to me that I was unaware of before. The home where he was born is still standing just below Dunn’s Crossroads but I never knew it until after my mom died. One day, very casually, Dad pointed it out as we drove by and I pulled into the yard. It’s up a dirt road and in sad need of repair.

He told me that his family owned all of the land around that home at one time, but lost it following the depression. Land, he said, was about a dime an acre, but they had no dimes. Speculators and bankers cleaned them out. I suddenly knew what he had been trying to tell me all those years about not trusting banks and bankers. He knew, from first-hand experience something that had been lost on my generation. When the financial chips are down, all bets are off.

WHATEVER GOES UP MUST COME DOWN

Radio was on a roll and bankers were anxious to get on the bandwagon. The changes in FCC rules that led to “move ins” caused a run on properties. We had been one of the first to engineer these moves, see the value and begin buying and selling these stations. Several factors came into play. When the commission removed the rules that made these “move ins” too time-consuming, it also gave licensee’s that three-year window to upgrade their facilities or be permanently downsized. Many stations came on the market. We located and bought as many as possible as quickly as we could because we knew that once those on the sidelines saw someone make a little money, the water would be filled with sharks.

In some instances, we were able to buy an FM running at low power or on a short tower and by simply engineering it to a bigger city, we were able to sell our contract to purchase for millions more than we had paid. In other cases, we upgraded the facility ourselves and then sold it for substantial profits. In no time at all, we were into double digits in the number of stations bought and sold. I believe that we participated in more “move ins” than any other entity, individual or corporate.

Predictably our hypocritical “show biz” brethren began to gripe and moan about that success. Forget the fact that someone was going to seize the moment and make those “move ins” happen. Those who did not catch on until it was too late bitched about those of us who did.

Joyner is just a “move in” artist some sniffed and is not an operator. Again, forget about the fact that I had been operating stations for almost twenty years before I first accomplished a “move in.” The fact was that more money would be made in buying and selling “move ins in a two to three year period than one could possibly make trying to operate in that environment. It only took one stiff breeze for me to learn never to spit against the wind.

One Flint, Michigan, station manager was quoted in Jim Duncan’s *American Radio* publication as wondering just where several industry names, including mine, would be in “just a few years?” I can’t answer for Jeff Smulyan and others that he named, but I can tell the old boy that Joyner is damn sure not stuck in Flint, Michigan, with the green-eyed monster of envy. I’m shuffling between a nice home in Naples, Florida, and another in the Triangle of North Carolina, sitting at midcourt when my beloved Tar Heels are in the Dean Dome, enduring George Beasley’s grab for the last Red Stripe in Jamaica and taking those rides with my dad.

If I sound somewhat miffed at some of those who carped at us, then so be it.

The grapevine in radio is quick and deadly. The same person who showed you his/her pearly whites and slapped you on the back at the NAB convention in Vegas was eating you alive when your back was turned. I detest two faced people.

With the business on a roll, the banks were now almost tossing money out of windows. The criteria for a broadcast loan seemed to be non-existent and as the money poured in, the values of stations escalated. If you’ve ever watched the Jimmy Stewart picture, *It’s A Wonderful Life*, you know what a run on a bank can do. A feeding frenzy begins and no one can stop it until it explodes. That is what happened in radio. Stations kept selling for higher and higher multiples and banks

kept endorsing the movement by spitting out bigger loans. Eventually, it had to explode and the bang was heard “round the world.”

Just as bankers had come racing into radio station financing like a Jaguar on steroids, they left equally fast. As if turning water off at a faucet, feast turned to famine. Obviously, many people were left financially strapped. They had paid far too much for the radio station(s) that the banks were so eager to finance, and now they found that friendly banker at the door with a knife between his/her teeth.

There literally was no in between. Bankers sought to cover their butts with the regulators by making the borrower the scapegoat. Banking regulators, for their part, are a humorless group of people with no concept of anything except a set of figures and a strict interpretation of governmental red tape. They labeled broadcast loans, all broadcast loans, as “highly leveraged transactions” and that put extra pressure on the loans. Banks had to set up reserves to cover these “excesses.” Rather than work with the borrower, they decided to hound him/her into paying out the loan, declaring bankruptcy and/or committing suicide. From my experience, I can tell you that the bankers did not seem to give a damn which of those options were chosen, as long as it was a quick decision.

Meanwhile those of us in broadcasting were listening to the president tell us that the regulators were not to continue automatically labeling our loans as “highly leveraged transactions.” We’d tell the bankers that and they just rolled their eyes and let us know that nothing had changed.

The left hand of government did not let the right hand know what was being done. Worse than that the corruption was evident. How else do you explain why a bank in New England was allowed so much leeway on the road to destruc-

tion to provide excessive funding for poor operating decisions on stations that proved to be unsound?

The savings and loans were able to get away with financial rape while this same regulatory body was whistling Dixie. I personally saw no money change hands, but I also did not see Lee surrender at Appomatox. Does anybody believe that war is still on except Granny Clampett?

Our earlier banking was with Wachovia bank and our local office was in Goldsboro, North Carolina. We had an excellent relationship with Wachovia and were out of that relationship before the banks began to backtrack on broadcast loans. Therefore it's not possible to know whether the relationship would have become strained with them.

A large Richmond bank came after our business like a steam locomotive, as did a major bank based in Charlotte, and we eventually moved our loans to the two of them. The initial kiss they gave us to switch over in the best of times came to resemble the one Marlon Brando gave out in the *Godfather* just before Terzo slipped the piano wire around the neck of the kissee.

STRANGULATION BY RED TAPE

With minority preference came opportunists. The abuse still goes on today and would be laughable if not so serious.

In mid-1990 I received a call from my, then current, law firm in Washington where one of their lawyers had an interesting proposition. The attorney was black and he had two black clients who were interested in applying for a new “drop-in” station for Louisville, Kentucky. This would be a full 50,000 watt class B FM licensed to the city of Louisville at 100.5 on the FM band.

It was interesting because Louisville is an excellent radio market with comparatively few full-power FMs. The only down side was the dominance of the Clear Channel Communications AM/FM combo there. These two stations take over thirty percent of the radio audience and upwards of fifty percent of the market revenues. The question was why do they need me, and the answer was—money.

I was told by the lawyers that the Louisville CP (construction permit) was all that was needed to build the station immediately. The land for a tower had been optioned, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) approval obtained to build the tower and if we were the successful applicant before the FCC, we had only to start building.

I joined with the two other gentlemen and our company filed for the CP. We found ourselves with sixteen other like-minded companies. This was set to be a major peeing contest and the biggest bladder had the edge.

After many months, the FCC decided that some people were taking advantage of the minority preference rule. Imag-

ine that if you will. The commission decided that it would set a deadline, after which no payoffs could be made to have other applicants step out of a proceeding except for reimbursement of documented expenses. A howl of protest went up from the collective wolves at the gate, but those opportunist who had been waiting for a payoff, began to look for a settlement before the commission's deadline fell.

Lawyers for the seventeen Louisville applicants came up with a novel solution. We would hold an auction for the station CP. The high bidder would be left in the running alone for the CP and the other sixteen parties would divide the moneys paid by the high bidder. We convened at a downtown hotel in Louisville and began the bidding. Since I had been told we could begin construction immediately, I took our bid to \$2,050,000 and left as the winner. Was that a giggle?

It did not take long for the FCC to grant us the CP, and in an equally short period of time, the FAA alerted us that they had made a mistake and must recall our clearance for the tower while they circulated a notice for thirty days.

That's one delay but not the only one. At almost the same time, we learned that a permit had to be obtained from the zoning commission of the county. We now hired a local attorney for this chore and cursed those in Washington. In the meantime, the Richmond bank had committed \$3,000,000 to us to buy and build the facility. While the FAA finally granted their permission again, the zoning board was another matter.

There was already a tower less than a mile from where we proposed to build our tower, and the permission of the zoning board should have been a formality. Our lawyer did the obligatory dog and pony show before the elected folk, and then watched in amazement as one of them described the joys of hot air ballooning over the area where we wished to build our tower. Was this project in trouble or what? This horse's butt

made grown men cry with his tales of the great outdoors and those of us who would spoil nature. Spoil nature my butt, here's a mature man who likes to ride over the heads of the rest of us in a wicker basket, beneath an oversized condom filled with helium and capable of dropping like a rock on the nearest power line, and he wants to talk about spoiling nature?

The board voted four to three and the man who had gas got the four. Nobody was in at our Washington law office. This was a time for panic. You could obviously sue the lawyers, but in the meantime, you'd lose a vital portion of your anatomy. We scrambled to find another tower to locate our antenna, and standing there grinning like a mule eating barbwire wire, was the black owner of the tower less than a mile away.

He said he would love to have us on his tower and then proceeded to arrange the greatest holdup since the fat lady strapped on panty hose. We said "no thanks" and kept looking.

Enter now the friendly folks at Clear Channel Communications. They offered to let us on their tower but only if we would agree to do a Local Marketing Agreement (LMA) with them which, in essence, allows them to "rent" the facility. They wanted an ironclad contract with us that guaranteed them the right to buy our station. Boxed in, we reluctantly agreed.

Our antenna was soon hanging on the Clear Channel tower and we were in the midst of finalizing a contract with them for the purchase of our station. We had secured the call sign of WTFX for the station and had resigned ourselves to trying to get out of this debacle alive.

To compound our problems, the squeeze had hit radio station financing, bankers were doing a fast shuffle out of broadcast loans and the Richmond bank, suddenly and without warning, pulled our committed line of credit out from under us.

They still expected us to make our payments with attendant interest on the money we had already drawn down. Again, we could have sued the bank, but we were so deep in alligators by now that we did not have time to battle the piranhas. Things had to get better, right? Not really.

It was at this time that we found that Clear Channel was afoul of the FCC dictates. The commission had passed a rule allowing duopoly. For the first time a licensee could own two FM stations in the same market, but not if the licensee already had stations that garnered twenty-five percent or more of the audience in the latest Arbitron ratings.

Clear Channel's cup ranneth over to the tune of almost thirty percent and they could not own WTFX. The commission obviously did not know Lowry Mays very well. Lowry was the head honcho of Clear Channel. Although it was a publicly traded company, Lowry was not big on formalities. A big, burly Texan, Lowry Mays had created major funding through the public market and had shrewdly built an empire. There was more than one way to skin a cat, and Lowry came from a long line of cat skinners.

Suddenly we were being asked to sell the station to somebody named Snowden whom we were told was black, whom we had never met, never talked with and would not know if he walked in the door. It scared the hell out of me. I told Lowry that I would prefer to keep WTFX and pay him tower rent. This was not to be he said. We went back and forth on the purchase contract that would have us selling WTFX to an unknown entity who just happened to be financed by Clear Channel Communications.

As the particulars of the deal ebbed and flowed we instantly received our answers from either Lowry Mays or his son, Mark. At no time did we see or hear from the mysterious Mr. Snowden. To this day I have never met Mr. Snowden,

received a letter or phone call from him, nor can I verify that he is alive or whether he's black. This man, if he exists, made Howard Hughes look like LaToya Jackson.

There came a time in these negotiations, when I simply could not overlook the fact that our butt could be in a major sling if the proposed transaction was looked at by the FCC. Lowry Mays continued to insist that the deal would be granted by the FCC. Each time we asked that he put some money on the table that Clear Channel would forfeit should the commission not give this deal its approval, he blustered and fumed and then went back to his "guarantees" that the transfer would be granted.

Apparently there are very few Chinese in Texas because the Mays menfolk had never heard the phrase "no tickee, no laundry." I knew this deal for what it was and I had other licenses to protect. If what he proposed was kosher, let somebody else be the happy recipient.

A broker had contacted us on behalf of a company called Prism, based in Arizona, and they were willing to pay us \$3.3 million for WTFX. That is the same amount that Clear Channel was offering. Obviously if we had not been afraid of the Clear Channel deal, we would have been insane not to stay in the loop with them. We were on their tower and Lowry was making nasty noises about our not remaining on the tower if we did not bow to his wishes.

Once again, we tried to reason with Clear Channel. We told them that we would take another offer if they remained unwilling to back up their bravado with cash guarantees. For whatever reason, Clear Channel was all hat and no cattle.

I was in Jamaica in the final days of the breakdown of the Clear Channel deal. The phone service in Jamaica would cause the pope to cuss his mama and I was on the horn hours each day. It grew very old listening to Lowry's "guarantees" in lieu

of a deposit and I finally gave Clear Channel a deadline. When they failed to make it, I turned to the Prism deal and incurred the undying wrath of Lowry Mays. I also almost lost a good friend who had been brokering the deal and who, although I had been honest about my intentions should Lowry not put cash on the table, nevertheless failed to see my point. That is the only part of the entire dreadful business that I regret, but I was not prepared to march in lock step with Lowry just because he had come to expect it from others.

The Prism deal was quickly put together for filing at the FCC. Clear Channel quickly became a royal pain in the fanny. First came the threats. We were told that we would not be allowed to stay on the tower and they blocked our engineer when he attempted to enter the transmitter building to sign the station on the air. They knew that as long as we could not get the station on air, we would not be able to file to transfer the license. It was against our agreement with Clear Channel for us to have our access blocked, but there was much beating on the chest and hearty he-man activity.

We simply went back to the hotel room and accessed our transmitter by phone. In moments, WTFX was playing the hits. I don't have any idea whose butt Mr. Mays chewed for that one, but we were beyond caring about it. The transfer application from us to Prism was filed promptly with the FCC.

When you are working against an ego the size of Montana, it is best to cover your keister. Thus we began a computer run to determine whether or not there might possibly be another tower in a useable area for WTFX if (when) push came to shove.

A recent movement of another FM station to the west of Louisville had indeed opened up some additional area for WTFX to locate. There was a tower already in that area, so we contacted the people who owned the tower. The tower in

question belonged to a station engaged in religious broadcasting. While I believe fervently in God, I must tell you that, as a rule, these folks move when the spirit tells them to and in this case either the spirit spoke softly or the licensee was hard of hearing.

We finally reached agreement for about one-third of the amount of rent that Clear Channel would have received from us. Obviously, Clear Channel did not believe that we could find another tower and felt that our future was controlled by them. Their lawyers were smugly hammering our lawyers over the head, as lawyers are wont to do, all the while we were hammering out a new lease.

The original deal, before the non-appearance of the elusive Mr. Snowden, was that if we would enter into the deal to LMA WTFX to Clear Channel, they would fund our antenna and transmitter equipment and sell it back to us over time as a part of the deal. Thus we had the transmitter, antenna, coaxial cable, satellite dish and related gear at the tower site, and a landlord who was convinced that we could not move it and thus were caught by the short hairs.

They were half right. We could not move it, but they forgot that our money had not paid for it. We proceeded to order additional equipment for the new site and get approval from the FCC to move there. With that announcement Clear Channel went bananas.

If I had put any credence in Mr. Mays' threats at that point, I would have stashed my first born with Salman Rushdie and fled to Paraguay. Instead, we pointed out the problems inherent with taking this dirty laundry before the FCC and asked if the Clear Channel stockholders could all be in attendance. The room cleared like cockroaches at the onset of dawn. I've always wondered whether those stockholders were ever told that they lost over \$20,000 a year net profit from the tower lease

because their supreme leader overplayed his hand. Instead of “hanging Joyner’s hide to the wall” they simply nailed themselves

I make no judgment at all about Mr. Snowden. I’m not sure I ever caught his first name and I remember his last name only because I once knew a man with a KFC franchise down in eastern North Carolina who had the same last name. This Mr. Snowden, not the chicken franchisee, may be a great broadcaster and a wonderful human being. I had no way of knowing either way because I never knew the man himself.

You cannot do the number of radio station deals that we did without having occasion to write a book. Some things defy description and we’ve all heard that we “should have been there.” This was such an occasion.

HANGING THE TAXPAYER OUT TO DRY

You'll remember that I said earlier that we'd get back to the Ken Johnson story later? Well, it's later. Mr. Johnson left Cary singing our praises. His bank placed a very large sum of money at his disposal—a very large sum of money. Remember the comment about “it's only monopoly money?” Well, with this line of credit, you need not worry about passing go or landing on the free space.

Later in our story you will watch this same bank go “poof” as the federal banking regulators moved in, but by then it was up to you, me and all God's chillun to bail out of the mess along with many savings and loans. Today those loan officers are scattered about the landscape where they eat, drink and make merry. To my knowledge none went to jail. Can you say “screw the system boys and girls?” I thought you could.

We did not hear diddly squat from Ken Johnson for more than a year. One day his lawyers called ours. They respectfully requested that we release our collateral lien on the AM station that had accompanied the deal in Georgetown, Texas, so that Mr. Johnson could sell it. We were told it was too small to deal with.

Having no knowledge that Mr. Johnson was about to file suit on us, we did the decent thing and allowed him to sell the AM for \$150,000. The money disappeared like Batman into the cave. Shortly thereafter, our company was sued in Austin, Texas, by Mr. Johnson's company. He claimed that the broadcast signal of the FM station we had sold him was not as we represented it to him.

Forget that he insisted on building it himself and could not find his fanny with a flashlight. The fact was that we had no inkling of any problem or perceived problem. “Why would he do this?” we asked ourselves. The answer was fairly easy to reach when we looked at his situation.

Mr. Johnson had bought four “turnaround” stations that had to have new towers built to cover larger cities. The intent was to become rich and famous as all of us hoped to do. His four were bought within a very short period of time.

The markets were Austin, Texas; Raleigh, North Carolina; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Nashville, Tennessee. The idea was good, but it would require an extraordinary amount of broadcast savvy to pull it off. You remember the story of the football games with no helmet? Enough said.

When Mr. Johnson’s company built the new tower in Austin, they found that they had interference problems and they brought in the experts to take a look. Their consulting engineer wrote them a report that told them they had received from us exactly what we had promised. The signal covered “substantially all” of Austin, Texas, with a “city-grade” coverage as defined by the FCC. Notwithstanding that answer, Mr. Johnson filed suit against us.

The fact was that by now even the myopic officers at the, soon to be defunct, bank in New England could see the handwriting on the wall. Mr. Johnson needed desperately to cut his losses. He owed us \$4.2 million dollars and thought that this was a dandy place to cut. Apparently his law firm from Mobile, felt that a suit would send us into chaos and we’d cancel his debt. It was a miscalculation that led us into three years of battle in the Austin courts. We knew we could kick his tail if we could ever get to court, but they were pros at dragging the matter out.

Finally, when it could be stalled no longer and just before court, the lawyers from Mobile proposed a settlement. Mr. Johnson was broke, we were told, and even if we got a judgment against him, we would not collect. Meanwhile we'd run up additional costs of court and of course, they told us, they would then appeal. Why the Lord found it necessary to create rattlesnakes when we already had lawyers I will never know.

The talks began in earnest to settle in Austin and we came to terms. We would pay \$3.1 million for the right to take back the station that we had sold them. We would also have to cancel the \$4.2 million note that Johnson owed us. If we did not settle then, we could lose it all since, for the first and last time, I had agreed to subordinate our debt to the bank in New England's first position.

The reason I had done so was the incredible pressure exerted on us by the bank's representatives at the original signing with Capitol Broadcasting and Ken Johnson. I was reminded that the bank had made "some \$60 million" available for Mr. Johnson and he was a "wonderful operator." I was almost ashamed of myself when the bank ended the oration. When the pyramid collapsed and the bank went down the tubes, I was even more ashamed of myself.

When the settlement reached the bank's offices it was turned down. The same bank that had shamed me for not taking a second position for its borrower was now desperate to bail out from under his carcass. They would approve the Austin settlement ONLY if we would agree to buy another one of Mr. Johnson's properties. The bank knew that we had little choice and being the wonderful people that they were, they put the screws on us big time.

In looking around the horn at Mr. Johnson's other stations we were appalled. His Mobile property was fine and Birmingham was okay, but I sure was not going to live in, or frequently

visit, Mobile and had no desire to own anything in Birmingham. The Raleigh station would have to be the one since it was in an area I knew and understood.

There was little time to do “due diligence” and Johnson’s lawyers were covering tracks like a cat covers droppings. We signed a “Release” primarily pertaining to the lawsuit in Austin and that “Release” would come back to haunt us after we found the problems in Raleigh.

The Raleigh station was WTRG FM and was actually licensed to Rocky Mount, North Carolina. It had a 2,000-foot tower located in Middlesex, North Carolina, and that allowed it to “city-grade” Raleigh. The station was known in the market for changing formats at the drop of a hat. The station was lower than a midget with flat feet.

Johnson had represented that the station had “turned the corner” and was now set to bill in excess of \$200,000 per month. After they got our money and we were operating the station, we found a sales policy of two for ones that gave us an effective rate of \$25 per commercial. Inmates had been running this asylum and there was nothing to do but hose it down and rebuild.

THE CONSUMMATE CON GAME

The 2,000-foot tower belonged to us, but the land it sat upon was leased for fifty years from a Middlesex farmer. We began to hear rumblings of a problem with the landowner but Johnson's Mobile law firm continued to deny any problem and told us to stay away from the landowner. We did as they asked and that turned out to be a big mistake.

After closing, when we tried to replace the antenna on our tower, the landowner told us we were trespassing and ordered us off his land. We called Mobile and were told that the farmer was wrong and that there was no problem. We asked the Mobile law firm to come in and tell the landowner that news and they refused. We were left with no recourse but to sue the landowner so that we could get the antenna changed out.

The landowner countersued and produced letters, dating some six months before our closing with Johnson, that clearly showed that he had told the Mobile law firm of an alleged breach of the lease. Johnson and the Mobile firm were then included as defendants in the lawsuit. That suit drug out for three years. I told you those folks in Mobile are pros when it comes to making a long story longer.

The offshoot of it finally was that one of the Mobile law firm lawyers who held a degree from Duke, which he waved around like the second coming, put forth a defense that in effect admitted they were guilty of negligence. However, since it wasn't fraud, the judge should let them escape out the back under the release clause that was signed.

In a nutshell, the release covered things that had occurred prior to September 26, 1990. The tower problem came to our

attention in December of 1990. “Ah”, said the learned lawyer. “He had already been negligent and caused the problem before September 26 and when they found out about it in December, it was simply a consequence of a prior action.” Confused? So was the judge.

The judge of Nash County came to court confused. He didn't want us to have the jury trial we requested. He said the jury in Nash County was not smart enough to figure out the case. He then said it was too complicated to be tried in his court. Turns out he was right. The judge allowed himself to be run around like a pony at the carnival. He bought the “consequence” and negligence argument and got out of his courtroom so fast the hair on his fanny was singed.

I could appeal, but his law firm was counting on Johnson's judgment-proof status and I had been in litigation with these “gentlemen” for more than five years.

WTRG, which I had bought from Ken Johnson's company on September 26, 1990 to settle the suit in Austin, was a well concealed fiasco. You could write an entire book on the things they did wrong in Raleigh radio. The station had changed formats like most people change underwear. It had been playing an Oldies format ('50s-'60s-'70s) for a year, yet it had no identity. The call letters were used once an hour because it was felt that they had a bad connotation due to all the format changes. Why not just change the call letters? Duhhhh!

The fact is there was nothing wrong with the call letters. It was the dummies behind the call letters that were the problem. I inherited the staff that Johnson left.

A few years earlier, I had opened a corporate office from which to run my stations and had not been “in the trenches” since that time. I tried to work with the management at WTRG, but it was not to be. They just simply did not have a clue.

I finally fired the manager I had inherited. He had worked for me for about five months and was given three months severance. He shuffled off to Buffalo (true story) and griped about his ill treatment from us.

I chalked that one up to the old regime, but the next mistake was mine. I hired a manager out of New England who had sought the job with a vengeance. He had been out of work for several months, but he was honest and seemed capable. I knew I had made a mistake within three months. He worked hard and he gave it all he had, but he just did not have enough. The station was costing me almost \$100,000 every month right off the back pocket since the banks would lend nothing else on the station.

The question was whether we could get this station turned around financially before it broke me. I finally made the decision that if I was to go down, it would be at the helm of the ship. We closed the corporate office, moved the manager and I took over myself.

Running a radio station is not brain surgery. The art is to listen carefully to what the customers (listeners) wants and give it to them. Sounds simple, but it's not simple at all. Most radio stations are driven by input from advertisers and agency time buyers. That was true at WTRG.

I did not cater to agency time buyers and the bigger advertisers. As soon as you quit catering to them, giving them tickets to concerts and, in some cases all-inclusive vacations, they turn to others who are more than willing to supply their demands.

My approach has always been different and I used that tried and true approach with WTRG. Take the appeal to the listener. Hear what they say to you and respond. Once you have the masses behind you the rest is easy. Time buyers can no longer justify leaving you off the advertising buy.

This cannot be a haphazard approach and it has to be genuine. Your listeners can spot a phony every time. These are the same consumers who have people pitching them every con game and scam in the market. They are far more sophisticated than most in our business give them credit for and they will ferret out the steak from the fertilizer.



Tom Joyner's parents, John T. and Eva Joyner.



1310 Goldsboro St.
The home where Ashley Thomas Joyner was born.

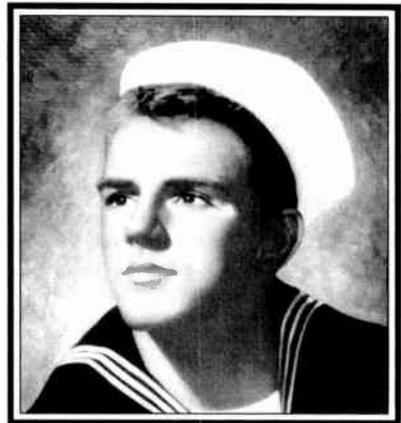


Tom and his brother Buddy.



Tom, #23, with the Elm City High varsity football team.

In 1960, Tom enlisted
in the United States Navy.

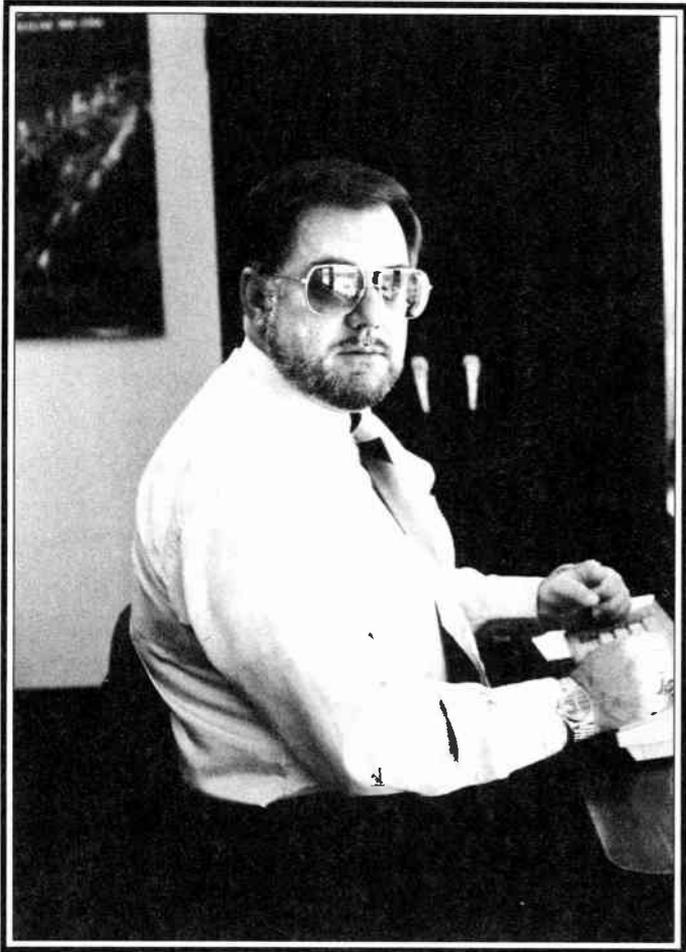




Ashley Thomas Joyner and his wife, Annette Evon (Tart).



Tom and Annette's daughter, Lisa Jane, at graduation from Meredith College in 1989.



Entertaining...Thought Provoking...
Informed...Opinionated, that's...

TOM JOYNER

HOW DO WE COUNT THE LISTENERS?

Audience ratings are the most sought after commodity in radio and television. If your audience is large enough and if you can prove the number of listeners you have, then the advertisers want to be on your station. The trouble is that no one has yet figured out a method that is sure or at least a method that can be used at a cost the industry can afford.

There have been many ratings gathering companies through the years from the days of Hooper through MediaAudit, Birch and AccuRatings, but the company that has retained the most believability is Arbitron. This is the Bible of the broadcast business and while they strive to perfect their results, Arbitron too comes up short and when it does, the innocent suffer the consequences.

In the past, Arbitron has used a heavy-handed approach when questioned about its methodology and its results. Realizing that most stations can't afford to sue them, Arbitron simply stalled and offered excuses. Only recently have they shown signs of being willing to consider meaningful changes.

Think of all the advertising dollars being pumped into the marketplace. Having been on the inside where I have dealt with stations, station rep firms and ad agency people, from planners to buyers, I can tell you that the process resembles "pin the tail on the donkey"—the person with the sharp pointed object is assigned the task of finding the target while blind-folded. If the stockholders of major companies could see the inner workings where these ad decisions are made, they would sell short and put their money into T-bills.

Advertising agencies go to great lengths to recruit new clients and they do so through hard work and creativity. So far, so good. Once the client is on board, and has approved the creative copy, the process begins to breakdown. Those empowered with the decision of which stations to buy in which markets often get marching orders such as “buy three deep in the top 100 markets.” The age demo desired is given with the most often requested demo being twenty-five to fifty-four. From that the “buying” begins.

There are many problems that are overlooked in the above scenario. First, twenty-five to fifty-four is not a valid demographic. It is, rather, a family reunion. It is archaic thinking. Today’s radio audience is far more targeted and all of us would be hard pressed to find a community where twenty-five-year-old listeners share musical tastes with fifty-four-year-old listeners.

The good news is that radio can deliver a highly targeted audience with cost efficiency. The bad news is that most, not all, agency buyers don’t take the time to understand how. They prefer to spend their time playing mind games in an effort to beat station rates down. Some give differing demos to competing stations, telling the Album Rock station that the desired demo is twenty-five to fifty-four in order to avoid paying for the stations strength in its key age demo which is lower. Then the Oldies station is told that the demo is eighteen to forty-nine which forces the Oldies station away from its core audience strength.

Any great radio station spends much time and money developing and keeping an audience that is fiercely loyal to it. Country music listeners and Oldies listeners are especially loyal to their favorite stations. Talk Radio is becoming that way. In contrast, there are several stations in all market sizes that never develop a constituency. In the trade we call them “scaven-

gers.” They never invest the funds, expertise or elbow grease necessary to put them in the top tier of market stations. All stations have somebody listening, but these stations have low audience shares year in and year out. They are always calling on time buyers with excuses and great plans for their next reincarnation.

Time buyers use these “scavenger” stations to “buy around” the market leaders who have invested time and money and therefore cannot prostitute their station rates. No heed is paid to the fact that leading stations generally have great sway with their listeners and greatly influence the decisions of those listeners at shopping time. Agency time buyers have no concept of quality, only quantity, and the client bears the brunt of these activities.

A typical call to WTRG would find our national representatives repeating the marching orders that they had been handed when calling upon an agency with an upcoming buy in Raleigh-Durham. First, a broad demo is called for to minimize our effectiveness. Next, the rep tells us of an arbitrary “Cost Per Point” that the agency time buyer is willing to pay.

This CPP is a figment of the buyer’s imagination with no bearing on reality. It is often arrived at by simply lying to all market stations about what the competitor is willing to sell its ads for. This is coupled with a suggestion that they can “buy around you” by patching together a few of these “scavenger” stations that will sell for whatever the traffic will bear, including only one or two leading stations.

Again, no thought is given to the quality of the audience, the fact that most “scavenger” stations’ listeners tune in and out and “share time” with the leading stations. This process is a disaster and the agency eventually blames “radio” for not delivering the desired results.

In recent years we have seen activity pick up concerning agency “shakedowns.” The station receives a call in which it is told that the agency needs “door prizes.”

What began with a call for T-shirts and caps, perhaps a few CDs, has blossomed into calls for TV sets, airline tickets and Caribbean vacations. The station that resists such practices finds itself without a “good relationship” with the agency.

Could this really be happening? Consider a small station in Texas that I managed some years ago. I received a call from a gentleman with BBD&O in Cincinnati asking if I would meet with him at the San Antonio airport. Does a rooster regret courtship? I had a small AM station in a town of 12,000 people in the hill country of Texas. We did not get many passes at national business. I was at the appointed spot at the appointed time.

The “gentleman” told me that BBD&O was having a meeting of auto dealers and needed door prizes. He told me that if I got him a TV set of specified size and make, he’d get me a sizable order for my station. I was told that a Boerne, Texas, Dodge dealer had “mucho” co-op dollars that he had not used and the gentleman before me was free to use it. I delivered the TV set and he gave me several thousand dollars worth of orders.

The calls were repeated over several months with different “door prizes” needed and an advertising order would always follow. It culminated with a call for a pony cart, saddle and bridle. Thousands of dollars in Dodge money was spent on my little station (quite a ways from Boerne).

Now Mama didn’t raise a fool and I knew after the first request that these were “more prizes” and not “door prizes,” but I went along with the game.

I don’t suggest that the practice is or is not as blatant now, but I’ve never wanted to know what goes into sausage and I

don't find many advertising companies looking to know what goes into their agencies' buying decisions. Am I upset about it? Damn right I'm upset about it. I love radio and I hate to see it prostituted. It is not in the interest of the product, the advertiser, the agency or the radio station.

Will it end soon? It will end when hell freezes over or when some company CEO earns his/her pay by following the ad money through the advertising tunnel.

In any event, it did not take me long to realize that Arbitron's methodology was off base in Raleigh-Durham. Half of my audience would disappear in each summer and winter rating book. I'd have the listener ratings back in spring and fall, but this fluctuation gave the ad community all that it needed to kick our ass from pillar to post. They did so with a vengeance.

Few in the ad community were willing to see the obvious and acknowledge that many thousands of WTRG's station listeners don't simply disappear every three months. My back was against the wall. My friendly banker was snarling at me even though I was still within my interest-only grace period and had been making those payments to the bank with funds from my personal accounts in his bank.

First I commissioned a professor from the University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler School of Business to undertake a research project detailing the problems with Arbitron's methodology in our market. It was costly and I paid it from personal funds. Still my bank sat there like a wounded vulture ready to pounce. The study showed serious problems for WTRG with Arbitron and pointed out ways to correct the inadequacies. So far, I had played by the silly rules that the powers that be say we should play by and all I had received was a beating. I had proof that nobody wanted to acknowledge.

What happened next changed the face of radio in Raleigh-Durham. My competitors raced forth to say that it was a well-planned, well-executed bit of promotion. In fact, it was a spur-of-the-moment decision born out of desperation and executed much like a rodeo bull rider—I jumped on, held on for dear life and tried to keep the damn thing inside the corral. The results offer proof positive about my assertions concerning the loyalty of a great station's listeners.

DUELING WITH THE (ARBITRON) DEVIL

My program director, Randy Bliss, was in my office as we reviewed the Arbitron roller coaster of the past eighteen months. It was obvious that WTRG could not survive unless we could break through the mystique of Arbitron and prove that we had enough listeners to place us in the top three stations of the twenty-five to fifty-four-year-old demographic in our market.

Our competitors were especially vicious in their attacks against us, using Arbitron to discredit our performance. They did not want our incredible audience growth recognized. Conversely, Arbitron ties a station's hands with their self-serving rules so that it's almost impossible to defend yourself. You cannot mention Arbitron or surveys. You cannot ask the listeners to gather petitions or write to you because Arbitron uses a written diary method for gathering its research and any mention of writing something down with your call letters brings penalties from Arbitron.

After age thirty, radio listeners are concerned with jobs and family and don't understand the importance of participating when Arbitron calls them. They must agree to keep a diary of their listening habits for a week and most don't take the time to follow-through. This means that those with lesser incomes and with time on their hands more often accept the Arbitron invitation to participate. This hurts Oldies stations and News/Talk stations greatly because their audience is composed primarily of hard-working, family oriented people and they go underreported.

It is important for people to respond to Arbitron's requests to fill out diaries and report their listening habits. The economic viability of radio stations is directly tied to Arbitron ratings. Say YES when Arbitron calls.

We found that our listeners were telling Arbitron they were too busy. We had to get through to our listeners to make them understand that this was important. Arbitron had its head in the sand and would not recognize this weakness in their system.

Arbitron had you coming and going and you paid for the privilege. Arbitron, and its reluctance to deal with a very real problem in our market, was threatening me with bankruptcy and threatening the livelihood of some twenty-five employees and their dependents. I could not allow that to happen.

I went to the WTRG control room and commandeered the microphone. I did my dead level best not to violate Arbitron's rules but I did what I had to do. We did not mention Arbitron. We told our listeners that "surveys" were being shown in the marketplace by our competitors that made our advertisers believe that "one half of you" (our audience) disappears every summer and winter. If that is true, we said, we cannot continue in the Oldies format. Unless our listeners are there, consistently and in great numbers as we believe them to be, then WTRG simply cannot continue in this format.

I told the audience that we stood for family values on WTRG, that we took controversial stands editorially and that we were the one station that they could tune to with their families, in the car, and not be embarrassed by what they heard. "If that is important to you," I said, "then we've got to hear from you and there is precious little time." I gave our phone number and our fax number and I told listeners that I had done all that I could do. The decision was up to them.

What happened next can only be described as a miracle. Calls began to pour in. The fax machine cranked up and would not stop. We had installed a twenty-four-line phone system that allowed callers to register concerns automatically long before this issue was envisioned. Still we had to hire operators and press our people into overtime. The fax machine burned out and we had to add more to handle the load.

I went back on air periodically to report our progress, and over a period of a few days, we registered almost 200,000 names, addresses and phone numbers of people who listened to WTRG and were willing to get involved to keep it. These people were livid that something they loved such as Oldies 100.7 could be lost because some “half-assed outfit” reported them missing every three months. I have never seen anything like this outpouring in thirty-one years in radio. The only thing that came close, was later in 1993, when we again marshaled our listeners behind Governor Jim Hunt in his call for the legislature to convene in special session to deal with the crime problem in North Carolina.

Armed with a suitcase full of faxes and letters, I went to New York to meet with Arbitron. They were clearly stunned at the results before them that could not be denied. To their credit, they sent people to Raleigh to review our other responses and promised to make changes.

On the other side of the ledger, Arbitron buckled under to a few of our competitors who filed complaints about what we had done. In the next rating book we were given a “Page 5B notice” which alerts advertising agencies that something happened out of the ordinary in the just-published rating book. It gave a capsule version of what happened that did not tell the whole story, but then that was the purpose of those who complained. They had to discredit the new audience figures because WTRG was now the number one station among listen-

ers ages twenty-five to fifty-four in Raleigh-Durham according to Arbitron.

Our competitors hit the streets with a fever. They claimed that we had “hyped” the ratings book. They claimed that the figures were not real. They said it was just a lot of radio listeners who listen to THEIR stations but “voted for Joyner’s” out of sympathy for the station’s “desperate pleas.” I was now the center of their fury because they had discovered that we had been building a vast constituency while they thought they had us under control.

To be fair, not everyone participated in the assault. Don Curtis at WQDR/WPTF kept his troops on the sidelines. The main players in the assault were WRAL FM, WYLT FM and WRDU FM.

I could better understand WRDU since its ratings had been fading like a cheap shirt over several rating books. While it was owned by two men that I genuinely liked, its manager was possessed. He ran screaming into the night proclaiming this great Arbitron injustice.

I let him run like a fly fisherman eyes a rainbow trout. I knew that he would ultimately step over the line and allow me to renew my campaign with my listeners. There is just so much mileage that can be gained when the enemy is some monolithic company (Arbitron) in New York that the listener cannot actually see. It is another matter altogether when the enemy manifests itself in the local marketplace for all to see.

My advertising representative firm called from New York with news in an effort to discredit us with national advertising agencies, with which WRDU had a “relationship.” They had fired off a letter on WRDU letterhead to their New York agency for distribution all over America. In it they accused me of “David Duke-like tactics.” Thank you very much. I now had

a local target for my supporters to concentrate on and we went back on air.

I read the letter on air with particular emphasis on the “David Duke-like” pronouncement. The faxes and calls intensified.

Having said all this, let me hasten to add, that the WRDU manager is a fierce competitor. He is a good competitor and I believe that today he would react differently than he did at that time. His back was also against the wall and he could see the tide of local ratings turning against him.

WRAL was another matter. Its owner, Jim Goodmon, didn’t need to get into the fray. WRAL had suffered through some recent rating books that were from bad to worse, but it was a heritage station whose major problem was a simple lack of direction. Jim Goodmon is a nice man. He does good things for his community, but he is not focused on radio since he has varied interests.

What really bothered me about WRAL’s involvement with my Arbitron episode was Jim’s condescending attitude. He told me that he would “never have done such a thing” as go on air with hype like I did. Perhaps not, but my back was against the wall and Arbitron was very close to sucking all of the life-blood out of me. All that I had worked for and accumulated was at risk. Jim has never faced that kind of ultimate pressure. The family fortune sustains him. With all due respect, Jim Goodmon could not begin to understand my motivations or intent. I did nothing wrong, legally or morally, I simply beat Arbitron at its own game. After this, Arbitron changed rules again to close off the avenue that I had opened.

WRAL was my biggest problem. Its rate integrity had gone from rock solid in the ‘70s and early ‘80s to impotency in the ‘90s. How many times did I hear time buyers say, “Why,

I can buy WRAL for a lot less than WTRG is asking.” Jim had heritage. I had a fluctuating Arbitron debacle.

How easy was it then for Jim Goodmon to tell me that he would never hype like we did on air? I like Jim, I genuinely like Jim, but it was just a few short months later when his TV station, WRAL, staged a major \$100,000 giveaway game to hype their ratings. Their competitor, WTVD, cried foul and the WRAL manager smugly pointed out that all’s fair in love and war.

In November of 1994, Jim suffered a heart attack and I debated leaving out the entire episode above. Thankfully, he is recovering nicely and, as I said, I genuinely like the man. He’s a major player in this episode and it deserves to stay in the book.

WTRG’s Arbitron numbers stayed in the top three from that point forward. Those who proclaimed our popularity a “fluke” after our on-air performance came to eat their words. Agencies that denied us advertising based on what our competitors told them that we had said, rather than what we actually said, came to rue the day.

I had said when I bought WTRG, just a step from bankruptcy some three years earlier, that there was a ten-percent audience share in Arbitron in the twenty-five to fifty-four demographic for an Oldies station that was full service—an Oldies station that delivered quality news and editorials—a station that said what it meant and took a stand. I knew the listeners were there, Arbitron came to know it as well. Later when I sold the station to its present owner my last Arbitron audience figure was 9.8 percent of the twenty-five to fifty-four demo. I was off two tenths of a percent—so I’m not perfect.

A TIME TO HOLD ‘EM

A TIME TO FOLD ‘EM

Sometime in late October of 1993, Carl Venters and Jack McCarthy called me and asked for a luncheon meeting. Carl and Jack owned WRDU and I knew that their bank had been up their colon to the navel. They used the same bank that I used.

I met with them and they were very candid with me. You can appreciate this only if you understand that radio and television people, movie people as well, never admit a problem. It's all kissy kissy, love ya babe in meetings. In this one, they came flat out and told me that the bank was pressuring them and that they were negotiating with a potential buyer for their company. They wanted to know if I would be interested in selling as well.

The FCC had made another sweeping decision and this one would allow one owner to hold a license on two FMs in the same market. It was called “duopoly” and it was destined to change radio forever.

I realized that under this duopoly umbrella it would be necessary for me to either buy another station to remain competitive or to sell the one I had. I told them that I would be receptive to an offer from their buyer. That buyer turned out to be Hicks Muse & Company from Dallas, Texas, along with their operator, Owen Weber.

We began talking at \$7,750,000 and I watched as they devoured Carl and Jack's company, Voyager Communications. I also watched as they ground Jack and Carl up like bad beef

in the negotiations due to their knowledge of the bank's ultimatums to Voyager. I did not blame Hicks Muse but rather the bank for hanging their borrowers out to dry.

Once Voyager had been gobbled up, I knew that Hicks Muse (they bought under HMW, Inc.) needed WTRG. WRDU was on a downward spiral while WTRG was on a serious upward trend and my cash flow was growing. I held fast until the price reached \$8,050,000 plus a non-compete fee of \$950,000 and then I sold.

I left WTRG with a 9.8 percent share of adults twenty-five to fifty-four in Arbitron and with record billings. I don't think the station will approach those ratings again unless they put back what they dismantled from our programming. Since February of 1993, the WTRG ratings have fallen by nearly one half.

THE ART OF THE DEAL

When I mentioned to some of my contemporaries that I was writing this book they first wanted to know how much about them I planned to reveal. Secondly they asked if I would go into some detail about the deals we made in the flurry of “move ins.” I assured them that this book would unveil a few warts, but it was not being done to spear anyone unnecessarily. As for the deals, I would run through them and those who lost interest could skip ahead.

Our experience with the Cleveland, Tennessee, station that we moved in to cover Chattanooga, as well as Cleveland, led us to look to the future. What we saw told us that the window of opportunity was short and that once the industry understood the details of the process, it would revert to the “monkey see, monkey do” scenario.

At this early point, the industry did not understand what was about to take place and the players were virtually nonexistent. Large media corporations were controlled by people who were concerned more about covering their keisters than they were about increasing profits and so they would sit on the sidelines. After someone else took all of the risk, these corporate moguls would reach down and pay top dollar for the property. They were not willing to venture capital at risk and, therefore, the stockholders would be shortchanged. The moguls would retain their position at the top however and that was their bottom line.

With the “big dogs” on the sidelines the opportunities were multiplied. The argument is made that these moguls had a responsibility to protect their assets and not take risks.

The point is well made except that there was little or no risk involved, especially in the earlier move ins. Show me a company unwilling to take even the slightest calculated risk and I'll show you a company whose stock should be restricted to widows or widowers of considerable age. No, it would have meant that the moguls would have to make a decision in front of God and everybody and this they were not about to do.

While getting the Tennessee station moved, I was given the opportunity to pick up the small 3,000 watt FM in Kinston, North Carolina. It's in the Coastal Carolina market and could cover but a portion of this nine-county metro, but again the opportunity was quick and unique. The station programmed to a black constituency and although there were 100,000 watt FMs beating each other up in competing formats, none of them wanted to be the first major FM devoted to Urban. They were paralyzed with fear of advertiser and agency backlash against the format.

I could feel that this little station would be protected in its format for eighteen to twenty-four months. So we bought it knowing that we had a definite timetable to get in, realize its peak potential and get out.

In the time that we owned the Kinston station, it became the highest rated FM in the nation programmed Urban. It was at its peak when we sold it to Caravelle some twenty months after purchasing it. The profit was not monumental but \$300,000 here, \$300,000 there, and pretty soon it's real money.

While getting the Kinston property in gear, I found an AM/FM combination licensed to Santa Fe, New Mexico. The FM was on a short pole less than 200-feet high and totally undeveloped. My engineering told me that it could move onto a nearby mountain and "city-grade" not only Santa Fe, but Albuquerque as well. The "experts" guffawed at the idea that

this station could cover that distance since it was fifty miles and “normal” city-grade would not reach it. “Normal” did not apply here. This was a mountain tower site and height is everything with FM radio. Again, the “experts” were living in the past.

I purchased it for \$950,000 and planned the move. As with every station we bought, I tested the water to see if a buyer wanted the property more than I did and one popped up. The price was \$1,600,000 as is and we sold. The buyers were two good old boys from Texas and they spread the word that we had been slickered. My reply? “Please don’t throw me in that briar patch no mo.”

Even as the Santa Fe station was being bought, I came upon a small deal in Gulfport, Mississippi. It would not be a barn burner, but it would pay the electrical bill. I made the purchase of this 3,000 watt FM and companion AM daytimer and almost immediately sold the contract to Caravelle. The gain was a little over \$100,000 but in real time it had taken me minutes to get it done.

Many hours were spent over my road atlas with pencils and a ruler as I searched from state to state comparing stations which appeared in *Broadcasting Magazine* with underdeveloped signals to the geography around those stations.

The rule of thumb I used was that a 100,000 watt FM on a 984-foot tower could city-grade approximately thirty-one miles. The next question was whether or not after relocating twenty-five to twenty-eight miles away from its current location, was there a larger city that could be covered as well from the new tower? With each station we discovered, we applied the same rules. We never bought a single station that I was not prepared to operate unless a buyer wanted it more than we did. That set us apart from those who entered the field of play later simply to buy and sell with no operating expertise. They had

the added pressure of HAVING to sell. I did not and the lack of sweat on my brow as I negotiated with a purchaser made my job easier.

A few stations that I uncovered in my research were simply not for sale. We made the initial contacts and went on ahead without staying to haggle. There were so many deals to be done and so little time before the brethren would awake and shout “me too.”

I got a call from George Otwell about a station in Eden, North Carolina, that might have potential as a move in to Greensboro. George is an excellent broker and I value his opinion greatly, but brokers did not spend the money or the time to engineer these move-in properties and I can't say that I blame them. They simply reported the availability of the station and wondered about a possible move in.

I met with Gene and Mary Ann Bohi, the sellers, and we arrived at a sale price of \$1,000,000. It was a premium for Eden, North Carolina, and the risk of the move was mine. After running the engineering and finding a suitable building site, I sold the contract to the Colonial Company for \$2,400,000. Colonial had bought my Cleveland/Chattanooga station as well. When the sale price was announced, how many times do you guess the Bohi's called me to gripe? Not one time. In fact, I went to their home to tell them of the sale so that they would not hear about it second-hand. I felt I owed that to them. These are classy people. They got the price that they asked for and they never looked back. I saw to it that an extra \$50,000 went to Gene and Mary Ann at closing.

A Washington engineer I used called me to tell me I should look at an FM in Whiteville, North Carolina, that he felt could be engineered to cover Wilmington. There were, even then, more radio stations serving Wilmington, North Carolina, than there are fingerprints on Cher's caboose and I had no interest.

I did pull out my atlas though to take a look at Whiteville. Moments later I called the engineer back. "Why can't it move to Myrtle Beach," I asked. "It could," he said.

I began to talk with the three people who owned the station. One was an elderly gentleman and his son. The other was a newspaperman. The FM was on a pole so low to the ground that Mickey Rooney would have to duck down to get under it. It was burning grass within a ten mile radius and the signal was going nowhere. The owners did not want to go into debt to improve the station as the FCC was demanding and they did not want it down-graded in class as the FCC was set to do. So they decided to sell, if the price was right.

By now I had determined that the station could move up to city-grade Fayetteville, North Carolina, and Fayetteville was not over-radioed. Also, Fayetteville was the home of Fort Bragg and Pope AFB. To add to my delirium, I found that the number one station in Fayetteville was a 3,000 watt FM licensed to Dunn. It was programmed Urban. I'm afraid I drooled on my best shirt.

A bargain was tentatively struck for me to pay the sellers \$1,000,000 for the station. Now folks, think about it. The station was almost a toy and it was sitting in a town smaller than a banker's heart. It had no cash flow to speak of and its value was in a possible move of the tower which may or may not be allowed. The sellers of course knew nothing of a possible move. They had to figure that this dummy sitting before them had been sent by a grateful God to reward them for all of their life's work.

Why then do I say a bargain was tentatively struck? Certainly not because I was waffling, but because the sellers called to tell me that they were perplexed. We had no contract, they reminded me, and some fella out of Florence, South Carolina, had just come in and offered them \$1,200,000.

I set my meeting with the sellers for a late Friday afternoon. I was not prepared to play “how high can you go” with somebody who had just discovered enough about this move in business to be dangerous. I met with the sellers and offered a firm and absolute last offer of \$1,300,000. The catch was that I had to have an answer by 6:00 P.M. the next day. I told you that Mama did not raise a fool and I had checked out my rival. He was a nice guy with no money. His backer was a soft drink executive who loved to fish. I found out that the exec would be on a deep-sea fishing trip that would not return to dock until Sunday. Thus the deadline that I knew they could not meet.

My sellers sweated it out while the rival buyer moved hell and half of Georgia trying to contact Senor Soda Pop who was deep at sea. At 5:50 P.M. on Saturday, Mr. Leder called to accept my offer. The man from South Carolina had cost me \$300,000, but I knew I would make it back. The rival and his backer were graduates of the University of South Carolina. I was a high school dropout who donated heavily to the University of North Carolina. We were Tar Heels, they were Gamecocks. You might say—we do chicken right.

There were beginning to be rumbles throughout the industry about the potential of move ins and a few people were beginning to try to come up to speed. I knew that time was running out on the real bargains to be had. We had a handful that did not pan out because somebody got into the middle and screwed it up.

I found an FM in Pryor, Oklahoma, and almost had it bought when Shamrock suddenly entered the picture. The station had a local company in Tulsa handling its sale because the court was involved. That local company told us that our offer would be acceptable but reneged when Shamrock got involved. When what amounted to an auction was proposed,

I knew that we had other fish to fry and precious little time to fry them. With that in mind, we offered to let Shamrock have the deal for what amounted to a finder's fee for us. They declined and the bidding began. We took it as far as we felt the deal was worth and then let Shamrock have it.

The bottom line is that Shamrock paid several hundred thousand dollars more than they would have paid under our offer for a station that has never really made it in Tulsa. Shamrock is an excellent company run by very nice people but they made "corporate decisions" rather than common sense ones and it cost them.

Tom Gammon, a broker, had called my friend George Beasley about an FM in Hammond, Louisiana, and George called me. Gammon thought that the station could be moved to cover Baton Rouge. George had not gotten into the move-in business at that point and so he called me. Gammon pointed out that time was the major factor in this one because he had reason to believe that the seller, Ron Strother, had a letter of intent on its way to him by regular mail. The offer was for \$1,750,000 and the potential buyer was Confer-Rothfuss.

I was very interested, but there was a problem with the timing of it. It was Friday and my wife and I, along with George and his wife, were set to leave on a cruise ship from Miami on Sunday. It was to be a meeting of the Beasley company managers and I had agreed to be one of the speakers.

George and I had a mutual attorney, Gregg Skall. Gregg and his wife Monte were also going on the cruise. There was no time to visit with Ron Strother in Hammond. I had hastily poured over the engineering to determine that the move could be made to encompass Baton Rouge, but this would not wait until our cruise ended because of the Confer-Rothfuss offer that was in the mail.

I called Gammon and asked him to see if the seller and his wife would come to Miami for the weekend at our expense to discuss the station. Anything to get the seller away from his mailbox and allow us time to speak with him. Strother agreed to the free weekend in Miami and we met in the Eastern Airlines conference room at the airport on Sunday morning. Time was so short that we sent our wives on to the cruise ship with instructions to board and sail if we did not make it. We told them we'd meet them at the first stop if necessary. We also asked them to stay away from calypso dancers with open shirts. They agreed to go but never actually agreed to the part about the dancers, so we pushed on as rapidly as possible.

A deal was struck for \$1,800,000 and Gregg Skall put the agreement together by hand on a legal pad. A binder check was given to the seller and we bolted for the ship, arriving just before it left port. There had not been a half hour to spare but the deal was done.

When we arrived back from the cruise, I took a call from George Otwell on behalf of Kirby Confer and Paul Rothfuss. They were most disappointed that they had not been able to get the Hammond station. I told George that we were thrilled with the station and that we agreed with Kirby and Paul that Baton Rouge was a desirable market. "Would you consider selling it to Kirby and Paul?" George asked me. I answered with a question of my own which had to do with a bear, a dense forest and toiletry. A meeting was set in Goldsboro for the following week.

I had never met Kirby Confer or Paul Rothfuss but I knew of them through their success in the business. Each had his unique strengths and I liked them from that very first meeting. We met in the Beasley offices and got right to the subject at hand.

They wanted to buy the Hammond FM, but we had to understand that they had thought they had a deal on it for \$1,750,000. While they were willing to pay us \$50,000 to \$100,000 over the amount we had paid for the station, surely that was enough. I told them how much we appreciated humor and we moved on to the “gnashing of teeth.”

A deal was struck whereby Confer-Rothfuss would pay us \$2,400,000 for our contract in Hammond. We signed the deal, shook hands and they left. I have never had reason to change my initial read on either of the gentlemen. I like them still.

Neither Gorge Beasley nor I thought we should tell Ron Strother of this development by phone or while he was completely sober. So we flew down to Hammond and took Ron and his partner to dinner. Far into the Jack Daniels and Wild Turkey we told them the names of the new owners of the station who would be subject to FCC approval. They reacted as gentlemen, but I do recall Ron suggesting that we should cover dinner and drinks. With that they asked that our waiter be issued tennis shoes and track shorts for the long night ahead. We left Louisiana with a dinner check the size of Chapel Hill.

During this time I had several balls in the air at any one time. The new tower was coming along well in Fayetteville and speculation as to our format was all over the road. I had secured the land lease for the new tower by repeatedly visiting with an older gentleman farmer. My background around farms in North Carolina came in handy because he was wary of strangers. The deal was cemented when I sat through the story of his gallbladder operation and viewed the stones encased in a mayonnaise jar without losing my lunch.

Hickory, North Carolina, had always been a market that intrigued me. It was far enough from Charlotte to be its own market and it was not over-radioed. Over the years, I had

made offers to buy an FM owned there by the Long family—as had others—but had been rebuffed.

I made yet another attempt to buy the station and this time Jeff Long was more receptive due to the FCC's mandate concerning upgrading facilities that were underpower. I used a broker as the go-between and a deal was struck for me to buy the FM for \$2,400,000. As yet, I had not needed to venture to Hickory and concluded the deal by phone and overnight mail.

It was my habit, when checking the engineering capability of a station that I was considering as a move in to check for any other stations that might also move in later. I knew that in all likelihood I would have to sign a non-compete with anyone buying a move in from me. Since I always bought with the assumption that I would operate the station, I wanted to know what was potentially on the horizon.

In the instance of Hickory, I could see that the Charlotte market, where we intended to move, was in for at least five more move ins and I knew that the available market revenues would be overwhelmed. It was my estimate at the time that Charlotte would be five years growing into the number of radio stations that it would soon have serving it.

As it turned out, I underestimated that impact by at least five years. The market is still trying to recover from the onslaught of move in stations that it absorbed.

As with all move ins that we contracted to buy, I again tested the market to see if there was a buyer out there who wanted the station more than I did and the answer was not long in coming. Bernie Mann surfaced through the broker, Bruce Houston, and we began a long and painful negotiation. Bernie had not done move ins either and wanted all sorts of guarantees. Finally I told Bruce to make sure that Bernie knew that Sears gave guarantees, but had no stations to sell.

The element of time, a pot and urination were discussed. It was at this moment that Confer-Rothfuss entered my life again and I can attest to the fact that Kirby and Paul are fast learners. Before the mouse could get back down the clock, a deal had been struck for them to pay me \$4,400,000 for the contract in Hickory. My seller, Jeff Long, and I had never met and we did not meet until the closing. I closed with my seller in the morning and closed with my buyer that afternoon. I had not been to Hickory; I had never seen the station.

I was told that Bernie Mann had gotten a trifle miffed at me for losing out on the station. I hoped not, but as you can see this was no time for the timid to be in the race. A fortune could be won or lost in the twinkling of an eye.

I do not mask my ire today when I think of those who sat on the sidelines or entered the move-in fray in its last stages and yet chose to find fault with those of us who had the greatest success. All the while that I was buying and selling these move ins, I was proclaiming to all who would listen that our business had entered a period of insanity. As the prices skyrocketed and bankers fed the frenzy with 125 percent loans, I went out of my way to do interviews in industry magazines and to appear on panels at the NAB where I spoke out about the insanity I was seeing.

In *Radio Only* I said “the emperor has no clothes” when speaking of the escalating prices being paid for stations. Was I defensive about it? Damn right I was defensive about it. I spent almost all of my adult life in radio and I knew that the prices being paid for these stations was lunacy. Fueled by the availability of funding, buyers felt that the bankers had directors who were the icons of industry. If these people thought that the price was right, then who are we to argue?

I would have been a fool not to understand what was happening better than most, not to understand that these move ins

were going to happen with or without me and yet be a good little boy and let those who had traditionally held all the marbles control the game. Yet pious little people in our industry attacked those of us, me in particular, as just “buyers and sellers.” I was in this business for eighteen years before I sold my first station. I will put my operational expertise up against the best in this industry and I have done that many times. But when the rules change and those around me are scratching themselves trying to find dry land, I am not about to join them.

Thirty days before we put Fayetteville on the air, I ordered a 200-plus showing of billboards with the logo “FOXY 99...is coming.” Still the market veterans pondered what my format would be as I built the studios.

The 3,000 watt FM stations owners were convinced that I would not go after the black audience because, after all, “he has a major FM station and he won’t waste that signal in that format.” That had been the prevailing wisdom in eastern North Carolina for years. The “black format” had been relegated to AM stations and small power FM’s that had no other place to go. I did not consider the format flawed. I knew that the African-American market was a vast one and that Fayetteville was ready for an “uptown urban station.”

I recruited the staff for WZFX (FOXY 99) three weeks before we went on air. I hand picked each person and set up the sales and programming myself. I did not want anyone with preconceived ideas about the urban format to poison the water for us. I would be the first general manager the station would have even though it kept me away from my family throughout the week. I was in Fayetteville by 8:00 A.M. on Monday morning and stayed there until late Friday evening.

Our competitor, D-103, made all the right moves, said all the right things and was owned partially by a white urban consultant. What they did not have was commitment and heart.

Saying all the right things only sets you up for the audience to evaluate. D-103 said it, FOXY 99 DID it. We blew them away by the second book. WZFX went on to become the highest rated urban FM in America.

As I was pushing WZFX to be all that it could be, I came across an FM in Martinsville, Virginia, that could move onto a mountaintop and cover Roanoke-Lynchburg. This would be no easy task as the mountain was as rugged as a buzz saw and populated by moonshiners who had no sense of humor. We were not helped when the Franklin County, Virginia, board decided to get involved with the “beautification” of the mountain.

Nobody had cared that there were moonshiners up the wazoo in these hills, but as soon as we began building something, here came the locals with demands for reseeding and replanting. It cost us thousands of dollars and valuable time, but we fulfilled each request made of us. They finally went away.

Introducing a new station into a community is difficult at best. The competitors run hither and yon pompously proclaiming that the new station is an interloper.

In our case, the knock was that we were a “little Martinsville station” trying to come into Roanoke. It was at this time that I discovered that WROV AM was for sale. Bert Levine had made WROV AM into a giant in the days when AM was king. It enjoyed a great reputation in Roanoke and had been slipping away slowly as AM’s luster dimmed.

I found that I could buy WROV AM including its land and studio building for \$250,000. I really didn’t need the AM station, but by buying it, we gained a renowned studio and several acres of land in downtown Roanoke. This was arguably worth the purchase price. We also gained instant entree

into the marketplace as a local station, WROV FM. The local paper headlined, "WROV finally has an FM."

Since WROV AM was formatted Oldies, WROV FM filled the Album Oriented Rock (AOR) niche that had been open for too long. It was an instant success.

Meanwhile I had discovered an FM that was mired deep in its own doo doo down in New Bern, North Carolina. This station was on a 600-foot tower, which was as far east as the ocean would allow. With the market, Coastal Carolina, comprised of nine counties, this FM could not compete. To complicate matters it was programmed Country against George Beasley's powerhouse, WRNS.

The owner, was determined to avoid the obvious niche in the market, urban. Here was a format hole large enough to drive a semi through with six Teamsters hanging off the sides. Yet, he persisted in pretending that it did not exist. I used the broker, Charles Giddens, to ferret this one out for me.

Charles Giddens is an excellent broker and had been a friend of mine for many years. I learned to trust him and his judgment over a long period of time. It was Charles who was in the middle of the power play that Lowry Mays tried to run on me in Louisville.

The deal for New Bern's WAZZ was struck at \$1,500,000 and we set about to build a new 1,000-foot tower in the middle of the market. We also changed the call sign to WIKS (KISS 102) and prepared to market it.

You will remember that I had sold a 3,000 watt urban station in this market to Caravelle some three years earlier and signed a three-year non-compete. The non-compete period was up. As I prepared to buy this new station, I contacted the principals of Caravelle and told them that I was coming back in the urban format with 100,000 watts. I encouraged them to get out of the format or out of their station before I got KISS

102 underway. To their credit, they knew I was serious and that I was about to come back and blow their hat into the creek. They set about to sell their station .

Enter David Luther of Danville, Virginia. David had a highly successful AM/FM combination in Danville. The AM was still viable because the market he was in was under-radioed and because the AM had never been allowed to falter. It was David's thinking that he could resuscitate the local AM that came along with Caravelle's urban FM. Good luck. I had tried the same thing when I had that combo and it would be easier to get Madonna not to talk ugly than to resuscitate an AM that has begun its downward slide. In any event, his company bought WQDW FM and WISP AM from Caravelle just before I came to town with KISS FM.

When WIKS (KISS 102) came on the air, it was second only to a sonic boom in Coastal Carolina. Radios were switched so fast that lint was sucked from navels. This FM now became the highest-rated urban FM in America. Why broadcasters get caught up in what they want to program rather than what the market needs is beyond me.

The next thing I heard was that David Luther was suing Caravelle for not telling him that my FM was on the way. It ground on through the legal system for quite awhile. In the meantime, WIKS had blown away the competition.

When I say that I can't understand why broadcasters program what they want to hear rather than what the market needs, I am cognizant of the fact that there is a tremendous bias against the black format, especially in the most rural areas. Retailers are dependent on the black consumer in those areas but that does not change their prejudice.

With major black powerhouses in Fayetteville and New Bern I began to think of a regional network of stations in this format. It was about this time that I came across an FM run-

ning far underpower in South Hill, Virginia. It had been purchased by people from Georgia and they had decided that it could not move south because that would cross the North Carolina state line. They then looked at Danville, Virginia, as a market to move toward.

I contacted the owners. They knew that I wanted to move the station near enough to Raleigh-Durham to impact that market, but their research had told them that it was not possible. They smiled smugly, never once alerting me to any reason why the station could not move south. Again, here was the ultimate dummy sent by a grateful God to reward them for their labors. We settled on \$1,800,000 and they tap danced all the way back to Georgia.

A radio station enjoys a license from the federal government and therefore it does not matter whether or not a tower is moved across a state line. We engineered a new tower just out of Oxford, North Carolina, and began to build. The Georgia seller screamed foul and wanted more money. It gave me a great deal of pleasure to suggest what he could do, but I don't think he ever did it since I noticed no extra breeze in that region of my anatomy and no excess moisture.

At that time Raleigh-Durham's urban audience was under the spell of a 3,000 watt FM located in Durham. It covered a portion of the market, but fell short of the entire market.

Just as we were preparing to come on air that station was sold to a very nice gentleman from New York named Phil Marella. Phil had enjoyed success in TV and had managed to put together Wall Street money to build a radio chain. They paid some \$6,000,000, or about ten times cash flow, for a 3,000 watt FM that was about to be eaten alive.

WQOK (our new call sign) came on with a bang. It did not take long for the superior signal to win. The best signal will win every time unless there is pilot error.

I kept this station about two years and sold it to Regan Henry, a black broadcaster, for \$7,500,000. Everyone laughed when Regan paid me that much money, but it was a win-win situation. Regan went on to develop a cash flow in excess of \$1.5 million. Suddenly the laughter died out.

A Watertown, Wisconsin, station was next up for us. It was moved into Madison, Wisconsin. It was a good buy but I allowed myself to be swayed by a “consultant” for the first and last time.

I wanted to go Oldies in the beginning but before we could get on air, another station in the market switched to that format. I then decided to move to country since there was a 3,000 watt FM in that format hole and I would have 50,000 watts of power. The consultants convinced me that Country would not work there and pushed me to a Contemporary Hit format (Top 40). We came on against a station that had been the market leader for twenty-three years and by the third book, we had beaten them in Arbitron. Unfortunately the bottom had dropped out of the Contemporary Hit Radio (CHR) market and the ads could hardly be given away.

This was the only time in my radio life that I suffered a real defeat and it’s made worse by the fact that I knew better and let myself be swayed. Never again.

Back at home the economy was constricting and bankers had realized that they had no idea what they were doing. Loans were being classified as “Highly Leveraged” and the pressure was on broadcasters to pay off the loans. The same banking butt heads that had helped lead us into the quicksand were now standing on our shoulders jumping up and down.

Our loans, with the exception of WTRG in Raleigh, were now with the bank out of Richmond. They had aggressively recruited us from Wachovia with great promises and utmost confidence.

Since we sold the first station in Petersburg, Virginia, I had had a partner. I owned sixty percent and he owned forty percent of our stock. With each deal we had been pulling down the profits but with the proviso that when, or if, the time came that financing tightened up for our industry, each of us would bring our personal funds back into the stations. That time had come and I approached him about funding. I was told that he had a liquidity problem, but that if I would fund the company, he would match it as soon as he could. I pumped out some \$1,500,000 of my personal funds into the operations before it became apparent that a problem was on the horizon.

The bank was becoming very insistent and I couldn't figure out why. Fayetteville was profitable and Roanoke was making its own way. Madison was not performing as we had anticipated, but we were making progress while at the same time trying to find a buyer closer to Wisconsin.

I knew that my personal cash reserves were as strong as ever and, in our meetings with bank representatives, I probed to uncover what their real concern was since my partner and I had personally guaranteed the notes. No satisfactory answer was forthcoming, just more pressure.

Our credit line that I believed the bank had committed to us for Louisville was suddenly withdrawn without warning. Since I was already committed to build the station, it created havoc. Again my partner told me that he was not in a position to help in Louisville, but that he would bring in his funds "as soon as some property sells."

On a visit to the bank in Richmond, they finally made the demand that a considerable amount of cash or liquid collateral be put up. It was at that point that I decided to let my lawyers do any further talking with the bank. The original give and take had become "you give, we take." We engaged Richmond counsel as well and prepared to sue the bank.

It was only then that we began to see the real problem. My partner had other loans with the bank and no one had been completely candid with me about that other involvement. I suggested to my partner that we part company, with him taking the Richmond bank financed stations, Fayetteville, Roanoke and Madison and me taking Louisville and Raleigh. That deal was struck and my former partner posted the extra collateral demanded by the bank.

I've described to you the Louisville sale and with it I retired the Richmond bank loan on Louisville without one penny being lost to the bank. I then turned my attention to the Raleigh station which was financed by the Charlotte based bank. In the meanwhile my former partner declared Chapter 11. I suddenly knew what the problem had been and I could only wish that I had known sooner.

The original loan for WTRG in Raleigh was made and called for two years of interest-only payments followed by a payout of principal and interest. I had always deferred to my partner in working with the banks. Frankly, I'm somewhat embarrassed to say I was not aware that, after the two years of interest-only, we had agreed to a quicker payout of principal rather than level payments over the term. I wasn't sure that I would have the station turned around quick enough to meet that obligation and so I did the one thing that will cause you the most grief. I sat down and leveled with my banker.

I told the bank that I still had about four months to go on the interest-only portion of my loan. I also told them that I might be cash-flowing enough to make the proposed principal payments when they came due, but I wanted to alert them that we also might not be able to reach that level that quickly. If not, I asked them to consider extending the interest-only portion or a reduced initial principal amount. My banker approached my request reasonably. His supervisor did not.

WTRG had come a long way in a short while. The loan amount was now approximately \$5,000,000 and we were very near the point where cash flow would cover us. I had pledged \$500,000 in liquid collateral at the loan's inception and so the bank was "uncovered" to the tune of \$4.5 million minus the value of the best technical facility in the market with a 2,000-foot tower and my personal guarantee of the entire debt.

Bear in mind that for years I had maintained more than \$1,000,000 in my personal checking account at this bank without being requested to do it. I had also put over a million-and-a-half dollars of my personal funds into the station's operations as well as moving my office to the station and taking over as general manager without pay. I allowed my salary to accrue rather than tax the station. That is the kind of effort the banks are looking for, or so they tell us. In reality, it did not make a dime's worth of difference.

At the meeting there would be no give and take in this discussion. The bank told us that the value of the station was no more than \$4 million and that put us "under water" to the tune of \$1 million. Apparently the bank had forgotten the half a million of posted liquid collateral. The resounding theme throughout the meeting was "the station loan is under water by one million dollars." There would be no interest extension and the bank wanted another \$1,000,000 in liquid collateral immediately. The bank suggested that I pledge my Florida home.

I could not believe what I was hearing. My attorney's office is in the same building as the banks offices in downtown Raleigh. I suggested a recess until after lunch.

Minutes later I was in the lobby of the bank getting a certified check for more than a half million dollars. A short drive to another branch and another certified check for the rest of my deposits followed.

I let my attorney convene the meeting after lunch without my presence. If this was the bank's idea of a banking relationship, I decided to pass. The meeting ended with my loan being passed up to Charlotte to the special assets officer, Bruce Loftin. This office was where the bank sent its broadcast loans when they knew not whether to punt or pass. Again I let my attorney do the initial talking with them.

In the meantime, we received a written offer to purchase WTRG from Benchmark for more than \$6,000,000. So much for being a million dollars under water on an approximately \$5,000,000 balance. That offer was followed by one from Prizm for \$7,100,000.

Charlotte authorized a new and graduated principal schedule that allowed me the leeway that I had initially sought. All of this heartache had been so unnecessary. My personal deposits, those of my wife and my daughter were now history. I began moving all family CDs, IRAs, SEPs and anything else out of the bank.

All across the country my friends in broadcasting were being bullied by such banking tactics. Unfortunately, some, or even most, of them were not in the cash position that I was in and the banks simply chopped them up like cheap hamburger. While the bank's supervisor caused me a great deal of stress, he had swung his hobnailed boot at me and missed. The first rule a banker who is going to play the game that way must learn is that if you miss, shame on you.

If you get nothing else from this book you must come away knowing that I found no banker is truly your friend unless you don't owe him anything, your wife is attractive and you keep a well stocked bar in your house.

An earlier chapter dealt with the sale of WTRG to HMW, Inc. for \$8,050,000 plus \$950,000 in non-completes. An LMA also added some \$150,000 to our bottom line. The bank was

off more than fifty percent when it ventured to mark our “water line.” That’s a pretty poor banking analysis. The entire loan was paid out at closing. This bank never lost one penny on the WTRG loan and they reaped a substantial profit through interest. The bank was not short-sighted, Mr. Magoo was short-sighted. This bank was blind.

It’s been an interesting ride for some thirty-one years in broadcasting. If you’ll indulge me, I’d like to share some thoughts on our business and on society in general from my perspective after three decades of “miking America,” speaking with and listening to the people who really matter. The people who pay the bills and bear the frustration.

DUOPOLY

It seems like an idea whose time has come. The FCC is right to be concerned with the economic viability of broadcasting. In allowing one owner to control two FM and two AM stations in a market, instead of just one of each, as had been the case before this new ruling, it was felt that this would make up for the overabundance of stations in most markets. So far, so good. But the down side is that the funding is not there for existing operators to buy a competitor. That opens the door for private money financing to buy up the inventory. It's fair to ask why that creates a problem and I hope I can supply that answer.

Radio's strength has always been its ability to serve its local market. Automation entered our business many years ago. Those of us who were operators did not worry about an automated competitor because we could outprogram them through local news and events, talk shows, instant weather reports and a myriad of other things. That localism is what causes a person in Goldsboro, North Carolina, to listen to his/her local station even though a number of Raleigh stations boom into that market with better personalities, and in most cases a better technical sound.

Take that localism away and you might as well broadcast from a satellite in space. Don't laugh, it's coming sooner than you think.

This private money used to create instant duopolies and instant "chains" of radio stations is being raised with promises that will be difficult, if not impossible, to meet.

I've had an opportunity to look inside several of them and I see a common thread running through. Investors are promised mammoth returns. Commonly, twenty-five percent is used as the anticipated return. Those of us who have been in the business awhile can tell you that a twenty-five percent return on investment in the first two to three years is a serious piece of work. A twenty-five percent return on the large dollar figures being paid for most second stations in these duopolies is "pie in the sky." It just will not happen. These prices are being structured, as often as possible, so that it is two years out before the investors really see the magnitude of the challenge that's been sold to them.

Let's use the example of Raleigh-Durham to illustrate my point. In mid-1993 six of the major FM stations in this market were owned by people who had lived in the market and were personally involved with their stations in some way. Less than one year later, only two of those owners are left. With my transfer of WTRG there is not one major station left that takes a stand editorially. Local news operations have been combined and cut back and listener access to the airwaves (with the exception of WPTF AM's talk station) is limited to morning personnel making fools of the caller.

There are a lot of juke boxes in Raleigh-Durham today where viable, involved radio stations used to be. I see that as very sad and while my selling price was a fair one, as was the price received by most of my former colleagues, I can tell you that I love the business enough to wish that I had never sold my station. It stood for something, it had a purpose and yet today it is just another frequency playing Oldies music.

What concerns me most is seeing how these companies expect to operate their stations to reach that twenty-five percent return on the investment. When you look into their future plans, you see that local news, editorial stances, open mike

opportunities for the listener and related localism is not in the budget. They just cannot afford to do these things with the budget constraints that saddle them. They look almost exclusively to sales gurus for salvation of the stations.

No one understands the value of making the sale any more than I do. I've been there in the white-hot heat with payrolls to meet and maverick bankers beating their chests. But I also know that radio survives, indeed prospers, because of its product. What comes out of the speaker is all that you have to sell. It captivates and enthralls or it's just another noise. How simple that is, but how misunderstood it has always been.

I truly believe that in two to three-years time we will see investor lawsuits on a scale never before witnessed when they find out that the operators either knew, or with due diligence should have known, that a twenty-five percent return on these investments was unreasonable given the escalating purchase prices being paid. We have a feeding frenzy all over again and again I tell you that "the Emperor has no clothes."

Watch for the bottom to fall out of radio station values again when the fan is struck by this fertilizer.

SHOCK RADIO

Sewage was never intended by our founding fathers to be covered by the First Amendment to the Constitution. Yet that is exactly the cover used to shield our nations “shock jocks.” The most bellicose, the most belligerent and the wealthiest is Howard Stern. There are little Howard Stern imitators, all across the country but the granddaddy of them all spews forth his garbage from a New York studio.

As a disc jockey in the ‘60s and early ‘70s, I had to find ways to entertain the listener without resorting to discussions about hygiene, defecation and genitals. It was taboo even to use the words “damn” and “hell” over the air. While I don’t think that using “damn” and “hell” on the radio would cause the planet to veer from its axis, I also can’t see why stronger terms need to be used.

First one and then another of the “shock jocks” giggled into their microphones and used words that they had knew would shock the listener. Just as you don’t expect to find a nude at an elegant cocktail party, listeners did not expect to hear these words coming from their radio. It was reminiscent of those discussions that little children have when they discover they have a “pee pee.”

In a little while most of us just tuned it out, but there are a lot of lonely people who love the outrageous. There are an equal number of “learned ones” who are willing to excuse anything under the guise of a First Amendment right. These people were made to order for Howard Stern.

There is no question that Howard Stern makes a great deal of money. If that was the only guide by which to measure

people, then Stern would be a giant. Yet Howard Stern is no giant. In fact Howard is as amazed as anyone on earth that his “shtick” has lasted as long as it has. That longevity has very little to do with Howard Stern. After all, how many times can Howard repeat himself and be original? I know, it’s a rhetorical question.

The Stern phenomenon is fueled by an FCC that acts like confused parents and a parent company that values the almighty dollar above all else. Despite all of his bravado, Howard Stern rues the time he must spend alone because it is there, all alone, that Stern must confront himself. It is there, all alone, when he’s forced to admit that he is a phony, that he is scared to death that someone will yank off his mask and expose the frightened little kid who conned an industry.

What kind of man uses the airwaves to make jokes of his wife’s miscarriage when she is still sick with grief? His excuse is that it happened and therefore he is free to talk about it. Even when he promised his wife not to talk about the miscarriage, he blundered along with no care for her feelings. To Stern the moment is everything. One laugh, one yuk, at any cost. All to feed the enormous ego within him.

What measure of man confronts his elderly parents on television with gutter language? Reveals their innermost family secrets in order to sell one more book?

What should we think of a man who prays on the air that the Lord would give cancer to FCC Chairman Al Sykes? That this cancer should spread all over his body? Howard excuses that action by a throwaway line that it’s silly to think that God listens to him, so it’s okay for him to have diarrhea of the mouth.

When Chairman Sykes left the commission and Jim Quello took his place it was Howard Stern who became angry over FCC fines for his conduct and poured out his filth and venom

on air concerning Chairman Quello. No insult was too great, no words too filthy for Howard as he raged about Chairman Quello day after day. What kind of infantile behavior is this?

Howard Stern announced his candidacy for governor of New York. He was very clever in pointing to just a few items that he would get accomplished and then step down. One task was to enact the death penalty and another was to fill all the potholes. How can a Stern listener disagree with that agenda? No doubt Howard would have gotten a lot of votes if he had stayed in the running because his legions consider him harmless. It's not their ox that Howard is goring at the moment. It's funny because it's "the other guy" that is the brunt of Howards "humor." As long as they never become that "other guy" the charade works.

We have rights, but with them come responsibility. The call by some is for Howard Stern's rights under the First Amendment. It's time that society demanded responsibility from Howard Stern. The FCC is on the right track after wallowing in inertia for too long. The fines should be collected and the commission should continue to levy fines as Stern continues to step across the line. The commission should also keep in mind that Howard Stern is not a station licensee. Those who employ him, who export his "show," do so not because of the First Amendment, but because they are greedy.

LIBERAL BIAS IN THE MEDIA

Rush Limbaugh came along when AM radio was desperate. Listeners had abandoned the AM band for FM and the owners of AM stations saw their situation going from bad to worse. As the losses mounted, common sense dictated that more investment into the same AM programming would only lead to greater losses. Some AM stations continued to try and compete with FM, but they did so by playing into FM radio's strength. FM, with its stereo quality, owned the "more music" niche. Yet, some AM owners stubbornly continued to try and bring back the good old days when AM controlled the music market.

There are still those proponents of AM stereo that believe this will put AM on a par with FM. The difference is that listeners switched from AM to FM because FM had stereo and better quality, while AM did not. Now that the switch has been made for some time, why would the listener come back to AM radio just because it's now in stereo? No, the future lies in alternative programming on AM, if AM is to thrive again. If it does find that programming, we have to consider how the industry will fare economically.

AM thrived when FM stations took little or no revenue out of the market. When FM began to thrive, it was the AM stations that took little or no revenue from the market. If AM and FM were to reach parity, where would the revenue come from to support it? Suddenly twice as many stations are dividing the same amount of financial pie.

Rush Limbaugh had to make a dramatic impact in a short period of time in order to get his conservative movement un-

derway. Radio and television ownership and management is controlled primarily by people who have almost snail-like movements toward change. In opinion and attitude, they are extremely liberal and they have very little tolerance for the conservative point of view. They are also keenly aware of the financial “bottom line” and anything that might be said on air that gives pause to the listener or causes a favored advertiser to “rethink his buy” is strictly taboo.

The trick for them is to get the most ratings mileage out of the programming without really saying anything controversial. You can see the trouble that Limbaugh’s popularity placed on my broadcast brethren. Most detested what he said and what he stood for, but the lure of turning their AM liability into an asset was too much for them.

As you scan the dial on both radio and television or as you read the pages of America’s newspapers and magazines, you will notice that very few conservative voices are available. Almost no young conservative voices are present. That is not by accident, but by design.

My radio stations always built their base around our editorial positions and open-mike talk segments. When we proposed to do that in larger markets on a power FM, the gasps could be heard throughout the industry. “You can’t do that on FM” was the popular refrain.

But people are the same in big cities as in smaller ones. They have the same fears, the same likes and dislikes and they all have one thing in common— they want to have a voice in their destiny. They want to be heard, to have someone listen when they speak. Despite the widely-held opinion of the “elite thinkers” in America, these “common folk” are much smarter than the credit they are given.

Should Rush Limbaugh’s popularity show the slightest dip in the ratings, you will see station owners abandon his view-

point with alarming speed. Many at the top of my industry make Benedict Arnold look like Nathan Hale.

Regrettably, we will see less and less of the “localism” in radio until it becomes fragmented by other forms of delivery into the home and automobile. In the meantime, you can forget about the old days of radio owners who stood-up to be counted. Today’s conglomerates only stand-up when there is cash to be counted.

Lest it be said that I endorse everything that Rush Limbaugh says, let me hasten to add that conservatives don’t always agree and there is no reason that they should always agree. I can subscribe to about sixty to seventy percent of the opinions that I hear from Rush.

I have my own line of conservative thinking, but had I not bought my own stations, that voice would never have been allowed to speak. The concern today is for one more advertiser. Take no chances, answer no questions, contribute as little as possible, take the money and run.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SOCIETY

The quickest way to raise hackles in this country is to mention religion. Some talk show hosts won't allow the subject to be discussed at all because the callers, both pro and con, get carried away. My opinion on the subject is my own and, if others disagree, then they are welcome to their opinion.

Pro-religion talk show callers hurt their own cause by blindly mouthing a doctrine that allows for no discourse. It's "I'm a soldier for the Lord and if you don't fall into line I'll kill you," or at least that is the effect their arguments have on others who are not as quick to convert. There is a very low tolerance level among believers when what is really needed is a high level of tolerance.

In the everyday lives of Christians, the Lord is called upon to be ever tolerant and forgiving of their sins. Yet pro-religion talk show callers can be some of the most insensitive, rude and obnoxious people on earth.

Anti-religion callers fervently believe that it is not enough to hold their opinions for themselves. They must attack those who do believe at every opportunity. They are willing to listen to nothing unless it conforms to their opinion. If you are beginning to see a common thread running through both groups, then move yourself to the head of the class.

I am a Christian. I'm afraid that I am not a very good one, but I do try to get better at it every day. I believe that the religious beliefs of every soul on earth should be respected, be they Taoists, followers of Buddah, Muslims, Jews, Christians or any of a number of other beliefs. I believe that all of us can

find enough common ground to agree on certain basic principles.

Anyone who does not see society crumbling around us just simply is not looking. I firmly believe that when we took religion out of our daily lives, we created a recipe for disaster because we did not replace those fundamental teachings with any other realistic guidelines. Our children are left with no moral compass in their lives. Life has lost its meaning.

Every day on the streets of America people die because the person on the other end of the gun or the knife has no respect for human life. How else do you explain the growing number of people, mostly young people, who can pull the trigger on a person begging for his/her life?

America has dug a hole for itself from which we may never be able to escape. Generations of people have come to see welfare as a way of life. A regressive tax system makes it more profitable to stay on the government dole than to work each day. An Illinois congresswoman berates her colleagues for suggesting that people who live in public housing should spend a minimum amount of time each week cleaning their own windows and cutting their own grass. She suggests that society has no right to demand accountability from those who continue on the public dole.

While I agree that we must treat all people with dignity, I see absolutely no reason why those on welfare should not work at a meaningful task to justify their use of the public's money. Being held responsible for the clean-up and care of your public housing unit does not seem to me to be overly burdensome. Furthermore I believe that it is attitudes such as that of the Illinois congresswoman that have led us down this path and which perpetuate poverty and welfare.

Given no direction and bearing no responsibility, we have children bearing children with society left to foot the bill. The

cost is not just in dollars, but in pain. Young men have quickly figured out that there is no negative result to them when they simply walk away from the baby that they created and its mother. That child invariably grows up by its wits, if it survives at all. The child becomes a “street smart” young adult with a dead-end future. They are doomed to repeat the same mistakes as the generation before them until they either die violently or society incarcerates them at great expense. The gap between the “haves” and the “have nots” continues to widen, causing more class envy and contempt.

There are certain principles that I believe people of all religions share. The Ten Commandments in the Christian faith are just as relevant in other faiths if we can put aside labels. Who among us can argue with “Thou shalt not steal? Thou shalt not kill? Thou shalt not bear false witness?” Most young people today don’t even hear these admonitions because there is no one at home to teach them right from wrong. The schools are forbidden to mention anything that might be construed as religion and attendance at a place of worship is no longer a badge of honor, but a reason for scorn.

This is a nation founded on religious principles yet we have abandoned those principles as the nation has grown. With each new arrival of immigrants, America has allowed itself to be changed. People who risked their lives to escape their own homelands expect America to adapt to their culture, instead of them adapting to America’s culture. There are many places in America today where it is impossible not to feel like an outsider in your own country.

Surely people should be allowed to speak their native language, worship as they wish and honor their native culture, but not at the expense of the culture of this country. If you are to live here, then you should be an American. No other country in the world is as tolerant of immigrants as America and

thus we have become the promised land. Policies that allow illegal aliens to abuse our generosity are widespread and make us the laughing stock of the world.

There are pregnant Mexican women at this very moment waiting to cross the border illegally, but fighting to time their arrival in America to coincide with the arrival of their newborn baby. If they can make it across the border and have the child take its first breath in America, then that child becomes a U.S. citizen.

As a U.S. citizen the baby has certain “rights” and one of the first of those “rights” is the one that allows this new citizen to bring Mom and Pop into the country with him/her along with all of the “rights and benefits” that come with it. The rest of us pay for the privilege that they enjoy. This is an insane scenario but one that is repeated on a regular basis. How can anyone who uses this archaic loophole to gain citizenship here ever have any respect for the American system?

THE POLITICAL CHARADE

It was envisioned by our founding fathers that certain of our civic minded brethren would give a limited amount of their time to help govern the nation. It was never envisioned that these people would actually make a career of living off the misery that they create.

Nowhere can we find evidence that any of the signers of the Declaration of Independence could foresee career politicians who actually died of old age after decades in office. Yet today, we have not a few, but many who have pulled-up to the public feeding trough with no intention of ever leaving it.

It comes as no surprise that lawyers have filled the most seats in Congress or that they have found or created all of the loopholes necessary to remain there and prosper. They have conveniently made it their business to create a utopian world for themselves to live in while forwarding the bills to the population at large.

Since it is far easier to enact laws that apply to others but not yourself, Congress has perfected the art. They exempt themselves from any law that might call them to task, yet place severe penalties upon the rest of us should we follow them and not the law. When it is suggested that term limits should be applied to Congress, the pellets hit the proverbial mechanized blade.

We are told that the voters have the ability to remove on a regular basis any elected official from office that they so choose and, therefore, there is no need for term limits. What is not talked about is the obstacles placed in the voters path by incumbency. The “ins” have such an advantage over the “outs”

at election time that it almost takes a scandal to unseat those in office.

The “freebies” enjoyed by incumbents places such a burden on their opponent that few congresspersons had actually been voted out of office. Yet on November 8, 1994 the voters finally rose up as one and cleaned the congressional house. That blunt message still rings through the halls of the Capitol even today but the question is whether or not the voters will stay the course and demand the reforms necessary to this corrupt system. I hope and pray that they will.

The most laughable aspect of the congressional system is its reward to members for becoming dottering old fools. It’s called the “seniority system” and its most exalted members are those who repeat themselves and slobber on their ties. These members are elevated to the head of committees with enormous power. Intelligence is not considered, the ability to keep ones undergarments dry during session is not a prerequisite. The only stipulation is that you be the “oldest rat in the barn.”

THE DECAYING JUDICIAL SYSTEM

In the last few years, callers to my talk shows have been more concerned about crime and violence in America than about any other aspect of our lives. They have good reason to be alarmed.

Consider an event that occurred in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. It could have been in any town in America, but this time it was in Chapel Hill. A young married lady of twenty-five was jogging on a public sidewalk just after daybreak. This was her normal custom and she felt safe in this community.

From out of the bushes sprang a young eighteen-year-old male with a handgun bent on raping the woman. She struggled and finally broke free. The assailant ran after her and knocked her down in the street. He then fired several shots from his revolver into her at close range. The jogger was dead and the assailant pedaled away on his bicycle. Police arrested this young tough and charged him with murder, but they were somewhat surprised since they had no record of violent behavior concerning this suspect. He was on bail for a larceny charge, but that was all they knew of him.

The police in Norfolk, Virginia, could have shed some light on this suspect for their comrades in North Carolina except that his record had been expunged when he recently turned eighteen and moved to Chapel Hill. The local authorities had no way of knowing this new arrival was violent and they could not know that he had a long history of lawlessness while in Virginia. That is why he had been released on parole on the larceny charge. After all, his lawyer argued, he's a first time offender.

As an adult that statement was true, but he had been an “adult” for a matter of days. Before that, his record was there for all to see had the justice system not shielded our eyes.

At trial, the jury bickered about personalities instead of seeking justice for a young dead woman. Certain women jurors refused to consider the ultimate penalty for this young tough who had taken life. Instead these ladies said they could understand his “rage as a black man in this society.” So much for an impartial jury and so much for justice for the dead.

A juvenile today of thirteen or fourteen is not the same as a juvenile of the same age in earlier generations. Exposure to daily doses of sex and violence on television and in movies has educated these young minds far beyond their biological years. The innocence of the ‘50s has been replaced by a cynical education from the streets and a lack of parental guidance.

It makes no sense to treat these young “dudes” as innocent lambs who have merely strayed from the path. They laugh at our feeble attempts to control the mayhem. They know that we have handcuffed ourselves with archaic laws.

These young toughs are all too aware of their “rights” and recite them to you. Our policemen and women are standing in front of someone at age fifteen who can recite the Miranda rights while the cop reads the rights from a printed card.

There is absolutely no reason why these young criminals should not be tried as adults with adult penalties. Even when they commit the most heinous crimes imaginable, society still pretends that these are children who don’t know any better. In the ways of the world, most of these violent juveniles are far ahead of the judge and juries that are charged with containing them. It is lunacy to protect their identity and pretend that they are wayward children. They do not need protection from us, we need protection from them.

Consider that you may have a violent juvenile living right next door, but are unaware because his/her identity is concealed from you by the justice system. You have no warning and no chance to protect yourself or your family from this person. You know of his/her past when it has already affected your future.

When a suspect gets into court, the jury will not be allowed to know of his criminal past unless his lawyer is stupid enough to put him on the stand. If that happens, the suspect will probably sue his lawyer anyway for malpractice. The jury would not even be told if this person had committed this identical crime several times in the past. This same jury is then called upon to make an informed judgment about this suspect. If you were on the jury, would you not want to know that the person on trial in front of you was not only named "Jack" but "Jack the, Ripper?" Our laws have swung so far toward the criminals benefit that society is truly in danger.

DO MOVIES, RADIO AND TV BEAR ANY RESPONSIBILITY?

Of course they do. Those who offer lame excuses to the contrary do us all a disservice. Radio bears less responsibility. However, with the antics of the “shock jocks” and the violence in the new music, radio must share in the blame for society’s ills. Rap music in particular is violent and disgusting. I salute the courageous women who have taken rap artists and record companies to task for the way in which women are portrayed by rap as “bitches and ho’s.”

The fastest way to get a macho rap artist to fight is to talk ill of their mama. These same people find no problem with uniformly denouncing women in the vilest terms. Where do these “bad dudes” think they came from? Their mama is a woman. Why should society separate their mama from the “bitches and ho’s” that they speak of?

It’s also comical to hear these artists defend this violent drivel as the “attitude of the streets.” They claim that they are performing some mystical public service by bringing America the message of the “hood.” If they have this high minded mission, then why don’t they return the money that they get to the “hood” to better the lives of those who live there.

From dollar one, these rap “artists” climb into their limos, move into luxury digs and hang gold jewelry from neck, fingers and toes. The message they send back to the “hood” is “I got mine sucka.” So much for high toned rhetoric.

Movies reflect the society in which they are filmed and this society supports violence. Parents don’t have any idea what movies their children pay to see and Hollywood will keep

cranking out the violence until it's not profitable to do so anymore. The movie industry is driven by profit and it cares less what the end result brings.

Television is where I believe most of the harm is done. This medium brings the garbage right into the living room. "Turn it off if it offends you" they are fond of telling us, but working parents can't easily follow that directive. When kids get home from school each afternoon they are confronted with soap operas that leave very little to the imagination. Almost every channel has one. MTV has a special place in hell for the irresponsible programming that it throws together. If it sells, film it and cleavage sells, as does violence. These people can even find words to suggest some redeeming value to Beavis and Butthead, a cartoon couple with crap for brains. Watch it some time for research if nothing else. You should know what your kids are watching.

The "learned elite" among us will yell "First Amendment" from the rooftops when this subject is mentioned. They tell us repeatedly that television cannot influence young people to go forth and do things. Remarkably the advertisers spend billions each year based upon television's claims that it can indeed get young people, and old people, to go forth and buy products. If it sells the good, it sells the bad equally well.

THE FUTURE

I was married to the former Annette Evon Tart of Dunn, North Carolina, on April 25, 1965. Our wonderful daughter, Lisa Jane, was born to us on December 8, 1966. We saw Lisa graduate at Meredith College in 1989. She became the first college graduate of J.T. and Eva Joyner's children or grandchildren.

Following the sale of WTRG in April of 1993, I took my wife and daughter for a trip to Europe for several weeks. We visited England, Sweden, Demark, Finland, Russia, Germany, the Netherlands and Belguim before returning to our home in Naples, Florida. I was retired after thirty-one years as a broadcaster. Lisa remained in North Carolina while Anne and I made ourselves at home in Florida. I really had no plans beyond writing this book and trying my hand at others.

On a visit to Durham to work on a fitness program at Structure House, I was surprised to answer the phone and hear my friend Don Curtis on the other end. In that conversation Don mentioned that his WPTF station manager, Joe Bell, had asked about the possibility of me doing an afternoon talk show on the station. Don said that he had told Joe that he was sure I would not be interested. It was at that moment that something inside me told me to give the idea some thought.

Anne reminded me that I had worked awfully hard for three decades to put us into a financial position that would allow us to live comfortably without the stress that most Americans live with daily. Did I really want to put myself through all that it would take to do the show and do it well she asked? Anne knew that I could not just do a talk show for three hours

a day. Anything that I undertake, I must do to the very best of my ability. A syndicated talk show would take a great deal of time and preparation.

The answer that kept coming back to me was—yes, with a series of “Ifs” attached: IF we could truly make a difference in people’s lives: IF we could influence listeners to take control of their own destiny and not wait on a government that would never come; IF we could find a way to reach young people who felt they had no hope; IF we could set an example for others who have the means to contribute but who take the easy way out; IF....IF.....IF.

TALK RADIO

I truly believe in Talk Radio and the effect that it can have on Americans. That faith was borne out on November 8, 1994 in a resounding message sent by the voters to the political power brokers.

For as long as I can remember, the mainstream liberal media has sought and maintained control of your flow of information. Letters to the editor are occasionally printed, but are many times edited to blunt their effect. On other occasions these letters to the editor are carefully selected to minimize any possible ground-swell of support that the writer may have sought. In this way, local papers are able to control what information you receive. Since most markets have only one paper, it becomes a powerful tool in the battle for mind control.

The News & Observer in Raleigh has made no bones about it over the years, they are LIBERAL and DEMOCRATIC. In fact, this paper may never have existed if it had had an opponent with the power that the N & O now maintains. The founder, Josephus Daniels, raised the money to buy and operate the paper by sending out "requests" on letterhead from the Department of Interior where he held a position at that time. Should a Republican try that today, the N & O would be on them like fur on a rabbit. From that humble beginning, the paper has grown to become The Old (un)Reliable of today.

In the early days, the N & O espoused terribly racist positions. Cartoons in the paper, available today, show extreme examples of race baiting and bigotry. While we are asked to take all of this in the context of the times in which it hap-

pened, the N & O seeks to rewrite history for others less fortunate than themselves. Even a casual reader detects a readily apparent guilt complex that results in editorial and commentary positions of apology.

I seldom, if ever, meet a person who has been the subject of a newspaper article who was quoted correctly and in context. Three days into my new talk show from the studios of WPTF, I found a very young N & O reporter in the studio for several hours gathering facts for a story on Talk Radio. She wanted to talk with callers after they got off air and we noticed that she only wanted to talk with those who had expressed negative views. This reporter kept trying to get some of us at WPTF to say negative things about the host that I replaced on air. We would not respond.

When the article appeared we knew that we had been had. Our listeners were called “mind numb robots” and the tone of the article was most condescending. Two quotes attributed to General Manager Joe Bell were contained in the same paragraph even though the comments were 40 minutes apart. Writing it that way changed the entire context of Joe’s remarks, but it fit the tone of the article and so it was printed that way.

Representative Kerry of Massachusetts made remarks a few years ago that dealt with shooting Vice President Dan Quayle. Kerry is a DEMOCRAT and *The News and Observer* found that story unworthy of much ink. A woman appointed to the government by President Clinton almost two years ago attended a “going away” party in San Francisco where the guests wore “Kill Jesse Helms” stickers. Yet as a DEMOCRAT, her comments drew scant attention from the N & O or other main stream LIBERAL media.

Contrast the above with all of the hoopla created by that same *The News & Observer* when it reported a casual remark from Jesse Helms in late 1994 about President Clinton’s pos-

sible need for a bodyguard if he visited North Carolina military bases. AFTER the national LIBERAL press feeding frenzy, we find the N & O meekly admitting that “perhaps” they should have mentioned that Helms had made the remark as an aside in casual conversation which the reporter admitted was in a “joking manner.” In other words, they knew that Helms was not threatening the life of the president yet left out the proper context of the remark. Whether Helms should have made the remark is not the question. The integrity of *The News & Observer* is the question, and they have provided the answer over and over again.

With this backdrop, repeated in LIBERAL papers, network television and magazines, it has been almost impossible for the average working American to separate the beef from the fertilizer fed to it daily in massive doses.

Enter Talk Radio. All of us have been in situations where we were frustrated, but felt all alone. How can we “fight city hall” as a lone voice crying in the wilderness? Suddenly, through Talk Radio we could hear that we were not alone. There were many of us who felt the frustration, the arrogance of power allied against us. The voices filled the airways and slowly but surely people began to join together. Collectively we can “beat city hall” became the silent cry and the results were seen in the elections of 1994. Without Talk Radio to remind us that we are not alone, that we are a majority when acting in unison, the same old power structure would be in place.

Predictably, the LIBERAL mass media will not give up without a fight. They intend to bring you “MIND NUMB ROBOTS” back under their control. To do so they must discredit Talk Radio and the people in it—including you, the listener.

The process has already started. Rush Limbaugh is the focal point because of his national popularity. It does not stop there however. Misquotes, negative cartoons and negative stories will continue to appear. Ignoring all positives, they will continue to seek to destroy all of us in talk radio by painting a distorted picture day after day. Those of you who listen to talk radio, who participate through your calls, must be vigilant. You must lend your voice in support of talk radio efforts or all that has been accomplished can be lost.

For my part, I am not in Talk Radio for monetary gain. My income from books, speeches and related activities go into a separate fund that I have set up to do charitable works.

I have been most fortunate in my life. I have worked hard, but the Lord has seen fit to bless me beyond my fondest dreams. I will continue with this syndicated talk show effort as long as I see it continuing to grow and to accomplish the goals that brought me out of retirement. That growth has, thus far, far exceeded my expectations. How long I continue with the Tom Joyner show will depend upon you—the listener. You are the reason that I am here and I thank you for the opportunity. I will try to be as fair and honest with each of you as I am allowed to be. To those who wish to attack and cajole, I can promise a spirited fight from which I will never back away.

There has been and there continues to be a war on for the hearts and minds of America. Until Talk Radio allowed the average American a voice in that war, you were left with “VEXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION.” This is a war that we can win—you and I—and “We begin now by *Clearing the Air.*”

RANDOM THOUGHTS

One of the great sorrows of my life is the inability to bridge the gap between people in the black and white communities. There is just so much mistrust on both sides that agreement has not been reached.

No one can change the past. We cannot erase decades of discrimination and hate. It happened, it is real and it is a sad period in the history of our country. Still, we cannot continue to hearken back to the past to explain the problems of today. I know too many black people of good will and a like number of white people whose hearts are in the right place. We can get along and trust one another, but to do so we must ignore the hatemongers among us who dedicate their lives to the past.

I have lived for more than fifty-two years and I have learned a few important lessons. Perhaps the most important of these lessons is that class envy and hatred are destructive. We hear constantly that we should penalize those who take risks and achieve wealth. "Tax them" we are told "for they have sinned."

I began with nothing. I was told in my childhood that I should "aim low" and not expect very much. I was not given the positive reinforcement that I needed. Instead, I was programmed for failure. This happens all the time to people on the low end of the economic scale. Most give in or give up. I was fortunate to have a mother and father at home. My mother kept telling me that I could be anything I chose to be if I was willing to sacrifice for it.

I was always smaller than those around me. I was only five foot three and 110 pounds when I first decided to play athletics in high school. Compound the problem with a hip

joint that would fold with the first good whack and you have a recipe for disaster. Trouble is, nobody told me I couldn't do it. I eventually became a starting halfback in football, a starter at shooting guard in basketball and a first team second baseman in baseball. You had to be faster and smarter to succeed and I was willing to work at it.

In the navy, I was a starter in basketball and flag football for Chase Field, as well as, a starting left fielder on the 8th Naval District All-Star fast pitch softball team. Whatever it took, early or late, I was there.

I approached life after sports with the same dedication. There are always excuses for failure. I was poor. I was short or I was tall. I was too fat or I was too skinny. I was black or I was white. These are all excuses. Some problems are harder to overcome than others but none are impossible. It just looks that way to those who only stand and watch.

Give me four people who are either all white, black, red or yellow. Give two of them money and leave the other two with no funds and I will show you discrimination. I submit that economics is the deciding factor. We live in a GREEN society—not black and not white. These two races are simply pawns that checkmate each other with regularity. It is the man with the gold who makes the rules. Paul McCartney makes his own rules with a fortune of some \$600 million. Bill Cosby makes his own rules with some \$600 million. One is white and one is black. The deciding factor is GREEN.

I hate no man or woman. Some I dislike more than others, but I hate no one. I can honestly say that I have tried to treat all people with respect regardless of race, creed or color. People who have opposed me in business or on the football field have found that I give no quarter and I expect none in return. Outside of those arenas I will help anyone with a genuine need. While I will give a dollar to those in need, I will fight to the

death any attempt to TAKE one penny from me. It is a matter of great principle.

Over a decade ago, I hired a frightened young mother who was divorced and trying to raise two kids while working for the county for a few hundred dollars a month. Her self-esteem was low and her goals were not much higher. I told her that I was difficult to work for because I demand perfection from those around me. But I also told her I would never ask more of her than I demanded of myself. She accepted the challenge and has met it. This frightened young woman of yesterday, who managed her budget in tens of dollars, can today sign checks for millions of dollars without blinking an eye. Don't tell me the human spirit is not capable of miracles. Thank you Lynette and I hope the future continues to bring you happiness.

Teach your children that people are capable of deciding their own fate. Two score and twelve years ago in a remote shanty house with no electricity, no running water and rats the size of cats, a poor undereducated mother held her son's hand. She lovingly convinced him that nothing could stop him from achieving all the marvels that he saw beyond his existence. She told him that great things lay in store for him if he was willing to believe and to work for that belief. "Son," she told him, "you can even become a millionaire if you want to."

"Mama, one has never been enough!"

I TOO HAVE A DREAM

Dreams are not unique to any race, creed or color. With all due respect to Dr. King, I too have a dream.

I dream that one day we can speak with one another without the suspicion and distrust that is constantly stirred up by those whose motivation is sheer power and money. There are people who use race to divide people and who use race to secure a platform for themselves at the expense of poor people who place trust in those who cannot be trusted.

I too have a dream—that one day it will be possible to speak of the misery brought upon poor people, black people and white people, without being branded a “racist” by those who propose to speak for that great mass of people and who have no right and no mandate to speak for anyone but themselves.

I too have a dream—that my wife and children can leave the relative safety of their home for brief periods and expect to return without being accosted by someone else’s child rearing mistakes. A dream that allows me to express those heartfelt fears without being branded a “racist.”

And finally—I too have a dream—a dream that one day all races may be able to deal with each other as individuals without interference by self-serving spokespersons, scam artists or opportunists, looking for a fast buck and ego gratification at the continued expense of the poor and downtrodden.

Dreams come in many colors. They are not simply black or white. Dreams can propel one to greatness. Dreams can cause us, if we are honest with ourselves, to see the problems

of our world as others see them and not from our narrow focus alone. It is not “racist” to dream your dreams. The dream belongs to all of us because we are Americans, not because of skin color.

Still, some would foist upon us their nightmare in the guise of a dream and we need not—we can not—we shall not—accept that nightmare and extinguish our own dream. Those who would push us to do so are not dreamers—they are schemers—and they are destined to fail.

HISTORICAL LETTERS

(Never actually mailed)

For as long as I can remember, I have enjoyed the solitude of a quiet room and the time to think. At some point, I tried my hand at writing poems and I can't say that I was very good at it. I can say that I enjoyed it very much. I decided to include some of the poems that I have written simply because I had the opportunity. I hope that you enjoy them.

Some time ago, I began thinking of writing a book that would include letters that could have spawned from history. These letters are written tongue in cheek. I may still publish a book of these letters, but I decided to include a few with this writing. If you like the idea, I'll proceed. If not, then I will return to my humble microphone and forget the idea.

These historical (hysterical) letters are not meant to offend those history buffs among us or those who wear political correctness on their sleeve. I simply began thinking of what some historical figures might have said (or not said).

I love a mental challenge and always have looked for ways to improve the storehouse of knowledge that dwells within us. Put a crossword puzzle in front of me and I cannot sleep until it is complete. I don't know where that particular drive came from, but I'm glad that I have it. I continue today, as I did in the days when I was working for minimum wage, to look for creative outlets. Here you see some of the ways that I release my creative urge.

Dear Mr. Ford:

Your application for a patent has been placed on my desk for review. I must confess that it has been the source of some merriment prior to finding its way to me.

Mr. Ford, contrary to the opinion of some, we are quite busy here. While it is true that almost anything worth inventing has already been invented, we take our work quite seriously. To suggest a patent be issued for a metal box that rolls on rubber wheels that is powered by a combustible engine stretches the imagination. To suggest that people will want to ride in it while perfectly good carriages are available goes beyond common sense. By law I must issue your patent, but the general feeling in the office is that a mustang will still be the transport of the future.

Sincerely,

Silas LsTrange

Dear Sirs:

As your landlord, I must advise you that I have observed damage to the outer structure of the house occupied by the three of you and must insist that repairs be made within the month.

Another issue which has come to my attention is the apparent acrimony that exists between you and your neighbor, Mr. Wolf. As owner of the dwelling, I am concerned when any dispute threatens to "blow the house in." Please settle this matter with due haste.

Sincerely,

Rufus Brawn, Landlord

P.S. A neighborhood committee has asked that I request each of you to observe the town ordinance banning facial hair.

Dear Josephine:

Your letter arrived yesterday after a month's journey from France and was well received. It is a miracle of modern times that the post can move so rapidly.

I am well and the battle goes as expected. The Russians are in disarray and are retreating like doves at the hunt. Tomorrow we will finish them near the place called Waterloo.

Forgive me my sweet for this short reply, but I must CLOSE. Dinner is yet to be served and each day has seen it arrive all the later. I must speak with the cook.

Yours in victory,

Napoleon

Dear Robin:

I have not heard from you in almost a month and I fear that I must speak my mind. Frankly Robin, I have grown to suspect that your amorous attentions are elsewhere. It is not normal behavior to be absent for months at the time nor to frolic in the woods with a band of merry men.

There is talk here that Friar Tuck was banished from London for "flashing" and that there is nothing under his robe save the good Friar. There are also those who feel the name "Little John" has a meaning more than meets the eye. I try not to listen, but I hearken back to the many times you have proclaimed to me that you have the biggest sword in Sherwood and I am left to wonder if you have seen all the armaments? I await your reply.

Yours,

Marion

Dear Oog:

We are in receipt of your idea for this round thing that all of us can ride on but we, like you, are not sure what to call it. Your initial thought to name it “round thing to ride on” just doesn’t have commercial appeal and the ladies here have also expressed some reservations about sitting on the thing. It appears to be somewhat uncomfortable unless there is more to the design than we have seen. Certainly it would require sitting sideways to avoid serious injury.

The other idea that you submitted will require more information. Rubbing sticks together for upwards to an hour in order to burn meat would not seem, on the surface, to be highly marketable. Perhaps there is a side benefit to be gained by burning the meat? In any event, we would need further documentation.

Finally, the “shortie pajama moose pelt” suggestion has been done to death and unless you can come up with some way to kept the chill off, it is just not of interest.

Sincerely,

Taurus Marketing

Dear Lord:

Normally I am not given to complaining about much, but I would like to bring up a few things that trouble me. I hope this letter does not come at a bad time because I know you’ve been busy the last six days or so.

It’s about this wife thing. Now, the soreness is gone out of my rib cage and I bear no malice toward you for just snatching that sucker out of there without my permission. From morning to night, all I hear is about how I never take her anyplace. If it’s not one thing, it’s another. This morning she accuses me of purposely wearing a fig leaf with a hole in it. I can’t win for losing. I’d appreciate it if you would rethink this “companion” idea and I look forward to hearing from you soon. Oh, by the way, if you are going to call me

tonight, make it after dinner. I'm not sure, but she said something about fixing applesauce.

Your friend,

Adam

Dear Julius:

I am not sure who has been spreading the rumor that you mentioned to me, but on my way home from the Senate today, I resolved to put your mind at ease. I would never join in any effort to harm you and I don't know who would do such a thing unless it be Crassus. I have not had a good feeling about him since the day he wore the short toga to the slave market sans underwear.

Let me suggest that we meet tomorrow in front of the Senate to discuss this further. It is safe there and since it is the ides it should be a slow day. Until the morrow then.

Your bud,

Brutus

Dear Marc:

I can't help but feel that your displeasure with the Queen of Egypt smacks of sour grapes. I feel that some of your venom is directed at me. Rest assured that I had no knowledge of your interest in her prior to my visit to the barge. I am also informed that she did not appreciate your humor. The wine tasting was held to show off her pets. Asking if you could kiss her asp was most indelicate. In any event, she is leaving shortly to return home. I trust in the future you will keep your oratory talents under control.

Hail,

Julius

Dear Eli:

I must admit to a certain amount of excitement with regard to your request for venture capital from our company. The idea of your Cotton Gin has interesting possibilities and we would like to discuss it further at your convenience. The process baffles our research and development people but if you can truly produce a Cotton Gin, the prospects are unending. Please call to schedule a time for us to review the process. We would also be interested in whether or not you have also been able to utilize another agricultural staple to produce vermouth?

Sincerely,

Joshua Seagram

My Dear Sir Raleigh:

I have spoken to the King about your suggestion to return to England with a weed rather than gold. I pointed out to His Majesty, as you asked, that once the weed is crushed and rolled it can be put between the lips and set afire. His Highness was not amused. I have been instructed to tell you that the Kingdom does not need a nose warmer, which we can only assume is the reason for the fire. Please continue the search for gold.

God save the King

Lord Fauntleroy

Dear Mr. Bridger:

The hide map that you sent to us was most helpful and you were surely correct about the distance from Illinois to California. It is, as you so quaintly put it, "a bear."

I am afraid I will not be going to California after all. The constant bickering has taken its toll. Mr. Bridger, I don't believe you have weighed all of the facts when you say that it "would be a

hoot” to have several wives. The down side is having to referee every silly dispute only to find your blanket tossed on the ground come nightfall by several disgruntled losers. That, combined with a severe case of heat rash led to a situation yesterday that I cannot reverse and maintain my followers. In the midst of another spat between wives I shouted “this is a disgrace.” The wagons halted and everyone began to celebrate the homeland. I never meant this was the place. It’s eat up with salt water for Pete’s sake. I’ll tell you one thing, as soon as feasible it’s going to be one man, one woman. Life’s too short.

Your friend,

Brigham Young

Dear Socrates:

I was sorry to hear of your trials and tribulations lately and hope that tomorrow will bring a brighter day. Most of those following the trial report that the prosecutor seemed hell bent on conviction more for your intellectual leanings than for any actual wrongs. I’m sure it will all be cleared up soon. In the meantime, why not get some refreshment, perhaps a drink, and your problems of yesterday will be forgotten tomorrow.

Plato

My Dearest Henry:

I take pen in hand on this lovely spring day to profess my undying love for you and for England.

Dear Henry, I wonder if I might have another go at providing a male heir to the throne? Since the birth of our daughter several months ago, you have not visited my chambers. I know that I have produced only daughters in this union, but I would be remiss if I did not point out that, if I have failed, it is not from lack of effort. With

all due respect I would point out that perhaps it is the royal genes that are responsible.

I trust you will not be offended or lose your head in this matter, but I must insist on a prompt answer from you.

Expectantly,

Anne Boleyn

Dear Kemo Sabe:

By the time you read this note that I have left by the campfire, I will be gone. It pains me to leave, but I see this relationship going nowhere. I thought, foolishly it seems, that having nursed you back to health, we could be more than “just friends.” This was not to be. I simply tired of riding into town for supplies while you lounged by the fireside or always being the one to “go around the back way” while you remained in front.

I have often wondered what I could do differently. More feathers in my headband perhaps, mint in the morning coffee? I am just at wits’ end and see no other way than to move on to California alone. Perhaps I will find solace in the place called San Francisco.

Your faithful companion,

Tonto

Dear Lord:

I am well into the project that you asked me to undertake and I must say that it has been a challenge. My neighbors have been complaining about the noise and have begun calling me names that are most unflattering. I know you said I should ignore the naysayers but it has been a while and there has not been a cloud in the sky. Please don’t take this the wrong way, but it is the dry season.

This morning we began bringing on the cargo as you asked and things did not go well. A ship without a shovel is not normally a problem, but when you board two elephants who turn out to have a stomach disorder—well, who knew. I have hosed down the gang-plank and we are looking for a replacement for the two rabbits who were following the elephants. Perhaps tomorrow will look brighter.

Warmest regards,

Noah

Dear John:

We know that you are dedicated to your work and we have seen the long hours that you put in. So it is our hope that you will take this letter in the spirit in which it is intended.

Don't you think we might have more success converting the flock if we were more nondenominational? It just seems that the advance billing of "John The Baptist" may be cutting us a little short on the head count. We just feel that the Catholics and Jews have little incentive to come hear "John The Baptist" speak. Not to mention the Methodists who have already been griping about how the "two fishes" episode favored the pope's people.

Yours in thought,

Matthew, Mark and Luke

AND HE'S ALSO A POET (of sorts)

At The Speed of Life

Son, it don't git a dang bit easier
the old man said with a grin
and in a moment his eyes teared over
as I leaned a bit closer in.

Ain't no sense in my tryin to tell you
what God knows my mama told me
cause I won't about to listen
and you ain't no different, you see.

We's all got the world by the handle
when we's young and in natral prime
Son, I'd a knowed all the women
if I hadn't a run out of time.

See I had me this fine automobile...and...
well it don't make no never mind
it's just sometimes I gits lookin backwards
but what's lost you ain't never gonna find.

See I's a old man good for nothin but dreamin
you's a young buck wid fire in yo eye
I can tell you...but you ain't believin
that one day that fire...gonna die.

So let me draw one time on yo whiskey
it don't hurt so much then you know
and I'll let you get on to yo party
cause anyhow I got's to go.

As he wandered off into the moonlight
for a haven in some darkened hole
I had to admire his courage
for sharing a part of his soul.

But after all he's over eighty
I'm twenty-one with mountains to climb
I've got places to go...things to do
hey, there's lots and lots of time.

First Up

I thought at first it would be easy
How hard could it be I said
and the answer came back resounding
with step one and a bump on the head.

Now wait said I with conviction
I'm not about to go off of the track
and with all of my dignity mustered
took step two and fell flat on my back.

Sometime later I vaguely remember
reassessing the smugness of youth
and vowing to save all those absolutes
masquerading as moments of truth.

So what have I learned o'er the decades
as the glass slowly empties the sand
that a fall isn't really an ending
just a lesson on how best to land.

Cycle of Life

There's a shimmering newness around it
as it snugly fits into the stand
and great is the anticipation
as slowly its visage turns grand.

Once mighty and tall it stood proudly
and the children had watched as it grew
till today when it came home for Christmas
and brightened the homeplace anew.

Gaily lighted and filled with tinsel
its branches like royalty stood
you just knew that its very fiber
would stop time if only it could.

But so soon the home fires are wasted
and the joy of the season is past
the once proud spruce lies forlornly
in the refuse to where it was cast.

And in the forest a small sprout awakens
splitting the dew as a knife
the children take note of its birthing
and all's well in the cycle of life.

Pollution

Ever wonder what lies neath the ocean?
I can only hazard a guess
but the part I can see on the shoreline

means there's more junk below and not less.
There just seems to be no bottom
since we haven't yet heard an alarm
so a little more plastic and rubber
should fit in without any harm.

First one of us then the other
without adding up all the cost
and then one day without warning
the ocean below us is lost.

Some call our attention to the problem
but they're branded "doomsdayers" and yet;
what they're saying is right on the money
as now nature calls in her debt.

So we took from the next generation
and replaced it with what we had sown
in hopes that when time came for reaping
we, at least, would be gone.

Yet seldom is it ever that easy
and the paycheck is hell as they say
for that tomorrow we thought we're escaping
was tomorrow just yesterday.

Dissolution

The beginning is paved with innocence
a smile, a word, perhaps wine
and maybe the danger was present
but I did not see its sign.

The next page of the book was exotic
giving promise of passion divine
“Whatever you say” was the byword
and nary a glimpse of a sign.

The minister’s words rained upon us
as the two of us were entwined
and we left on a sea of enchantment
no worry, no hassle, no sign.

Many years have gone by since that moment
that began with the verses to bind
and I can’t say they’ve all been abysmal
but I can say I’ve seen that damn sign.

So today as I start my renewal
as a single, which suits me just fine
I can smile at the eager young suitors
walking past me not seeing the sign.

And Cupid I ask just one favor
on behalf of my brethren so blind
just turn down the heat of lust’s lantern
so the weakest can all read the sign.

Political Life

There's an election coming soon in my district
said the congressman with jaw firmly set
and just as soon as that sucker's over
I'll be ready to tackle this debt.

Now I know it's a time bomb waiting
and I've meant to get it and yet
right now it's a nip and tuck battle
and I dare not acknowledge this debt.

At best I'll have one year that follows
and I hope to have meetings well met
but then if we can't reach any consensus
I'll have another election that's set.

See, it's not that I don't want to address it
and I'm sure the Senate does too
but you must understand our dilemma
we're between our own interest and you.

Prejudice

I've always observed human nature
and it's never ceased to amaze
how an otherwise rational person
could consider that racism pays.

On the surface a kind, gentle creature
but then doesn't it seem very odd
that we so often fail to look inward
and instead just accept the facade.

It's all so very frustrating
as you try to determine who's real
because words can come so freely
yet they're very much part of the deal.

To be sure it's not one direction
this malady grows wild and free
it's used by one then the other
but hate is always the key.

The pain is from watching the young ones
not born with the hate and the fear
you can see they've been coached adeptly
though why is never so clear.

If we knew how to stop the madness
don't you think we'd each of us win
just to look clearly on to the future
not to dwell on the sickness within.

Now I know it's not coming tomorrow
with this pattern so firmly in place
but shouldn't we start on the journey
of returning mankind to God's grace.

Paul Revere

The redcoats are coming, he told them
as the horse scrambled on down the lane
and the lights of old Boston were fading
as he bent low to fend off the rain.

It all had happened so quickly
though he'd known the crown was not pleased
when the Patriots entered the harbor
and the tea from England was seized.

Still, there were those who cried patience
until now the die had been cast
and the British army came marching
to bring war upon them at last.

But none of that mattered this evening
as he crouched lower still in the night
for the word must be spread before dawning
and the lights of Concord loomed bright.

So close had he come to completion
when the Redcoats stopped his alarms
for a moment he feared he had failed them
but his message had called them to arms.

From every farmhouse and tavern
with muskets and powder held high
the Patriots answered the challenge
each man not afraid now to die.

History recorded the battles
for the freedoms they all held so dear
and there's a special page in its memory
for the ride of Paul Revere.