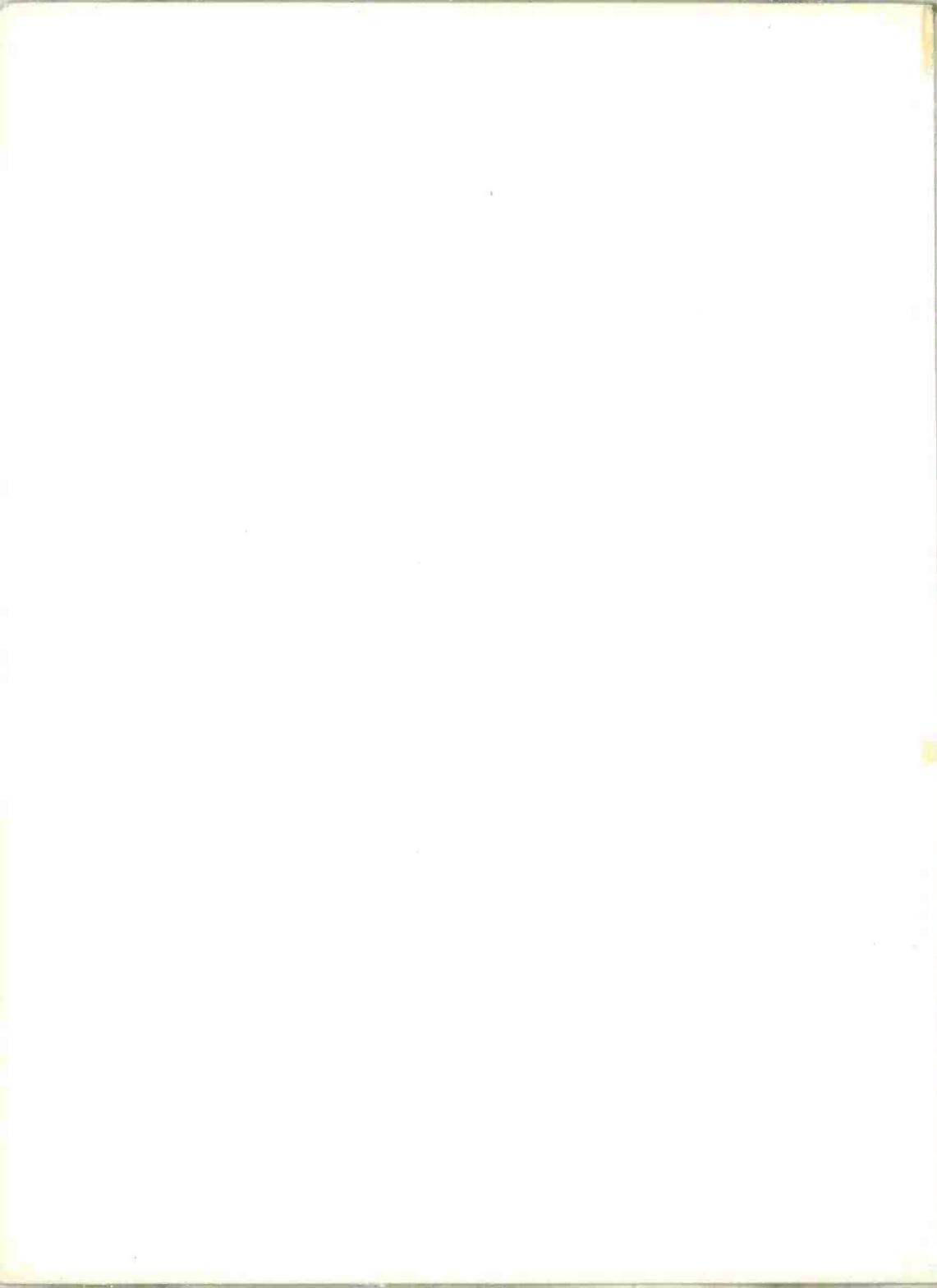


# **Feedback:**

*Echoes from My  
Life in Radio*



***Charles F. Payne***  
with Dick Hitt



FOR DAVID STEWART -  
HOPE YOU ENJOY THE  
"READ"

# FEEDBACK:

*Echoes from  
My Life in Radio*

Charlie Payne

8-17-00

**Charles F. Payne**

**with Dick Hitt**

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Ruby Moon Press  
3817 Yellowstone Street  
Irving, Texas 75062

[www.RubyMoonPress.com](http://www.RubyMoonPress.com)

ISBN: 0-9665370-4-1

## Praise for Charlie Payne's "FEEDBACK"

"Payne's book is simply the best radio book I've ever read. It is a whimsical, moving, oft-times bittersweet masterpiece written by a man who truly loved what he did. If you ever wanted to know why people created the call letters they did (KMOX St. Louis? WGN Chicago?) or how FM radio works, this is the radio neophyte's book. From radio's cognoscenti, Payne has chapter after chapter after chapter of stories about some of the most celebrated men of our time.

"Throughout, Payne will keep you doubled over in laughter. His story about 'der musik was no longer verboten' is just one of many which elicited belly laughs like I haven't experienced in years.

"From his roots in one-horse Emhouse, Texas through his wartime experiences with Patton's Third Army sprinting into the Ardennes to his light-hearted run-in with Russian submarines off the Virginia coast, Payne once again reminds us of why Tom Brokaw named his book "America's Greatest Generation."

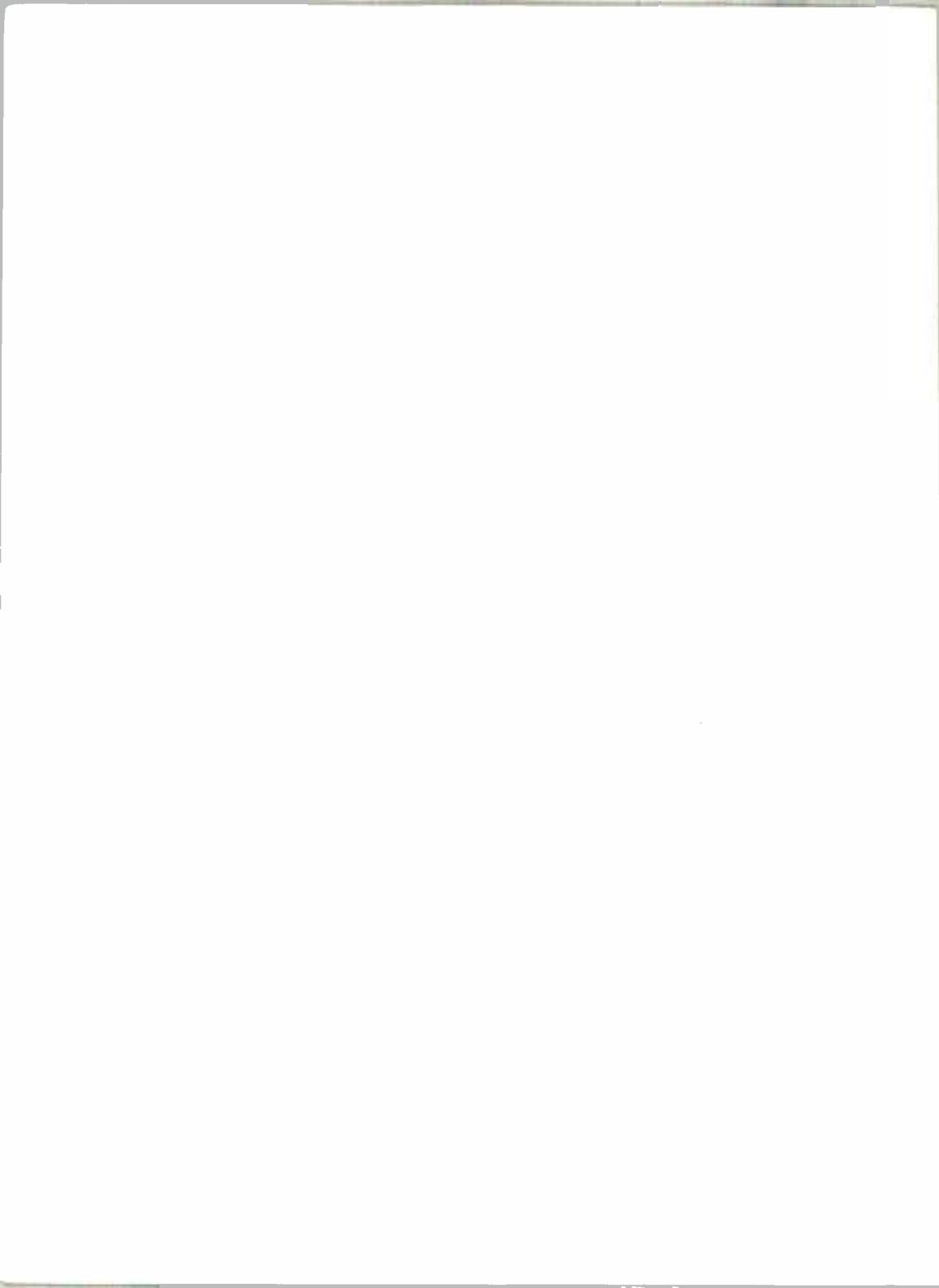
*Bart McLendon*

"Charlie has taken us on a nostalgic trip through his life in radio. The reader will enjoy how his experiences mirror the very history of the radio industry. Great read!"

*Ron Ruth, Executive VP, Radio Advertising Bureau*

"True love still matters . . . [Charlie] stuck by good music and made it pay. Feedback is a standard in its field."

*Ford Mitchell, former President,  
Texas Associated Press Broadcasters*



## FOREWORD

"FEEDBACK: Echoes from My Life in Radio" is a genuine authorized autobiography. Every episode, every event is true and authentically presented. As you read, page by page, you'll be with me at age six when I made my first radio, and at age 12 when I fashioned my own transmitter and first broadcast recorded music, on through my first job in a real radio station at age 15. In due time, you'll shiver with me again during the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium and you'll hurry to hop aboard one of the Sherman tanks in General Patton's Third Army. All the events are sometimes exciting, sometimes hilarious, and all will have the ring of truth—because they are true.

I think it'll be more than interesting to you, the reader. You will have a personal sense and feeling of the development of radio broadcasting, the changes brought on by television, the problems and projects—all the way from 250-watt KAND in Texas to 50,000-watt WINS 1010 in New York City—and you'll be there when we fulfill our dream of owning and operating our own stations WCPK and WINNER95 FM in Virginia.

After you finish reading "FEEDBACK: Echoes from My Life in Radio" I sincerely hope you can say "I've been there, I've done that."

Thank you,  
*Charlie Payne*

## DEDICATION

This personal autobiography is sincerely dedicated to the special people in my life who made writing this book possible. Their encouragement and participation in the development of the project goes without saying.

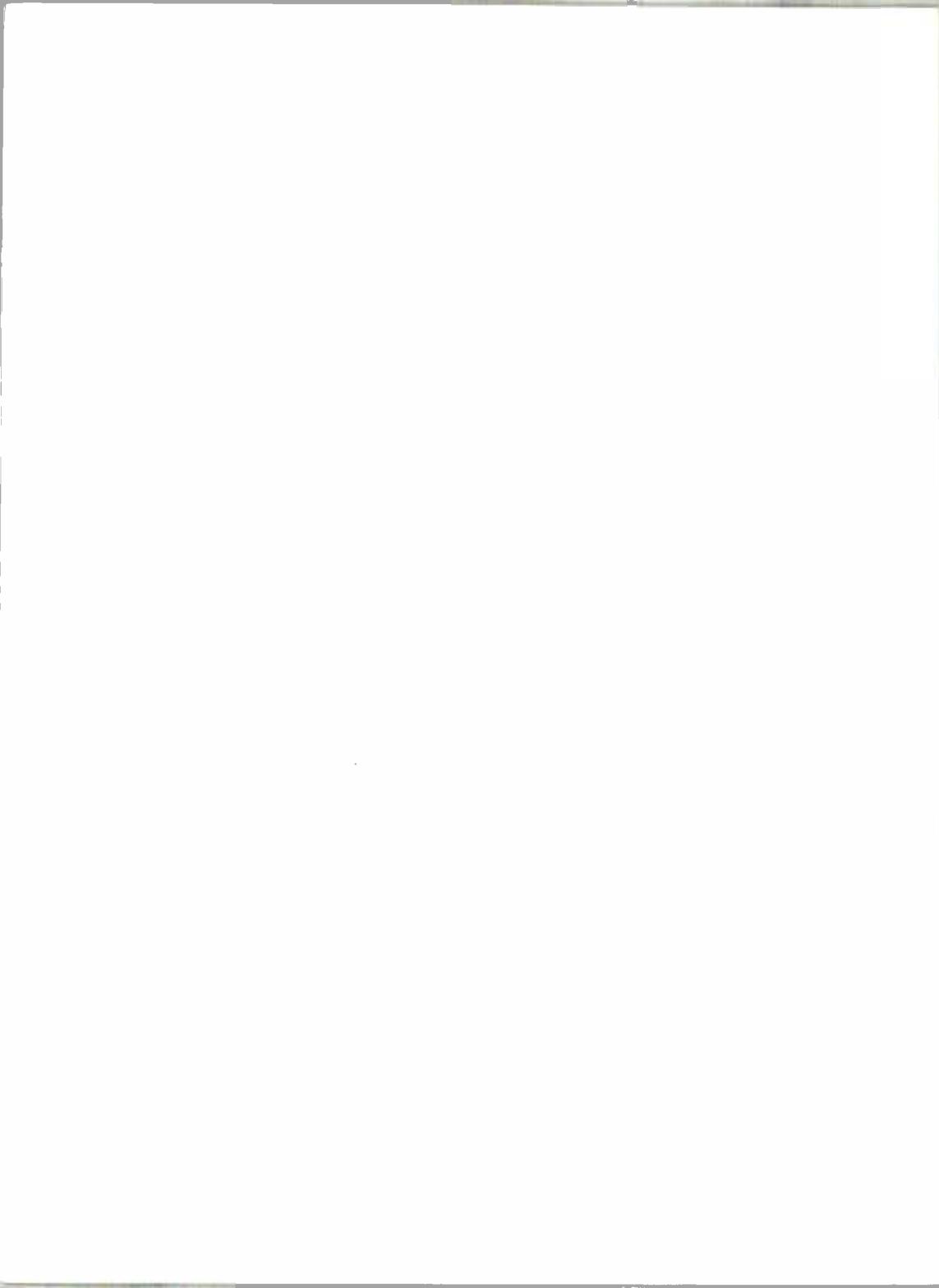
To my wife, Katy, the Mother of my sons and, at the same time, Executive Vice-President of our own group of stations.

To Charles Jr. and George for their ideas and contributions.

I shall always be grateful.

## CONTENTS

Foreword .....	v
Dedication .....	vi
Chapter 1: Magic in the Air .....	1
Chapter 2: Sorcerers' Apprentice .....	19
Chapter 3: Memoirs of an Ex-Civilian .....	36
Chapter 4: Whiz Kids and Quiz Biz .....	55
Chapter 5: Cast of Characters .....	66
Chapter 6: Blessed and Other Events .....	72
Chapter 7: Hijacking Moscow .....	78
Chapter 8: Ad-Ventures .....	81
Chapter 9: An Embarrassment of Watches .....	85
Chapter 10: Cut to the Chase .....	90
Chapter 11: "... Evvabody Evvawhere!" .....	95
Chapter 12: Power Plays .....	119
Chapter 13: Big Apple: <i>Esprit de Core</i> .....	135
Chapter 14: Dealing with the FCC and Jesus ...	167
Chapter 15: Virginia Real: Hello WCPK .....	178
Chapter 16: Tea Dances and Happy Tidings ...	186
Chapter 17: We Interrupt This Life Due to Technical Difficulties .....	200
Chapter 18: The Agony of Victory? .....	204
Chapter 19: Networking Before Networking Was Cool .....	213
Chapter 20: End of Tunnel .....	224
Chapter 21: Have You Hugged Your Radio Today? .....	227
Chapter 22: It Was What We Didn't Play .....	232
Chapter 23: Zsa Zsa Said It! .....	238
Epilogue .....	240



**Chapter 1**

**Magic in the Air**

The Twentieth Century began a few years ahead of schedule, ironically at Stonehenge, the mystical jumble of geometric rocks and ditches on the Salisbury Plain in southern England. Stonehenge dates from about 3000 B.C., and scholars still argue about its meaning and its role. They agree that parts of it were built by a people who had widespread European trade connections, that the layout of its structures could predict equinoxes, eclipses and the changing of the seasons, and that the Romans vandalized it 2,000 years ago. So, if you ask me, this was an anthropological wonder of news, weather and sports.

Guglielmo Marconi brought showmanship to Stonehenge in 1896, when he chose this scene of ancient accomplishment as the place to unveil his modern one: radio. There at the scene of such profound mystery, another one crackled when Marconi transmitted signals—signals without wires!—across nine miles of the Salisbury Plain. The demonstration allowed Marconi to patent his invention in Great Britain. It would soon change the world. The idea of wireless communication was so amazing that at first even its inventor didn't see its full implications. No wires! It was downright miraculous, the idea of this stuff just shooting through the air, waiting to be somehow captured and heard.

Marconi's radio signals began in primitive dots and dashes, intended as another but quite mysterious and electromagnetic way to spew out words and thoughts over the air as an option to the telephone, the telegraph, smoke sig-

nals, jungle drums or shouting. But as the magic of radio would soon demonstrate unforgettably, you can't send Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" by telegram. No letter could ever equal the chilling drama of Edward R. Murrow's voice from London, speaking between the hollow whumps of exploding Luftwaffe bombs: "As I watched those white fires flame up and die down, watched the yellow blazes grow dull and disappear, I thought what a puny effort is this to burn a great City."

But in 1896 the potential of wireless radio exceeded the ability of most minds to grasp it. (It would be seven more years before the Wright Brothers first flew.) When the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Co., Ltd. was formed, its first applications were exclusively nautical. The Marconi Company raised rickety towers along the eastern seaboard of the U.S. and Canada, selling ship-to-shore communications. Within three years, by 1899, Marconi had further amazed the world by sending the letter "S"—three dots—in the first trans-Atlantic radio transmission from Newfoundland to Cornwall. In 1907 radio was adopted by the British and Italian navies, who had begun to recognize it for the dazzling, magical weapon it could become. On the eve of World War I, the U.S. Navy commandeered every privately-owned radio set in the country for the war effort, training 400 operators a week on a contract let to the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Co., Ltd.

Marconi's first primitive, startling technology has evolved into the present multi-billion-dollar global sub-culture of music, talk, sports, news, weather, finance, gardening, evangelism, and, above all, salesmanship. It also has brought happiness, suspense, laughter, helpful hints, life-saving advice, romance, relaxation and intensely personal memories to millions.

Radio won the Nobel prize for Guglielmo Marconi, and also gave my life its direction. Here's how and why.

By most gauges the Great Depression officially began on October 30, 1929, with the Black Friday stock market crash and the subsequent swan dives of ruined captains of industry from their office windows. There was a decade of hard times ahead, and the ripple effect took some time in bringing the magnitude of the bust to the country at large. It was the catastrophic version of trickle-down economics. In early 1930, along the rolling prairie and Trinity River bottomland of Corsicana, Texas, 60 miles southeast of Dallas, prosperity hadn't been all that noticeable in the first place among the hard-scrabble, dry-land cotton farmers of the region. Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and rural electrification were still some years away. Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow hadn't yet embarked on their career as felonious folk heroes, in which the ever-poorer citizens of North Central Texas would be about evenly divided on whether to root for the bank robbers or the cops.

That year I was six years old. In my memory the resonance of those evenings is focused on a table-model, bedside radio with a wooden, cathedral-arched cabinet. The brand name "Atwater Kent" appeared just above a softly illuminated dial filled with the adventure of frequency numbers that spoke of faraway places. Later I'd see photos of Atwater Kent in *Life*, *Look* and other magazines. I remember him as a spiffy and apparently eccentric millionaire industrialist with a faintly rabbit-like face who seemed to wear tophats and swallowtail coats a lot. He was a dead ringer for the sketches of the Mad Hatter in my copy of *Alice in Wonderland*. But Atwater Kent's humming, sparking, magical box brought my family many hours of joy and fascination.

In the memories of my sixness, in my mind's ear, it always seems to be a Sunday evening. It's about 10:30 p.m. I am in bed, eyes closed, but far from sleep because I am listening to the magic coming from that bedside box. I hear the unmistakable, sing-song three chimes of the National Broadcasting Company (which are, in fact, the musical notes G, E and C—standing for "General Electric Corporation" in honor of its role as an early licensee of R.C.A. components). After the chimes come the soaring, dipping, rollercoaster notes of the ghostly clarinet that opens George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," a piece of music ideal for its placement in a time intersecting with America's cultural aspirations, the artistic genius of its people, and the skills of its technicians. Gershwin's great piece is being played by the Paul Whiteman orchestra on my radio, live from the very verge of midnight in some wonderful place in New York City. They are playing just for me, thrilling me, causing me to sit upright in the darkness of my bedroom in the Texas prairie night.

This is more magical than Merlin, better than Aladdin's Lamp—this is real. The sound of this magic, and the magic of this sound, is elusive, and eerie, and forever charming. It is radio, beckoning to me in ways I couldn't yet imagine.

In 1930 commercial radio and I were the same age. On rare wintry nights of the right air density, listeners in Texas might actually pick up the signal of KDKA in Pittsburgh, the nation's first commercial radio station that, six years earlier in 1924, had launched an era by broadcasting one of President Calvin Coolidge's speeches. It was the same year I was born. But 1930 was still the early days of radio's novelty and innocence. KDKA and other stations solicited postcards from listeners: "If you're picking up our signal, please write and tell us ..."

My hometown, Emhouse, is still there today, nine miles north of Corsicana on U.S. Highway 287, which is an underappreciated, 3,000-mile road of indefatigable twists and turns. It begins near Beaumont and the Gulf of Mexico and continues through Houston, Emhouse, Fort Worth, Amarillo, on through New Mexico and into Colorado, to Denver and Fort Collins, then to Laramie and on into Montana and Yellowstone National Park, and finally up to Helena, ending just short of the Canadian border at Choteau, Montana.

With the opening of U.S. 75 and Interstate 45, both of which bypassed Emhouse, Highway 287 definitely qualifies as "the road less traveled" today, but it once was the straightest way to drive from Dallas to Houston. Emhouse also straddled the line of the Trinity & Brazos Valley Railroad: southbound to Houston, the conductor's litany of stops through our neighborhood went, "... Ennis! Emhouse! Corsicana! Mildred! Richland! Streetman! ..."

Emhouse's population today is a shaky 175; if it ever had a high-water mark, it would have been in the 1930s when it had a bank, a newspaper, three dry-goods stores, three grocery stores, two churches (Baptist and Methodist), two drug stores, two doctors, and the Emhouse School. It also had a namesake—Col. E.M. House—who had some degree of national and even world celebrity of the period. Edward Mandell House (1858-1938), had been president of that Trinity & Brazos Valley Railroad—which was the pragmatic reason for the town's being named for him. Emhouse wasn't the only community to find itself blessed with a coveted location on a rail-line route after being named for some railroad dignitary. There was much more to Col. House, though, than being a big railroad enchilada. He later served on the Texas governor's staff, and in 1912

was instrumental in winning the Democratic presidential nomination for Woodrow Wilson. He became Wilson's principal adviser, and was his personal delegate on the American Commission at the Versailles Peace Conference. He was a main architect of the League of Nations.

My father, Benjamin Franklin Payne, was the owner of one of those two drug stores. He died when I was three. My mother, born Annie Irene English, ran the store thereafter. Her roots in that region of North Central Texas extended well back into the 19th Century through her Cherokee-Comanche lineage.

At age six, when I was barely big enough to ride a bicycle, Emhouse added another entrepreneur: me. I threw a newspaper route for the *Dallas Morning News*, Sundays and weekday mornings. In the afternoons I threw a route for the *Dallas Journal*. Both papers came to Emhouse via the south-bound trains. The *Journal*, also owned by the *News* in a lively print era when Dallas supported four daily newspapers, was a full-size paper with a tabloid mentality; its two distinctions were its racier approaches to the day's news, plus a newsprint stock in a shade of light, minty-green. The only modern comparison I can make with that color is the *San Francisco Chronicle's* "Sporting Green" sports section. I was the exclusive Emhouse outlet for these two metropolitan dailies. There were between 40 or 50 subscribers on my routes. I paid a penny a paper and sold them for three cents apiece.

I had started learning to read at four. My mother would perch me on a counter stool at Payne's Drugs, prop the front page of a newspaper up against a napkin holder or the pie case, and have me call out the words in the headlines as she pointed to them. This system was eerily prophetic. That's exactly the way you read from cards clipped to an easel in

a broadcast studio.

And there's a fringe benefit for a kid growing up with a drug store in the family: you have constant and free access to every comic book, magazine and periodical that comes in to the store. Often the covers of the top magazines in the distributor's stacks would be mildly damaged by the baling wire that bound each stack, or in the snipping of the wires. Usually too tattered to sell, they were damaged goods, and fair game. And in those days magazine-browsing was a pretty general pastime among customers of any age. The "*Do Not Read Magazines*" notices wouldn't start going up at drug store news racks for another 25 years.

At the age of six, I was reading every copy of *Popular Mechanics* and *Popular Electronics* that I could find, to learn as much as I could about what made that magical bedside box work. I even understood a lot of it. I saved back 35 cents from the paper routes—that took a while—and sent off for a Galena crystal from Allied Radio Corp. in Chicago, a corporate forerunner of Radio Shack. The crystal detector was the heart of the radio receiver (so I was assured by the articles I was reading). I wasn't sure why or how it worked, but one of the nice features about radio technology was that it could be forgiving of its pioneer. Lee DeForest, who invented the regenerative circuit and enabled radio to progress from dots and dashes to spoken words and sounds of music, didn't understand how or why his invention worked, either.

In the magazines I saw that the simple schematic for the receiver called for the winding of a coil of copper wire. Sending away that 35 cents for the crystal had depleted my research and development funds; there was no money for copper wire. The solution for me, and hundreds or thousands of other radio-freak kids of the day, was a practical

application of the Gypsy Chicken Recipe method, which begins, "First, steal a chicken ..." It was well known that some of the world's best coated copper wiring could be found in the electrical distributor systems of Model T Fords. Accordingly, Model T owners in Emhouse and Corsicana began experiencing the same electrical problems of Ford owners all across America—vanishing distributor coils.

The conventional way to build a homemade radio was to take the cardboard core from a roll of toilet paper, brush it down with shellac and let it dry. And then, after we stole the wire from the Model T coil, wrap the coil around the core. Usually you'd have enough for two radio receivers. Schematically, this would be your antenna from outside. You'd bring the antenna in and put it to the top of the coil. Then you'd put the crystal between that and ground, and from ground you'd go up and tap across into the coil to tune it. The world is made up of two kinds of people: those who immediately understand that sentence, and the many more who don't, and never will.

Once you built the set, you needed headphones to hear anything, and since headphones were in the same category as coated copper wire—unattainable on urchin income—we used the receiver pieces from upright telephones as headphones. Whether or not this usage caused the origin of the term "headphones" I can't say, but it's a sure bet that many telephone handset receivers were cannibalized before their time.

Your headphones would be on either side of the crystal. You'd tap into one side and then into the other. Your antenna would be that same length of coil wire, sometimes as much as 150 feet of it, strung from the top of the house to the garage and insulated on both ends. As the signal came into one end of the crystal detector, the audio impulses were

passed on. It was in effect a primitive diode. One end of it would be a "cat whisker" that would touch down on a sensitive part of the Galena crystal. Even today it still sounds suspiciously like magic, and it made you wonder how Marconi ever thought of it without a *Popular Mechanics* to consult. But the magazines assured me this was how it was done, and they were right. I couldn't count the number of times I tried things that didn't work, but by age seven I could make radio receivers pretty consistently. When you're that age and something of your own handiwork can bring in news and music from bare air, you are hooked.

At about that time my sister, Ann, had a serious medical problem that required abdominal surgery—no small matter even today, but a hazardous procedure in the mid-30s. While she was back home recuperating, I made for her what turned out to be one of the smallest radio receivers I would ever make, about one inch square. I may have been a few years ahead of the Japanese on that one. She listened to it by the hour in her sickbed, and she never forgot that radio. Forty years later and 2,000 miles away, it would be given back to me, mounted on a marble block, inscribed with the letters WCPK #1.

If that's getting ahead of the story it nevertheless fits into the Emhouse time frame, because the "K" in WCPK all those years later would stand for Katy.

Katy Watkins. Daydream object. Fantasy focus. Puppylove partner. Childhood sweetheart. Girl of my dreams. Wife. Helpmate for life. Cliches become cliches because of their repetitions in reality, and my cliches about Katy Watkins begin with the fact that I'll never forget the first time I laid eyes on her, in the first grade of Emhouse School.

In that part of Texas in the 1930s high school went only

through the 11th grade, and the kids in Emhouse, grades one through 11, all shared the same squarish brick schoolhouse. The town lost its school to nearby Blooming Grove in the 50s, and the old building has been converted into senior citizens' apartments.

There were many moments when it was hard to be wrapped up in schematics of radio circuits because of the intruding visions of Katy's matched set of ebony hair and eyes. This isn't supposed to happen to boys at age six or seven, but either I was precocious or else that law hadn't been passed yet.

Katy's father, George Watkins, was one of Emhouse's bigger wheels—head of the school board, owner of one of the dry-goods stores, a gentleman farmer-rancher-livestock trader. He may have had mixed emotions a year later when Katy and I were publicly married in the second grade. I wore a rented tuxedo, size peewee regular, and Katy was in a white satin gown with train, made for her at her parents' request by my mother.

The event was what was known as a "Tom Thumb Wedding," held on the school stage, scripted, overseen by one of the teachers, attended by the whole town, and one of the cultural rages of the times—as popular and ubiquitous in small towns of the South as those itinerant photographers who posed kids on ponies. This was a fullblown wedding ceremony of little kids, probably inspired by the earlier popularity of the Ringling Brothers circus' wedding of the famous midget Tom Thumb. (A little later, in the 30s, Hollywood cashed in on the idea with a western film made with a cast of kids, midgets and Shetland ponies.)

The Tom Thumb Weddings were held at schools all over. What I most remember about ours was that the "minister" was a third-grader, Willis Champion, who wore a home-

made frocked outfit and read the service from a script sheet tucked inside a Sears, Roebuck catalogue.

As far as I was concerned, the mould was cast, only it would be 15 years before I'd marry Katy again.

Meanwhile, *Popular Mechanics* kept up its monthly drumfire of puttering challenges, and I moved on from Galena crystal detectors to tubed receivers, operated by electricity. One day, experimenting with our table-top receiver, I discovered I could go into the circuit of the radio and pick up the necessary power to operate a homemade radio transmitter. *Uh oh!*

I rigged a Hartley oscillator, modulated it with music, and discovered I had myself a radio station on the air. I used the same antenna wire (top of the house out to the garage), and tied into the circuit to transmit the sound of my station, which was at once gratifying, thrilling, precocious and illegal. I knew it was possible to tap into the utility company's electric pole out back to pick up the voltage I needed to run the tubes for the transmitter. I'd heard of some kids who'd done this, taking a few good hair-spiking shocks before they got it down. Leaching juice from the power company was as illegal then as it is now; moral principles aside, I considered it too dangerous to try. That was always my mother's chief concern with my hobby: that I or someone else would get hurt. Most kids' mothers worry about broken bones, cuts and scrapes. Mine worried about electrocutions. But she was amazingly tolerant of the mazes of wires that were necessary to set up all these things, and never grumbled about their housekeeping aspects although it did disturb her to be around so many wires carrying current. The electrification of America's households was one thing—but she felt she was doing more than her share.

Just knowing how to tap into utility lines put my peers

at a considerable technological step ahead of Ben Franklin, but I doubt that many modern-day kids would be able to do this kind of experimenting. There's not enough privacy or access to electric poles, and there are big signs posted in the waiting rooms of every electric utility offering rewards for turning in people seen tapping electric lines. The genius of modern kids revolves around improvisations with personal computers, Nintendo games and calculators; there's no limit to what they might accomplish—so long as there's not a power failure.

Every afternoon after school I would fire up the transmitter, once again using a converted telephone—this time as a carbon microphone—and play music from a stack of 78 rpm records. After an hour or so I'd shut down, go out and try to sell commercials to local stores, then come back to the "studio" and play radio some more. I was shaken to learn the number of townspeople who listened to the station. Many said they even enjoyed it, but whether it was for the quality of the programming or because the concept was as cute as a Tom Thumb Wedding, I'm not sure. I actually sold some spots to merchants, but at the time the thrill of broadcasting outweighed the considerations of cash flow. My attitude about this would change soon enough. There were enough people like me doing this kind of thing—discovering how to make a radio station—to earn special mention as outlaws in the congressional Communications Act of 1934, establishing the Federal Communications Commission and regulating the licensing of stations.

I stayed on the air until the day a friend who was a ham radio operator sent me greetings from some regional inspector of the new Federal Communications Commission. The message was, "Tell that kid to get that station off the air."

As government fiat, it was informal but effective. It was an early start in what would be a long career of closely following the FCC's suggestions ... until the day some decades hence when we would make landmark law by becoming the first to beat the FCC in a courtroom.

To give an idea of the need for the Communications Act of 1934, in 1912 the U.S. government had passed the first laws concerning radio broadcasting. Within five years, more than 8,500 transmitting licenses had been issued. After the Navy enforced its draconian "radio silence" rules during World War I, an effort was made to retain military control of the airwaves after the war. The Navy argued that the medium of the airwaves was too vital to be entrusted to commercial interests. But at the war's end radio amateurs returned to the airwaves in such overwhelming, cacophonous numbers that the federal government decided to let free enterprise determine the fate of American broadcasting.

Americans still don't realize how fortunate they were in this decision. In many of the nations where this wasn't done, private radio transmitters would remain illegal. Even in Great Britain, a nation as enlightened about private rights as any on earth, there remained a wariness about citizens and radios. Early in World War II, on May 26, 1940, Prime Minister Winston Churchill signed an order for the confiscation of "all wireless sets in private automobiles."

The first issue of *Radio Broadcasting* magazine in 1920 commented on the growth of the miracle medium: "The rate of increase in the number of people who spend at least part of their evening listening in is almost incomprehensible." The number of commercial stations exploded from eight in 1921 to 564 in 1922. There were churches, colleges, department stores, and in one case, a stockyard, with their

own radio stations.

In their 1987 book, *Border Radio*, authors Gene Fowler and Bill Crawford captured much of the sense of the new American culture in the 20s. "It is difficult for our video-glutted generation to imagine what radio meant to Americans in the 20s. Radio was the housewife's companion, the friendly voice of consolation that brightened the world of cooking, washing, and child rearing with music, romance and understanding conversation. Radio became the center of the family entertainment circle, as children, parents and grandparents gathered by the Grebe, Radiola, or Aeriola set in the radio room and marveled at the sounds they heard mysteriously transported from faraway lands. Radio was hailed as the world's greatest source of knowledge, the creator of international harmony, and the invention that would stop all wars." (This latter hope showed a lack of appreciation for what an indispensable aid to war-making radio communications could be.)

Those who had radio sets spent the better part of their days and evenings tuned in to the voices from the ether. Those who wanted to buy sets, according to a contemporary chronicler, often stood in the fourth or fifth row at the radio counter waiting their turn, only to be told when they finally reached the counter that they might place an order and it would be filled when possible. By the mid-20s America was truly a country crazy for radio.

The resulting oral traffic jams on the frequencies were described as "hertzian bedlam." Broadcasters hopped around on frequencies and boosted power in their efforts to be heard over the rest of the babble. Farmers complained that the colliding radio waves caused their cows to give sour milk. In 1923, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover decided that the chaos of the airwaves was intoler-

able, froze the issuance of licenses, and assumed the power of allocating different frequencies to different radio stations.

Runaway radio continued until passage of the Radio Act of 1927, when the first real broadcast bureaucrats were created and the Federal Radio Commission was established. Even this wasn't firm enough, and in 1934 the far-reaching Communications Act finally reined in the industry by giving the necessary licensing powers and enforcement teeth to the new Federal Communications Commission.

An ironic difference between then and now was that early radio was an endless onslaught of programming rather than commercials. While the government tried to regulate it, broadcasters tried to figure out how to make money from it. A national radio conference in 1922 actually recommended that "direct advertising ... be absolutely prohibited." Commerce Secretary Hoover said, "I believe the quickest way to kill broadcasting would be to use it for direct advertising." Fowler and Crawford wrote, "In 1924 there were 526 radio stations in the country, and more than 400 of them refused to accept sponsors. In 1927, most American radio stations served as publicity vehicles for their owners, which were newspapers like the *Detroit News*, retail stores like Gimbel's and John Wanamaker, hotels and product manufacturers. AT&T viewed radio as an extended telephone system with limited potential and ran its radio stations under the management of its by-products services division." It's a further irony that AT&T and other telephone giants have come full circle in their developmental thinking, and now have the same plans for their networks on cable television.

As order was imposed on the American airwaves, the renegade sounds simply moved south across the Rio Grande into Mexico. In the 30s we amateur tinkers could

tickle the coils with our cat-whisker tuning wires and bring in a whole new babble of overpowering signals coming from the gigantic antennas strung along the Mexican border from Matamoros to Tijuana. It didn't matter what the FCC said; these stations were licensed by the Federal Radio Department for the Republic of Mexico. In many cases, U.S. station operators found ways of owning and operating a border station.

Border radio was the physicist's version of illegal aliens, and the airwaves themselves didn't care about the source of the legal licensing. While U.S. stations were regulated on the strength and frequency of their signals, border stations boomed out at incredible strengths—sometimes up to 750,000 watts—and at pellmell points on the dial. After sundown, their signals could sweep for a thousand miles across the Great Plains and over the Rocky Mountains, regularly obliterating local stations' signals as far away as Denver and Salt Lake City. Screaming out over its 840-kilocycle frequency, XERA could stomp on stations as far apart as WWL in New Orleans (870) and KOA in Denver (850).

For such superpower, the transmissions were relatively clean, and much of the credit for this belonged to a man who would become a friend of mine, James Weldon, a Kansas City engineer who in the 30s worked for station XERA, whose call-letter I.D. said Del Rio, Texas, but whose transmitter was located across the Rio Grande in Ciudad Acuna. As chief engineer, Jimmy Weldon developed the Klystron tube, a device of extreme magnitude that became a pivotal part in the development of high-power transmission of television signals in the 1940s. Weldon later founded Continental Electronics of Dallas. To this day many of the high-power AM stations around the world continue to operate Weldon's Continental transmitters—some of up to

a megawatt (one million watts) or more.

There was a simple shrewdness that enhanced the power of their technology. While U.S. stations were licensed to operate at 10-kc separations on the dial (i.e., 830, 840, 850) it was Weldon's tactic to drop XERA in between those frequencies—at 835. Thus the signal gouged its way through thick and thin, technically becoming a nationwide clear-channel station.

Weldon later liked to tell horrific stories of the power of those stations. He said that at about 9:00 p.m. on a summer evening, just before full dark, if you stood near the five towers of XERA in Ciudad Acuna you could see a bluish white light glimmering from the guywires leading to each tower. The eerie glow was a corona effect outlining the framework of the structures as the transmitters pulsed out that overpowering transmission.

"And," he said, "when we were going at full power, 750,000 watts, folks over in Del Rio would call us and complain that when they turned on their fluorescent lights, they couldn't turn them off."

The redeeming quality of border radio was its flagrantly weird programming—yodelers, evangelists, quacks, prodigies of the infant advertising industry, all screaming out their once-in-a-lifetime offers over XEG in Monterey, XEAW, Reynosa; XEPN, Piedra Negras; XEAK, Tijuana, XENT, Nuevo Laredo; XELO, Juarez.

One of the most legendary radio offers from border radio was the picture of Jesus Christ guaranteed to glow in the dark. To get it, the announcer advised listeners in network-quality English, "Simply send one dollar to Jesus Christ, XERA, Del Rio, Texas."

Del Rio's most famous citizen, radio personality and man of science in those days, was Dr. John R. Brinkley, a

fugitive from the ethics committee of the American Medical Association. He founded the Villa Acuna station, first as XER, and later admitted to incomes of "eleven hundred thousand dollars" a year in the mid-30s as listeners streamed across the border to check into his hospital, whose services he advertised on the air. His specialty was rejuvenation of the male libido, through implantation of goat-gonad glands. Even in Corsicana and Emhouse, a joke of the day was the definition of the fastest animal in the world: "A goat running past Dr. Brinkley's hospital." XER then was at 735 on the dial; its power was "only" 150,000 watts, and it claimed it was drawing 27,000 pieces of mail weekly from every state in the U.S. and 15 foreign countries.

Personalities stayed on Brinkley's station according to their "mail-pulling" power. He may have invented ratings. Another border radio star was Rose Dawn, a woman referred to by *Time* magazine as "a blondined uplifter." She was Dr. Brinkley's personal astrologer, and in addition to divining the signs of listeners' horoscopes, she would offer to pray for a particular radio fan or give advice on matters of the heart for a fee of \$1—the same price she charged for a vial of her special exotic perfume or a copy of her "blossom-like-a-flower" personality book.

Those were runaway, renegade radio days. I was 12 years old. I'd have hardly guessed that one day I'd be running a Mexican border station myself.

## Chapter 2

### Sorcerers' Apprentice

In May of 1937 Margaret Mitchell of Atlanta, Georgia, won a Pulitzer Prize for her ambitious new novel *Gone With the Wind*. George VI was crowned King of Great Britain. The German dirigible "Hindenburg" exploded while landing at Lakehurst, New Jersey. Neville Chamberlain became Prime Minister of Great Britain. Lou Gehrig of the Yankees, starting his 13th season, passed the 1,850 consecutive-games mark. And Corsicana, Texas got a radio station. Its call letters were KAND.

Around Emhouse and my environs the buzz was that the owners of this new station had sunk up to \$20,000 into the facilities and equipment—this magic-in-the-air deal wasn't a cheap proposition, you know. A decent house was \$3,000 and a used car cost \$75. And KAND, which to outsiders had the obvious but wrong connotation of having something to do with candy, was the owners' second choice. They wanted to call their station WOLF, because the same group of investors also owned the Wolf Brand Chili Company. Wolf Brand's canned chili was already a staple in the cupboards of the Southwest, and the town was suitably proud that the company's headquarters was in Corsicana.

But there already was—and still is—a station called WOLF, in Syracuse, New York. Further, the FCC had begun imposing its rule that stations east of the Mississippi River should begin with the letter "W," and stations west of the Mississippi would start with "K." There are still exceptions to the "K" an "W" east-west rule, but they're invariably sta-

tions whose call letters were grandfathered in, dating before the 1934 FCC Act that established the policy. (The conventional theory is that those two letters were picked because they are distinctly enunciated and not easily misheard as other letters can be, as in "C", "B," "D" and "V." International agreements already in place at that time assigned stations in Canada to begin with "C" and stations in Mexico with "X.")

So the owners of the Corsicana station settled for their second choice, KAND, as in "canned." As in chili.

The whole world of call-letters can be illuminating, strange, or whimsical. You can bet that nearly every set of call letters in the country has meaning to someone, although they can be pretty obscure. Or they can be pretty obvious, being based on the station's city or its geographical or cultural attractions. WNYC in New York City and WIND in Chicago—for the Windy City—are naturals. There's WACO in Waco, Texas; KOVO in Provo, Utah; KSL in Salt Lake City. KRLD in Dallas derives from Radio Laboratories of Dallas, and there are historians on both sides who insist that Dallas' WFAA once stood for either "Working for All Alike" or for "World's Finest Air Attraction." Texans assumed WBAP got its call letters from some connection with the Baptist denomination, but the station has said it only stood for "We Bring a Program."

KRGV in Harlingen-Weslaco, Texas serves the Rio Grande Valley; Chicago's superstation WLS purportedly came from its original ownership by the World's Largest Store—Sears. Its Chicago competitor, WGN, was the broadcast arm of the *Chicago Tribune*, the self-proclaimed "World's Greatest Newspaper." Saint Louis' KMOX, the booming voice of mid-America, began in 1925 in Kirkwood (K), Missouri (MO) on Christmas Eve (X).

Forty years after I first heard the sounds of KAND (the canned chili station) in Corsicana. Katy and I could attest to the appeal of giving a station call letters with a personal meaning. Our WCPK in Chesapeake, Virginia had the nice dual attraction of standing for Charlie and Katy Payne and also for our broadcast area—the Chesapeake region.

When KAND went on the air I was 13. “Teenager” wasn’t yet an official cultural or demographic category. We didn’t know enough to organize and have people write songs about us. But “hanging out,” as a social action somewhere between loitering and languishing, was one of the few terms teenagers used back then that’s still in use to this day. I did my hanging around at the studios of KAND. As with all kids there were chances for pick-up baseball games and bike-riding and Saturday cowboy movies, but none of that interested me as much as just being around the place where radio was happening.

I haunted the station and its studios, spending countless hours staring through the soundproofed glass windows into the control room. At most stations today it’s a task getting past the receptionist (and the security guard), but in those days of radio’s prideful infancy, the owners invited the public to come in and look around. Visitors and gawkers alike were welcome, but I’m sure I wore out mine. I was intrigued by the nuts and bolts of all that mystical technology going on in the control room, captivated by the sounds being broadcast, whether live or recordings or by that mainstay of early programming, the “electrical transcriptions.” Transcriptions were discs, too, but bigger and thicker than ordinary records, something like a Graham cracker. They carried magical stuff that you couldn’t buy in stores—sound effects! Commercials! Announcements! Whole programs! The fact that they came in the mail or by Railway

Express, the slower grandfather of today's overnight services like U.P.S. and Federal Express, hardly detracted from their sense of urgent excitement.

As an early groupie, I did what I could to spend every spare minute watching and listening and inhaling the excitement of the radio station. I tended to think of it as diligence, dedication and intense focus. The people around the station probably tended to think of it as being a pest.

I was so certain of the direction I wanted my life to take that I tried to learn everything I could about music and the production of sounds. In school I signed up for every speech class on the schedule, and took part in every public speaking, debate, and declamation competition that was offered. (Every town of any size in the late 30s and 40s had some citizen, invariably a matronly lady, who offered private classes in something called "Expression." Parents enrolled their kids in Expression, and they did readings, skits, songs and the like. Every so often the Expression class would have a recital, like piano students, and in small towns the radio stations would air the show. It was free programming for the stations, and gave a whole generation of six-year-olds the chance to make their broadcast debuts singing "You Must Have Been a Beautiful Baby.")

Practicing for the speech competitions at home, I delivered everything—reading from newspapers, history books, *Popular Mechanics* and cereal boxes, as if there were a microphone in front of me. I kept wishing there were some way I could manage to hear what I was sounding like. I was mentally and wishfully inventing the tape recorder. My practice declamations might have sounded like aimless droning to an eavesdropper, but it was a measured amount of fantasy mixed with a lot of daydreaming.

After almost two years of hanging around KAND I was

as familiar to the neighborhood as the paper boy—heck, I *was* the paperboy—and in the summer of 1939, when I was 15, I was ecstatic to learn I was being promoted from pest to part-time staff member. Today my position would be called something like “intern,” but those were even the days before the word “gofer.”

I'd made friends over those two years with the staff announcers and engineers at the station, and it was pretty obvious to everyone there that radio was my consuming interest.

There were stars of radio then as now, nationally and at the local levels, but the curious thing about their fame was that it sprang from their voices and, to a lesser degree, their names. No one knew what radio stars looked like. There were the great voices on the networks from New York and Hollywood—Andre Baruch, Arthur Godfrey, John Daly, George Herman, Harry Vonzell. News correspondents like William L. Shirer and Edward R. Murrow were still mostly unknown and hardly heard; their fame would come with the outbreak of World War II and the bombing of London. But the real stars of radio to us fans in the late 30s were the staff announcers.

The local stations had their stars, too. In Corsicana my hero was a fellow named George Erwin, who was destined to move on in the industry after his salad days in North Central Texas. One day George asked me if I'd like to get some practical experience on the control board, as well as doing a few announcements on the air!

My only question was how soon I could start, and the happy answer was immediately. I came in every day, gave station breaks and made simple announcements, all for no pay—but who cared.

I continued in the job through the end of summer and

then went reluctantly back to school for my junior year. In a few months George Erwin started his series of career moves onward and upward, joining KXYZ in Houston and later becoming a mainstay at KFJZ in Fort Worth, the flagship station of Elliott Roosevelt's Texas State Network.

The sign-on staff at KAND had assembled before its microphones some broadcast talents who were well above the kind of quality that might be expected in a market of that size. One of the first voices I'd heard as a listener belonged to Neil Fletcher, who had been on the staff of station KGKB in Tyler and was sent to Corsicana "on loan" until KAND got off the ground. Fletcher was glib and affable, a veteran trouper of the traveling medicine shows that performed in edge-of-town tents all over the southwest. A medicine show was a sort of cross between country vaudeville and evangelical revivals. The traveling shows were baptisms-by-fire for performers who learned show business the hard way.

Neil Fletcher became wealthy and famous eventually—but not because of radio. He and his brothers developed the "Corny Dog"—that weiner-on-a-stick wrapped in sweet dough and slathered with mustard or catsup, a perennial staple of midways at the State Fair of Texas and, later, available at concession booths at just about any event in America. Corny Dog aficionados still swear by "Fletcher's Corny Dogs" as the best of all ... and they still "sell 'em by the millions" at the State Fair of Texas.

Some of the other talents on that start-up staff at KAND included Chuck Whittier, Bob Syler and Tee Caspar. At the time, Tee's brother, Charlie Caspar, was the radio voice of the St. Louis Cardinals on KMOX in St. Louis.

George Erwin's departure and the continuing success of KAND made it possible for me to come on board again the

following summer of 1940, in a job a couple of steps up from my start there as "staff pest" the previous year. I was officially considered to be the Summer Replacement, as staff members left on vacation or took extra time off. My announcing shift was seven days a week and usually ran from 10 a.m. to noon, and then again from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. Seven days a week, nine dollars a week. This was high cotton for a 17-year-old kid from Emhouse, though it wasn't quite enough to afford a place in Corsicana so I wouldn't have to commute the nine miles from home.

Doing the work I loved and getting paid for it. Could things get any better than this? Yes! After a few weeks I got a raise to \$13 a week. This was getting close to being well-to-do. It was the kind of windfall that had to be optimized, as the financial geniuses say, so I immediately went out and found a used, black, two-door, 1930 Ford sedan. It was \$75. "Beautiful" is a condition that seems to become harder to capture with age, but in my 17th summer of 1940 that car ran beautifully. I wish I still had it.

I was settling into the rituals of radio as a career—or at least I certainly hoped so at the time. I was impressed by the numbers and quality of the people who were passing through KAND, on loan from other stations or for whatever reason. Each of them made a contribution of some sort to my own education in broadcasting, although neither of us might realize it at the time.

One of the early staff announcers was Jimmy Jones, who had come from KSAM in Huntsville, Texas. Besides being the site of the main unit of the Texas state penitentiary and one of the earliest settled towns in Texas (although it was named by its founder for the Huntsville in Alabama), it has claimed a strong and enduring identification with the state's earliest hero, Sam Houston. The college located there

is Sam Houston State University; and thus the call letters of KSAM. It's the station that first gave a job in news reporting to an earnest young cub from the college named Dan Rather.

Another of the full-time announcers when I came aboard was Milford Mitchell, who later had a big career in the Midwest after shortening his name to Ford Mitchell. For part of that time, the station's chief engineer was a cordial sorcerer named Bill Bradford, who quickly carved out a reputation for his technical know-how and later became the owner/operator of KSST in Sulphur Springs, Texas.

When the war years came and most announcers of military age went off to the service, good radio voices got pretty scarce around Corsicana. We conducted a talent raid on the speech class at the local Zion's Rest High School and came back with a curly-topped kid whose name was A.R. Nelson. A.R. began learning the trade on my shift and turned out to be a prodigy. He ditched the initials and became, instead, Art Nelson—a brisk, glib pro who would dominate the mid-day ratings in Dallas for a decade while working for the legendary Gordon McLendon at KLIF. Art later moved on to the West Coast bigtime at KRLA in Los Angeles.

The wartime phase of KAND involved another memorable character, J. Earle Fletcher, no relation to Neil the Corny Dog King. J. Earle, who took to selling, schmoozing and negotiating the way baby Mozart took to fugues, had broken into radio at KFJZ in Fort Worth from the newspaper business. He combined the two media on the air with a journalistically questionable, but immensely popular, show called "The Shopping Reporter." J. Earle's programs were long on commercials, and he played an almost continuous string of records by Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. Bob

Wills, whose birthplace of Turkey, Texas in the Palo Duro region of the Panhandle still celebrates him with billboards at both ends of the city limits, was the developer of the "Texas Swing" school of music. Its evolution led to the styles of Willie Nelson, Lyle Lovett and ZZ Top. Where popularity and impact among Texas listeners was concerned, Bob Wills was the Garth Brooks of the late 30s and 40s.

Wills, whose instrument was the fiddle, figures, in absentia, in one of the classic apocryphal anecdotes of urban Texas. As the story goes, the classical violinist Yehudi Menuhin was booked for a concert in Dallas at the same time as the Texas-Oklahoma football game, when hotels traditionally are booked, months ahead for miles around. When the Menuhin party arrived on a Friday night at the Baker Hotel to claim their rooms, there had been a mix-up and the clerk told them there were no rooms available because of the big football weekend. "But you don't understand," Menuhin's representative pleaded with the room clerk, "this is Yehudi Menuhin—the greatest violinist in the world!"

"Hey, Bubba," the clerk said, "I don't care if he's Bob Wills—we still don't have any rooms."

While they were working together at KFJZ, Fletcher and Truett Kimzey, who was chief engineer of the Fort Worth station and of the Texas State Network, got the idea of offering to lease the KAND operations from the station's corporate owners, Wolf Brand Chili. Their timing was good, due to wartime's attendant manpower-staffing and other operational problems of the food and radio businesses, and so the deal was made. Fletcher and Kimzey took over the station during 1942 and 1943. One of the life-changing inconveniences of being a youthful entrepreneur was that it also meant that you were draft age. The military draft caught up

with Earle (and a little later, with me). Earle meanwhile had become a good friend, mentor and confidant of mine. He had also helped me over some of the bumps in the romantic road with Katy.

After the war Earle Fletcher put his programming and managerial stamp on a number of Texas towns and stations, including Wichita Falls, Bowie, Cleburne and Conroe.

Two more talents from the KAND days remain in the memory, and would be heard from elsewhere. Bud Levy was a local Corsicana guy whose airwork made him very popular across North Central Texas, and who later spent years as one of the stars of Shreveport, Louisiana's powerful station KWKH. Its "Louisiana Hayride" shows on Saturday nights competed for listeners with Nashville's "Grand Ol' Opry." One of "Louisiana Hayride's" later discoveries in the mid-50s would be a truck driver from northwestern Mississippi named Elvis Presley.

KAND's announcer staff in those early years was rounded out by Dave Naugle, who had one of the most magnificent voices of all. He later spent years as a news anchor in Dallas and Fort Worth, and his work is heard even today across several states, on voice-overs for the Southern Baptist Convention's radio projects.

My rookie days at KAND totaled up to more than a mere job. In its 250-watt way the station was a vocational and emotional, even passionate, experience. It was a step up the ladder, of course, but for me it was a daily venture into that magical interface where the wonderful illusions of radio and the real world met.

There was a quaintly formalized and self-conscious sense to live-radio productions in those days. The profession was learning itself even as its listeners were being introduced to the possibilities of broadcast entertainment.

KAND was on the cutting edge of this new culture—by necessity if not by creativity. Anything “live” would take precedence over the best of recorded and transcribed shows. It was a hometown station that would instantly join the network for anything that was coming down the pipe live. Such great live moments often included the national feeds of the Glenn Miller Band—and the second half of the phrase: “Live from Frank Dailey’s Meadowbrook Ballroom in Cedar Grove, New Jersey!” Or there would be Benny Goodman from the Chez Paree in Chicago, Freddy Martin from the Coconut Grove.

KAND was typical of other local stations, too, in that we often broadcast the live sounds of whatever hillbilly or Texas Swing bands we could collar. It happened that many of these groups became virtual “house bands” for certain stations. Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys thus became regulars on WACO in Waco. KAND proudly presented Floyd Sykes and his Musical Ramblers.

There were better known traveling bands who were happy to stop and make free appearances on our air. It was good for their business. It wasn’t unusual for a group of the C&W stature of Roy Acuff and his Nashville show group to stop off in Corsicana to do a free 30-minute gig. On at least one occasion, the package included country’s queen of comedy Minnie Pearl.

One afternoon in 1942 at about 3:00 o’clock in the afternoon I was alone in the control room. In walked a frankly hayseedy looking character, scraggly and rumpled right down to his battered cowboy boots. He was wearing a light colored felt hat with patches of scalp oil that had seeped through and stained the hatband, a pretty common condition in one-hat households of the period.

He introduced himself. His name made no impression

whatever on me. He was holding a brown grocery-type bag, folded over. From it, he pulled out a record.

"I just made this here record up at that Sellers Studio in Dallas," he announced. He said it was a demo for the Columbia/Okeh label, and that the label's bigwigs had decided to release it. He had stopped by, he said, especially to leave it at our station and would sure appreciate it if we thought it was good enough to play on the air.

At the time I was the host of a daily show called "Hillbilly Hit Parade." It aired every morning from 11:15 until noon. It was popular, too, judging from the phone calls and all-important "mail-pull" we got about it. Apparently word of the show and its growing audience had reached whoever made the decision on this fellow's record.

My visitor explained that he was from the East Texas town of Kilgore and that he and his band broadcast a daily show on KOCA ("Oil Capital of America"). I took the hype with the standard grain of salt. When he left I put his record away on a shelf in the music library and, what with one thing and another, I frankly forgot about it. I don't even recall if I auditioned it first before putting it away. Anyway, the record sat there in the library and for a few days didn't get played by anyone else either.

Still later, somebody at the station came across it, played it, and said, "What's this thing doing stuck way over here?" Then it was played on the air—and played and played and played.

It was "Pistol Packin' Mama," by Al Dexter, one of the runaway million sellers of the time and later also a hit on the pop charts when it was released by Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters.

The lessons of that incident would stay with me forever. Later, as program director, manager and owner of other sta-

tions, I remembered the Al Dexter lessons: listen to what's on a record; don't be misled by artists' obscurity or, in the other direction, their hype. In future years I would personally audition every record that came into one of my stations. In the later days of long-playing discs and AOR—album-oriented programming—this got to be a time-consuming chore, but there was no way around it. There might be 12 tracks on a new LP and only one or two might merit airplay—but listening to them was the only way to find out.

We considered ourselves to be on the crest of the entertainment wave, but advances in the disc-jockey business would make our operations seem laughably primitive in today's computer-controlled milieu. When I started at KAND in 1939 and 1940, music came only from 78 rpm shellac discs, which came in both 10-inch and 12-inch sizes. There were the electrical transcriptions, too; discs 16 inches in diameter, a little thicker than conventional records and with one other notable difference: ETs usually were played inside out. That is, you put the needle into the grooves near the center of the disc from where it played outwards, rather than on the outer edge and having the needle revolve in toward the center. In those days, there was only the standard recording groove; microgroove LPs didn't come along until 1948.

Our control rooms had no durable, diamond-tipped needles. Those needles, which would ride the grooves straight down and greatly reduced the hopping and skipping of needles, wouldn't come around until after the war. The control-room operator had to change needles with every new disc or track. Further, there were red-shank steel needles for the shellac 78 rpm discs, and green-shank (harder) steel needles for the vinyl electrical transcriptions. The unbreakable rule was that needles had to be changed for

each new record.

The quick, timely, seamless segues of today's radio were not possible then. There's a deejay trick called back-cuing, or slip-cuing, in which the record is manually turned a couple of rpms until the raspy, grinding sounds of the track's beginning can be heard. Then the disc is backed up slightly, so that when the turntable switch goes on, the music begins instantaneously, without the dead pause of waiting for the needle to reach the beginning of the sounds. (Rap music groups also adopted this device, but they use it for its crunchy noise effect.)

Since records and transcriptions revolved at different speeds, there was no slip-cuing. Transcriptions were marked with an arrow on the label. Place the needle at the arrow on the selected track and the code on the label would tell you that the music began three revolutions into the disc—except that these guides were invariably wrong. It was Murphy's Law, syndicated nationally.

Switch-flipping was critical at times like station breaks because of the complexities of our network feed system. We were part of the Fort Worth-originating Texas State Network, which in turn was tied in to the Mutual Broadcasting System. After, say, Gabriel Heatter and the news on Mutual, the network voice would say, "This is the Mutual Broadcasting System ..." and it would be time for the Fort Worth control board to say, "... and the Texas State Network ..." and then it would be up to us to come in with, "This is KAND, the Wolf Brand Chili Station, Corsicana."

Long before satellites, uplinks, downlinks and land line feeds from originating station to network and then back out to stations, we used a procedure called "line reversal." It saved money. All of the TSN affiliates had the capability, but putting it into practice could be iffy.

As it worked, a show originating from TSN in Fort Worth would come into our studios on a leased telephone line. Then, from our studios, another leased line was used for us to feed all the TSN programming to other stations on the East Texas leg of the network—namely, KGKB in Tyler, KOCA in Kilgore and KFRO Longview. One morning I was in charge of the control room for a music show that was to be on from 8:30 to 8:45, featuring Wiley Walker and Gene Sullivan, two popular hillbilly singers of the day. The whole thing was sponsored by Montgomery Ward, and I'll never forget it. Wiley and Gene were at the studios in Tyler. It was fed into our studios in Corsicana, and by flipping a couple of switches on line reversal, our control room feed would then go back to Fort Worth for distribution to all of the TSN network stations.

I flipped the switches as I was supposed to, but as we found out later nothing happened. The line reversal didn't work. TSN fed dead air to 29 stations because the signal was somehow short-circuited. In Corsicana. At KAND. Right under my fingers. Rather than their fully-sponsored 29-market feed, Wiley and Gene were heard only in Tyler and Corsicana.

I had a worse scare involving a show that I was afraid *was* going to go out on the air. It was another time our station was originating a feed to the 29 stations of TSN. I was the announcer, producer and board operator. The performer was Ernest Tubb, one of country music's original superstars. He had a regular show on TSN, and for this broadcast he and his band were in Corsicana and were originating it from KAND.

Only a few minutes before airtime, the star showed up and Tubb was "in the barrel," if I may mix my container metaphors. He seemed to walk and move with that dead

solid calmness you associate with someone who is seriously drunk, and the fumes coming from him would have been the envy of any distillery. While I nervously went through the prepping of the equipment, he sat, frighteningly still, in a chair in the main studio. As I started the commercial intro for the sponsor—Gold Chain Flour—I felt ill omens buzzing around like malignant horseflies. Then, at the instant of “show-time,” Tubb stood up, caressed the microphone and went into the best damn rendition of “Walking the Floor over You” that I ever heard.

I could always be pretty sure that KAND’s listening audience, regardless of the time of day or night, would include Annie Irene Payne—my mother. This was especially true when I pulled a nighttime shift. My mother had been a schoolteacher before marrying my father and, later, carrying on the drugstore business after his death. While I never considered her to be a prude, she was uncompromising in her views of what was decent and proper. One evening on a record show I introduced and played some tunes by Cole Porter. After I signed off the station later that night, I got home to a cool reception from my mother. She was obviously troubled.

“What’s the matter?” I asked. “Are you feeling okay?”

Her answer was a curt, “I heard what you played tonight.” The sentence had the sounds of some kind of betrayal. “I heard that song,” she repeated, accusingly.

I remained stumped. Finally I learned from her that the song that had offended her—especially when it was introduced on the air by her own flesh and blood—was Cole Porter’s now-standard “I’ve Got You Under My Skin.” I had never remotely considered my mother to be a prude, but her sense of propriety obviously was strained by the song. The great composer’s skill with clever, naughty lyrics

and double entendre did not impress KAND's most loyal listener in Emhouse. I can imagine her opinions of today's lyrics by Madonna or The Rolling Stones.

But soon devilment of a more ominous sort was coming down the lines to our little station in Corsicana. I was working the control board on a midweek morning about 11:00 o'clock when the network broke in to announce that Italy had just joined Germany in declaring war on France. It was one of the more obscure flashpoints of the start of World War II, but it had a special impact upon me since it happened "on my watch."

In those grim months radio stations everywhere in "neutral" and "safe" America were broadcasting news of the world scene and its tragic escalations without partisan bias. On KAND, for instance, we'd carry the British Broadcasting Company's "World News Views" for 15 minutes, and follow it with a quarter hour of news picked up off the short-wave band from Radio Berlin. I can still hear the hoarse and staccato delivery of Adolf Hitler in his speeches, and the swelling and ebbing, filtering effect of the short-wave signal from Berlin.

Before long I would be involved in some then-unimaginable and personal experiences with Hitler and radio, as they affected each other and the rest of the world.

### Chapter 3

#### Memoirs of an Ex-Civilian

December 7, 1941, FDR's "Day That Will Live in Infamy," was also a day that lives on in radio bloopers. The flash bulletin about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that most people remember from that distant Sunday was the one on CBS, delivered by John Daly, who was later to be the elegant and erudite host of "What's My Line?" on television for two decades. The bulletin interrupted the broadcast of the Chicago Bears-Washington Redskins championship game of the National Football League—which was won, incidentally, by the Bears, 73-0. Daly, then a young staff announcer, already possessed that mellifluous and cultured voice that sounded almost British. It was a telling gauge of the shock effect of Pearl Harbor that it even rattled Daly. He read the bulletin almost breathlessly, adding that the attack had come "against naval and air installations on the principal island of 'O-Hah-oo'." Daly had stumbled on the word "Oahu," which is tricky to pronounce even in peacetime. This was certainly no big deal, especially since no one would notice the mistake for 15 years, when the wartime commemorative albums began to come out; but the gaffe was instructive for the unsettling effect that such Sunday surprises have even on the best in the business.

During the early months of the war people working in the technical fields of radio—board operators, engineers and such—actually were encouraged to stay where we were because the occupations were considered essential to the war effort and to civilian morale. Soon enough there were

manpower shortages throughout the industry. Being 17 at the time of Pearl Harbor, I assumed my time in uniform would have to come—but meanwhile I was more interested in Hartley Oscillators than in hand grenades.

Just after turning 19 I got my famous “Greetings!” letter/draft notice, signed by FDR himself, in the late summer of 1943. So did my older colleague Earle Fletcher. Earle beat me into the Army by three days. We were both sent to the Camp Wolters Army Induction Center near Mineral Wells, west of Fort Worth. It was about a hundred miles from home. Too close. Some farther place would have been easier psychologically because of the so-near-yet-so-far feelings that come with basic training in your own backyard.

Because of his radio credentials, Earle went on to the Signal Corps and got assigned eventually to a psychological warfare project dealing with super-secret applications of sounds on the front lines. The applications were so secret that, a half century later, I’m still not sure what they were.

My own background in broadcasting looked as if it would stand me in good stead in the military, too. The counselors at the Induction Center assured me that after basic infantry training, like Earle, I’d be sent to the Signal Corps, but, even better, to officers’ candidate school at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. I considered that an adventure to look forward to—not that I had many other options (although the Army did).

Meanwhile I spent five days at the Induction Center, waiting to be shipped out to basic training. The first day started off looking special. I saw that my name was on a short list posted at company headquarters. It said I was to show up at a certain numbered building with a select group of other inductees on the list. That building was the regimental kitchen. I had drawn Kitchen Police, K.P., on that

first day.

It's always drummed into recruits that every minute counts in training, but of course they could spare me from that first day's study of war long enough for me to spend the entire day and night on K.P. The day started at 4:30 a.m. I hadn't realized the Army had already become so specialized: my duty that day was washing the coffee mugs, and only the coffee mugs. There were 5,000 of them, and I washed them all three times that day. I can't say if this mug immersion was the whole reason, but I never did get to like G.I. coffee.

The next couple of days were spent in a series of I.Q. and aptitude tests. My radio and electronics savvy surfaced to the point that I was summoned for an interview and more tests by the Army Air Corps, whose recruiters saw my 5-foot-8 size as just right for a cockpit somewhere. I told them I still wanted to do something in the radio field and wanted nothing to do with airplanes. They insisted. So I took another battery of tests. To my great surprise, I learned in one of them that I was color blind. The test that sank me was the one in which you're supposed to perceive numbers made by the patterns of colored dots in an even bigger field of colored dots. This result brought me mixed emotions. I wasn't interested in flying, but I wasn't interested in being uncorrectably color blind, either.

Less than a week later a group of about 50 of us were packed aboard a Southern Pacific train. We headed west through El Paso, Phoenix, Los Angeles ... then turned south for about another hundred miles to Camp Callan, just outside of the otherwise artsy community of La Jolla. Guys at other posts would refer to Camp Callan as a country club, but going through basic Army training will take the bloom off of any beauty spot. There was some routine marching

and manual-of-arms training, along with learning about rifles and basic infantry weapons, but the course soon leaned toward anti-aircraft gun battalions. Soon, oddly enough, there was also a lot of class work in radio basics—theory and codes. We learned to key telegraphers' Morse codes, too.

The hours and days of *dah-dah-dits* were tedious in the extreme. Even though I managed a respectable rate of 30 words per minute, I never cared about pursuing code any further—to the point that I never had a desire even to get a ham radio operator's license in civilian life.

I ended up in a radio unit supporting one of the anti-aircraft gun batteries. Our unit went on two weeks' maneuvers in the Borrego Desert-Salton Sea area around the California/western Arizona border. It was winter-time, temperatures below freezing at night and up to 100 in the daytime. Troops in North Africa learned about the unpleasant anomaly of desert extremes the hard way, with people shooting at them, but this hot-and-cold desert was no fun, either. Our radio transmission rig was operated by a gasoline generator which took a lot of tender nursing.

The transmission frequency we used—and had to monitor 24 hours a day—turned out to be the same frequency assigned to the Air Corps' flight training facility way over in Santa Ana, California. There were times that we'd be sending voice transmissions—and the control tower at Santa Ana would answer. Other times, we'd have conversations with the pilots on their training missions. It was strictly against regulations, but it was strangely comfortable to once again have a microphone in my hands and communicate with strangers.

One day toward the end of our basic training cycle the intercom in the barracks barked out the orders for Payne

and two other guys to report to camp headquarters. (This is one area in which electronics has regressed over the years. Fifty years ago in the army, intercoms were always loud and clear and alacritous. Despite all the advancements since then, I never can understand what they're saying on the squawk boxes in hamburger drive-through lanes.)

At headquarters we were shown, one at a time, into a room where there was a bird colonel and two captains. In retrospect—in fact, even at the time—it was obvious that this trio was from the O.S.S., Office of Strategic Services, the wartime ancestor of the Central Intelligence Agency. Of the other two fellows from my unit summoned along with me, one had been a college professor in political science and the other was a linguist. I was to be the radioman, it was explained. Of what, I asked.

They told us (individually) that their organization was forming three-man teams for special missions. After some advanced intelligence and security training, we'd be air-dropped into the home islands of Japan to establish listening outposts in advance of the invasion of the home islands. Just like in the movies, the three officers spoke about the danger of the assignment, told us our chances for surviving it would be less than 50/50 (I never could figure out who did the actuarial tables on secret-mission odds), and explained that we would have to volunteer for this job.

As we learned later, we all volunteered. Mixed emotions again: pride and trepidation. Skipping ahead for a moment, the delightful part of this story is that none of us ever heard another word from the spooks. The development of the atomic bomb, and its use, made the home-islands invasion unnecessary, and while undoubtedly there must have been more advanced plans for the use of similar teams in the Japanese homeland, they didn't include us.

La Jolla, on the northern fringe of San Diego, was only about 100 miles from Los Angeles and Hollywood, and nearly all the G.I.s on the West Coast got at least one pass to Tinseltown. Hollywood came to us, too. With the proximity of the base, there were abundant U.S.O. shows that came through, including many that originated radio broadcasts from Camp Callan. I hung around as many of those as I could get to, and even wangled some backstage jobs on the shows of Bob Hope and Rudy Vallee.

Basic training lasted for a 13-week cycle. I knew this range of skills would stand me in good stead once I got to officers' school when my training was over. But it still left advanced training, and in my case once again it was back onto a Southern Pacific passenger train, heading in reverse along the tracks that had brought me out. Except we kept going—through Los Angeles, Phoenix, El Paso, Houston, New Orleans, Atlanta—and up to Wilmington, North Carolina, bang on the Atlantic coast and home of Camp Davis.

The base was buttoned up tight because it was the training area and proving ground for a couple of exotic and super-secret weapons: radar and FM radio. FM, which got its name from Frequency Modulation, was an entirely new and different breed of radio. It had been invented by Edwin Armstrong, who with David Sarnoff and Lee DeForest comprised the triumvirate of American radio pioneers.

The curious thing they had in common was that they all claimed they never listened to radio: DeForest because he couldn't abide the commercials; Sarnoff because he was too busy building his empire of Radio Corporation of America and National Broadcasting Company; and Armstrong because he couldn't stand the static.

One of the assets of FM was that there was no static. It

was the development of FM that caused the profound, bitter and permanent break in relations between Armstrong and Sarnoff, who once had been close friends and business partners. Sarnoff, who as a 15-year-old ham wireless operator had monitored the first transmissions from the sinking luxury liner Titanic, spent years and millions of dollars fighting the development of FM, since it represented competition for his R.C.A. equipment. Armstrong ultimately committed suicide, but years later his wife was awarded anti-trust damages when his series of lawsuits against Sarnoff and R.C.A. finally came to trial. Although commercial FM radio wouldn't make its breakout until after the war, in the late 30s Armstrong had formed an FM radio network, principally along the Eastern seaboard, and at one point before the war there were thousands of FM radios in use. At Camp Davis the Army was harnessing FM's potential for its superior qualities in radio transmission.

Radar was an even more stunning concept to those of us who knew nothing of its existence—which was most of us. At this stage the term “radar” wasn't even in the rumor mill, although you did hear occasional, murky scuttlebutt about some magic ray we had that was capable of amazing things. Considering radar's capabilities, “magic ray” was pretty accurate. It was a British invention, and, along with ASDIC, the submarine-tracking technology, one of the great electronic secrets shared with us as part of the tradeout for the lend-lease weapons we had sent to Great Britain in its time of peril.

Radar's lead patron had been none other than Winston Churchill, in the years just before he became wartime prime minister. He wrote about radar in his memoirs:

“The possibility of using radio waves scattered back from aircraft and other metal objects seems to have

occurred to a very large number of people in England, America, Germany and France in the 1930s. We talked of them as R.D.F. (Radio Direction Finding) or later as Radar. The practical aim was to discern the approach of hostile aircraft, not by human sense, by eye or ear, but by the echo which they sent back from radio waves. About 70 miles up there is a reflecting canopy (ionosphere), the existence of which prevents ordinary wireless waves from wandering off into space, and thus makes long-range wireless communication possible. The technique of sending up very short pulses and observing their echo had been actively developed for some years by our scientists ..."

In February 1935, a government research scientist, Professor Watson-Watt, had first explained to the Technical Sub-committee that detection of aircraft by radio echoes might be feasible and had proposed that it should be tested. The Committee was impressed. It was assumed that it would take five years to detect aircraft up to a range of 50 miles. On July 25, 1935, at the fourth meeting of the Air Defense Research Committee, Sir Henry Tizard made his report upon radio-location. By March 1936 stations were being erected and equipped along the south coast. By the end of 1939 we could track incoming planes up to a distance of 35 miles at 10,000 feet.

At Camp Davis we had intensive lab work and classroom studies on the theory and operations of both FM and radar. The sessions were so secret that we weren't allowed to do homework—no lab or classroom notes could be brought back to the barracks. Our sessions included a six-week crash course in advanced calculus and trigonometry—subjects I'd never gotten around to back at my 11-grades Emhouse School.

In one of the classes our assignment was to construct a

radio receiver with some spartan parts on hand. As it happened I was the first one to finish and thus we had the only radio working in class on the morning of June 6, 1944—when we tuned it to hear the overseas reports of the D-Day invasion. The transmission we picked up was the famous broadcast by wire-service pool correspondent George Hicks, broadcasting from the deck of the invasion flagship U.S.S. Ancon. That event was one of the those benchmark occasions of my generation—the kind you always remember where you were and what you were doing—and I thought it was only appropriate that, once again, I had the experience because of radio. A memorable day, and we didn't get much classwork done on June 6, 1944.

It was toward the end of the Camp Davis advanced training course that I got the word from the Army that officers' candidate school in Missouri wouldn't be needing me: the Signal Corps had all the second lieutenants it could use for the foreseeable future.

Instead I ended up back in Texas—barely—on the western lip of the state at Fort Bliss in El Paso. My unit was billeted in the Logan Heights section of Fort Bliss, but we were often trucked out to duty at a new, strange, remote and desolate spot called White Sands, New Mexico. We had no idea what was going on there, but whatever it was, it was serious because my assignment was manning radar operations in long-range detection mode, sweeping the skies for unauthorized aircraft. We had fire control for four batteries of big-caliber, long-range anti-aircraft guns.

We wondered if this might have something to do with the proximity of the Mexican border, but we had no idea what. Our radar picked up stray planes frequently wandering into our restricted airspace, but we never got to shoot anyone down. Chase planes were sent up occasionally. We

were using still another exotic development, I.F.F. (Identification Friend or Foe). We could shoot signals toward planes up to 150 miles away, and the pilot would never know he was being challenged. The I.F.F. operated automatically, electronically querying approaching planes. Authorized U.S. planes had onboard transponders that reacted to our electronic signal. It was probably one of the first cases of machines talking to each other.

It all seemed very important to us, although we had no idea of the real reason: that White Sands was part of the cosmically secret Manhattan Project, the development and testing of the atomic bomb.

With the Normandy invasion and the gallop of our armies across Europe, the war was going well. One day a general addressed our unit as we stood around in the scrubby dunes of New Mexico. He told us that we and our radar equipment were so essential that "You men will never be sent overseas!"

It was September of 1944. Well, with such an ironclad guarantee from a general, promising we'd be stateside for the rest of our time in uniform, it struck me that my first duty was to run out and call Katy and ask her to marry me.

Katy and I and our parents had already had the standard conversations and reached the standard prudent conclusions on this romantic matter: so long as there was the likelihood I'd be going overseas and anywhere near a combat zone it would be wise to wait until the war was over, or I was back for good, to have the wedding that had been a foregone conclusion since our grade-school days. But now, as I kept explaining to her on the phone, we'd never have a better rationale or a firmer guarantee than the word of some general that I was so valuable to the defense of New Mexico that I'd never get shipped out. This changed everything!

Even better, our side was doing okay without me.

I put in for a furlough starting the last week of September, the same week British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery captured Boulogne and Calais, while Gen. George Patton's swashbuckling Third Army was continuing its breathtaking rush across the open country of northern France and Belgium. On September 11, patrols of the U.S. First Army had actually crossed the German border near Aachen.

Katy and I were married in Emhouse at 8:30 in the evening on October 4, 1944. It was a Wednesday.

Back in Fort Bliss, we had an apartment in the Five Points area of El Paso. I had been back on duty only a week when the Army posted a blizzard of bulletins around Fort Bliss. They announced that our particular units were being disbanded immediately—and that everyone in them was up for reassignment. Katy and I didn't often rely on drollness in our conversations, but we agreed that things really would have been snafued if we hadn't had that guarantee from the general.

I was given a few days to get our affairs in order, had some temporary duty at Camp Maxey near Paris, Texas, and then shipped out to Camp Shanks, New York, the last piece of dry-land U.S.A. for troops going overseas.

Well, I'd always hoped for an ocean cruise aboard the *Queen Mary*, and I got it—with 15,000 other guys. The erstwhile luxury liner had grown a little dowdy and tarnished in her own military service, but was still a magnificent ship. We made the North Atlantic transit in just over four and a half days, without an escort, and put into Glasgow, Scotland.

Corporals' travel orders usually just kept us in motion while the Army decided what it was going to do with us.

From Scotland I was sent by train to London, just in time to witness one of Hitler's V-2 rockets leveling part of a city block. My group went on to the port of Southampton, then across the Channel to LeHavre, which had been recaptured only a few weeks before. There was a cattle-car ride on a French train to Paris, and then on to Metz, where I learned I was joining Gen. Patton's Third Army.

I ended up in a front-line communications unit with the 336th Field Artillery of the 87th Division. At that time the division was in the process of moving through Luxembourg and into Belgium. It was part of Patton's hell-for-leather drive to get up to the Ardennes forest to relieve the 101st Airborne in the Battle of the Bulge. I must admit I was beginning to miss the desert while I stood shoulder-deep in Belgian snow, thinking the thoughts that come to a frostbitten radio grunt who's been promised he'll never have to worry about going overseas.

The Third Army's advances were some of the war's most legendary stuff. There was an *esprit* to serving under Patton that made even the smallest units think they could do anything. In my first night on line in Belgium, I was "volunteered" for a fire-fight patrol. There were 12 of us, equipped with enough small-arms firepower to take care of any reasonable encounter. As the radioman, I was issued a backpacked FM transmitter/receiver and a long whip antenna. Most of the other G.I.s carried M1 rifles; I had the lighter, sleeker .30-caliber carbine that enjoyed a reputation as a sexier weapon but with the distinctive drawback of not being able to hit anything at any distance. In single file I walked as the 11th man, next to last. The guy behind me was the rear security. He carried a Browning Automatic Rifle.

The usual mission on these patrols was to probe the

German lines to a distance of about three miles and try to bring back a prisoner for interrogation. We'd push off around midnight and try damned hard to get back before first light. Today the idea of skulking off behind the lines with the expectation of coming back alive with an enemy prisoner seems anachronistic, quaint and almost civilized, compared to the lethal dirtiness of the jungle wars that were to follow. Still, we had some action that was sufficiently heart-stopping.

One morning we were returning across our lines and came in at the wrong place. We'd missed our unit outpost by a couple miles. It was another division's turf. There was radio silence, which rendered me, the radio operator, useless, and to top off our troubles, our secret password didn't work. We were challenged at gunpoint by a young sergeant from Arkansas who was pretty sure we were Germans dressed in American uniforms trying to infiltrate the Third Army's positions. (As is pretty well known, this gambit was actually tried by the Germans early in their breakthrough in the Battle of the Bulge. The stunt was the brainchild of S.S. Lt. Col. Otto Skorzeny, Hitler's favorite pimperl, who also led the raid that rescued Mussolini from his mountain-top jail cell late in the war.) We were held at gunpoint for about half an hour, until we were identified. That's the day I learned that the business end of a .45 automatic begins to look like the entrance to Carlsbad Cavern.

Especially after the Bulge crisis, there were some stunning respites, thanks to the radios we were well-equipped with. All over the Third Army, we had radios that were often tuned to BBC broadcasts from London, and especially to the awesome and unlikely sounds of Radio Luxembourg, the closest thing we had to American broadcasts. It sounded great—their power was a staggering million watts. They

could just about broadcast through mountains. There were even commercials. One occasion I particularly remember was riding in a Jeep listening to Radio Luxembourg as Jo Stafford sang on a show sponsored by Campbell's Soup. The Wehrmacht was only a few miles away. It was a bizarre assault upon the senses.

A song we heard often on the BBC was "Lili Marlene," a melancholy German song and favorite of the Wehrmacht troops. It had been banned by the Nazis because of the sentimental power it held over their homesick and war-weary soldiers.

One day we took a small German town east of the Rhine and some of us went in to liberate the town's beer tavern. It had a piano by the bar. There were no customers, and no beer. I was sitting at the piano, picking out the notes of "Lili Marlene" when an officious and portly German, who was the owner of the bierstube, waddled up to me and bristled, "Das musik ist verboten!" It was a very German moment. I told him to forget it, der musik was no longer verboten.

As was customary with Patton, we were always on the move. It wasn't unusual to start a letter to Katy in one place and finish it a day or two later, 50 miles deeper into Deutschland. Patton's pacing of his armor often threatened to outrun his supplies—and sometimes also his communications. We were always humping to keep up.

More than once, we timed attacks on certain targets and outposts so that we'd arrive at mealtime and get to capture some of that nice hot food the German Army kitchens trucked up to their front lines. We captured ham, cabbage, sometimes kraut, boiled potatoes, the good dark rye bread and ersatz butter. All hot and delicious. We'd capture the German boys, send them to the rear, and take their food. War is hell, and sometimes tasty.

We saw major action at the crossing of the Moselle river, then advanced eastward to the bridgeless Rhine. On the evening of March 24, 1945, about a hundred of us loaded all of our gear into ten small boats provided by the Corps of Engineers. We cast off from Rheims, just below Koblenz, toward Ober Lahnstein, the southern anchor of the Third Army's push to capture Koblenz. That town had been the site, since World War I, of a statue of Kaiser Wilhelm astride his horse. It sat on a triangular jetty, facing north at the confluence of the Rhine and Moselle. There have since been many units from various Allied countries claiming to have leveled that statue, but I can testify to the radio transmissions from our sector and the grid coordinates we broadcast, calling for battery after battery of 155-mm fire to blow up that blob of bronze. We enjoyed blowing up Kaiser Bill.

In retrospect, this was probably a desecration of Prussian art, but at the time it struck us as a hell of a lot of fun. Besides, we could always use target practice.

Our advances took us into arguments with the Germans over possession of a series of hilltops and mountain positions. We were operating FM transmissions back to the artillery batteries. Often we were close enough to hear the shouts of Wehrmacht soldiers. It was in one of these engagements that I wound up on the wrong end of a spray of bullets from a Schmeisser machine pistol, better known as the burp gun. Only one of the rounds hit me, grooving my hand. I got minor first aid and congratulations on my Purple Heart, but the field hospital was on the other side of the Rhine. I stayed in the field.

As we took German towns we discovered that the inhabitants had cleared out. We were assigned billets in many of the private homes. It was always my first interest to check out their radio sets and record collections. The

radios were different from ours, smaller and apparently built as tuned radio frequency receivers and not the superheterodynes. The "superhet" receiver, an American invention, contained an oscillator that kept reprocessing incoming signals and gave much better clarity. The German models were "gutless wonders," quite spare with minimal circuitry. The Muntz TV sets of the 50s would remind me of those German sets.

Every German home we saw was loaded with religious icons and plaques, along with musical instruments and invariably a phonograph. One German label was much in evidence: a blue shellac "Odeon." Practically every record collection included one or two German discs of "Schoener Gigolo"—German-language versions of the Bing Crosby and Russ Columbo American hit of the 1930s, "Just a Gigolo."

I was having great adventures for a guy who had been so essential to the defense of White Sands, New Mexico. That didn't even count the day our Air Force strafed us. It was during the same series of engagements when the Germans were pigheaded about holding on to a certain piece of high ground. In fact, we had become virtually encircled. We got on our trusty FMs, contacted headquarters and asked for an air strike. Their instructions were for us to unfold our fluorescent yellow banners around our perimeter so that the pilots would know where we stopped and the enemy began. Most of the enemy by now was scaling up various ridges toward us. In less than a half-hour the first of five P-51 Mustangs came screaming down out of the clouds on a strafing run over our position. In fact, right *on* our position. So did the other four fighters. Our own planes strafed us until they ran out of ammunition and left. It was a fairly excessive introduction to the principle of Friendly

Fire. But it was also more than remarkable that the only casualty we had in our position was a German soldier we had captured. We spent the next hours putting out the brush fires around us that had been ignited by the P-51s' phosphorous tracer rounds. The horrendous sounds of their .50-caliber cartridges thumping into the ground around me stayed with me for many years. A .50-caliber slug makes a terrifying slap, even when being fired accidentally.

In due time we cleaned up our holdings on the east side of the Rhine and went on to stops in Limburg and Giessen. This was when Patton, who had planned another lightning thrust up the autobahn to beat the Russians to Berlin, was ordered to wheel his army and make for the Czech border. This decision by politicians was enforced by the military's informing Gen. Patton that he would be getting no more gasoline for his tanks and vehicles to make the run to Berlin.

During these days I could keep my set tuned to Radio Berlin. Early one evening in April of 1945 I was catching a broadcast that was obviously the voice of Adolf Hitler—presumably one of the last he ever made. As I listened to his customary shifts from a frenzied rant to a almost whispery, person-to-person tone, something struck me as very unusual about the broadcast. From my broadcast days I was familiar with a certain characteristic of recorded speeches, transcriptions and the like. The opening minutes of a 15-minute transcription were customarily clean and clear, and then the sound quality would invariably muddy up considerably, losing the high notes and clarity, as the needle traversed the 16-inch disc. When that disc would end and the engineer segued to a new disc on another turntable to continue the program, there was always a discernible improvement in sound quality. Like other radio people, I could spot the difference immediately. But listening to Hitler that

night, I was struck by the continuity of the speech. Never once was it noticeable that Radio Berlin was switching from the end of one disc to the beginning of another.

I mulled the possibilities. Had he made a film of his whole speech, and Radio Berlin was playing the soundtrack? Maybe the Germans had developed a gigantic disc. The turntable would have to be the size of a truck tire.

The puzzle was solved a few days later when the army captured its first Magnetophone—a device developed by a German scientist named Raenger and, in fact, later to be marketed as a Raengertone tape recorder. It was the basis of tape recording, and the Signal Corps soon had not only appropriated the process, but improved it. It worked first as a magnetic wire recording, but it was a quick step to magnetic tape—basically the same technology that is common throughout the world today. Doktor Raenger's gadget would eventually lead from audio recording to TV recording, then to VCRs, computers—and on to whatever comes next.

By April of 1945, I was so weary of G.I. food (the hot, captured German meals were getting harder to come by) that I'd written to Katy back home, asking her to ship over some Wolf Brand Chili and Cokes in the 6-oz. bottles. The packages came. It was a great treat and a touch of home. We'd been struck by the sight of old, pre-war "*Drink Coca-Cola*" signs in places all over wartime Germany, but of course there were no Cokes to be had.

On Easter Sunday morning, 1945, we were in the town of Saalfeld, Germany, and we appropriated a blue, 1938 two-door Buick that belonged to the town's burgermeister. In the late afternoon we took it for a spin around the countryside, noting that the waving patches of edelweiss blooming on the hillsides were a poetic match for the car's shade

of faded Buick blue. Wonder of wonders, the factory-equipped Delco radio worked, and there in the lofty terrain of the Oberhof Mountains we tuned the radio to the middle of the band and picked up WABC, the 50,000-watt CBS station at 880 on the dial, its signal skipping across the roof of the world and down to us in Germany. We listened to the Easter program, live from St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York.

My final job in Europe on May 8, 1945, was helping set up an FM Repeat Network that joined Allied elements up and down the front lines. The primary need for the network was for our units to receive instructions on what to do with the droves of German prisoners who were straggling in along the line all across Germany to surrender.

There wasn't as big a hurry to get us home as there had been on that four-and-a-half day dash across on the Queen Mary. The S.S. Marine Robin required 16 days to bring us back across, to Camp Patrick Henry at Newport News, Virginia. Aboard the ship, I got myself named "station manager" and all-around handyman for the on-board public-address system, which I operated as a radio station. My helpers and I monitored the BBC for news during the crossing, and also piped in music which we played off of "V discs" (records pressed only for the Armed Forces Morale and Entertainment section. It was on this voyage that I first heard, and played, "Sentimental Journey" by Doris Day singing with Les Brown's band.

It fit.

**Chapter 4**

**Whiz Kids and Quiz Biz**

"I have a lady in the balcony, Doctor."

"All right! Very good! And—uh ohhh, it's time now... for our Thought Twister!" (Delighted moans and groans from the studio audience, and, presumably, from many of the twenty million Americans listening at home.)

"Madam, I'll pay you seventy-five silver dollars if you can repeat back to me our Thought Twister, which I'll say one time, and one time only. Are you ready, Madam?"

(Nervous mumble as audience continues to titter.) "Oh, I guess so..."

"All right, then. Now remember I'll say this one time, and one time only. And here it is: "'It looks like rain,' said Payne to Lane. 'It does look like rain, Payne,' to him said Lane."

The wickedly popular Thought Twister features on the Dr I.Q. radio quiz show were rarely any more complicated than that rain-Lane-Payne example, but there was something about the combination of the big, for 1940s, bucks at stake and the tension of being on a live broadcast that made contestants fall victim to a Murphy's Law of memory tricks. Whatever could go wrong in those simple recitations usually would, to the gleeful groans of the live audience in the theater and those listening at home.

Dr I.Q. (there was no period after Dr, a subtle truth-in-advertising device also used by the Dr Pepper soft-drink company to convey the sense that there's no real doctor involved here) was one of America's most popular quiz shows in the two-decade period that began in the late 30s

and hit its greatest stride through the war years and directly after, when the country was in love with such constructive distractions as quiz shows.

Along with Phil Baker's "Take It Or Leave It," which gave our language the phrases "Sixty-four dollar question," and "Information Please," Dr I.Q. was a perennial ratings champ—not only in the quiz-show milieu it helped to pioneer, but as a weeknight broadcast staple right up there with "The Great Gildersleeve," "Mr. District Attorney" and "Fibber McGee and Molly."

Dr I.Q. was the almost accidental creation of a slight, endearing and croak-voiced Texan named Lee Segall, for whom I went to work in 1947 in Dallas.

Lee had hastily invented the show in the mid-30s as a cheaply produced advertising vehicle for Metzger's Dairy of Houston, a business owned by his father-in-law. The idea involved the master of ceremonies, "Dr I.Q., the Mental Banker," working at center stage in an actual movie theater. Announcer-assistants roamed the audience, choosing contestants in their seats—and thus eventually making "I have a lady in the balcony, Doctor" one of the country's catch phrases. At first aired only in Houston for the dairy sponsor, the show was a sensation and soon caught the attention of Will C. Grant, another former Dallasite whose Grant Advertising of Chicago had become one of the industry's biggest.

Grant's proposition was for Segall to package his Dr I.Q. idea for national airing. Grant in turn sold the show to NBC and, as sole sponsor, Mars Candy Co. It was a particularly happy match, for every time a contestant missed an answer, the consolation prize was "A box of Mars bars (or Snickers, or Milky Way) for that lady in the balcony." Another plug for the product.

There were several programming touches that set Dr I.Q. apart. Foremost, perhaps, was the voice of Dr I.Q., who managed to sound warm, friendly, crisp, liquid, and authoritative all at once. While most other emcees came off as either buffoons or pedants, Dr I.Q. seemed caring, playful, and all-knowing. The gimmick of awarding silver dollar—sometimes just theoretical silver dollars—set the show apart and made the cash prizes seem somehow more valuable than plain old legal tender. One of the secrets was in the good Dr's mellifluous way with the phrase "Sillll-ver dollars." There was even an extra tone of intelligence, or occasionally good-natured trickery, to his questions.

"Strangely enough," Dr I.Q. might ask, "two presidents who served consecutive terms, our fourth president and our fifth president, both had the same initials. Who were those two presidents?"

The contestant who correctly answered James Madison and James Monroe would hear Dr I.Q. delightedly say, "Give that gentleman eighteen silllverr dollars!"

Contestants usually had less luck with the tricky ones: "Technically speaking, what is the main reason why the first day of the week should not be called 'Blue Monday'?" And Dr I.Q.'s ingratiating response to the predictable wrong answer would be: "Oh, I'm sorry, but the first day of the week is Sunday! But a box of Snickers to that gentleman in the center loge!"

The start of Dr I.Q. was well before my time with Segall, but he often talked about agonizing over what kind of deal to ask for when the opportunity had finally come. What he actually got, in those pre-war days when a loaf of bread was a dime, was a flat fee of \$1,250 per week, 52 weeks per year, with Segall providing the completed scripts as well as having final approval rights of the personality who would be

the national Dr I.Q. Lee's deal held good for more than 20 years, at \$1,250 a week, week in and week out.

By the time I came aboard Segall's Variety Broadcasting Co., Inc. at KIXL in Dallas in 1947, Lee had orchestrated so many I.Q. shows, and the bulk of the questions, that he called regular staff brainstorming sessions to keep new puzzlers coming. My own favorite among the show's elements was the "Thought Twister," which was usually placed a little past the halfway mark of the 30-minute program and marked a sort of frivolous crescendo. Lee's right-hand assistant, Helen Wilensky, labored over impeccable scripts on legal-size sheets, in triplicate, that were sent to Chicago each week.

The first voice of Dr I.Q. was Lew Valentine, who had quit high school at San Benito, in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, in order to take a radio job offer. He later worked in Houston and then at WOAI in San Antonio before his break as a Monday-night network star on NBC as "Dr I.Q., the Mental Banker"—a lofty title for a high-school dropout.

Later, the longest-running voice of Dr I.Q. came from the KIXL staff; he was Jimmy McLain, whose authority as quiz-master must have been enhanced by the fact that he was also a practicing Episcopal priest. During the week he also worked as a staff announcer at KIXL and often came in to the studio in his clerical collar. It made for consistent decorum in our off-the-air language, too. After McLain left the Dr I.Q. show in the early 50s, the show moved to a half-hour slot on ABC Television; the new Dr I.Q. was Stan Vainrib, an announcer from Birmingham, Alabama. I lost track of his career after the show went off the air.

KIXL, Segall, and a remarkable cast of characters were to be instrumental in breaking new ground in the radio business, and I was pleased to be a part of it.

My “ruptured duck” veterans’ lapel pin had hardly had a chance to tarnish before I was able to get back into the business I loved shortly after being mustered out of the service with 20 million other guys.

My new job was back in Texas, too—at the brand-new KGVL in Greenville, a blackland farming town located about 50 miles northeast of Dallas. In those days, and in fact well into the 1950s, a sign hung over the railroad tracks on the western edge of Greenville, whose population was then about 14,000. The sign said: “*Greenville: The Blackest Land, The Whitest People.*”

Well, there was plenty of work to go around in race relations at the time. It wouldn’t be until the next year, 1947, that baseball’s Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in New York and all of the cities of the National League—and we all know what an easy time he had of it then. (By the fall of 1993, the city of Greenville was holding an annual civic celebration saluting its blacks’ contributions to the region’s cotton-gin industry, along with a new sign: “*Greenville: Blackest Land, Greatest People.*”)

KGVL went on the air in the Spring of 1946, thanks mainly to some technical sleight-of-mind-and-hand by its owner and former chief engineer of the Texas State Network, Truett Kimzey.

Because of wartime priorities and equipment shortages, many new stations had to wait to get their transmitters, but Kimzey’s technical talents enabled him to build or to jury-rig whatever equipment he couldn’t purchase. He had a habit of astonishing his radio peers anyway; in 1933 he had demonstrated his own television camera and screen, fully six years before the big NBC television debut at the New York Exposition of 1939. (The first patent for television was issued in 1926 to John Logie Baird, C.F. Jenkins and D.

Mihaly; the patent for color television was granted in 1928 to Baird.)

Truett Kimzey is also credited with developing an early backpack broadcast unit. He designed it to be carried hole-by-hole on the golf course at Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, for KFJZ's live coverage of the Colonial tournaments. It was a battery-operated mini-transmitter, strapped to the back of the announcer who took his cues by headphones and talked into a hand-held carbon microphone. The signal was relayed via low-power to a remote broadcast mobile unit truck, which in turn relayed the feed to the studio by another link on another frequency. His collaborator in much of this work was George Marti, the engineer who later developed studio-to-transmitter STL links which became known worldwide as the Marti System—still in use today. (Marti later built station KCLE in Cleburne, Texas—and eventually became mayor of the town.)

Our Greenville station KGVV went on the air in March 1946, operating on 1400 kilohertz with a power of 250 watts. I came aboard as program director, with my way paved by my old Corsicana colleague, Earle Fletcher, who was general manager.

We had our work cut out for us. Greenville was far enough removed from Dallas to be an autonomous center for its own farming region. It had both morning and afternoon daily newspapers. We were the only radio station in Hunt County. We were affiliated with the Texas State Network primarily for regional sports and statewide news, and associated also with the Mutual Broadcasting Network. That still left a lot of hours to fill every day and night. We strived to serve the needs of all of the area's elements, from agriculture, county fairs, livestock auctions, crop and price reports, to high-school sports coverage as well as play-by-

play baseball coverage of the Greenville franchise in the Class B "Big State League."

Like so many stations of the 40s, we had a music policy that could be best described as either All-Inclusive or Nonexistent. Early mornings, in between farm reports and market quotations, you'd hear a generous serving of country music—or, as it was called then, "hillbilly stuff." Country before country was cool, as the Nashville poets wrote later. Later in the day, it would be "pop" and "big band." Our operating policy seems to have been that at some magic point in the early afternoon, say 1:38 p.m., our listeners' mass subconscious would decide, "That's enough of Ernest Tubb and Eddy Arnold; now let's have some Jo Stafford and Woody Herman."

There were lots of live remote broadcasts from the area's leading churches—and there can be lots of "leading churches" in a town the size of Greenville.

One of the programs that still sticks with me was the live broadcast at 1:45 p.m. every Sunday from the chapel of the James-Coker-Peters Funeral Home, featuring pipe-organ music with Mary Fanny Monroe at the console. In covering this assignment, I would set up all the equipment, check in with the studio, do all the announcing, cue the organist and hope we got off in time for the 2 o'clock news.

It was all new and goofy, it was challenging and rewarding and useful for what was to come in our lives; yet the sense of that year of 1946 left us sounding a minor chord. On Christmas Eve night, I rushed Katy through the winter-dreary, frosty streets of Greenville to the hospital for the birth of our first child. The night was to be the culmination of nine months' uneventful and anxious endurance, but it was capped instead by the unbelievable and unthinkable. Our firstborn son, seven and a half pounds, full term, was

taken from us by last-minute complications. He was a dream that was not to be.

In the Spring of 1947 there was a notice in *Broadcasting* magazine about a new station soon to make its debut in big-time Dallas, 50 miles and a world away from us in Greenville along U.S. 67, a two-lane highway that passed through towns called Caddo Mills, Josephine, and Fate. Soon there were stories in the Dallas papers confirming the opening of the station, detailing the rock-solid lineup of Dallas and Hollywood luminaries who would be involved. It was Lee Segall's company, Variety Broadcasting Co., Inc., and the stations would be KIXL-AM and FM. From the ranks of Dallas' civic movers and shakers there would be the likes of financier and city-father Julius Schepps, and a promising young downtown attorney named Robert Strauss—later, of course, to be adviser to Presidents, chairman of the National Democratic Party, and U.S. Ambassador in Moscow.

But it was the all-star cast of minority stockholders in the two stations that boggled the eye: Robert Taylor, Tyrone Power, Greer Garson, William Holden. Lee Segall, already famous within the industry as the creator of *Dr. I.Q.*, had befriended them all during the war while working in Dallas in some kind of show-business liaison job for the Eighth Service Command of the Army's Special Services. Greer Garson was by then a Dallasite herself, having married oilman E.E. (Buddy) Fogelson.

Shortly after the war Segall had also produced radio shows for the silky bandleader/singer Eddy Howard, the continental chanteuse (from Milwaukee) Hildegarde, and comedian Henny Youngman. Pulling off the difficult trick of being craggy-faced, gnome-like and cherubic all at once, Lee was one of broadcasting's biggest hitters—especially

among those living in the Southwest—and I somehow managed to wangle a job interview a few weeks after first hearing of KIXL's imminent opening. I don't know about Lee, but I was impressed during the interview. I guess my credentials were a cut above the average, since I had nearly ten years' broadcasting experience on top of Army service, and it was only 1947. I was hired as program director at KIXL.

I was with a station that was going to be the first post-war new kid on the block. It gave us a golden opportunity to bend every effort in order to be different. Dallas already had more than its share of conventional, play-everything, full-service stations. It was our job to find a market niche and carve it.

We chose "Beautiful Music."

Granted, the boundaries of beautiful music pushed a much smaller envelope in those years before the creation of rock 'n roll, disco, urban R&B, hip-hop, bebop, zydeco and rap. We saw our basic task as establishing a different (unheard of!) all-day mood for the station. "Lilting" was one of our favorite adjectives. We finally made it a verb. Some people called the result "Muzak with a mentality," but I wish they wouldn't.

I started the job with the incomparable advantage of a free hand from Lee Segall, for which I am still grateful. I was able to pick and choose from all seven of the major transcription services, carefully following our framework of tempo and mood in programming the best from Standard Radio, Lang-Worth, World Broadcasting System, Associated Program Service, Capitol Transcriptions, NBC Thesaurus and the little-known but very listenable tracks from C.P. MacGregor in Hollywood.

We played Frank Sinatra, Jo Stafford, Dick Haymes, Frank Chacksfield, Neil Flanagan, Ray Anthony, Jan Garber,

David Rose, Perry Como, Doris Day, Paul Weston, Ray Conniff, Stan Kenton, Ted Straeter.

Instead of consultants based 2,000 miles away and playlists prefabricated for the tastes of 27 states, we had one unalterable rule: "It's not what KIXL plays that makes the difference, it's what we don't play."

Actually, "mood projection" was our goal. Beautiful music certainly was the key ingredient, but the tones of the announcers' voices and the other special features all blended into the end result. While Lee Segall left all of the programming in my hands, it was one of his own original ideas that became our most captivating and talked-about feature. It was called "Something To Think About" and it was logged twice an hour between commercial messages, usually at about :15 and :45 past the hour. They were basically brief philosophical one-liners, pithy and droll, epigrams and observations rounded up from all over. Each one was introduced by a chime, thus separating our program content from the commercials. After the opening chime, the announcer would say:

"Here's something to think about. (pause) About half the troubles of life can be traced to saying 'Yes' too quickly ... and not saying 'No' soon enough. (pause) Think it over."

Or, (chime): "Here's something to think about. (pause) The old-fashioned woman who paid and paid and paid ... now has a daughter who says 'Charge it.' (pause) Think it over." (chime)

Another chime ended the "think-it-over" break.

It was a tribute to the skills of the announcers—and it became their challenge also—in the countless numbers of ways there were to say "think it over." They ranged from the imperative to the suggestive.

There were thousands of think-it-overs during KIXL's

years on the air. The supply was limitless, since we could find and rewrite, for radio, material in everything from *Reader's Digests* to Rotary Club newsletters to church signboards. The feature became so popular that listeners and business firms started requesting copies of these "Thoughts for the Day." Lee Segall eventually printed collections of them in two volumes. The station sold them for a dollar a copy, and each edition went into several printings. (One day bandleader Stan Kenton visited the station and Lee presented him one of the booklets. Kenton, who was hip before his time, glanced at a couple of homilies on the pages and growled, "This isn't some of that Sammy Kaye shit, is it?")

Perhaps America had a different mentality in those days. Forty years later, at my own station WCPK in Chesapeake, Virginia, I resurrected the think-it-overs briefly. What happened was, we got a storm of indignant callers grumbling, "Where the hell do you people get off, telling me I've got to think something over!?"

I'm still thinking it over.

## Chapter 5

### Cast of Characters

The first station manager of KIXL was Louise Cobbler, an enlightened and news-making appointment on Lee Segall's part. Louise had come from her hometown station of KRRV in Sherman, Texas, to make her mark at Dallas' WRR, the first municipally-owned radio station in the country. Although stations founded after 1934 followed the FCC Act's policy of "W" call letters east of the Mississippi and "K" call letters west of it, WRR, which dated from 1926, had the grandfathered rights to the "W" call letters even though it was west of the demarcation line. So did the Dallas stations WBAP and WFAA. It often made for confusion in understanding that rule when you had three exceptions to the rule in one town.

Tom Massey, a veteran of New York radio, was named general manager of KIXL shortly after its opening. Massey was a native North Carolinian, and son of the founder of the company that made B.C. Headache Powders. Depending on the free-samples policy, this was probably the perfect family business for someone trying to get a new station started.

Massey brought with him to Dallas John Wilson, tremendously talented in production and operations with the bonus of a magnificent voice. John had worked at CBS Radio in New York and had been on retainer at McCann-Erickson advertising agency. It was John's voice that often introduced "The Guiding Light" and other McCann productions on CBS. His voice was right at home in our mood-projection pioneering on KIXL's beautiful music sound. He

also did a daily program called "Sentimental Journey," laced with poetry and reflective thoughts over a subtle background of live organ music played by Bill Wells. It was the sort of program that is widely deprecated now as a cliché of oldtime broadcasting; but it was the great success of shows like John's that enabled them to become clichés.

Bill Wells, the organist, had a media-mixing talent that brought spectacular results. His intro-catch phrase became very popular with the listeners: "Hello, Mom, take your shoes off ... come over here, take it easy ..." He had regular features twice each morning, at 8:30 and noon. His gimmick was broadcasting with a baby grand piano. He also had a pleasant baritone singing voice. He would program, say, a Doris Day record, and near the end of the disc, he would join in with the music, playing in the same key with the recording. When Doris Day's disc ended, the live mike from Studio B would cut in, piano sound, same key, with Bill talking over his own piano noodling; then his piano would modulate to the key in which the next recording was made, for the smoothest transition one can imagine. Bill Wells, whose real name was Burrell Ussery, came to KIXL from Memphis. He later left Dallas for Chicago and successfully transferred his act to the CBS station WBBM.

Dallas supper-club star Joe Reichman, nationally known as "The Pagliacci of the Piano," also used the playing-along-with-records gimmick with success on the radio. Reichman for many years was the headliner at the Adolphus Hotel Century Room. He made records, and had a statewide radio show.

Others on the station's maiden-voyage staff included Charlie Sherwood, born Charlie Seewir in St. Louis. There was Maury Ferguson, a diminutive fellow who, like so many in the business, had a deep voice that made him

much taller on the radio. He had come from WKY in Oklahoma City. His wife, Patty, was our control-room operator. It was an unusual assignment for females of that day, but she was terrific in the job.

One of my most memorable hires was a young Dallas lad named Bela Meskimen. Conventional wisdom is that Hungarians are supposed to be brooding and somber people, but not this time. He was a capable and mellow announcer but his real aspiration was to become an actor. To this end, he would break into the Kirk Douglas role from "The Champion" at the drop of a coffee break. Subtle and subdued in person, animated and creatively zany on the air, Bela Meskimen later changed his name to Bruce Hayes, went to work for Gordon McLendon at KLIF in that station's legendary days of "Top 40" dominance, and was the city's top morning-drive deejay through the decade of the 50s. He successfully made the move to the West Coast and to Los Angeles' KFVB, where he hit it big in La-La Land as Juicy Brucey.

Speaking of Hollywood, at least once a year I'm reminded of another KIXL colleague from long ago. His name is Hank Simms. After his days at KIXL, this native Oklahoman likewise shipped out to Los Angeles and Hollywood. It's the voice of Hank Simms today doing the off-camera announcing for each year's Academy Awards presentations.

There was Bill Rice, another Dallas native and fine announcer whom I still heard in the early 90s feeding an overseas news brief from the Middle East for the ABC Radio network. There was Brad Olson, tall and suave and possessed of such projection talents that he eventually worked on the Broadway stage with notable success. There was Hugh Lampman, who came to us fresh out of Highland

Park High School already endowed with an intimate, coaxing voice. Hugh later went on to be one of the top national hosts of the popular all-night American Airlines "Music Til Dawn" shows, and later still was one of the three founding air personalities with Ron Chapman and Jack Schell at KVIL in Dallas.

It's a lot funnier after these decades than it was at the time, but I had to fire Hugh from KIXL. We had an important advertiser named Weiner Lumber Company, whose ad slogan was: "Than this there is no idea keener ... For lumber needs, remember Weiner."

Hugh's sin was breaking into an uncontrollable laughing fit while trying to read a live Weiner spot. It became one of those episodes where his snorts became chuckles became hysteria, feeding on itself. Hugh almost got it under control, and then looked through the window into the control room, where the engineer had turned his face so that Hugh couldn't see him laughing. But he could see his shoulders shaking, and so Hugh broke out laughing again.

"I think it was about the sixth time I was fired from KIXL," Hugh recalls today. "Lee liked my voice, so he always let me come back. We lived in mortal fear of Lee Segall, who was all-seeing, all-knowing, and especially all-hearing. No matter what time of day or night you screwed up, you could be sure Lee Segall was listening. After the Weiner incident, which was at noon, Lee called me in and gave me the choice of quitting or reimbursing the station for the cost of the 15-minute show. I think it was \$35. I wrote him a check, but he never cashed it."

Hugh has gone on to do voice-overs and on-air TV talent for hundreds of clients, but I don't think Weiner Lumber is one of them.

Another staff announcer was Dave Florence, whose

Dallas career wasn't hurt by his being the son of Fred Florence, one of the city's major bankers and civic movers. Dave was a capable, journeyman announcer but had a marked deficiency in his knowledge of classical music, which usually came during our mid-day programming. Dave was weak at putting composers with their selections, which was why he occasionally announced that the composer of a certain piece was Nitram Grebnetug. It sounded credible. Nitram Grebnetug was the station's music director, Martin Greenberg, spelled backwards. Another time, a listener called and requested that Dave play "Liebestraum." He agreed to this, put down the phone and shouted over his shoulder for some help from anyone in the studio: "Hey, what is Liebestraum's first name?"

There was a big pool of talent available to the station from the Southern Methodist University drama department. Hugh Lampman was an S.M.U. freshman when he worked at KIXL. Another rookie on the KIXL staff was Jerry Haynes, a then-aspiring actor who later as "Mr. Peppermint" became the star of a very popular and long-running kids' show on WFAA-TV in Dallas. Jerry also has landed dozens of roles in theatrical and television films shot in the Dallas area. Another S.M.U. drama student helped produce and appeared in several productions that were broadcast on KIXL. His name was Aaron Spelling—destined to become over three decades arguably Hollywood's biggest producer of TV movies and series. In the same drama class at S.M.U. was a petite coed from Amarillo named Carolyn Jones—later to be a leading Hollywood actress, star of "The Addams Family" and wife of Aaron Spelling.

For a time the station also featured on the air, for short weekday stints, a group of four young fellows from Dallas'

Sunset High School. They were called the Sunset Quartet. One singer's girlfriend was usually hanging around the station during their rehearsals. The singer's name was Paul Mansfield and his sweetheart's name was Jayne. They were married after high school graduation, and while Paul would eventually stay in Dallas, Jayne Mansfield went on to Hollywood.

The station also had a women's director, the ebullient and articulate Meg Healy. She and her late husband, Col. Tim Healy, were featured personalities for many years on a husband-and-wife talk show (on WFAA) called "The Healys at Home," broadcast daily from their suite in the Melrose Hotel. In due time, Meg's son David also joined the announcing staff of KIXL. With his inherited showmanship, a great personality and a booming voice, David Healy decided to pursue a stage and film career, much of it in Great Britain. In the film "Patton," it's David Healy who plays the role of the Army chaplain.

## Chapter 6

### Blessed and Other Events

In 1949 KIXL celebrated its second anniversary on the air, but on July 30, in Katy's and my opinion, an even grander event occurred: the birth of our son Charles Jr., eight pounds, one ounce. This seemed to call for further production; I had the attending physician, Dr. A. Truett Morris, come into the studio to record all the dimensions and details about our son. Then we added narration by our staff announcer John Wilson over a background track of Brahms' Lullaby. We turned these recordings out on five-inch discs complete with a blue label, imprinted in gold. As far as we know, it was a first in the field of unconventional birth announcements, and years later our friends told us they still had the discs.

The station's non-air staff at that time also boasted some people who were destined to be all-stars. One was Ted Strauss, Robert's kid brother, who later headed up the nationally known Susan Crane Giftwraps firm, then became a downtown Dallas banker and a key Dallas broker. His wife Annette distinguished herself in city politics, first as a city councilwoman and then as the city's first woman mayor. Ted and Bob Strauss were original KIXL stockholders, and later owned stations in Phoenix and Atlanta.

Bob Tripp, the head engineer, earned a reputation as a technical genius in running the demanding sounds of "beautiful music." As a wartime Signal Corps officer, Bob had been involved in some important breakthroughs, especially in overseas communications. He was a member of the team that was able to harness shortwave broadcasts in such

a way that Gen. Eisenhower in London could talk to Gen. Patton in North Africa in a split second. Their system was a prototype of the "single-sideband" transmission that became the model for all global communications in the pre-satellite days.

At KIXL Bob presided over an innovative two-channel binaural sound. This had been pioneered in New York City by WQXR, the *New York Times* station. It required signals from both KIXL-AM and KIXL-FM. FM multi-plexing had not been blessed by the FCC, so we were able to achieve the same effect as stereo by using the left channel signal fed to the AM station at 1040 kilocycles, and the right channel to the FM station at 104.5 mHz.

For its time it was a relatively spectacular stunt. To capitalize on the hoopla we had a sponsor, a leading Dallas department store, set up demonstration receivers in their store. It meant nice revenue for the stations and brought welcomed publicity for the sponsor and the stations. It was the only "stereo" in the market, and put KIXL on the crest of the wave in the impending explosion of FM broadcasting.

Throughout the early days and months of our noble beautiful music experiments, we were able to refine the sounds of the station into something very close to a scientific success at mood projection. The programming was cycled to pique a listener's interest with the first tune in a segment, and then have that interest mount to a crescendo by the fourth tune, or 13 minutes into the segment. The last tune of the segment was designed to relieve the listener, gently and emotionally, from the involvement with the first three tunes. It was a planned progression, and it usually worked.

The formula for the progression was simple but rigid,

with an infinite number of variations possible within the mix. This guide would be for a segment immediately following a commercial break: Always open with something big, lush, sweeping. An example would be a song by someone on the order of a Mantovani, or Ted Heath, or the Jackie Gleason Strings. The opener needed to be a big sound, because you've just had commercials and it's showtime again.

The second song must be a vocal. Keeping in touch with the tones of humanity, if you need a psycho-babble rationale. It was irrelevant whether the vocalist was male or female, it just had to be melodic. It could be up-tempo or quiet ballad—didn't matter, so long as the melody line was there. A typical song for this spot might be "Lover Come Back to Me," or, in more recent terms, something like "The Way We Were."

The third element should be a small instrumental group or piano artist, someone like Eddy Duchin or Carmen Cavallaro—you might even go with The Three Suns. The song needed to be smallish, soft, smooth, quality.

Number four's job, carrying us up to the quarter hour, was to peak us out again in preparation for another break. It was the one that brought you out of the creeping languor we'd built up in one, two and three. Here you'd use somebody like Andre Kostalanetz, or Khachaturian's "Sabre Dance," or it might even be Xavier Cugat, Perez Prado, or "Hava Nagila." Get you alert and breathing hard so we can sell you a car or some supermarket specials.

By survey, KIXL, and later most all beautiful music stations, could boast of a sound that kept listeners tuned to that one station, without dial-hopping, to amass the longest time spent listening to this format than any other. It meant, for our sales people, some marketable constancy that could

be offered to a sponsor, and to a sponsor it meant knowing the commercials would reach a ready audience.

Lee Segall's coup in assembling his group of stellar celebrity stockholders had helped the station's publicity efforts from Day One. On Day One, June 8, 1947, MGM film star Robert Taylor had been live in the studio, reading the Browning poem "How Do I Love Thee?" He dedicated the reading to his wife of the moment, Barbara Stanwyck.

Greer Garson, already a Dallas citizen through her marriage to oilman Buddy Fogelson, was at the station often and made frequent public appearances on station promotions. She also voiced a series of public-service announcements, adding that unmistakable British class to our sound. Tyrone Power and William Holden stopped in frequently when they were in the region on studio publicity trips.

Once, invited to lunch with Segall and Holden at the Variety Club in Dallas, I was taking the occasion to regale them with some anecdote about the station when, gesturing to make some point, I batted the drink tray out of a waiter's arms behind me; the drinks toppled all over Holden. I don't remember what the story was, but I'll never forget the embarrassment of telling it.

Tyrone Power brought his new and controversial bride Linda Christian into the station on their way back to Hollywood from their Mexican honeymoon. Ms. Christian mystified many of us at the station by spending hours at a time in the ladies' room. By morbid coincidence, all three of the male movie-star stockholders would suffer sudden and shocking deaths: Taylor and Power by massive heart attacks at youthful ages; Holden 20 years later from head injuries after a fall at his home.

Celebrity guests, Dr I.Q. brainstorm sessions, the logistics of mounting a station and programming sounds that

would be the model of many other stations to come—it made for full days and a thorough grounding in all aspects of the radio station game.

In 1953 I was offered the job of sales manager of KIXL, and I accepted. Not long after that, Tom Massey moved on and I was named general manager of KIXL, along with the titles of vice president of Variety Broadcasting Company. As a new member of the board of directors, I was also allowed to buy in as a minor stockholder.

By then the radio industry was recognizing the sound we had been instrumental in developing at KIXL. I was being invited to sit on programming panels at broadcasters' conventions and seminars across the country. In the mid-50s stations were seeing turbulent signs on the horizon: the emergence of rock 'n roll, a flat national economy, the erosion of listenership to conventional, eclectic programming.

At conventions and seminars in Houston, Little Rock, Atlantic City, Washington D.C., Syracuse and Boston, I was usually the lone voice advocating beautiful music.

I got to know such luminaries as Seymour Siegel of WNYC in New York City; Sidney Kaye of Broadcast Music; Ted Jones of WCRB in Boston; Sam Carey of WRVA in Richmond; Bob Hanna of a New York state broadcast group; Ralph Wentworth of BMI.

My presentations often boiled down to a voice-in-the-wilderness prediction that, just as KIXL had done in pioneering beautiful music, stations of the future were going to have to specialize in narrow ranges to counter the fragmenting audiences caused by proliferating stations and the impact of television. My prediction, back there in the early 50s, was that one day we'd see stations that played nothing but classical music, stations that played only country music, and maybe even stations that had all news all the time!

There was a lot of hooting at my lunatic futurism, especially when I'd add that eventually stations wouldn't even try to appeal to the total, universal audience.

Obviously, from the flurry of programming elements I've referred to in KIXL's early days, there was constant encouragement of new ideas. Many of them were saleable. John Wilson's "Sentimental Journey" segment was an eagerly sponsored hit from the start. John also originated a "mystery automobile" feature daily, which was picked up by the Mohr Chevrolet dealership. In a typical program, Mohr's Mystery Chevrolet would be roaming the streets in a certain pre-announced area of the city. The feature was called "Try and Find It." The first listener who spotted the Mystery Car from the clues given to its exact location got a cash prize.

John also created a musical-mystery feature that originated from the Student Union Building at S.M.U. Students in the audience would be quizzed about music that was being played back in the studio, and could win cash prizes.

## Chapter 7

### Hijacking Radio Moscow

I even had a couple of ideas myself. One, coming at the height of the Korean war, was a Sunday afternoon news roundup called "The World at Our Fingertips." It was an amalgam of segments from foreign newscasts, taped off the shortwave band of the various countries' official stations. We ran partly afoul of FCC rules, which held that no U.S. radio station could rebroadcast the signal of another station without permission. While we had permission from the BBC in London, CBC in Montreal and the Australian Radio Service, we had neglected the dubious pursuit of permission from Radio Moscow and other Iron Curtain sources. The FCC was sympathetic with our problem and bent the rules, saying we could proceed with the series—but should be prepared to take it off the air if they ever changed their mind. The show ran, fully sponsored and well-received, for 26 weeks.

Another of my ideas was foreign-born. I approached the public relations and advertising department of Dallas-based Braniff Airways with an idea of playing selections of beautiful music from the various countries along their very successful routes across South and Central America. It may date this story somewhat to reveal that Cuba, before Castro, was one of the vacation spots to be featured. The musical packages would be devoted to popular composers of the countries on the routes, which eventually included Colombia, Honduras, Argentina and Brazil. The show was called "Flight Into Melody" and it, too, aired on Sunday afternoons. It was good public relations for the airlines and

for the countries represented—aside from being a production nightmare.

There were actually plans in place to syndicate "Flight Into Melody" to stations in Washington, Miami, Houston and San Antonio, among others; but according to Braniff, the political situations in the countries involved never were stable enough, at the same time, to get the deal organized.

One idea that did make it into syndication was "Heidelberg Holiday," a three-times-a-day, five-minute feature involving an *oompah* opening, an announcer intro in both German and English, and a recently imported German recording, all sponsored by Lone Star Beer. Harry Jersig, the president of the brewery, liked the series so much that we produced it for ten other stations in Lone Star's southwest marketing region. Jersig delightedly passed along a memorable piece of fan mail the program had generated. It was a grateful letter from a young bride who said that the highlight of her honeymoon in the Hill Country had been listening to "Heidelberg Holiday" on the radio.

Honeymoon raptures aside, radio was resembling a daily grind to me by 1956. I was 32, general manager of a major radio station, and looking for signs of light at the end of this admittedly pleasant tunnel. It was burnout, except we didn't know yet to call it that.

I wondered what it would be like in the advertising business. I had noodled enough successful ideas to agencies on behalf of the radio station that I was curious about their end of it. One idea I'd had involved Maryland Club and its famous slogan. My broadcast adaptation, used by Maryland Club for both its radio and TV campaigns, opened with the first five notes of Chopin's "Polonaise." After those five simple notes the announcer would say: "In the world of fine music, there is only one Chopin ... in the

*Charles F. Payne*

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world of fine coffees, there is only one Maryland Club. The coffee you'd drink if you owned all the coffee in the world."

So I had this nagging little clump of curiosity about how I'd do in advertising. I left KIXL in 1956 and set out to make a mountain out of that molehill.

## *Chapter 8*

### **Ad-Ventures**

Lacking a navigable waterway, mountains, beaches, ore deposits, a salubrious climate, or Henry Ford, Dallas through the years has been accused of having no reason to exist as a major metropolitan area. Actually it has an ideal location as a confluence of U.S. and international airline routes, but first they had to wait for airplanes to be invented. Meanwhile Dallas created a need for itself as a white-collar capital of creative merchants such as Stanley Marcus, oil operators, insurance firms, and later the electronic and computer industries.

The city always has been warm toward creative endeavors, especially when they were extremely profitable. Thus Dallas became the headquarters of broadcasting geniuses like Gordon McLendon, the cutting-edge technology of entrepreneurs like Texas Instruments' Cecil Green and J. Erik Jonsson, data wizard Ross Perot, cosmetics marketer Mary Kay, creatively eccentric millionaires like H.L. Hunt and Clint Murchison Sr. and Jr.

There's a large and versatile creative community. For some reason, mostly having to do with marketing prowess and a head start in recognizing a potential industry, Dallas is the world capital of the singing jingle business. And its advertising community for some decades has been playing on the same level with the agencies in New York City and on the West Coast.

When I jumped ship at KIXL in 1956 to put on what was then known as the gray-flannel uniform, Dallas agencies were only at the early threshold of the national reputations

they were soon to earn. The agency I joined was the Bloom Agency, then and still one of the leading firms in town. Today Bloom/FCA has its own skyscraper on the edge of the skyline, but when I joined them they were doing business in a couple of leased floors in an office building on downtown's Akard street.

The agency had the image of a precocious youngster in the field then, but while it was a new shop, its substance was grounded in some old-line Dallas clients who had been brought along by founder Sam Bloom. Sam had pounded the streets as an ad salesman for the *Dallas Times Herald*, had worked his way up to general advertising manager, and then, correctly sensing a void in locally grounded full-service ad agencies, had started one. He had brought many of those newspaper clients with him.

At the time I came aboard as an account executive specializing in broadcast needs, the Bloom Agency had 65 clients; they were overwhelmingly local accounts, but prime ones. Bloom had the Dallas department store business to itself, handling the radio and television campaigns for Neiman-Marcus, Titche-Goettinger, and Sanger-Harris, the big three names in the business at that time. Titche-Goettinger has since been absorbed by Joske's, which in turn has become Dillard's; the Sanger-Harris chain is now owned by Foley's, which in turn is a part of Federated Department Stores.

Bloom's client list also included competitors in the automobile business: Earl Hayes Chevrolet, Ed Maher Ford and Morris Robinson Dodge.

It seemed to me that my own credentials from twenty years in broadcasting made me right at home in the creation of ideas and their execution. Unlike newspapers and television, in radio the people who sell the commercials often had

to write them as well as voice them. I had done plenty of that, starting from the time I'd sold commercials to the neighbors on my pirate radio station in Emhouse. When you've written commercials for a show starring an organist named Mary Fanny emanating from studios in a funeral home, what surprises can there be left? I was sure I had enough creative juices flowing to come up with enough ideas to go around for selling Chevys, Fords and Dodges without repeating myself.

In my first week in advertising there was more yelling and screaming and wailing than I had expected. The reason was a gigantic flap that had occurred, indirectly involving the agency's biggest account, Zale's Jewelers. Zale's was not only prestigious and profitable, but it gave the agency a national presence with its operations coast-to-coast.

Through some tie-in involving Zale's, Federated and Sears, Roebuck, the agency had prepared an elaborate, two-page color print ad for Coro costume jewelry that was to run in some fashion magazine on the order of *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar*. The concept had been okayed, the artwork and the copy was done to "camera-ready" status, and all that remained was for some person at Sears' Chicago headquarters to give the ad its final authorization. Deadline time was critically near, as is the rule in all advertising projects, so a Bloom exec had flown to Chicago to hand-carry the ad layout and get the necessary approval. He got the approval, and then back in Dallas it was learned he had gotten the wrong person's approval. The deadline was missed, the ad run was cancelled, and I spent my first week in advertising going to meetings in the board room helping to think of creative ways to eat \$20,000 worth of unusable color-separation plates.

That first week I learned the difference between radio

*Charles F. Payne*

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flaps and advertising flaps. When Lee Segall accused Hugh Lampman of ruining the Weiner Lumber show, the station had to eat \$35 in time charges. Now here was a never-run ad that was costing \$20,000.

## *Chapter 9*

### **An Embarrassment of Watches**

Early on I became involved with the broadcast aspects of the *Zale's* account, which led to frequent white-knuckle airline trips through sandstorms to the far reaches of West Texas, where *Zale's* had stores in Amarillo and Lubbock. *Zale's* and another early Bloom client, *Haggar Slacks*, had known the value of promotion since their modest early days. A friend of mine from Lubbock still remembers the days right after the war, when minor league baseball was at its peak; the Lubbock Hubbers played in the Class C West Texas-New Mexico League. Every time a Lubbock player hit a home run, the P.A. system would announce that he was getting a free pair of *Haggar* slacks and a wristwatch from *Zale's*. That year the Hubbers' rookie third baseman Bill Serena (who later made it to the Chicago Cubs in the big leagues) hit 59 home runs during the regular season and 12 more in the playoffs. It makes you wonder what Serena ever did with 71 pairs of slacks and 71 wrist watches.

One of Sam Bloom's priorities was a constant search for new business. The workaday policy at the agency was that account execs, in addition to the assigned clients we were to service, had to make "cold call" presentations on a regular basis to potential new clients. Some of these you made with meticulous presentation of layouts and campaign ideas, some were just goodwill calls.

One of my first cold-calls was to an obscure Fort Worth company that seemed to be doing well with its line of small leather goods, hobby supplies and do-it-yourself moccasin kits that youngsters could put together in class handicraft

projects and the like. They were friendly, homey folks and said they appreciated the trouble I'd gone to, but they didn't really think they'd need any bigtime advertising just yet. They said they'd keep us in mind, though.

Long after I'd left the Bloom agency, they were still making pitches to that little company—Tandy Corporation, which soon afterward bought out Allied Radio Corp. of Chicago and created a gigantic chain that became pretty well known as Radio Shack. By the early 90s, Tandy Corp., with its Radio Shack, Tandy Computer, Color Tile and Bombay Company divisions, was a four-billion-dollar-a-year industry.

Except for my Army service, it still struck me that my entire life from the age of six had been steeped in the ephemeral precincts of life, from the make-believe boundaries of radio to the harder-edged but still fanciful world of advertising. Once your self-evaluation gets started, it's hard to shut it off. It had been a semi-official family legacy that I was destined to become a physician. The uncle for whom I was named was a doctor, as was his son. My own Dad had gone into pharmacy. After my father's death, my uncle had set up an annuity for me that was intended to pay for my medical schooling. My getting hooked on broadcasting at age six had cancelled those plans, although as a kid the subject that had intrigued me most, next to electronics, was reading medicine and pharmacy. (My cousin, the doctor, took up electronics as a hobby. We flip-flopped.)

But for whatever subconscious compulsion was involved, I enrolled while at Bloom for an off-hours course in psychology at Southern Methodist University. "Psychology of Human Motivation" was the course title that attracted me. It probably didn't do me any harm, although I can't ever recall thinking, after making some sale

somewhere, "Ah ha! If it hadn't been for my psychology training, I couldn't have accomplished this!"

There was no need to take "Abnormal Psychology," since being around the people who are attracted to the advertising business offers a world of case studies. I mean that kindly for the most part, since there was a fascinating and talented cast of characters in and out of the Bloom offices whose brains received, processed, and re-transmitted ideas at strange angles.

One of these was a unique idea man named Mitch Lewis, who always came up with a good and novel idea no matter what the problem was. He was on staff at Bloom for awhile, but his mind was so fertile and his approach so audacious that he eventually just became a one-man consulting agency, dreaming up promotions for all parts of Clint Murchison Jr.'s empire, including the Dallas Cowboys, and for the McLendon radio chain. One of Mitch's better promotions occurred for a San Francisco station, which had a wild success with a contest to name the city's fog. "They call the wind Maria," ran the teaser, "... but what do you call the fog? Irving? Max? Send in your entry and your reasons in 25 words or less ..."

Mitch's creativity also extended into his personal problems. Mitch woke up regularly with woeful hangovers. The descriptive phrase he coined for the condition was "having the clangs."

Sam's number-two man in those days was a youthful, methodical optimist named Al Lurie, who was destined to share even more experiences with me later back in radio. Al was a veteran of wartime film work in the Signal Corps, and had been a member of the original staff of WBAP-TV in Fort Worth in 1948, the first television station in the Southwest. Sid Richardson, one of Texas' legendary mil-

lionaires from the lusty ranks of the Hunts and Murchisons, had been a financial backer of the other Fort Worth TV station, KTVT-Channel 11. On their first day on the air, Richardson visited the studio and his only comment, made to one of the technical crew, had been, "First thing you've gotta do is get all these goddam cables up off the floor! Somebody's gonna trip!"

Al Lurie's TV background got him the task of overseeing Bloom productions in video, and he promptly drafted me to help on some. Once we were discussing an idea for the Frito Company and, needing some demonstration footage to work with, we used my home-movie camera, a Revere 8-mm silent model. We not only used my family camera but my family: we had Charlie Jr. and Al's three daughters as the "talent" in our shoot. The results were not bad, but also not good.

We had Sam Bloom's blessing and his encouragement to keep trying weird ideas. But our respective kids did eventually make it into a commercial for another client, Levine's department store. It was a spot for Mother Goose shoes, which became "Madre Goosa" with a voice-over track in Spanish for seasonal airing on some border TV stations in the Rio Grande Valley.

Speaking of Charlie Jr., he had a little brother by this time. On July 20, 1957, Katy and I welcomed George Watkins Payne, who, like his brother, weighed in at eight pounds, one ounce.

A big part of my job was overseeing the productions of the local television shows that our clients sponsored in their virtual entirety—something that would become pretty rare as stations' time charges inflated. Single-sponsorship used to be almost commonplace, even on the network level. Philco had its "Playhouse 90," Chevrolet had "Bonanza"

and "The Dinah Shore Show." The "Hallmark Hall of Fame" continued single sponsorship into the Nineties, but they became much less frequent. Not many remember that the first Super Bowl in 1967 was sponsored in its entirety by a company that felt it needed a big boost in national recognition: McDonald's Hamburgers. On national radio, in 1993, the baseball World Series, once sponsored only by Gillette razor blades, had eight sponsors who co-oped the sizeable tab.

Morris Robinson Dodge was one of those Bloom clients with its own TV show, a weekly country-and-western show broadcast from a nominal wrestling arena called the Sportatorium. The emcee and packager of the show was the Dallas radio veteran Johnny Hicks, whose "Hillbilly Hit Parade" on KRLD radio went all over six states of the region on KRLD's booming 1080 signal. Morrison the car dealer was a swarthy, craggy-faced fellow of wrestler proportions himself who loved my idea of substituting his picture for George Washington's on a dollar bill used as a graphic in his TV commercials. With his husky, cloggy voice over a pronounced ethnic gutturalness, Morris Robinson always introduced himself on camera as "Moss Hhhrrrobinson."

The commercials as well as the shows were live, and thus fraught with peril.

At the agency I used to take calls from local performers anxious for the exposure on the show. One of them was Trini Lopez, who, in those days before his hit records and Las Vegas lounge-act salaries, was happy to come in and perform for \$25 a shot. So was C&W future star Sonny James, whose agent was Ed McLemore, owner of the Sportatorium.

## *Chapter 10*

### **Cut to the Chase**

Another client, Skillern's Drugs, sponsored the "Hopalong Cassidy" series on KRLD-TV Channel 4. It was a syndicated show in black and white, still remembered and beloved by any former kid under 60 for its scratchy video and its crackly sound track. It arrived each week at the station in a 16-mm film canister, and hardly ever before the last possible minute. The film of each episode had to be shipped to Dallas from whatever was the last faraway station to have aired it. The Channel 4 programming people, Gene Cuny and Bill Baker, and I had an oft-repeated phrase to describe our anxiety in waiting for Hoppy: "The bicycle is late again this week."

The agency's account service and acquisition department depended on a very capable and straight-forward fellow named Aaron Pearlman, who as a numbers-cruncher and conventional person, showed signs of feeling himself surrounded by madmen.

Which brings us to the art department, a hotbed of talent, alliteration and assonance, with Bill Bond, Buzz Ballard and Bill Hill.

Bill Hill, an agency star in design and planning, went on to become a principal in his own agency in Dallas. Bill Bond escaped to the Texas Hill Country, where he's now noted for his cowboy-art western bronzes and sculptures. Buzz Ballard, like his good friend Mitch Lewis, seemed to stay in perpetual motion, including the crossing of state lines. My favorite story about his adventures as a hired nib involves

his joining the Hallmark Greeting Card Co. in Kansas City. Once he got up there, Buzz, a dedicated free spirit, found himself shackled to a drawing board from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. every day, drawing nothing but butterflies. Artistic temperament and corporate specialization are not often compatible. In due time he was back in Dallas.

Rounding out my fourth year in advertising I took a sort of emotional inventory. It turned out inconclusive. While I was working with some talented and likeable people and while I was far from dissatisfied and not exactly disillusioned, I had to admit that the business didn't seem to have the combination of challenges and satisfactions I was craving.

There's no time like a limbo of indecision to be invited on a fateful coffee break. The call came from Hal Thompson of Fort Worth, once an announcer in the halcyon days of WFAA Radio. He had become the southwest representative for the national broadcast sales firm Peters-Griffin and Woodward. Such firms, acting as broker-sales reps for groups of stations in the selling of commercial time, have a low public profile but are critical in the broadcast business, unless you're Public Radio and don't need to sell commercials. Peters-Griffin and Woodward was one of the top firms in the narrow spectrum of that business. It was referred to generally through the industry as PGW and somewhat affectionately, to its own insiders, as Push, Grunt and Wiggle.

Hal Thompson was passing along an offer that came from PGW's New York office: they were planning to open a Southwest sales office in Dallas, and would I consider running it?

I would.

Rep firms are little known outside of the broadcast

industry—newspapers and magazines also use versions of these firms as their advertising representatives—but are next to indispensable in securing otherwise inaccessible commercial business for the stations that are their clients. It's because of the selling work of rep firms that stations in small markets like Nacogdoches, Texas, or Selma, Alabama, can add the spots of national advertisers to their logs. Without rep firms doing the buying on such a mass, organized basis, it would be an overwhelming logistical task to make all the calls and send all the contracts necessary to cover the markets.

The list of clients I represented for PGW included many of the major stations in the Southwest and elsewhere: WBAP in Fort Worth, KTRH in Houston, KFDM in Beaumont, KENS in San Antonio. Away from the region, I had responsibility for all of the stations of Westinghouse Broadcasting's "Group W"—WBZ in Boston, KDKA in Pittsburgh (which had been the first commercial station in the U.S.), KYW in Philadelphia, WIND in Chicago. This was my first involvement with Westinghouse's powerful and far-flung mini-network, but it wouldn't be my last.

PGW's client list was a prestigious one. It was made up mostly of the powerhouse 50,000-watt stations that blanket their regions. Besides my own Texas and Group W stations, the firm also represented WHO in Des Moines and WRVA in Richmond. The job gave me a chance not only to represent some of the country's leading stations in radio time sales, but also a first-hand opportunity to observe some great stations in operation, not only in the Southwest but across the country.

I did a lot of flying and driving, and more than once reflected on the thought that the familiar, comforting availability of all those radio signals on the lonesome highways

have done nearly as much as automobiles to shorten the distances and time involved in traversing the country. There must have been millions of nighttime travelers over the decades who have experienced those brisk, crackling tones of the WHO announcers in Des Moines who can be heard on winter nights several states away from Iowa, giving their station breaks and the frigid temperature readings that are usually 30 or 40 degrees colder than wherever the listener is.

It was good being back in radio, even from a different perspective. At many of the stations I called on, I was already known from the intramural grapevine as the father of the beautiful music format. There was one 50,000-watter that asked me to consult with them in a considered switchover to beautiful music. I agreed to do it at no fee, just to help get the station out of its rut. After some considerable time and effort on the part of the station's programmers and me, the new sound was just about ready to take to the air when the general manager's wife decided she preferred a contemporary pop sound to beautiful music projection.

The factor of spousal-validation was a new one on me in the field of programming concept. Of course every broadcaster I'd ever known in the business had been sensitive to the input of wives, sweethearts and family (I'd played a lot less Cole Porter in Corsicana after my mother's scolding) but I'd never known it to control policy on such a level of magnitude before. That station never really got off the ground with its hybrid sound, and not long afterward it was sold to new owners.

The opinions of media executives' wives in day-to-day operations almost certainly have been a bigger factor than anyone (except the executives) suspected. This policy has

had its good effects, too. In 1993 I heard the marvelous syndicated newspaper columnist Erma Bombeck reveal, on a radio talk show, that she owed her career to the wives of editors. She had been an obituary writer on the Dayton, Ohio *Herald* in the late 50s when the paper gave her a shot at writing a humor column from the woman's viewpoint. Within three weeks, she said, her column was being syndicated, mostly due to the syndicate's strategy of sending samples to the editors of papers and asking them to get their wives' opinions on the potential readership of such a column. Women weren't supposed to do humor in those days, but Erma was eventually syndicated to more than 600 newspapers.

At PGW my agency contact list took me all over Texas as well as into Shreveport, Oklahoma City, Tulsa and Denver. Tulsa always was a memorable stop, for even then it was the headquarters of evangelist Oral Roberts, who already had a house-agency for buying time to place his radio revival shows on stations throughout the region. His time-buyers were just as consumed by bargains and across-the-board discounts as the numbers-crunchers at any more secular agency representing laundry soap or spark plugs, but in learning the ropes in this territory you soon learned not to schedule a meeting at the Oral Roberts agency between 9:30 and 10:00 in the mornings. That's when all business stopped in the agency for the daily devotional and prayers.

*Chapter 11*

**'... Evvabody Evvawhere!'**

People who either loved or loathed the Eisenhower era like to say that absolutely nothing happened in 1959, but this wasn't true in my case. That was the year Gordon McLendon called me. Millions knew him from his baseball broadcasts as "The Old Scotchman." It was typical of his skills in audacity and illusion that he had begun calling himself The Old Scotchman when he was only 25. To the public he was most famous for his Liberty Broadcasting System's "Baseball Game of the Day," heard on 458 stations around the country.

Gordon brought a crackling resonance to the microphone along with an actor's knack for building tension and drama. He could make a foul ball sound exciting. The most magical part of McLendon's baseball feats, though, was that while he made his audience feel they were at the games, he wasn't actually there himself. The listener heard the buzzing crowds, the hollow, off-key whack of the bat hitting the ball, the excited roar following a base hit, the singsong spiel of a drink vendor apparently just passing the press box. While the ambience of the ball park sounded for all the world like Shibe Park in Philadelphia, Sportsman's Park in St. Louis, Comiskey Park in Chicago, it was all being put together in a basement in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas.

Every day McLendon would weave the whole epic of a summer afternoon together, working only from a ribbon of teletype paper before him that carried a telegrapher's bare-bones rundown of the game: "Cavaretta up for Cubs. Ball

one. Low. Ball two. Outside. Called strike ...” McLendon would then stretch out that sketchy report into a tense segment of pitcher’s wind-ups, stretches and glances at the baserunners, runners leading off base, the batter stepping out of the box, an airplane passing overhead. McLendon eventually would take those few words on the teletype ticker and run Phil Caveretta of the Cubs to that 1-2 count in a real-time simulation that was probably more portentous and entertaining than if McLendon had actually been at the game.

There was an innate chuckle in his voice and in his trademark opening: “Hello, evvabody evvawhere, this is The Old Scotchman ...” The listener’s imagination is an intrinsic impact of radio; The Old Scotchman nudged those imaginations along and enhanced them with his often ingenious, earthy and poetic descriptions and asides.

Joined in his basement cubbyhole only by an engineer and a sound effects man (the teenage sound man, Wes Wise, later would become Mayor of Dallas), Gordon McLendon took these shorthand dispatches and created a near-miraculous tapestry of excitement, action, humor, triumph and heartbreak. Between the balls and strikes, the pitching changes and the rain delays, he could fill the broadcast with droll stories of baseball lore and an amusing way with the standard cliches of the game. He mixed it with a curious blend of literate observation and home-spun phrases. His most famous moment in baseball came with the 1951 “Miracle Home Run” of Bobby Thompson in the New York Giants’ playoff upset of the Brooklyn Dodgers. After more than a minute of the sounds of the hysterical crowd, Gordon said of the game’s dramatic turnaround: “Well, I’ll be a suck-egg mule!”

That was the McLendon known to the radio public of

the time. Inside broadcasting, he had already reached the status of a revered legend and a fearsome, unbeatable competitor. Throughout the 1950s, his flagship station KLIF had defined dominance in a market, often running up ratings of 60 or 70 in a cut-throat milieu where, years later, a 5 or 6 would suffice for first place. In the radio business McLendon eventually would be recognized as the creator, along with the Midwest's Todd Storz, of "Top 40" programming, the now-standard system of repetitive or frequent plays of songs on the hit list. But even before his rock 'n roll dominance, The Old Scotchman's chain of stations were market-busters around the country, even when playing the mundane releases from the era of Guy Mitchell and Doris Day. Many people still think that, musically, nothing much did happen during the Eisenhower Administration—perhaps forgetting the fact that Elvis Presley came along smack in the middle of it.

It was McLendon's showmanship, often in the unlikelyst of places, that distinguished the sounds of his stations. At KLIF in Dallas an example was the dramatic, recorded opening of a routine newscast on the hour. It began with the distant chimes of Big Ben, and The Old Scotchman's portentous voice saying, "In London it is eight o'clock"—or seven, or three, or whatever the corresponding hour to the time of that newscast on McLendon stations in Dallas, Houston, Chicago, Louisville. Then came the sound effect of a mighty airplane's piston engines coughing into life, then quickly catching hold and revving: "... at Orly Airport in Paris it is 9:00 p.m." Another engine sputtering to life: "At Hong Kong's Kai Tak airport it is midnight ..."

Delivered in Gordon's tense, sepulchral tones, the news opening in a few seconds gave the listener the sense of a global sweep and the promise of exciting news to come. The

news openings were often far more worthwhile than the newscasts that followed.

The five-minute newscasts usually featured wire-service rewrites plus an ideal average of three voice actualities from points where news was breaking, from city-council chambers to construction cave-ins. It required a fairly large and expensive staff. At anytime during music programming, when a hot, breaking news story might be unfolding, the KLIF newsroom would take charge and break into whatever music program was in progress, announcing the bulletin break with a wailing, Doppler-type European police siren at full volume. There was a minimum of two KLIF mobile units on the streets at all times, although it sounded as if there were more: Gordon never numbered his news units "1" or "2"; they were No. 17, or 37, or 52, making the fleet sound much bigger than it was.

The call letters he'd eventually choose for his station in Louisville were WAKY—and wackiness was often the hallmark of McLendon's skill in promotions. In the early 1960s, thousands of KLIF listeners descended on a shopping center and virtually tore up its parking lot, following clues for finding a buried-treasure promotion. City officials were still punchy about it 30 years later.

Personally Gordon could be affable, ebullient, or, in the manner of many geniuses, mercurial. People in radio are no different from most in being taken aback by the appearance of someone we've only known as a voice on the radio—the difference is that we expect to be surprised. And while the timbre and power of The Old Scotchman's voice would lead one to expect to meet some strapping, ruddy-faced, sandy-haired Highlander, McLendon was slight, dark and deceptively bland-looking. Protuberant eyes were the most prominent feature of a questing face. He spoke in real life as

he did on the radio—resonantly, meticulously, and yet somehow always comfortably.

The McLendon empire got its energy from Gordon's promotional and programming genius and from the financial prowess of his father, B.R. McLendon. The company had its origins in Idabel, Oklahoma, where the elder McLendon, trained in the law, took ownership of a defunct movie theater in a settlement for legal fees. It was in the 1930s, in the pits of the Dust Bowl years and the Depression.

Determined to resurrect the shuttered movie house, B.R. went to Dallas, made the rounds of film distributors, and eventually made the acquaintance of former Oklahoma railroad telegrapher-turned-cowboy-singing-star Gene Autry. B.R.'s first deal for his Idabel picture-show house was to rent Autry westerns, at first for a flat fee of \$12.50 per week. The westerns played on Friday nights, and Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Admission was 25 cents. Two bits at a time, that Idabel theater grew into the foundation of a sizable Southwestern cinema chain. Eventually it would include ornate theaters in downtown Dallas, suburban multiplexes, and the two largest drive-in theaters in the world—twin five-story-high screens side-by-side in North Dallas.

While the senior McLendon was starting the movie business, his precocious son, already an avid radio fan, was handling public-address play-by-plays for sports events at nearby high schools. Gordon went to Yale, and during World War II as a naval officer he took his talent for linguistics to an extreme—learning Japanese and working in Naval Intelligence as an interpreter.

After the war the family purchased its first radio station, the 250-watt KNET in Palestine, Texas. In 1947, the same

year that my KIXL signed on the air, Gordon and his dad applied for and got a construction permit for a 1,000-watt daytime station in Dallas, originally licensed to the Oak Cliff section of the city; thus the call letters KLIF. It would become the McLendons' flagship station.

Gordon and I had been friendly competitors ever since then. My beautiful music at KIXL had been one of the few formats that had been able to put up a ratings fight against Gordon and his jackhammer flair for promotions and publicity.

I was in my PGW office at the Merchandise Mart when he called to suggest that we meet for a cup of coffee. Those were busy days at the rep firm, and in addition to the regular duties PGW had me frequently on the road and on the banquet circuit, making speeches to broadcast and advertising groups on my experiences in creating Beautiful Music. About a week later he called again, and we did meet for what would prove to be a fateful cup of coffee. It was the early Spring of 1959.

McLendon confided that he and B.R. had been offered a station that was quietly up for sale in the San Francisco Bay area. The deal at the time, he said, was so sensitive that he couldn't even tell me the call letters of the station. Gordon came right to the point. It was always his style. He said he wanted to see if I could help turn that new San Francisco station into an updated version of my old KIX—beautiful music. In other words: a format twist for the famously pop-driven McLendon programming that would be no more shocking to the industry than if today Madonna announced she was entering a convent.

But that was how McLendon already perceived the market-gap opportunity in urbane San Francisco: a station that, like the area, was slick, smart and cool for its times. His

offer was flattering on more than one level. Not only was it coming from Gordon McLendon himself, but it was an important recognition that “beautiful music” and Charlie Payne were synonymous. This stage of the offer was just a query as to whether I could find the time from PGW to consult on getting the proper sound for his station. There was no firm offer beyond that, which suited me at the time.

We agreed to terms that called for me to spend two weeks—my vacation time from PGW—in San Francisco, all expenses paid, with a nice consultant’s fee as well.

When Katy and I arrived the sale of the station was in its final days of closing. The station was KROW, an old-line, 1,000-watt, full-time station at 960 on the AM dial, and licensed not to San Francisco but to Oakland, nine miles across the bay. The seller was Sheldon Sackett, of Coos Bay, Oregon, a publisher of union newspapers and periodicals. Gordon and Sackett had originally sealed their agreement with Gordon writing Sackett a token check for \$5.00 toward the purchase of the station. Sackett had promptly taped that check to the wall in his suite at the Sheraton Palace.

As *Broadcasting* magazine soon reported, the sales price for the station was \$800,000, an extravagant, nosebleed amount for 1959. Observers weighed in with the conclusion that McLendon had finally overreached himself, paying that much for a little thousand-watter—in Oakland! (Ten years later, after a decade of unfailing rises in each year’s profits, the McLendons would sell the station for eleven million dollars.)

In the interim period between changeovers, McLendon began shifting talented staffers from other parts of the chain to run the Bay station. Knowing how to surround himself with capable people and not hesitating to use their talents was one of the keys to his consistent success. He appointed

as general manager of the as-yet unnamed station Homer Odom from Dallas—whose wife Billie, a longtime McLendon Corporation mainstay, eventually came up from a brainstorm session with the winning set of letters that would name the station: KABL.

Some of us wondered why such an obvious and perfect combination of call letters for the city of quaint cable cars had gone overlooked by other stations in the market, and then we found out: those letters had been assigned, years before, to a U.S. naval vessel that had been sunk in the early days of World War II. The ship, and its nontransferable call letters, were at the bottom of the Pacific, and the FCC's first decision was to let them stay there.

But the McLendons, so convinced that KABL would be a perfect I.D., aimed their company's Washington attorney, Marcus Cohen, at the problem and in a relatively short time for threading bureaucratic brambles, the letters were freed up and assigned to the new station.

Until KABL, The Old Scotchman's pet call letters presumably had been those of his station in Houston: KILT. From there he transferred Joe Somerset to KABL as the program director. Joe was another colleague of mine destined for bigger things. He later joined Capital Cities Broadcasters in New York City, overseeing WPAT, WROW, WKBW and others. He later left Cap Cities to own his own station in Connecticut. Another McLendon hand sent to the Coast to punch up KABL was Don Keyes, a onetime weekend disc jockey who grew into the McLendon Corporation's executive ranks, planned and executed the company's policy book, and went on to be a station-owner in Tallahassee.

With such call letters, it would have been a challenge to think of a promotional slogan that didn't work. Some of the early ones were: "Like the Cable Cars, KABL Music! Very

San Francisco!" And "KABL ... in the air, everywhere, over San Francisco!"

My consultancy worked smoothly during our brief time in San Francisco. We laid our play lists and sequence formulas for the concepts of KABL's beautiful music, and the nuts and bolts of putting it all together could be done in our absence. Some of the conceptual sessions, when Gordon sat in, were memorable and amusing. Gordon's genius was in knowing how and when to hire the best people to run his stations, together with his own inherent genius in knowing how to promote the results. But he didn't have the slightest idea of how to carry a tune. He was, at best, tone deaf.

I remember one KABL meeting when he said, "At this stage, I think we need a kind of sweeping song like, uh, 'Granada.'" Then to make his point he tried to hum it. It sounded more like a man trying to clear his throat. Finally, exasperated and sensing the room about to break out in chuckles, he said, "Oh, you know—GraNAda!" In the corporate jargon of the 1990s, Gordon recognized that you could always hire somebody to hum for you.

One of the first staffers in place at the station was Bok Reitzel, the general sales manager who had been personally recruited by Gordon, in part because of his close connections with San Francisco society's movers and shakers. Reitzel's wife was a member of the Folger Coffee family—a sister of Abigail Folger, who was to be one of the victims of the Manson Family-Sharon Tate murders ten years later.

Reitzel thus had the right social and old-boy-network connections. He also had the work ethic of a Balkan prince. "He fits in," Gordon cracked, "like socks fit a rooster." But he was making the people who counted aware of KABL. (Another folksy McLendon observation is still quoted: "Never invest in anything that eats, or needs painting.")

Reitzel's social connections got the city talking about the station, and once again Gordon's unorthodox strategy would prove correct. Within a year after introducing its new format, KABL was number one in the market's Pulse ratings.

The way the station was introduced was pure McLendon flash. The stunt has been done so many times at so many stations since then that it has become a tiresome cliché, but when KABL hit the air it was novel, and incidentally sensational.

Before the unveiling of the station's new sound, most of the competing stations in the Bay area had been positive that as a McLendon station, its format would be bound to revert to rock 'n roll, since that was the strength of the other McLendon stations at KLIF in Dallas, KTSA in San Antonio, KILT in Houston and KEEL in Shreveport.

But, instead, this is what happened on KABL's opening day in May of 1959 at 6:00 a.m. on a Saturday. That was the final weekend of the station's existence as KROW. At 6:00 a.m. the station played a goofy and raucous pop hit called "Giant Gila Monster." It was a loud, offensive and incredibly bad piece. "Giant Gila Monster" was also the second song played, and also the third. Then the deejay would announce that Frank Sinatra's "Night and Day" was upcoming, and then play "Giant Gila Monster" again. Following that, Doris Day's "Love Me or Leave Me" was the announced number, but the control room again played "Giant Gila Monster."

Again and again and again, for 51 hours and 58 minutes, the station played nothing but that terrible record, and after the first couple of hours the word had spread around the Bay area like one of California's perpetual brushfires that if you wanted to hear some really execrable radio, dial in 960.

Especially in a staid and image-minded setting like the San Francisco Bay area, the listeners couldn't comprehend what was going on. But they listened.

By mid-morning on Saturday both the Fire and Police departments, alerted by concerned calls from many citizens, had pounded on the station door to ask what was going on. Continuous play of something like "Giant Gila Monster" could easily be mistaken for a hostage situation.

There had been no print or TV advertising of the station to this point, but the tidal wave of word-of-mouth during the two days of the gimmick made up for lost time.

The key to the success of that continuous record play stunt was the time frame. It started on a Saturday morning at 6:00 because the local and regional offices of the FCC were not manned on the weekends.

The same-record play continued until Monday morning at 9:58 a.m. By then, "Giant Gila Monster" had had roughly 2,000 straight plays. At 9:58 there was 60 seconds of dead air. For the next 60 seconds the announcer bade farewell to the old KROW and announced the birth of KABL. On the dot at 10:00 a.m. on May 9, 1959, beautiful music began along with the announcement that now KABL was "In the air ... everywhere ... over San Francisco!"

That slogan was the next thing that got us into trouble with the FCC.

In the Bay area, of course, San Francisco was the market prize—but the station's license was to Oakland. Among market factors—demography, economics, prestige, image perception—to mix a maritime metaphor, there is a gulf between the Bay's two sister cities far greater than that nine miles of soggy geography that separates them.

From the start, then, the McLendon strategy was to create the illusion that KABL was indeed a San Francisco sta-

tion. We went to some trouble to further that misconception. We held classes for the announcers to create the desired projection and effect, teaching them to "swallow" Oakland in the station identification announcements.

It was mandatory that Oakland be mentioned. So a typical I.D. tag would be: "This is KABL (Oakland), 960 on your San Francisco dial. In the air, everywhere, over San Francisco!" (Sound effects of cable-car bells).

It didn't take long for the FCC to take exception to the tactic. The federal agency recorded air-checks of all the stations on a random basis. Upon hearing the KABL segment and the misleading I.D. tag, the FCC issued the station a citation for a clear violation of the rule that the city of license must explicitly follow the four assigned call letters. Ours had done that, but sneakily. The FCC held (rightly) that we were violating the spirit if not the letter of the regulation.

They issued a fine of \$20,000 to the McLendon Corporation. Stiff as the amount was for 1959, Gordon didn't object to paying it, since the controversy was generating almost as much free word-of-mouth promotion as the "Giant Gila Monster" had. But the Washington counsel, Marcus Cohn, objected to the fine, saying it wouldn't look good on the FCC records. Marcus argued the case before the FCC, and got the fine reduced to \$10,000. But still Cohn objected and wanted the citation wiped from the books. This was finally too much for the FCC. They threatened to reinstate the full \$20,000 amount. So the station paid the cut-rate version of the fine, and agreed to change the I.D. tags as well.

I had returned to PGW after my brief consultancy to set up KABL's programming. But those start-up adventures and the obvious potential of that station, plus a generous

offer from Gordon to join the station full-time, proved too much to resist.

In early 1960 I had been representing PGW at a series of meetings at WHO in Des Moines when The Old Scotchman reached me on the phone and made his offer. My official title was to be general sales manager, but our arrangement implied much more from the operational and programming standpoint. Before the days of satellite syndication, perhaps the most important task at a beautiful music station was to make sure that the mood and projection of the station remained consistent. If you were going to be in charge of it, you had to be there.

One of the talented mainstays of the KABL staff harked back to my early days at KIXL in Dallas. Dave McKinsey, one of the most brilliant and nimble-minded promotional specialists I have ever encountered, had been a member of Dr. Weiss's speech and drama classes at S.M.U.—the same group that had included Aaron Spelling and Carolyn Jones. Dave had gone to work in Dallas for the McLendons at KLIF, and had been sent to KABL as production and program director.

Promotion, as I've said, was the corporate forte from Dallas as well. It was one of Gordon's pet provinces, and Don Keyes in the home office kept ideas coming, too. But McKinsey had a unique, puckish humor that was especially well-suited to San Francisco's droll and sophisticated mindset, which I suppose had been formed by a combination of vista, fog, water, wind and Herb Caen, the great columnist of the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

While his favorite and most-often-quoted Bay radio personality was KSFO's Don Sherwood, Caen became an early supporter of KABL and occasionally would come into the studio to cut public-service announcements. We found it

politic to invite him to do that. Caen was also intrigued by the career and mystique of Gordon McLendon and wrote often in, I hope, mock horror, of the Texas cultural manifestations that Charlie Payne and Gordon McLendon were bringing to "Baghdad-by-the-Bay."

Caen also would write about our promotions when Dave McKinsey's ideas struck a chord. One was the St. Patrick's Day Snake Race, sponsored by KABL. We actually raced snakes in downtown San Francisco. Our gimmick was that since St. Patrick had driven the snakes from Ireland, they had to go somewhere. Charities got the proceeds; the station got the promotional benefit.

Caen was and is a unique asset of the city he dubbed Baghdad-by-the-Bay. His power, his universal readership and his cool, relevant awareness have endured through generations of San Franciscans who read his daily column in the *Chronicle*. He is the city's historical and cultural conscience and the creator of most of its punchlines. Thus our promotional gimmicks had to be pretty good to merit his attention. One such was KABL's name-the-fog contest. The premise was something like, "They call the wind Maria ... but what do they call the fog? Bruce? Irving? Send in your ideas in 25 words or less to ..."

Despite the FCC's displeasure, Oakland's KABL was becoming a big part of San Francisco. One night at a party I ran into Al Newman, the program director of the old-line station KSFO. They were running a series of jingles called the Sound of the City. The narration on one of them went, "... And the cable car bells and the fog sneaking lazily through the bay ..." and throughout the whole spot was the tempo of windshield wipers snick-snacking. The spots were wondrously effective.

I said, "Al, how can I pay you to stop playing those and

let us have them over at KABL? They don't fit your station."

He said, "I know ... but aren't they good?!"

It irked me that KSFO's programming didn't have that kind of ambient, moody, San Francisco-in-the-fog format, while we did. Sometimes I'd tune in KSFO in the morning and they'd be playing Sousa marches.

But their morning-drive jock, and Caen's pet, Don Sherwood, was fast, facile and good. He was the kind of loose-cannon talent that managers would just as soon not have to worry about, but he was on the air in San Francisco for years. One of his famous misadventures came the night he had a few too many and hit a pedestrian with his car. It wasn't fatal, just awkward: she was the police chief's sister.

I had talent headaches of a different sort at KABL. One of these headaches was mild, but chronic. His name was John K. Chapel. The "K" was presumably for Kurapotkin, since his resume' claimed that his real name was Ivan Ivanovich Kurapotkin de la Chapel. He had a large following in Bay radio and had been one of our first hires. His listeners had followed him to KAB from KLV in Oakland, which later was to become KEWB, a Warner Bros. station and sister to KFWB in Los Angeles.

John was quite short, mustachioed and fussily dapper. He was elegantly precise and clipped in his delivery, sounding faintly continental in the manner of Gabriel Heatter, the wartime commentator. John K. claimed that his mother was French and his father White Russian, and that the family had arrived, after fleeing the Bolsheviks, by way of Siberia and China. (In San Francisco, anything is not only possible but likely.)

His unique and fussy news style was a success at KABL. His newscasts added a layer of genteel relevance to the beautiful music format, and advertisers paid premiums to

buy adjacencies to his newscasts. He was salable, but Lord, he was single-minded about what constituted worthwhile news. He was committed, to a fault, to news about landfill hearings, P.T.A. meetings and social fillips, especially for East Bay cities like Alameda, Berkeley, Hayward, Orinda, Walnut Creek and San Leandro—which he unfailingly pronounced as Saan Le-aaawn-dro. He showed mostly disdain for any hard news from San Francisco, or the rest of the world, including Southern California. One morning in the week of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, I listened in shock to two straight newscasts in which John K. Chapel didn't even mention the crisis whose climax might be merely the outbreak of nuclear war. John K., instead, had given his Ted Baxter version of Saan Leeawndro city council doings.

At the station I called him into my office. "John," I sighed, "I know that Bay area news means a lot to you. But if someday I could arrange to have Fidel Castro personally lead a parade down Telegraph Avenue, could I count on you to mention it on your newscast?"

He smiled tightly. A fleeting, wounded look crossed his courtly face. He said, "Mr. Payne, you are correct. The omission was an error on my part." He really spoke that way in real life. Then he left and continued to do the news the way he wanted to. It was hard to argue with his ratings.

He also disdained rising early. But we had made it part of his lucrative contract that he do a 15-minute newscast at 6:30 a.m. in addition to his later segments. In order to make it palatable for him to do the early news, we had installed an Associated Press news ticker and microphone in his home. It always somehow pleased me to know that when I heard his cultured, stentorian reports of events at Orinda and Saan Leeawndro at 6:30 a.m., he was doing the news in his pajamas.

San Francisco is rightly considered one of the great cities of the globe—especially by those who live there. We found a home in San Rafael, across the Golden Gate Bridge in Marin County. The daily commute in the car took about 30 minutes from Marin to the KABL offices on Commercial street in downtown San Francisco, just off Montgomery and a couple of blocks east of Chinatown. (Even though the license and transmitter were in Oakland, we people of KABL were actually in San Francisco.)

The drive in to work was always exhilarating, with the bright orange girders of the Golden Gate providing a majestic framework for the city of seven hills. I've always liked Katy's answer to a question explaining why we loved the city so much. Her theory is that "When the Almighty created the Universe, I think He stopped and smiled just a couple of extra minutes on the Bay area."

From our home in Marin County we were 15 minutes from Stinson Beach and the Pacific Ocean; 15 minutes in the opposite direction to the breathtakingly brooding redwood forests of the Muir Woods; 30 minutes from the wine country of Napa Valley and Sonoma; three hours from Lake Tahoe and the California-Nevada line, where the Cal-Neva Lodge's swimming pool had a black line drawn on its floor with "California" written on one side and "Nevada" on the other.

We were only a day-trip's distance from places like Carmel on the Monterrey Peninsula, Yosemite National Park, and Squaw Valley, scene of the 1960 Winter Olympics. But in San Francisco you could never tell when you'd encounter a winter sport—even in baseball season. Because of the city's chronic winds and quirky weather patterns caused in part by the Japanese Current, July and August could be the coldest and rawest months of the year.

Candlestick Park, the Giants' baseball home, perches on the very edge of the bay and can be a frigid ordeal. For our oldest son's birthday party on July 30, 1963, we took him to a night game at Candlestick. Katy wore a heavy wool pants suit, blouse plus sweater, and a full-length cashmere coat over all that, together with knit cap, scarf, earmuffs, and kid gloves covered with woolen mittens. This was for a baseball game. We were all covered by a wool plaid football blanket, and even at that, were none too comfortable. Caen once wrote in his column about night games at Candlestick that it was the only ballpark where, by the time a cup of coffee was passed from the vendor down the row to your seat, it had whitecaps on it.

Much of San Francisco's magic takes place in its famous restaurants. I often dropped by Fisherman's Wharf on the way home to pick up cracked crab and sourdough bread. There were splendid steaks at Ernie's, the elegantly funky Dave's Blue Fox (where the menu cover read, "Located across the street from the City Morgue"), The Red Knight on Sacramento Street, Italian foods at Torino's off Montgomery and Fior d'Italia, near the waterfront. It was a typical San Francisco experience to go into the Sheraton Palace Hotel for lunch, order the shrimp-and-artichokes in remoulade sauce, then glance over at the next table and see Wernher Von Braun.

On a given day San Francisco is full of famous visitors—or people who look like they should be famous. George JEU's Lamps of China restaurant was a popular gathering place for visiting Hollywood stars. Once, as the story goes, actor Marlon Brando and director George Englund were hanging out there, wondering who could be cast to play the part of the native leader in the Asian film they were about to shoot, "The Ugly American." George JEU was a success-

ful restaurateur, slight, slender, affable and distinguished, but after enough rice wine I guess he could look sinister at a distance. They signed him to play the part. Jeu no doubt felt more comfortable passing out puffed shrimp than hand grenades, but he made the film and had a prominent part in the credits.

From San Francisco we hopped the famous but now slightly scruffy S.S. Lurline for a vacation cruise to Hawaii (even though in those days United Airlines offered jet airfare for \$100, each way.) After three days and 2,400 miles, the great old ship pulled into the harbor at Aloha Tower, while at dockside the Honolulu Municipal Band struck up the sweetly sad, almost funereal strains of the island song "Aloha Oe."

We were met by some radio executives whom we had entertained in San Francisco. They were delighted to be greeting anyone from the mainland. If anyone in Hawaii had a complaint about living there it was about the odd problem of being a little stir-crazy in paradise. On their island of Oahu, you could drive only about seven miles in any direction without hitting the water's edge.

Listening to Hawaii's many radio stations, it struck me that the market was over-developed, especially for that time. Since the islands were so far removed from the mainland, or so some of the owners told me, the FCC had been pretty generous with its license grants. This had resulted in two dozen or more stations operating in a relatively tiny market, with not enough advertising to go around. While I searched the dial looking for strains of that lovely Hawaiian music, I couldn't find any station in Hawaii that was playing its distinctive native music. Back on the mainland, the Mutual Network had had a big hit musical series with Webley Edwards, "Hawaii Calls." Ukelele chords had made

a fortune for Harry Owens, and Bing Crosby had sold a million copies of "Sweet Leilani;" but you couldn't hear any of this on the radio in Hawaii.

I was always anxious to get back from a vacation to work in San Francisco—an emotion that people in other places don't often feel. Beyond the excitement of the city and the stimulation of its spirit, a big part of my gratification was in having the trust, respect and loyalty of Gordon McLendon. As an example, when KABL had first taken to the air with its new sound, Gordon had opted to stay in Dallas at corporate headquarters.

"You're not going out there?" an incredulous staffer asked.

"No," Gordon said, "there's no need. Charlie's out there."

Within a year KABL had reached number one in the San Francisco Bay Area Pulse Survey. Our way of noting the milestone got us even more attention. I approached a well-known bakery with a trade-out proposal. The trade-out is a venerable, widely used and, most importantly, cheap means of acquiring anything from cars to tee shirts. The station trades advertising airtime in return for the goods. It's a good deal for both sides since the advertiser is getting retail time for wholesale products.

For this trade-out we swapped air time to the bakery in return for hundreds of loaves of San Francisco sourdough bread. Our targets in the promotion were the advertising agencies of the Los Angeles and Hollywood markets. Especially then, the Southern California agencies controlled much of the time-buying in Northern California media.

At 3:00 a.m. on B-Day, hundreds of loaves of the bread came out of the ovens of The Bakery on Geary Street. They were packed into boxes about 4-feet-by-4-feet. The bread,

still hot, was trucked to San Francisco International Airport, and loaded onto air freight for Los Angeles. In L.A., the bread was picked up by staffers from our sales office. They put each loaf into a paper sleeve and stapled onto the sleeve a card we'd had printed.

At 9:00 a.m. on the dot every account executive in the sales office was making calls on key time buyers at the ad agencies, presenting the still-warmish loaves of bread with the card that read:

*"Like Sourdough French Bread,  
KABL Music...Very San Francisco.  
#1, Pulse, Spring 1960."*

Later sales curves confirmed the impact of our bread stunt. We repeated the same day, hot-from-the-oven stunt later in Chicago, New York and Detroit. Years later, whenever I ran into any of these agency execs, they would still fondly mention the sourdough bread promotion. And the bread had been free through tradeout. So had the transportation. We had promoted United Airlines air freight in all of our press releases. The only out-of-pocket costs to the station? The index cards that were stapled to the sleeves.

One day I had looked up from my desk at KABL to see the pudgy bulldog form of B.R. McLendon himself. He had flown out from Dallas, he said, "because I wanted to come out and personally shake the hand of the man who led the station to its first \$300,000 billing month." It was a gratifying gesture. That night he took Katy and me to a sumptuous dinner at Ernie's.

A week later he sent me a blistering memo from his office in Dallas, saying I should be ashamed for letting our expenses for copy-machine paper run \$30 over budget.

Meanwhile back in Dallas the redoubtable Old Scotchman had another promotional weapon that he used

often and to great effect. About 25 miles northwest of Dallas, on the pleasant shores of Lake Dallas, sprawled his impressive ranch, Cielo—the name coming from the Spanish for “heaven.” It wasn’t much of an exaggeration.

Cielo had more than the usual amenities for ranch living: not only the spacious water and shore-line views but a private landing strip, a fleet of fishing cruisers, horses and stables, a luxurious bunkhouse arrangement around a courtyard and swimming pool for overnight guests, as well as a soundstage for film production, a street of frontier-town prop fronts, and a theater-sized screening room for new film releases. (The McLendons also owned a chain of movie theaters, and Gordon himself became involved in the production of at least two memorably bad movies—“Giant Gila Monster” and “The Killer Shrews.” It’s typical of the McLendon touch that even his bad Shrew movie has become a cult classic among fans of *Le Cinema Bad*.)

Cielo was used often as a scene for junkets and parties for key advertising execs who were flown in for weekend revelries. The guests usually would arrive on Friday and leave on an early Monday flight, with the McLendon Corporation picking up all the costs. They were usually productive get-togethers; when execs from Detroit auto-makers could rub elbows with their counterparts from Procter & Gamble or Anheuser-Busch, things happened. Yuppies call it networking, but Gordon was 30 years ahead of the times.

One day Gordon’s confidant Mitch Lewis—still another creative genius on the staff—brought up the idea that Cielo should have its own wine label; a touch of class for meal-times at the ranch, and bottles of it as mementos of the trip.

As the closest manager to the Napa Valley, it befell me to see to it. I had already met vintner August Sebastiani, and

we came to a quick tradeout agreement: Sebastiani's vineyards would get air time throughout the McLendon chain—in Dallas, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston and Chicago. In return, we received more than a thousand bottles of Sebastiani's best Cabernets, Zinfandels and such. Mitch Lewis designed a special Cielo label, and Gordon's friend, Clint Murchison Jr., had the shipment flown in for free on his Lockheed Lodestar. Once again a flashy and enduring stunt with hardly any out-of-pocket expense.

It may have been such stories that prompted Herb Caen to remark to me once at the KABL studios: "I'm just wondering when The Old Scotchman's going to install pay phones on your elevators."

I got an idea for one of our better promotions one day while Katy and I were on an outing in Northern California's woods. Near Sausalito we encountered an artist who was carving totem poles out of redwood. His name was Barney West. His finished totem poles stood nearly 30 feet high. At his clients' preferences he would carve into them either traditional Indian figures, or family members, or even pets.

Dave McKinsey wrote an amusing 60-second spot urging KABL listeners to order their own custom totem pole, "artistically sculpted to your order ... all for only \$3,500, F.O.B. Sausalito." We got a totem pole out of the deal, and Barney actually sold several more as a result of the promotional spots we ran for him in return.

Such "exotics" were another reason for people to tune into KABL, and the promotions proved that beautiful music didn't have to be dull.

We fielded a station softball team for the Bay Area Advertising Softball League, and won the league pennant in 1962. Don't tell the FCC, but we did it with ringers. With a total station staff of only 19, we had to find outside help.

Two of our illegal players were Pep Cooney, later the general manager of the *Chronicle's* TV station, KRON, and Ed McLaughlin, who was the sales manager of our ABC-owned competitor, KGO. While McLaughlin's sacrifice bunts on the Marina softball field were nothing to write home about, he did somewhat better in broadcasting, moving on to New York City and eventually becoming president of ABC Radio.

Although our ratings at KABL quickly surpassed the indifferent numbers chalked up by our predecessor, KROW, we enjoyed keeping alive the legends of some of those who had been there before. Don Sherwood had been on staff before going on to greater things at KSFO. The advertising copywriter at KROW had been an irrepressible young working mother named Phyllis Diller. She figured in a perhaps apocryphal tale of suffering a whole day of upset stomach and spending it in the ladies' room, having wheeled in her IBM Selectric and plugging it in to keep churning out the ad copy despite her indisposition.

After our takeover, singer Roger Miller, already on his way to superstardom, would drop into our studios to record jingles and other material for an East Bay candy manufacturer who had given him some work at a time when the singer needed help. He hadn't forgotten. He was still grateful to an advertiser who'd used his talent at a time when his ego and his pocketbook were at low ebb. There are some great people on both sides of the business.

## **Chapter12**

### **Power Plays**

1. She Loves You—The Beatles
2. I Want To Hold Your Hand—The Beatles
3. Hello Dolly—Louis Armstrong
4. Pretty Woman—Roy Orbison
5. I Get Around—Beach Boys
6. Last Kiss—J. Frank Wilson
7. Where Did Our Love Go—The Supremes
8. Love Me Do— The Beatles
9. Please Please Me—The Beatles
10. All My Loving—The Beatles
11. Little Children/Bad To Me— Billy J. Kramer
12. People—Barbra Streisand
13. We'll Sing in the Sunshine—Gale Garnett
14. My Guy—Mary Wells
15. Hard Day's Night—The Beatles
16. Door Wah Diddy— Manfred Mann
17. Love Me With All Your Heart—Ray Charles
18. Under the Boardwalk—The Drifters
19. Chapel of Love—Dixie Cups
20. Suspicion—Terry Stafford
21. Bread and Butter—New Beats
22. Rag Doll—Four Seasons
23. Glad All Over—Dave Clark Five
24. Dawn—Four Seasons
25. It Hurts To Be In Love—Gene Pitney
26. Dead Man's Curve—Jan and Dean
27. Come a Little Bit Closer— Jay and The Americans
28. World Without Love—Bobby Rydell/Peter and Gordon
29. Don't Let the Rain Come Down—Serendipity Singers
30. Baby Love—The Supremes
31. Wishin' and Hopin'— Dusty Springfield
32. Twist and Shout—The Beatles
33. Memphis— Johnny Rivers
34. You Don't Own Me— Lesley Gore
35. Let It Be Me— Betty Everett and Jerry Butler
36. Walk On By— Dionne Warwick
37. House of the Rising Sun— The Animals
38. G.T.O.— Ronnie and The Daytonas
39. White on White— Danny William
40. Hey Little Cobra—Rip Chords

That was the "Top 40" rock 'n roll playlist of 1964. With the obvious exceptions of Louis Armstrong and Barbra Streisand, any resemblance between Top 40 and beautiful music was more than coincidental—it was mostly incomprehensible to those of us who were much younger old fogeys in those days. Nearing the end of its first decade, rock 'n roll was just beginning to sense the dimensions of its power, and stations like the McLendons' KLIF in Dallas were riding the crest of the wave. It was songs like those 1964 hits that soon began to telescope nostalgia, becoming instant "golden oldies," forever to remind their listeners of senior proms, geometry quizzes, first loves and '57 Chevys.

How the number forty became such a cardinal element of rock 'n roll radio is not clear in an official way, although my McLendon colleague from those days, Don Keyes, tells a story that sounds like it ought to be true.

It involves Todd Storz, the Omaha broadcaster who is generally credited with being the creator of Top 40 programming. As the Storz story goes, he was in an Omaha tavern one day in the late 50s and noticed an intriguing repetition in the pattern of songs being played by the bar's customers on the jukebox. There were exactly 40 tunes on the jukebox, and as Storz listened through the afternoon, idly at first and later paying much closer attention, he noticed an almost predictable pattern in the way certain songs kept being played. People in the bar obviously had some favorite songs on that jukebox list, and they wanted to hear them again and again and again. It was almost the opposite of the way most radio stations were being programmed, keeping a rigid separation between replays of a song. But these hits on the bar's jukebox were being played much more often and in an almost compulsive sequence. The tunes obviously had the awesome power of making the working-class

patrons keep digging into their jeans pockets for quarters to play their favorites. Storz made the connection: why couldn't the psychology of this phenomenon be transferred to the programming of a radio station? At the time he was running the family's station, KOWH, a 1,000-watt daytimer whose call letters originally traced back to the city's newspaper, the *Omaha World Herald*. Since 40 records also provided a minimum numerical variety for a three-hour disk jockey shift, Top 40 soon had its debut on KOWH.

What Gordon McLendon soon would add to the mix was his genius in promotion—taking the Top 40 concept and adding the pizzazz, the fun and the contests that captured listeners. It was the format that took his own stations to such dominance in the industry. Eventually stations would offer the "Super Sixty" or the "Fabulous Fifty" or whatever, but these were all variations on the theme.

In January of 1964, Top 40 and the mysterious magnetism of rock 'n roll became my concern, too.

Katy and our sons and I had moved back to Dallas, where Gordon had offered me the challenging dual jobs of general manager of KLIF, the chain's flagship station, and national sales manager of the McLendon Corporation.

There was a corporate vice presidency along with the deal. Coming in to the corporate headwaters and being entrusted with the flagship station was a great promotion; leaving San Francisco was a wrenching decision. It was strange: I was back home again, but what I was homesick for was the Bay area. Most days I was too busy to dwell on that. My corporate jobs included constant personnel recruitment, as well as executive duties like decisions on placement of the KABL transmitter, whether a Mexican general's bribe money should be in an envelope or a briefcase, how many Beatles sweatshirts to buy when Sears had a produc-

tion overrun.

Since its beginning in 1947 as a modest 1,000-watt day-timer at 1190 on the dial, licensed to Dallas' bucolic Oak Cliff section, KLIF itself had grown dramatically in power, both literally and figuratively. It had become a 50,000-watt daytime powerhouse, completely dominating the Dallas-Fort Worth markets with ratings numbers far beyond anything seen before or since that time. And it had become the flagship station of a broadcast chain that had become dominant, as well as loathed and feared by competitors, across the country and in every market where it operated. Its "Texas Triangle" of KLIF in Dallas, KTSA in San Antonio and KILT in Houston covered 85 percent of the state's radio market.

The same audacious opening gimmicks and relentless promotions in other markets had followed the success of KABL in San Francisco. The McLendon chain was a major player, right up there with Westinghouse Broadcasting, Cox, Storer, and other national groups of stations. At various times, fitting in under the FCC's ownership limitations of seven stations, the McLendon Corporation operated the three mentioned Texas stations, as well as WAKY-Louisville, WRIT-Milwaukee, KEEL-Shreveport, WYSL-Buffalo, WNUS-Chicago, and KABL-San Francisco. Oops, I mean KABL-Oakland.

And there were more broadcasting innovations to come, each venture a little more outrageous and audacious than the first, inspired by Gordon McLendon's own restless nature and a sort of mischievous creativity. The first of these wider horizons came shortly after the success of KABL, when Gordon began casting about for a Mexican border station to add to the empire. Then as now, there was a strict rule in Mexico that only Mexican citizens could own a sta-

tion, but this was a minor obstacle. The McLendons came to terms with a surrogate Mexican owner for a station then known as XEAK at 690 on the AM dial. It was located in Tijuana, just below San Diego and, considering the monstrous transmission power allowed to stations south of the border, an inconsequential 120 miles from the massive Los Angeles market.

The takeover of that station came in tandem with another of Gordon's eerie programming instincts: that the time was ripe for an all-news station. Not in Mexico, of course, but across the border and up the coast, in the world's biggest hotbed of car radios: Los Angeles. No commentaries, no music, nothing but hard news 24 hours a day. XEAK became XTRA—for "Extra," the historic street-corner call of newsboys. Being already the nation's prime mobile, commuter-based, freeway-laced market, Southern California was an ideal target for the all-news experiment, and especially for that public-service idea whose time had come, the traffic report. XTRA did well from the start, enjoying a city-grade broadcast signal contour that boomed right up the coast from Tijuana-San Diego, blanketing Southern California. Later, the McLendons bought an existing FM station in Los Angeles as an adjunct to XTRA, making it possible to combine sales and production operations for both stations in an office complex on Wilshire Boulevard.

The FM station became K-ADS—the first all want-ad station. No news, no music, no features: just paid personal want ads. Again, a McLendon idea went against the grain of FCC precedent, and the K-ADS project required some lawyerly lobbying, but the permit was eventually issued.

But this time the FCC had no authority in XTRA's Oakland-like identity crisis, since the signals were reaching

Los Angeles from across the border. XTRA's studios and transmitter were located slightly south of Tijuana. There were five transmitting towers saddling a picturesque hillside at Rosarito Beach. The station's I.D. announcements made every effort to gloss over the location. Throughout a typical news hour, listeners would hear I.D. breaks: "All news, all the time ... XTRA News over Los Angeles." Then, to comply with the legalities, once an hour the control room would play a taped official station identification in Spanish. It had been recorded back in Dallas by Yolanda Salas of the corporate executive staff—who, incidentally, would soon become the wife of Snuff Garrett, one of Hollywood's top record producers, who got his start back in Dallas as Gordon McLendon's mail boy. Her silky voice followed a brief Flamenco guitar run, and said only "XTRA Tijuana." It would be the only reference to Mexico during the entire hour. It wasn't even a speed bump on the hour's torrential flow of "news from LA."

At one point Gordon assigned me to look into an idea that would give XTRA an unquestionable, albeit devious and oblique, Los Angeles connection. About a quarter mile off shore from the five towers at Rosarito Beach there were two tiny islands, uninhabited and unnamed. The plan was to buy one of the islands, name it "Los Angeles," and then erect some sort of augmenting transmission apparatus on the island. Thus the station could be legitimately, sort of, broadcasting from Los Angeles. It was the kind of outrageous idea that appealed to Gordon very much, but my inquiry into land clearances and other legalities made it too expensive a joke.

XTRA continued doing business as before, and with those special flourishes that made operating in Mexico a much different kind of experience. My schedule occasional-

ly called for me to be the one to make the weekly payments, always in cash, to the Mexican general who was in charge of the district.

Another audacious stunt raised eyebrows and hackles all over Northern Europe, although Gordon's involvement was not widely known. The people of Stockholm, Sweden, along with much of the Scandinavian Peninsula, awoke early one morning in the mid-60s to the shocking novelty of a radio station playing rock 'n roll music, with, incredibly, commercials. It was Radio Nord. Sweden did not permit commercial broadcasting, but the government was powerless to stop the radio waves pouring in from a ship lying about 12 miles offshore in international waters. It was transmitting on 1120 kilocycles with 20,000 watts. Radio Nord caused a sensation in all of the Scandinavian countries, appealing to listeners of all ages who were curious about those decadent sounds of western rock 'n roll, and simultaneously luring a full slate of advertisers who had never before been able to buy commercial messages.

Most of Radio Nord's commercials, promotions and features were being taped by our staff and facilities at KABL in San Francisco. The produced tapes were rushed to San Francisco International Airport and then, in keeping with the buccaneer nature of the operation, put aboard S.A.S. as "on-board mail" and handled by airline crew members on direct polar flights to Stockholm. A tape produced one day at KABL could be on the air the next day. In Stockholm the tapes were retrieved and then ferried by plane out to the North Sea and dropped onto the deck of the converted German trawler that was housing Radio Nord.

McLendon chief engineer Glenn Callison, in collaboration with Ralph Dippell of Washington D.C., designed the wackily ingenious transmitter for the trawler, rigging up a

gyroscope system that allowed for compensation of transmissions in heavy seas. The antenna was a "folded dipole" that ran transmission wire about 100 feet to the top of the tower and then, with insulators, ran the same wire back down to the deck—in effect electrically doubling its height. It was crazy, but it worked and it shot Radio Nord's signal so far that polar bears could have shown up in the ratings.

The pirate station had a glorious and notorious run for almost a year, until the indignant Swedish government finally passed a stiff, punitive tax levied on any firm using Radio Nord for advertising.

The company's first venture into television also had a quirky but profitable motivation. The challenge began when somebody reminded Gordon at one of the staff's brainstorming sessions that the Canadian government prohibited advertising of beer and wine on stations licensed in Canada. This differed from U.S. rules, which held that beer and wine could be advertised, but not hard liquor. Considering the revenues that beer and wine accounts brought into U.S. stations, Gordon thought it would be worthwhile to study the problem.

The eventual result was the licensing of a McLendon television station, Channel 9, in the unlikely environs of Pembina, North Dakota. The best that can be said for Pembina's growth pattern is that it has been static. In the 1990 census its population still was 741. It lies about two miles inside the Manitoba border off of U.S. Interstate 29; an unlikely place for an NBC affiliate—yet that is the feat the McLendons pulled off by opening a TV station that beamed its signal mostly north—toward the conveniently nearby metropolis of Winnipeg. American and Canadian brewers and vintners found the Pembina station to be a handy avenue for getting their messages across into Canada. The

technical side presented great difficulties, since cable connections for TV networks didn't yet exist on those remote northern Great Plains, and satellite transmissions were still some years distant. But the company's inventive chief engineer, Callison, rigged up an overland microwave repeat system to bring the NBC network to that bleak tundra.

Our return to Dallas in January of 1964 came at a bizarre turn of history. The city of civic boosters and super salesmen was still staggered and morose from the events of a few weeks before, the assassination of President Kennedy. Dallas was being condemned around the world for its atmosphere of right-wing extremism that some believed incubated the tragic events. The ripples of anti-Dallas sentiment ran far. Some friends of our family's had been driving their station wagon on a Colorado vacation. When they pulled into a gas station to fill up, the attendant, seeing their Texas plates and Dallas dealer medallion, refused them service.

At that time one of the leading restaurants in Dallas was Brockles Steakhouse. Its owner, an expansive Greek immigrant named Andrew Brockles, had built a national business with his jars of Brockles salad dressing, a utopian concoction heavy on the garlic and bleu cheese. Brockles had first served it on crackers as an appetizer at the restaurant, and over the years its popularity had made it a national mail-order product. I was visiting with Andrew Brockles in his office one day when he was sorting through the mail orders for gift packs of his sauce. He opened a letter from a man in Ohio who had requested a six-pack gift carton of the salad dressing. He'd enclosed a check. On the check, to the left of the signature, the man had written, "Dallas—Shame!" Brockles sighed, gingerly laid the check on his desk, wrote "VOID" across its face, crossed out the order

and returned it all to the sender. He didn't feel a further note was necessary.

One of the most graphic media mementos of those assassination days is "The Fateful Hours," an LP album produced by Don Keyes at KLIF and pressed by Capitol Records in Hollywood. KLIF's news department had been the "pool" radio organization feeding hundreds of stations news bulletins, updates and interviews during that grim weekend. Under Callison and engineer Les Vaughn, the Ampex reel recorders had never stopped turning, and the station captured nearly all of the audio aspects of those several days of horror. The first evening's tape featured the first and only audio sound bite of Lee Harvey Oswald as he was being booked at police headquarters. There are still some rare copies of the record around at collectors' specialty stores. Television producer David Wolper relied on "The Fateful Hours" for much of the sound track of a mid-60s assassination special.

One of my first duties upon my return to Dallas as general manager of the station was to receive an F.B.I. agent who came into the office and demanded all of the original, raw tape reels of our assassination coverage. By this time some months had passed since the assassination; the Jack Ruby trial was underway and in Washington the Warren Commission was in the midst of its investigation. Yet the agent demanded the tapes with such a sense of urgency, implied threat and cavalier bullying that, ever since then, I've tended to believe those JFK witnesses who've claimed they were threatened by various federal agents warning them not to talk about the event.

I refused to surrender the tapes but offered to provide dubbed copies. The FBI said that only the originals would suffice. Again I declined. The company's lawyers took over

then, and after a few months the FBI settled for the duplicate set. I've often been glad that I saved the originals from the limbo that seemed to be the fate of those assassination materials the FBI confiscated.

Because of KLIF's gigantic ratings and its pervasive effect on the culture of the city, it was a hit-maker station with influence far beyond its listening area. Members of the Dallas establishment, especially the stuffier ones, never would admit they listened to KLIF. But it was amazing how quickly they could react if, for instance, their names were used on one of Bill Leonard's local gossip reports. They would call Gordon within two or three minutes and complain, "Er, my daughter said she heard my name on your station, and ..."

The music gurus from *Billboard* or *Metronome* magazines recognized that if a new release made the KLIF playlist, its chances for top rankings coast-to-coast were almost guaranteed. Dallas traditionally has been a demographic barometer for producers of music and movies. Film studios still "sneak" their new releases in Dallas for a test before a sophisticated audience. The KLIF Top Ten, a weekly printed sheet distributed to record shops, carried incredible influence. When songs recorded by local or regional groups showed up on the Top Ten sheet, they were automatically auditioned by the major record labels on both coasts. Many went on to become national hits.

The potency of the system held inherent dangers of payola, of course. During my years there we almost managed to dodge that bullet. The main reason was the quality and integrity of our music directors and program directors, people like Ken Dowe and Johnny Borders, with Don Keyes looking on from the corporate offices.

One pay-for-play incident happened shortly after my

return. It bears telling because of the bizarre way it ended. It involved a song that had been recorded by The Five Americans, a group promoted by a Dallas insurance executive who had decided he wanted to be a record producer, too. Actually the group had made a previous record that had enjoyed a modest success. I heard their new song driving to work early one day during morning drive, and, while I had no delusions about my rock 'n roll expertise (I left that up to our specialists), I knew an atrocious, pedestrian, mediocre, absolutely meritless song when I heard one.

At the meeting, Ken, Johnny and Don all claimed to know nothing about how the tune got played on the air. They hadn't been able to reject it because they hadn't even heard it. Meanwhile, it had played twice more on the same air shift that morning.

I ordered the record pulled. Eventually, through the work of a private investigator, we would learn that the record producer, John Abdnor, had motivated both members of our morning-drive team to play his clients' record. It had cost him some cash and a full-length mink coat for one of the jocks, and a houseful of new furniture for the other.

None of that was known at first, but meanwhile Abdnor, who would have fit nicely into the sue-everybody mentality of the 1990s, decided that KLIF and I had engaged in unfair artistic restraint. I had personally pulled the song from airplay, therefore it would have no way of making the KLIF Top Ten, therefore it couldn't become a hit, therefore the Five Americans would not become national idols, therefore they would lose revenue from royalties, personal appearances, concerts, posters, endorsements, and bookings. They could probably forget about winning a Grammy, too. Abdnor filed suit against me and the station for \$715,000.

As the trial date approached, the case's unusual elements made it a national news story. I had assumed that the music industry's media would tend to support a station's right to determine what went out over its airwaves, but in fact *Billboard* magazine and its reporter Claude Hall depicted me almost daily as little better than rock 'n roll's version of a book-burner. And, confirming a few opinions around the station, Abdnor and The Five Americans were getting a good free-publicity ride from their suit.

The publicity would backfire, however. One day before trial we got a call from a man in Hollywood with the appropriately strange name of Allan Allen. He said he had been following the case in *Billboard*. He claimed to have a computerized music-consulting business. He had worked for stations in New York, St. Louis, Miami and Chicago, doing research and taking samplings of music tastes and gauging the likelihood of certain songs becoming hits. "I've run that song through my system," he told me, "and I'd be willing to testify that even if you'd played that record every hour, gave it every chance to be a hit, it still wouldn't have the basic elements to make it and stay on the charts."

Talk about sweet music. He offered to come to Dallas and testify at no charge. Music research in those days was still a new science, while the idea of computerized hokey-pokey held a certain mystique for the public. We weren't inclined to look a gift psychometric researcher in the mouth.

He flew in for the trial, bringing with him a computer/printer apparatus which certainly appealed to Gordon McLendon's boundless sense of showmanship. As the judge came down off the bench to observe, our technicians hooked up the computer, which was connected to Allen's database back in California, and our attorneys proceeded to

actually swear it in. Into the keyboard they typed: "Do you swear that what you are about to tell this court is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

There was a pause of three or four seconds. Allen's technicians back at his office in California were reading the question at their end. Then back in Dallas the bell of the printer sounded, *ding ding ding*.

"I do," the printer clacked out on its paper in the courtroom.

Of course, Allan Allen could have brought all of his research data with him and been questioned conventionally in the courtroom, but that would have lacked the showmanship of the computer tapping away up there by the witness stand. Today most judges surely would know that computer stunt was pure showboat stuff. But the McLendon lawyers got away with it. It was an idea that was ahead of its time. It was five years before Stanley Kubrick made "2001: A Space Odyssey," when talking computers came into their own.

That day our testifying computer went on to spew out dozens of pages of numbers and data and case histories of other radio hits. But, in what must have been a loss to the history of odd litigation, the trial ended early when the judge dismissed the case.

Once the facts were in on the evidence of the Abdnor payoff to the morning team, we fired both of them. (The two-man morning show, which would become pretty standard throughout radio, was one of the early innovations of McLendon programmers. KLIF's most successful team duo was Charlie and Harrigan. "Charlie Brown" and "Irving Harrigan" were "house names" of the station; a succession of disc jockeys would take the names that were the property of the station. First and foremost of the Charlie and

Harrigans were Jack Woods and Ron Chapman, who, let me hasten to say, were not the ones involved in the Abdnor incident. Woods went on to be a West Coast broadcast star, and Chapman became the longest-running and most successful radio personality in Dallas, eventually hosting the KVIL morning show for more than 25 years. For most of those years he was No. 1.)

KLIF's other air personalities furnished the mix of talent and personalities that brought the station its greatness. Ken Dowe was a drive-time star for more than a decade, using a squeaky falsetto voice for an alter-ego character, Granny Emma. It gave him the odd distinction of being his own straight man. He later moved on to work in Cincinnati and on the West Coast, eventually owning stations in Oklahoma City and San Diego. Johnny Borders, who grew up in nearby Waxahachie, was not only a top-notch program director but worked the mid-morning air shift. He later became a station owner and consultant in Waco, Amarillo, Lubbock, and finally Springfield, Missouri.

Russ Knight, "The Weird Beard," had the 7:00 p.m. to midnight shift. He lived up to his adjective with a repertoire of eerie yips and yowls. He made every evening seem like full-moon time. He moved on to success at WXYZ in Detroit.

The Weird Beard was replaced at KLIF by a youngster from Tyler, Texas, named Eddie Payne. There was no relation, but just to make doubly sure, Borders and I changed his air name to Jimmy Rabbit. To create that dusky mood for some of his late-evening raps, he would douse all the overhead fluorescent lights and work with only one dim red bulb glowing just above the control-room console. I never understood why, but it worked.

Working with an assumed air name is the rule rather

than the exception for disc jockeys, perhaps even more so than actors. A Horace Ginsburg will find a wider rapport with listeners if his name is something like Jake Williams. At the height of the Beatles and British-rock craze I hired a British disc jockey with the real and reasonable name of Michael Tinker. But he had a successful run doing mid-days at KLIF as James Bond. A curious example of a radio guy who almost changed his name is Ron Chapman. Real name: Ralph Chapman.

Gordon McLendon and Clint Murchison Jr., the founding owner of the Dallas Cowboys, were close friends, a fact which probably helped KLIF secure the first few seasons' broadcast rights to the Cowboy games. Our sports director at the time was Jay Randolph, who hadn't been quite ready for metropolitan radio when he first came aboard. Being the son of the U.S. Senator from West Virginia, Jennings Randolph, hadn't hurt his chances. Jay worked hard and was a quick study, but in his first week on the job he almost made me drive the car off the road when I heard him read a story about baseball's Alou Brothers—Matty, Felipe, and Jesus. But on the latter name, instead of "Hay-soos," he said "Gee-zus."

Jay was the first voice of the Cowboys, then moved on to KSD in St. Louis, and went on to do years of fine work for NBC, mostly as a golf announcer.

*Chapter 13*

**Big Apple: *Esprit de Core***

Professional monotony was never among the problems one might encounter working with and for Gordon McLendon, amid the perpetual motion of fresh ideas. I was holding down the top chair at KLIF in Dallas, which had become an unprecedented steamroller in ratings and dominance. At the same time I was a "cabinet level" player in the chain's other operations, which were almost bizarre in their variety: the North Sea pirate ship, Radio Nord; the silky sounds of my own broadcast baby, KABL, in San Francisco; the outrageously sited TV station in Pembina, North Dakota, sending its VHF signals shooting across the frozen tundra to sell beer and wine in Winnipeg; the all-news innovation XTRA, keeping Los Angeles abreast of the 24-hour news from an audacious transmitter in Tijuana.

Challenges and gratifications aplenty; but in broadcasting as well as its sister media professions, and indeed as in nearly all lines of work, there is the feeling of the un-dropped shoe when one considers the terms "career" and "New York" in the same thought.

I had neither burned nor trembled at the idea of biting into the Big Apple. The McLendon organization counted as the big leagues of broadcasting, even though the headquarters happened to be in Dallas. Thanks to the workaday grapevine of the industry, which would later be reinvented by Yuppies as "networking," my name came up periodically across the country when stations, chains and (talk about "networking") networks were filling vacancies. In 1965 I'd been told I was on a list of executives submitted to NBC as

qualified to take the presidency of the radio division.

(When that item had been printed in the trades, B.R. McLendon had leaned into my office one morning and said, with customary gruffness, "Goin' to New York, are you?" I told him I was flattered but not, as yet, tempted. He had chuckled and said something about it being a move I'd sure have to consider. There was a benign tone in his voice but it mostly served to remind me that I'd never have the right surname to ever expect any kind of equity position in the McLendon Corporation.)

So when Larry Israel of the Group W/Westinghouse stations called me in 1966 to exchange brief pleasantries and to invite me over for a cup of coffee (he was in New York, I was in Dallas), I figured it was less trivial than it sounded.

Flying to New York, sometimes without a toothbrush, had become a routine part of my duties at KLIF. For one emergency presentation by our Manhattan-based sales reps, I had boarded a flight in Dallas, got to New York in time for lunch and the afternoon dog-and-pony show, and was on a return flight before 5:00 p.m.

I told Larry that I'd be happy to drop in on him next time I was there. "There" was Group W's suite of lush offices on the 18th floor of 90 Park Avenue, at the corner of Park and 40th, two blocks south of Grand Central Station and the Pan Am Building. Larry was president of Group W, the radio and television stations division of Westinghouse Broadcasting, serving under the Group president Don McGannon. While most of the country thought of Westinghouse in terms of light bulbs and refrigerators, I soon learned that the broadcast units were Westinghouse's biggest profit sources. Except maybe for nuclear submarines.

Larry Israel hadn't been too subtle about wanting to

talk. I knew that Westinghouse had acquired WINS-1010 in New York City, a putative flagship station for the chain that was recently running at half mast. It had been a pop music/big-name disc jockey station boasting personalities like staff music director Dick Hyman, who was already famous in recording, composing, movie scores and as a leader of various house bands. One of its top deejays had been Murray the K, Murray Kaufman, who with people like Martin Block and Al (Jazzbo) Collins was a ranking member of the first generation of disc jockeys who had reached stardom in the business. But WINS had been converted to all-news, all-the-time, patterned closely after our successful prototype at XTRA. WINS had a comfortable place in the middle of the dial with a power of 50,000 watts—all aimed roughly eastward from the transmitter at Lindhurst, New Jersey. The directional signal was intended to blanket the five boroughs of New York, but as a result, it couldn't be heard much beyond 15 or 20 miles west of the transmitter. Thus the station regularly got mail from listeners in Great Britain, but couldn't be heard in Philadelphia.

At our meeting Larry offered me the job of general manager of WINS-1010. Its owners were in a hurry for the station to claw its way up and out from its position well back in the pack of what was then the world's largest market total of 45 radio stations. By Larry's estimates the station was losing about \$80,000 a month. Among the bigger overhead items were such things as a full salary for Murray the K, who was no longer on the air but whose new contract, signed just before the format change, dictated that he be paid anyway. For months, Murray the K would personally come into the station every two weeks to pick up his paycheck.

My meeting with Larry Israel was brisk, cordial and

fraught with portent, but I nevertheless had to ask Larry for a little time to weigh all of the consequences of a move to New York. I explained that it would be another wrenching upheaval for my family. We had just laid down our roots in Dallas, again, and it would be no small matter to move still another time. For such reasons, I added, I didn't think even Westinghouse had money big enough or green enough to tempt such a move.

Well, thankfully Larry wouldn't take maybe for an answer, and I hadn't been back home long when he called back with a bigger, greener offer.

We agreed I'd report to start running the New York station in November of 1966. It was in the middle of the school term, so I went first and stayed at some company-furnished quarters in the Hotel McAlpin at 33rd and Broadway. Katy and the boys would join me in a few weeks, during the Thanksgiving holidays, and we would begin looking for a place to live.

It was Katy's thought that the famous, standard suburban railroad commute to and from Manhattan from Connecticut or Westchester County, celebrated in movies, New Yorker cartoons and the cultural mind of America, was a genuine waste of time, in addition to its obvious fatigue and family-time factors. We decided we'd rather be New Yorkers all the way, living there as well as working there. It was a decision that many commuters probably would make, too, if possible. We were fortunate in that Westinghouse was making it financially viable to pay the prices of living amid the city's shops, restaurants, theaters and incomparable ambience. We would be paying more to garage the family car than the mortgage payments for our first house, but to a New Yorker the phrase, "After all, it's New York" covers a multitude of aberrations.

As Manhattan tour guides, there's a lot to be said for real estate agents. They may be a little weak on historical plaques but they've got the locations of all the nooks and crannies down cold. The place we chose was neither a nook nor a cranny. It was 870 United Nations Plaza, part of the then brand-new twin towers located just north of the United Nations Building on First Avenue. We were the first owners of 10-B in the East Tower. Goggling at our neighbors—Sen. Robert Kennedy, Johnny Carson, Angela Lansbury, Truman Capote and David Susskind—left me hardly any time to contemplate how far away I was from Emhouse, Texas.

U.N. Plaza was at First and 49th. I would never once drive the car to work; it was a constantly refreshing, ever-changing, urban beachcombing experience to walk to work every day, over to Park Avenue, down to 40th street and then to our 19th floor offices of WINS-1010. It was a frequent joy for Katy, too. Our home was three blocks from Saks Fifth Avenue, Lord & Taylor and B. Altman Co.

Our elder son, Charles Jr., attended the Dwight School, a boys' prep school on 73rd Street. George, our then nine-year-old, enrolled at P.S. 59 on 57th street.

It was getting George into school that gave us our first experience of the Big Apple's grotesque darkside. Those mid- and late-60s, days of protest, unrest and irreversible change, were giving America its first previews of how things can go wrong, and as usual New York was on the crest of the wave. The city had gone dark the year before with history's most celebrated power failure. These were the days of the historically messy garbage strikes, resulting in three-story high heaps of sidewalk trash bags, boxes, slime lakes and rats the size of cats. Gotham's growing pains never seemed to end; cops, firemen, subway atten-

dants, cab drivers, museum guards and ambulance drivers were variously on strike, or threatening to be.

As mothers are wont to do, Katy accompanied George to what was supposed to be his first day at P.S. 59, only to discover that the city's schoolteachers were on strike. The kids were on their own that day. What to do?

Well, thinking only as concerned and appalled mothers and not pausing to consider the nuance of anti-unionism, Katy and another of the mothers set in motion a system of temporary teachers. It was intended merely to keep the kids occupied and supervised until the crisis had passed. For several days they filled the breach until the New York Board of Education and the teachers' union came to terms. But thereafter, Katy was dimly viewed in some quarters as a scab and "strikebreaker."

And in some ways my radio station was a busy and urgent microcosm of the city's heartbeat, as well as its palpitations. At the time, WINS was the only all-news station serving the 15 million radio listeners in the New York market. (During my tenure there, William Paley and crew over at CBS's Black Rock headquarters building would convert their WCBS into head-to-head competition with us.) But at the time we had the format and its responsibilities to ourselves, and thus every move we made qualified as pioneering.

It was no secret that the station was losing money. Those \$80,000 in monthly losses were the big 1966 variety of dollars, too—the kind that would buy two loaves of bread or three gallons of gasoline, or an entire lunch special in most towns. As I took over, the gross monthly billings were about \$170,000. The costs of opening the doors every day came to \$250,000 a month. There were 102 staff members plus management on the payroll. Staff morale was a problem, cou-

pled with insatiably escalating costs driven by the pressures of three unions that had contracts with the station. The announcers and news readers were members of AFTRA, the American Federation of Radio and Television Artists. The control room engineers and transmitter engineers belonged to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). Our copywriters were members of the Writers Guild-East. Each union practiced a fierce territorialism. An announcer with AFTRA was prevented by union rules, for instance, from adjusting a volume knob that was under the jurisdiction of IBEW.

The general sound of the station was totally news; no music whatsoever, no entertainment features, just hard news, "actualities," sound bites, sirens, fire bells and prattling newsmakers with perpetually shifting agendas. I made the job harder by instituting a firm rule against taped repeats of whole news segments. I saw news re-runs as a contradiction in terms, and any listener who's ever sat through a Saturday morning of droning, cloning, recycled "news" reports will understand my reasoning. My rule was that every item, once on the air, must be rewritten and freshened before it could be heard again. I know the consultants say it doesn't matter, that listeners don't pay attention to the way news stories are presented, but my motive was to retain listeners rather than anesthetize them.

Logistical problems aside, I was blessed with some shining talents on the staff. The reporters included Stan Bernard, later to be a globetrotting correspondent for NBC-TV. Bob Cain went on to become an anchor for Cable News Network. There were Doug Edelson, George Bergeson, Charles Scott King and Dick Levitan; all made their marks in the local news or syndication business. One of our weekend part-timers was Dave Marash, who wanted to dabble in

the news business in addition to his regular job as a political science instructor at one of the nearby New Jersey universities. Marash, of course, became one of Ted Koppel's principal reporters on ABC-TV's "Nightline."

Our Group W stations had been the first mainstream broadcasters in the country to hire a black commentator; his name was Carl Rowan. He would later produce a nationally syndicated column and also become director of the U.S. Information Agency. One of his fellow rookies at WINS-1010 was Rod MacLeish, whose eloquence would carry him into the 80s and 90s as a national broadcast pundit. He was the nephew of Harvard professor and national poet laureate Archibald MacLeish.

Emigrating from the basically laid-back atmosphere of Dallas to the more literate cauldron of a New York news operation, I occasionally harked back to Gordon McLendon's joke about cultivating gentility: "Learn to say, 'Incredible!' instead of 'Th' hell you say!'" This was good advice when surrounded by the kind of cosmopolites that gravitate to New York news.

Under the format I molded, each announcer/news reader was responsible for his own 45-minute news segment. When he was relieved by the next anchor, who would have his own editors and writers, he would immediately begin preparing for his next news set. On each daily shift, each announcer was responsible for three segments. There was a news director and three or four news writers on duty at all times, stripping the newsprinters of all major news wire services, including the British-based and far-flung Reuters wire. As Group W's New York flagship, WINS-1010 served as news center and pivotal news-anchor point for all of the Westinghouse stations, which included WBZ in Boston, KDKA in Pittsburgh, WIND in Chicago, KYW in

Philadelphia, WOWO in Indianapolis and KFWB in Los Angeles.

In turn, we received news "feeds" from our sister stations, as well as a feed from Standard Radio News of Canada. The overseas feeds from Westinghouse correspondents came through our facilities for distribution to all corporate stations, as well as the Canadian group and, often, special feeds to WTOP in Washington D.C., the radio service of the *Washington Post/Newsweek*.

These were formidable news resources but often they were barely enough to provide fresh fodder for our daily Black Hole of news: 24 hours, 1,440 minutes, 86,400 seconds.

We tried to make the news day a mosaic of elements to keep it unique and listenable. Group W, as well as the entire Westinghouse Electric Corporation, was deeply committed to the area of community involvement. Our public affairs director, Bob Kivelson, worked hard at getting next to the stunningly diverse people who made things happen in New York City. Our studios routinely became a gathering point for the city's politicians, labor leaders, school officials, culture mavens, media lightning rods, societal hotshots and religious personalities. A frequent visitor was the Jewish Defense League's militant rabbi Meyer Kahane, just coming into prominence then, and later to be assassinated in the 1980s.

Political-action groups that were to become national icons were then only becoming known to us as early alphabet soup: CORE with Roy Wilkins, SNCC with Stokely Carmichael. Migrant farm labor hero Cesar Chavez came to meet our editorial board (myself, Bob Kivelson, and production manager Bill Rohrer) and to have lunch at our studios one day. Unlike our colleagues over at Time, Inc., we

remembered not to serve grapes on the lunch buffet.

As part of the civic involvement it was company policy throughout Group W that every general manager would voice his station's regular editorials about local and national issues—preferably local ones. Since it's almost unavoidable to keep the preachy tone out of editorial messages, soon enough we had feedback from the listeners that they didn't much take to the idea of some guy with lively traces of a Texas accent telling 'em how to make New York a better place. We got lots of calls and mail, and the complaints dealt as much with how I said it as what I said.

One of the memorable complaints, though, was about the subject matter. I had just aired an editorial calling for the early stages of gun control when our switchboard operator took a call from a listener.

"Who is that sonofabitch who just gave your editorial?" the caller asked.

"That was Mr. Payne, our general manger," the woman on the switchboard said.

"Well, tell me, where does that sonofabitch live?"

"I'm sorry, sir, we can't give out that information."

"Okay then, you tell that bastard that this is Major so-and-so, U.S. Army retired. I live in the Bronx. I have a shotgun and I know how to use it. I am coming down there to get him."

As best we could tell, the Major had given his true name when he made this vigorous complaint. We took it seriously enough to beef up our station security crew for the next few days.

Some of my crusades met with more success, if you don't mind linking civic betterment and dog poop in the same thought. I can say without fear of successful contradiction that I was the first New York radio station general

manager ever to run a hard-hitting editorial on the need for residents to curb their dogs in order to cut down on the volume of dog poop that littered the sidewalks of New York. I guess it's better than no notoriety at all. It was unavoidable to note in my walks around U.N. Plaza and elsewhere that every family seemed to have at least one dog—and often two or three or more on a mass leash. As a new and eager Gotham boulevardier, I found it disconcerting to walk down my glittering 49th Street only to keep plowing into fresh dog droppings. So one day in 1967 at WINS I indeed voiced an editorial about it—and the thenceforth famous New York City curb-your-dog-or-pay-a-fine ordinances were passed in due time.

It was during one of the garbage strikes, sweltering days and nights of Alpine compost heaps, that the city's Mayor John Lindsay and New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller were at public odds over the handling of the issue. Ever since the era of Fiorello LaGuardia, who had read the comic strips on the radio to the city's kids during a newspaper strike, New York City's mayors had grasped the power and the need for keeping in touch with constituents through regular media appearances. Lindsay, the lanky, patrician politician who had been elected to Congress from Manhattan's Fifth Avenue "Silk Stocking" district, was as adept at this as most. His press secretary had arranged with WINS and other leading stations for a special broadcast line—it was called "Line 1,00"—on which Mayor Lindsay could broadcast directly to our news rooms. If the news was hot, the line had the capability of broadcasting on a live feed. For routine, undated announcements, the stations could record the mayor's statements and use the tape at their discretion. The normal procedure was for the press secretary to alert the stations that the mayor "would go live

at noon on Line 1,000." This was our notification to adjust our features to backtime and to join his mini-network on the button at noon, or whenever.

The occasion for this live report was that Lindsay had just returned from Albany and a confrontation with Governor Rockefeller about the jurisdictional responsibilities for the latest garbage strike. At noon our announcer cued the remote feed: "For a special news report, we take you now to Gracie Mansion and the voice of the Honorable John Lindsay, mayor of the City of New York ..."

Some commotion and rustling could be heard in the background. The mayor was angry. His mission to Albany had not borne the results he was expecting. He was only a couple of minutes into his report when he paused and snapped, "Would someone please close that fucking door?"

He had obviously thought he was making an editable recording rather than going out live on our 50,000 watts. As the song says, there's a broken heart for every light on Broadway, but I'll bet our switchboard that day had more lights than Broadway.

Our Friday afternoon drive-time segments between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m. always keyed several stories to the area's weekend outdoor activities. We had a fishing report that was done by one of our engineers, Fred Hornby. Fred, a resourceful technician and an avid fisherman, had come to me and pitched doing the show, and since he had a capable voice and seemed to be a bright guy otherwise, I okayed it. We gave him the assignment of broadcasting weekend fishing reports from Montauk Point, out at the tip of Long Island, the home dock of a sizeable deep sea fishing fleet. His reports would deal with the weather, forecasts, guides' tips on which fish should be running, and so forth.

Fred would make a phone call to our control room on a

dedicated line connected to taping machines. Our engineers would take the raw feeds, which often consisted of several "takes," or partial versions of the same story, and then put together a complete story for air. Fred's fateful Friday-evening report began like a normal weekend fishing feature. I was still working in my corner office and I heard Fred say on the air: "The present barometric pressure is expected to hold steady and ... uh ... the Bluefins are ... unnhhn ... aw, I lost my fuckin' place."

Then the report continued as it should have. Our control room engineer, instead of scrapping the first version as Fred had expected, had run the tape cartridge whole. As I explained to Fred when I fired him on the following Monday, the engineer should have caught it, but then again he shouldn't have had to catch it. The problem shouldn't have existed; radio pros should know better than to use those no-no words even when they think it doesn't count. The incident caused a predictable blizzard of paper work between the station, corporate headquarters, and the FCC. That's a word not even Howard Stern will use on the air. After a couple weeks' cool-down, I rehired Fred, but he came back aboard with a stern reprimand.

Speaking of the Broadway lights and the awesome sweep and stir of the great city, Katy and I got to meet and enjoy the company of luminaries both in and out of the media business. Among our close friends were Al Rosenthal, owner of the fabled Palisades Amusement Park on the bluffs of Palisades, New Jersey, just across the Hudson River from midtown. It's the view New Yorkers see from inside that magnificent skyline. Al's wife was Gladys Shelly, a songwriter of note who had written special material for Fred Astaire, Arthur Godfrey, and the husband-wife singing team of Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme.

Al was a courtly showman of the old school, and one of his favorite New York things to do was to host small gatherings in the Maisonette Room of the St. Regis Hotel, where the dusky blonde chanteuse who was officially billed as "The Incomparable Hildegarde" held forth. Like Liberace, Hildegarde was actually from Milwaukee but her continental chanteuse image was so strong and universal that nobody knew, or cared. It was a quarter century after her global hits of "Darling Je Vous Aime Beaucoup" and "Lili Marlene," and she could still hold a supper club crowd prisoner. The syndicated Broadway columnist Earl Wilson was our table-mate at one Hildegarde evening. His column then was running regularly in the *Dallas Morning News* that I used to throw on my route in Emhouse.

Katy and I looked forward to the glitter-and-glitz circuit, events such as the black-tie grand opening of the new Madison Square Garden. A floor full of famous faces, Katy radiant in her ball gown, a big party hosted by Bob Hope with Bing Crosby and Pearl Bailey—a swirling party videotaped by NBC and, a few weeks later, boiled down and transformed into an hour of prime-time television.

On another evening, Katy and I were leaving our co-op, again in formal dress, headed for a function at the Waldorf-Astoria three blocks away. We'd decided it would be one of the rare times we'd actually drive our car somewhere in Manhattan; it was a numbing winter night with sleet and snow covering the city, and finding cabs would be a bigger problem than usual. As we stepped out of the elevator into the lobby of our building, we ran into a sea of reporters, cameras, klieg lights, cops, jostling and shouting. There were more than a hundred media people in the swarm, as well as that many more who had been drawn in from the street by the commotion inside. The reporters' cars blocked

the street outside and the ramps in the building's parking garage. Our neighbor, U.S. Senator Bobby Kennedy, was announcing in the lobby his candidacy for President of the United States.

What I remember from the moment is the thought that it seemed an inadvisable place to be making a public appearance in an atmosphere of barely controlled chaos. The building's foyer and lobby were an expanse of open space and glass walls, offering visibility and, yes, vulnerability from a wide area along and across 49th Street, in Sutton Place. It was an ominous thought to have, but it was the kind of thought one had by then about the Kennedys. Recalling that unease was more than 20/20 hindsight in view of Robert Kennedy's assassination a few months later. Katy and I both remember my remarking about the unnecessary danger at the time.

The social events in and around 870 U.N. Plaza occasionally brought the neighbors in contact with each other. Our first encounter with Johnny Carson was at one of these parties. He was polite, reticent, quietly charming but apparently anxious to stay anonymous. He had taken a drink from one of the bars and then retired to a distant table well out of the spotlight. His manner didn't encourage bantering. My sense was that Carson is one of those not uncommon show-business icons who only come alive when the red camera light is cued. Fame is only a job, although a damned good one; and this party after all was taking place at an extension of his home—his only haven of privacy in all of New York City.

Of course, in the view of many friends and associates who would call us to say they were coming to New York, the most important function we could perform as citizens of the Big Apple was to get them tickets for the Johnny Carson

Show. Carson was the hands-down preference among the studio-ticket set, although a fair number wanted to get in to see the tapings of the Merv Griffin Show. This would have been more convenient for us, since the Griffin Show was a Group W/Westinghouse property. It was taped nightly at the Little Theatre Off Times Square, on 44th Street.

For the Carson problem we were always able to count on Rudy Tellez, one of his producers, a Texan from El Paso whom we had known in San Francisco, where he produced the Les Crane Show for KGO, the ABC station there. He had arrived in New York at about the same time we had. Rudy always made us look good; a call to his private line invariably would result in four, six, or even eight tickets waiting at the 'will call' window. John Rhodes performed the same kindness for us on the production staff of the Griffin Show.

Anytime we needed a jolt of Vitamin N.Y., we had only to look out our 10-B window on the west end of the tower. The view was a portion of the United Nations Building and grounds, the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building, the R.C.A. Building and Rockefeller Center. Our neighbor at the tower's east end, overlooking the East River, was Mary Lasker. She was the widow of Albert Lasker, the advertising pioneer who, with George Washington Hill, had turned a couple of phrases that had entered the language: "Lucky Strike Green Has Gone to War," and "L.S.M.F.T." In a wartime world of rampaging initials and bureaucratic alphabet soup, "Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco" had found a memorable niche. Lasker also had been a driving force behind the rise of the Lucky Strike "Hit Parade" series on radio and, to a lesser effect, on television.

When we moved into United Nations Plaza, Mary had been a widow for several years and had taken a consuming interest in the beautification of the building, the block, and

indeed the city. She had paid for the massive stands of shrubbery and flowers that surrounded the U.N. Building. She also had asked the city to allow her to provide the flowers for the islands of greenery that dotted much of the up-and-downtown length of Park Avenue.

One day the tenants got a notice announcing that Mary Lasker would like to offer some of the oil paintings from her personal collection to be hung in the public corridors of our 10th floor. It was okay with us; the paintings included a Renoir and a Monet.

It gave one pause for thought while waiting for an elevator: civility on such a level that one could farm out one's spare French Impressionists.

Since my earliest memories of building those *Popular Mechanics* radio receivers in Emhouse, one of my chief heroes had been David Sarnoff, for so many years the president, chairman, and personification of R.C.A., the Radio Corporation of America. He had arrived at Ellis Island as a teenage Russian immigrant, had become swept up in the romantic new milieu of radio, had taught himself Morse Code. In April of 1912 he'd stayed for more than 36 hours at his listening post, scribbling down the coded distress messages from the stricken S.S. Titanic. He went to work for the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Co., and in 1915, at age 24, he presented them the plans for a radio receiver.

General Sarnoff—the brigadier rank came from his World War II duty as General Eisenhower's chief of communications—had spent a career as a brilliant engineer and innovator, and I was frankly thrilled to find myself in the same room with him on the day I attended an R.C.A. stockholders' meeting in the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria. By then he was retired from day-to-day operations but was still the company's public face, handling the entire

stockholders' meeting with agility and his mythic, gigantic dignity.

A quirky thing that I remember from his speech that day was his frequent reference to the company not as just "R.C.A.," which was common usage, but as "The R.C.A." I guess it only seemed quirky; considering R.C.A. as an abbreviation, his version would be the correct one.

I actually got to know his son Robert, who succeeded him in control at The R.C.A. Along with other managers of significant New York stations, I was frequently asked to serve on this or that industry panel, and the younger Sarnoff was often there, too.

Ironically, General Electric Corporation's stunning takeover of R.C.A. in the mid-80s was in fact the closing of an historic circuit. After World War I, the U.S. government had looked to Westinghouse and to General Electric as prime developers of the infant radio industry. While those two giants had developed the technical end of the business, the actual sale of radio sets came to be dominated by David Sarnoff and his fledgling company. A Justice Department anti-trust action had forced a separation of the technical and sales ends of the Westinghouse-G.E. combine, creating the vacuum that Sarnoff's R.C.A. had filled.

Meanwhile, in and out of the office, the gravitational pull of the New York scene in my business had me crossing paths again with many of the people I respected from previous stops in the broadcast business. One of my closest friends was Tommy Murphy, who would soon make a successful bid for the ABC television and radio networks with the impressive team he had put together at Capital Cities Broadcasting Group. Murphy's knack of spotting and snaring top people had put him together with the likes of Joe Somerset, Dave Burke and Don Pels. Somerset, with whom

I'd worked at KABL in San Francisco, went on to become a radio station owner and operator. Pels, who was Cap Cities' comptroller, had some feats of fiscal wizardry that gave Cap Cities its first serious breakthroughs. Later he put together a group which bought LIN Broadcasting's lineup of radio and television stations in major markets. I have Don Pels to thank for providing the introduction to some very key people in the banking industry as well as in broadcasting. It was people like him who gave New York its sense of being the place where things happen.

Things were happening at WINS-1010, too. By the Spring of 1967, audience ratings showed us as No. 1 in adult listeners in the Greater New York area. We had rooted out, for the first time, the long-entrenched champion WOR, which had owned adult listenership in morning drive for years. Our ratings advances showed a corresponding effect on the bottom line of the ledger sheets, too.

Within the news spectrum that I had expanded, I encouraged the staff to do more of what would soon become known as "investigative" stories. Even though investigative journalism has become its own industry in the wake of the Woodward-Bernstein Watergate episodes, I was always of the opinion that the term was properly redundant; all reporters should be investigative reporters.

At this time there was an ongoing, and unexposed, scandal going on in New York's mental institutions. The officials involved had successfully stonewalled traditional media inquiries. I came up with the idea of fitting out our reporter Dick Levitan with a hidden tape recorder; the microphone appeared to be the cap of a fountain pen clipped to his shirt pocket. Dick got in, and got the story, a series that led to top news awards from the New York Association of Broadcasters. Our staff also managed to expose the corrupt

system in which city construction funds evaporated on the way to the job. We disclosed that, for instance, funds allocated for a park or building project went through 17 different departments before the work was done. Millions of dollars dribbled out of the bucket under that system.

It wasn't just these enterprise public-service stories but our entire, exhaustive, seamless coverage of world, state and local news that was building our listenership. We had expected a good ratings book, partly because of a most unusual indicator. Around my U.N. neighborhood, whenever there were volatile stories breaking on the world political front, we began to notice more and more U.N. diplomats and bureaucrats strolling around with ear-plugs from transistor radios. This was well before the days of satellite broadcasting, CNN and such. Whenever my staffers or I would ask these people which station they were listening to, an overwhelming number answered "WINS." This was a promotion department's dream. Eventually, the station actually got the press section of the United Nations to acknowledge that WINS' newscasts were the ear-buzz of choice. "They can learn of fast-breaking news faster and more authoritatively than by relying on communications from their own countries," the statement said in part. As I said, a promotion department's dream.

And then just when they needed us ...

On June 6, 1967, the Six-Day War began between Israel and Egypt. At about 1:00 o'clock on the afternoon of the first day, as our earplugs must have filled every ear in the General Assembly, WINS suddenly, without warning, went off the air.

We had been struck with a monumental double-whammy of technical problems. I told our chief in-house engineer, Bruce Ratts, to stick close to the control room and monitor

the remote-control operation. Then I got Ben Wolfe on the line. Ben was vice president of engineering, for the entire Group W/Westinghouse Broadcasting Group of radio and television stations. In quick order, it was decided that I should drive Ben over to the transmitter site in Lindhurst, New Jersey.

We screeched and skidded across the rural landscape along narrow winding roads, like two guys from a farcical English movie, curling past massive trash dumps and ramshackle manufacturing plants. Finally we came upon our cluster of four short towers, lined up in their southwest-to-northeast configuration to throw out that blanket coverage of New York. Ben and I went into the transmitter house, talked with the engineer on duty and determined the problem, which was rather huge.

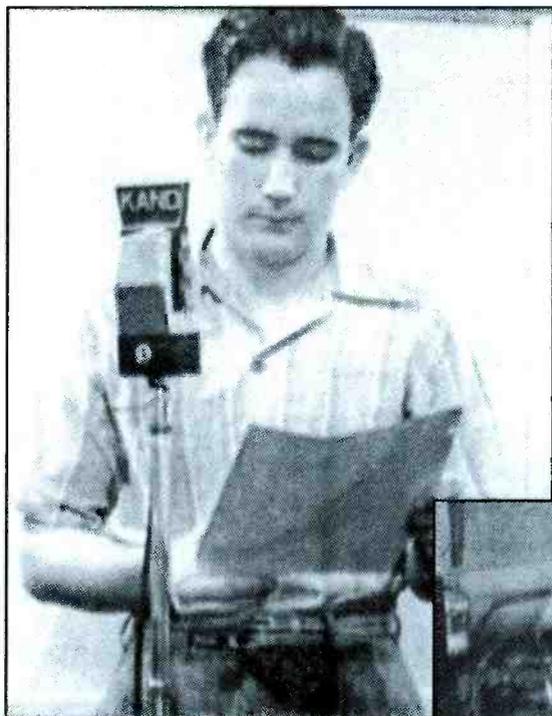
First of all, every station has a backup system designed to kick in during emergencies like this. But our standby transmitter, a 10,000-watt Collins transmitter, had just been taken out of service for a major overhaul. Murphy's Law was working with a fury.

Our regular mammoth R.C.A. Ampliphase transmitter, vintage 1946, was going it alone. Ben, a terrific engineer, sized up the problem. He punched the proper sequence of buttons. Nothing. He opened the metal housing doors behind the main transmitter panels and performed every known emergency procedure. Nothing. Patiently, he started all over again, punching all the right buttons in the right order, and again, nothing happened.

Then, strangely, recalling a similar problem I had seen back at our 250-watt KAND in Corsicana, I opened the back panel in the high-voltage section of the transmitter. By then we knew that the main problem was to make the high-voltage relay activate, hold and feed the proper voltage to the

big tubes in the transmitters. I opened the panel adjacent to the high-voltage section. I went outside, picked up a wooden two-by-four, came back in, moved the relay to the "on" position and jammed it in place with the piece of wood. The high-voltage relay held. WINS-1010, all 50,000 watts of it, was back on the air.

This roughly compares to reattaching an airplane wing with Elmer's Glue—it's neither taught nor even considered in engineering school—but it worked that day. Ben Wolfe and I never see each other without reminiscing about our day in the country with the two-by-four. But that aging Ampliphase transmitter lasted long enough to be replaced by the slick new Harris (Gates) transmitter, whose purchase I promptly okayed as general manager of WINS-1010.



In the beginning ...  
Author at 16 in 1940.

Author at controls of KAND.

Note the 16" electrical  
transcription—for music.





Author with Greer Garson,  
fellow KIXL stockholder.

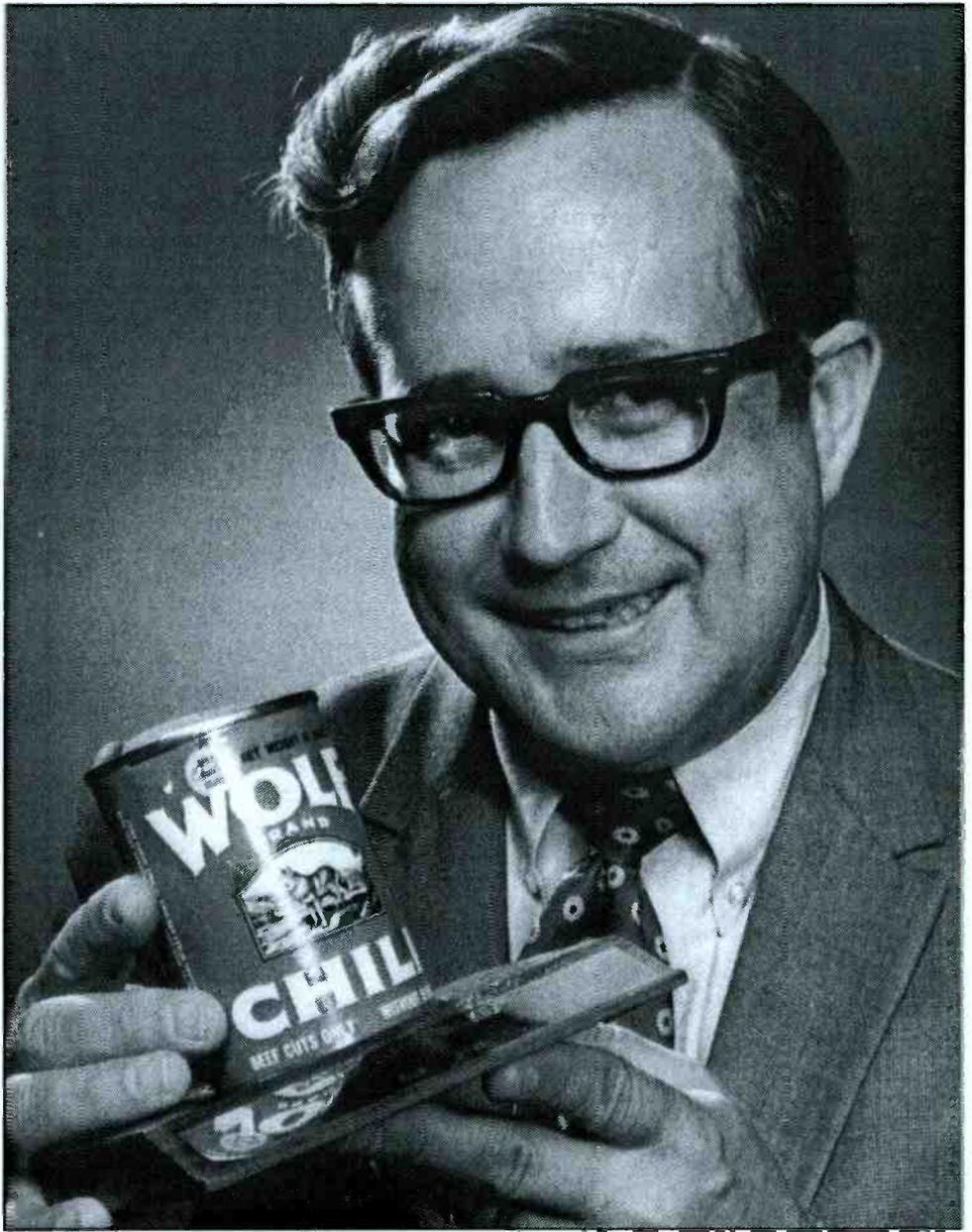


Film star Rober Taylor's  
initial broadcast,  
KIXL, Dallas, 1947.  
Announcer is John Wilson.

Katy, ready  
for party planning  
at McLendon's  
Cielo Ranch.



Charles and Katy Payne  
with William Holden, Paramount Studios, Hollywood.  
Bill was also a KIXL stockholder.



Plaque "Corsicana Kid" presented to Author by  
Texas Colleagues.



Former  
McLendon  
executives take  
top awards at  
N.Y. State  
Convention.

Author from  
WINS, NYC.

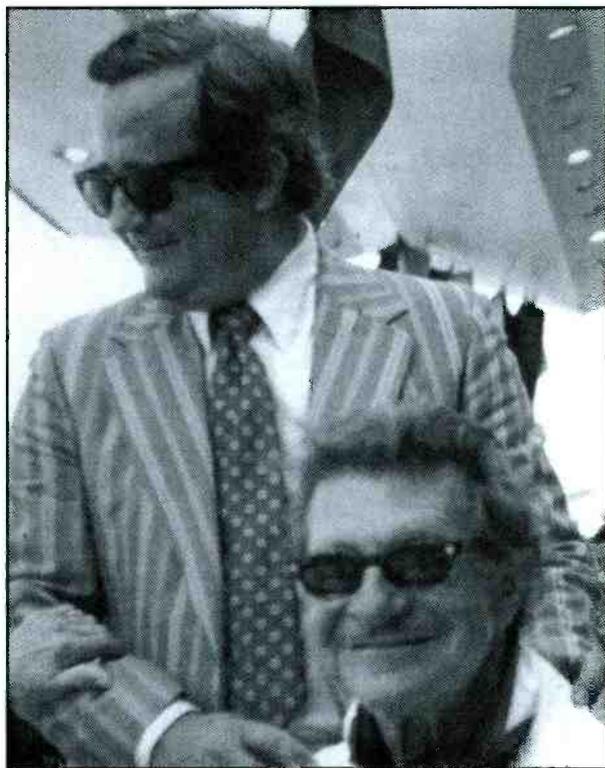
Bill Weaver  
(right) from  
WKBW, Buffalo.

Author in the  
general manager's  
chair, WINS,  
New York City,  
19 floors  
above  
Park Avenue.





Corporate Headquarters—Payne of Virginia,  
WCPK-AM, WNRN-FM.



Author with band leader  
Johnny Long,  
Cavalier Beach Club,  
Virginia Beach.

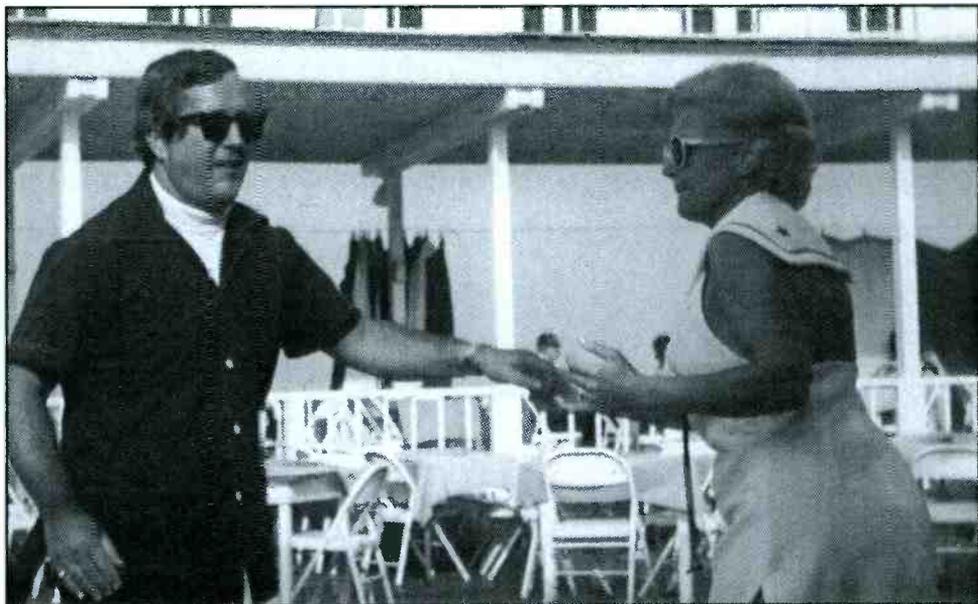
Long's Decca record,  
"Shanty Town,"  
sold multi-million copies.



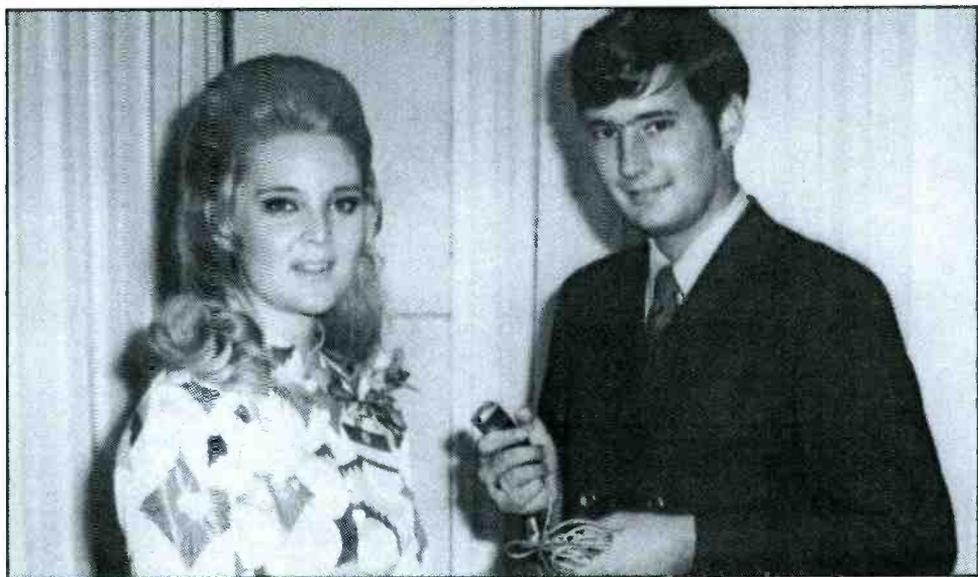
Charlie, Katy and words from Danny Thomas,  
heard on WCPK.

Legendary  
Gordon McLendon,  
conference room,  
KABL,  
San Francisco.





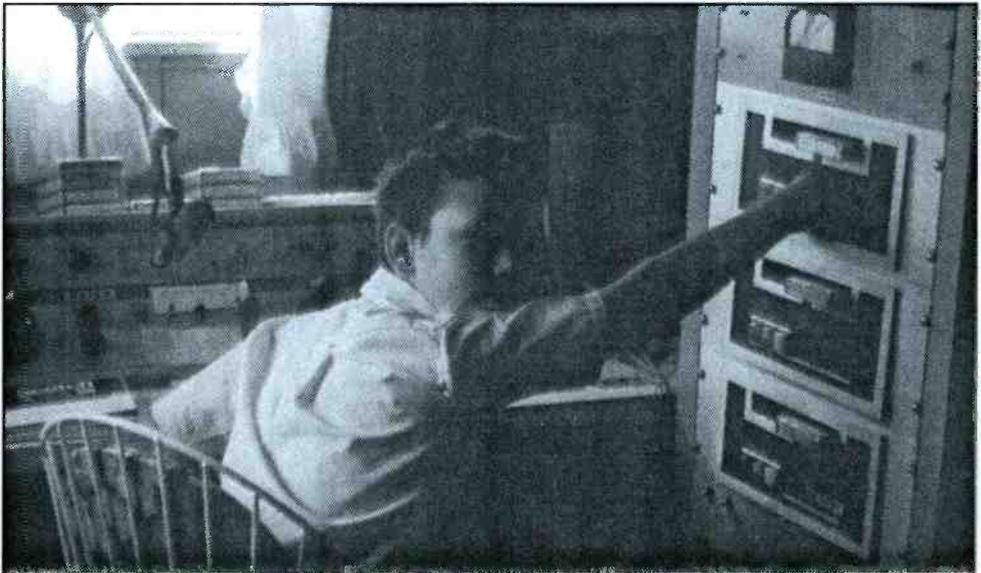
Charlie and Katy check out dance floor  
as band rehearses.



Miss America chats with Charlie Payne Jr.,  
heard on WCPK.

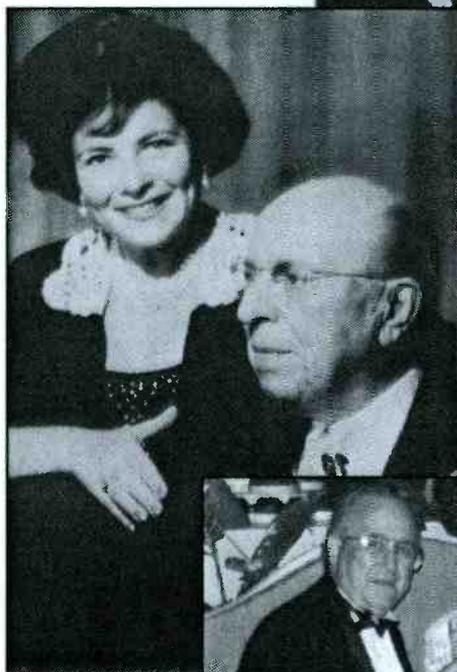


Billboard promoting WINNER 95.



Youngest son, George, handles WCPK controls.  
He earned FCC operator license at age 12.

Katy and Charlie  
voicing special  
announcements.



World famous  
Viennese composer  
Robert Stolz  
with  
Frau Einzi.



Golden Wedding  
Anniversary,  
London.

## **Chapter 14**

### **Dealing with the FCC and Jesus**

Not counting the time-out caused by World War II, I was finishing my 25th year in radio in 1967. For me the musical mileposts of that quarter of a century stretched from Spade Cooley to Blue Barron to Jefferson Airplane, yet through it all my glimmering goal was the same in 1967 as it had been on my first day on the air for KAND in Corsicana. I wanted to own my own station.

This is a pretty widespread ambition in the broadcasting business, and it is rarely a secret one. Among the many people to whom I had mentioned my ambition was Ralph Dippell, then a member of a Washington D.C.-based engineering firm. Ralph and I had been friends and colleagues from my time with the McLendon Corporation, when Ralph's firm had consulted on several projects. Ralph enjoyed a reputation as one of the best in the esoteric field of antenna design. He was respected not only by his engineering colleagues but, importantly, by many of their counterparts in the Federal Communications Commission's engineering sections.

Ralph called me at WINS to advise me that he had heard of a Construction Permit that might be available. Was I still interested in putting together my own station? Both in thought and deed, people in radio tend to capitalize Construction Permits, since they are rare, valuable, and widely sought after. They are FCC authorizations for new stations. While applications for existing stations invariably involve competitive hearings which in turn lead to mazes of cross-filings, a Construction Permit is a relatively blissful

and direct way to begin a station. It's the pot of gold at the end of the red tape. Once your purchase of the permit has been approved by the FCC, all that remains is to buy the equipment, build the station, and go into business.

According to Ralph, this Construction Permit had been issued for an ownership group in Virginia that, having endured the lengthy bureaucratic obstacle course required for obtaining the permit, had for some reason decided not to build the station. Ralph told me he would have the group's attorney call me.

The call came the next day from Harry Sells, a lawyer certified to practice before the FCC. He told me the group he represented had indeed traveled the long road before the Commission and all its hearings, studies, reports and filings, had secured the Permit, and was now having second thoughts about building the station.

The station was assigned to a newly incorporated city, Chesapeake, Virginia. For what it says about licensing ordeals, the permit originally had been applied for and issued to the city of South Norfolk, but that had been more than four years earlier. In the meantime, the city of Chesapeake had come into being, combining elements of South Norfolk and previously unincorporated parts of old Norfolk County.

After reviewing the ground rules for acquiring a Construction Permit, I loaded the rest of the Paynes into the family Olds 98 and we made the first of a long series of drives down the New Jersey Turnpike and across the Del-Mar-Va Peninsula to look around the area. That drive took us from the nation's No. 1 media broadcast market to the 62nd largest. The term "culture shock" hadn't been invented yet, but we nevertheless had it. The area was still largely rural. As both sides had learned during the Civil War,

you could hide whole armies in its forested marshes. Now the region was dominated in the public mind by the well-known Naval installations around Norfolk and Newport News. In 1967 the region was on the brink of decades of explosive growth that would result in a statistical and demographic sprawl called Tidewater Virginia. In 1967 it was still a cluster of eight smallish but growing cities in search of an identity, although its fiercely independent parts felt they already had all the identity they needed. Norfolk was the civic keystone, but, then as now, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, Newport News, Hampton, Williamsburg and Suffolk were protective of their individual existences.

Topographical, pastoral and historical beauties aside, Tidewater had obvious potential as a burgeoning broadcast market.

It was a fling I wanted to take, but not badly enough to abandon the years of work I had done to become general manager of one of New York City's premier stations. Katy and I saw it as a dilemma poised on the horns of opportunity.

Riding herd on WINS' increasingly prestigious all-news operation remained a great and gratifying career. The world's and nation's drum-fire of news roared on, and WINS was at its crest. On January 27 that year, astronauts Virgil Grissom, Edward White and Roger B. Chaffee died in the spacecraft fire that brought the first blotch to the space program. Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, Gaza Strip and east bank of the Suez Canal following its breathtaking victory in the Six-Day War. My neighbor Bobby Kennedy was tuning up for his star-crossed presidential race. On June 17 Red China announced the explosion of its first hydrogen bomb. The torrid and

tempestuous summer of 1967 brought racial violence throughout our cities; 7,000 National Guardsmen were mobilized to aid the police in Detroit; there was rioting in New York City's Spanish Harlem, in the upstate New York city of Rochester, in Birmingham, Alabama and New Britain, Connecticut. On October 2 Thurgood Marshall was sworn in as the first black U.S. Supreme Court justice. On October 21 the South Vietnam National Assembly approved the election of Nguyen Van Thieu as president. Dr. Christian Barnard and his team of South African surgeons performed the first successful heart transplant on December 3.

Katy and I decided on a plan that would enable us to take our flyer in Virginia while holding on to the challenging and greatly satisfying work I was doing.

I made my proposal through John Steen, a close working colleague in the legal department of Westinghouse Broadcasting over in the Pan-Am Building. I told John of the opportunity we might soon be having, while emphasizing that I was certainly happy with the position I held at WINS and with Westinghouse. I told him I wanted to explore the possibility of acquiring the Virginia station while retaining my position as general manager of WINS. I felt that my ownership of the new station, at least in the short-term, would provide no conflict in my responsibilities, duties or opportunities at WINS. Again for the short term, I wouldn't be in a daily supervisory contact with the new station. I told John that I could ask nothing more than for him to run my request through channels and see what happened.

There's an old saying in broadcasting, and in nearly every other industry, that "It's easier to ask for forgiveness than for permission." But I'd been in management too long

to subscribe fully to it. I owed Westinghouse the honesty.

My proposal must have been an even bolder idea than I'd thought, for John Steen later told me it was the first such proposal that had ever been made to the company. But within a couple of weeks, he called to say that my request had been approved. I not only had their blessings for the venture, I still had a job.

And the job was bringing challenges, satisfactions, and accomplishments that surpassed even my original hopes, as well as the company's fondest projections for profits and ratings. We were even winning awards for the ads we ran promoting our accomplishments in news coverage. Steve Bell, director of promotions, was winning them for his series of bold, full-page ads in the *New York Times*. The announcers on staff were enjoying even more moonlighting relationships with advertising agencies and their production houses; the voices of our WINS-1010 talent were being heard across the country on radio and television commercials for a number of products. Charles Scott King, who had been our announcer/commentator for our coverage of the World Class Automobile Races in LeMans, France, took advantage of the connection and for years would work as the off-camera voice for major carmaker accounts.

There may be a more heavily unionized and strike-happy place than New York City, but I don't know where it is. The labor picture in the New York City of the late 60s was especially tempestuous, with subway motormen, teachers, garbage workers, airline baggage handlers, newspaper staffs and even museum guards taking their periodic turns at paralyzing the city. As was the case at most broadcast media companies, at WINS we dealt with several unions: American Federation of Television & Radio Artists (AFTRA), the American Newspaper Guild (news writers),

and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), which represented the engineers and other technical staff.

In late 1967 the station's contract with IBEW was expiring, and it fell to me as general manager to do all of the contract wrangling for the company. In those days, under the Westinghouse policy manual, the Group W general manager conducted his own union negotiations and no one from Westinghouse's legal department was even permitted in the room when sessions were underway. My assistant during these IBEW negotiations was Bill Rohrer, WINS' operations manager.

My years as a manager for the McLendons and in Texas, a militantly anti-union right-to-work state, hadn't exactly prepared me for these duties. I had always prided myself on being a "hands-on" type of manager, tapping into the pulse and emotions of the stations and even pitching in to help run the equipment when necessary. This wasn't permitted by the technical unions in New York City. I further found it impossible to maintain my usual rapport with a staff that was represented by three unions, each often with its own conflicting agenda. I found these conditions stifling.

The contract with the engineers was due to expire at 6:00 a.m. on a Monday morning about two weeks' distant when we accelerated our meetings with the IBEW representatives. We began meeting daily, and then extended our sessions into day and night marathons.

My notes from those meetings remind me that the union was determined to win some policy changes on the matter of "turnaround time," the end result of which would be more engineers on duty. They also asked for double-time pay when handling intra-company news feeds from our sister stations—a nice sinecure when you consider that intra-

company news feeds were about the only kind we did. They wanted control in spelling out interns' duties; they wanted engineers to physically accompany all newsmen on stories that would require the use of a tape recorder; and they wanted those engineers to be furnished with company cars, separate from the news units being driven by the reporters.

They also wanted improvements in the quality of the coffee machines and a better variety of foods offered in the snack bar. I was in their corner on these latter two demands.

Our negotiations were more crucial than normal in the corporate view, since the union hierarchy had let it be known that if our talks became hopelessly snagged and a strike did materialize, they would not hesitate to ask for sympathy or secondary strikes at all of the other Group W stations, in Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Fort Wayne and Hollywood, as well as strikes on the company's two leading program properties, the New York-based Merv Griffin Show and the Mike Douglas Talk Show, taped daily at KYW in Philadelphia.

Our talks continued, day and night, with no agreement. It was a few minutes past 3:00 a.m. on the Monday morning of the contract's expiration day when I declared a rest and a coffee break. Our opposite numbers representing the union had been the shop steward of the engineers, his assistant, and the IBEW's representative for the New York City area.

I looked in the union representative's direction when I called the coffee break and said I was going to walk down the hall to a vacant office for a few minutes. He took my hint and followed me.

We sat down and I went over my "laundry list" of union demands that I felt the station could live with, together with

a longer list of their demands that I said were either too expensive or flatly unworkable. Presumably every sort of negotiation eventually reaches this moment of truth, when, one on one, the adversaries look at the skeleton of the creature and go over it bone by bone. Throughout the long bargaining sessions these same phrases had been bandied back and forth—too unworkable, we'll consider it, etc.—but our isolation in the private room brought a different dimension of finality to our maneuvering.

The union rep and I were in that room until nearly 6:00 a.m., the witching hour. I looked up from my notes on the desk. I looked him in the eye. "What is it you really want out of all this?" I said to him.

He answered with hardly a hesitation. "A twenty-one inch color television set," he said.

"I'll pretend I didn't hear that," I said in only slightly feigned shock, "but what is your home address?"

I don't know what he told his people, but I told my people that the union rep and I had reached a meeting of the minds on a fair and equitable agreement, without going into any further details of the pragmatic advantages of a one-on-one negotiation.

Our rough-draft notes from our meeting were readied for typing and ultimately for membership approval. At a few minutes before 6:00 in the morning, I walked out into the black pre-dawn of Park Avenue, headed for 49th and First and my home in the U.N. Plaza. I didn't quite make it. When I walked into the East Tower lobby with two days' growth of beard, suit, shirt and tie showing the corrugated look of having been lived in while grabbing naps in the office, I was stopped in the lobby by one of the building's new security guards.

Disheveled, disreputable, furtive, wrinkled, rumpled,

all of the above—take your pick. I obviously didn't strike the security officer as someone who belonged there, but he did let me wait around while he called upstairs to Katy on the intercom phone, who confirmed that she was, indeed, waiting for an absent husband.

Group W had convened a general executives' meeting in London, which we were forced to miss when the union negotiations ran overtime. But I felt we had accomplished a difficult but fair agreement, one that kept peace with the other sections of the staff. I received several well-done memos from members of the Westinghouse legal department, who felt the agreement I had helmed would set some useful precedents for future negotiations. The memos from the legal eagles would have to suffice as a corporate pat on the back as well, since I never heard via memo or even a token phone call from anyone else up in the corporate headquarters. I found it disappointing, and somewhat mystifying.

Meanwhile, in Virginia the groundwork for a new radio station was beginning to take shape. Even before the union talks had begun in Manhattan, the FCC-certified lawyer Harry Sells had called to ask what I wanted to do about call letters for the station.

The Construction Permit had been issued for the call letters WSJT, which the original ownership group apparently had intended as some kind of alphabetical shorthand for "Super Jet," conveying some sense of a hard-driving, crest-of-the-wave rock 'n roll format.

We were not yet committed to a format, but I had assumed that I would be "dancin' with whut brung me," the beautiful music presentations I had helped to pioneer. Whatever it might turn out be, though, we wouldn't be needing any super jet connections, so I began seriously mulling a new set of call letters.

We had none in mind, curiously enough, since the choice of call letters is a certain finalizing validation of one's plans to open a radio station. At first I considered the idea of promoting the station's dial position, 1600. I noodled some of these ideas around with the lawyer and with others. What about WXVI, the Roman numerals for 16, I ventured. Then we could have "W-16 weather, W-16 News," and so forth.

Sells pointed out that there already was a station in the Tidewater market with call letters that were probably uncomfortably close to my choice: there was WXRI, in Portsmouth. Sells theorized that if we were to apply for the letters XVI, the FCC probably would grant the use of the letters, but they would probably be close enough to cause the owners of WXRI to file an objection that could hold up the process for at least some months, and perhaps indefinitely. All it would take would be for WXRI to write one tiny letter of exception.

The lawyer suggested that maybe we were making the problem bigger than it was. He suggested that a personal request might clear the way. "Call the owner, explain your idea for WXVI, and ask him if he'd let you file for the letters without objecting."

Late that Wednesday afternoon, I called the station in Portsmouth and asked to speak to the owner or manager. I was told the owner's name was Pat Robertson. Of course the name meant nothing to me at the time. I didn't even know what kind of format his station was using.

When the man who would become famous for mixing religion and politics in a big way came on the line, I introduced myself and told him the reason for my call. I outlined in the broadest terms my reasons for wanting to use WXVI, and I assured him we would probably be using those actu-

al letters somewhat minimally, emphasizing instead the "W-16" type of I.D. promotion.

There was a moment's silence, and then Pat Robertson said: "Well, Brother Payne, I just don't know. I think we'll have to pray over it and ask Jesus about this thing."

I wasn't sure what the right response was to something like this. So I said, "Okay, when may I call you again?"

He said, "Oh, how about tomorrow, about this same time."

I hung up, thinking that in a career of conversations with programming wunderkinds, drunk cowboys, news-room fops, Mexican generals and North Sea pirates, this dialogue would have to rank right up there.

The next afternoon, Thursday, at a few minutes before 4:00, I called the station in Portsmouth again and asked for Pat Robertson.

He came on the line. His first words were, "Brother Payne, Jesus told us not to let you have WXVI."

It was a position that didn't seem to be negotiable.

Chapter 15

Virginia Real: Hello WCPK

It's worrisome enough having to deal with the FCC, the moneylenders, lawyers, contractors, engineers, electricians, record-pluggers, plumbers, and building inspectors when you're starting a new station, but being told that Jesus, too, is lined up against you does wonders for an entrepreneur's focus.

I told the Pat Robertson story as often as I could to as many people as I happened to see over the next few days. A couple of friends suggested that we should go ahead and file for the call letters anyway, then let Robertson file his exception and produce Jesus in person to testify at the FCC hearing. The most realistic and decisive argument against this ploy was the fact that any such hearing, with or without subpoenaed Messiahs, would be months, maybe years, in the future—and we were anxious to be on the air as soon as we could.

At about this same time, Stan Wilson, a friend and former colleague from KFJZ in Fort Worth, was in New York. Katy and I invited him over for dinner. Once again I told my Pat Robertson story, and after Stan had finished chuckling and shaking his head over the ecclesiastical effrontery of some people, he was silent for a moment. Then with his next words he solved our call-letter problem.

"Why don't you consider CPK," he said. "You know—the CP stands for Charlie Payne, the K stands for Katy, and the whole thing looks like an abbreviation for Chesapeake."

WCPK not only offered the asset of personal posterity, but, in conveying the sense of the whole of Chesapeake in

shorthand, provided a sort of instant equity in our marketing area. We also imagined, accurately, that it would be sort of nice hearing your family initials broadcast every half-hour. It was one of those ideas that seemed so logical in retrospect that, years later, we wondered how we could have considered anything else. WCPK was born that night at the dinner table in New York City.

The paperwork went through and the construction work stayed on schedule; the airdate for WCPK ("The air is now sweeter over Tidewater Virginia!") was set for December 17, 1967. It was a Sunday morning. We went on the air at 10:00 a.m.

The sound of our station format basically was "beautiful music," closely hewing to the languid melodies, mannered tones, time chimes, throaty segues and drop-in features I had developed at KIXL in Dallas and KABL in San Francisco.

It was going to be daunting to be the new boy on the block in a diffusely sprawling market of 33 stations. We hired a former colleague from the McLendon ranks, Gordon Lloyd, as general manager. He headed up a full-time staff of eight—pretty sparse in retrospect but sufficient for the beginning, when our broadcast license was for the hours from dawn to dusk.

Meanwhile, 360 miles to the north in New York City, WINS-1010 was consolidating its solid No. 1 rating position with adult listeners in the greater New York market. Perhaps it takes some reminding, nearly three decades later, of what a revolutionary concept an all-news station was in the late 60s. Listeners today who futilely search the FM dial, especially on weekends, looking for a newscast or a human sentence or any other sign of the real world amid the mindless, automated, smugly consulted and open-ended medi-

ocurity of pop music programming, may not remember that the AM band, too, used to be like that. Having a spot on the dial guaranteed to offer news and information at any minute of the day or night was a novelty that was unquestionably filling a need, as the ratings and revenues of all-news WINS continued to show.

The station also was continuing to rack up a series of public-service and public-affairs programming awards as *lagniappes* to its growing commercial success. We in management were constantly being invited to speak before civic groups and industry meetings, to tell the story of pioneering in all-news. I lectured frequently to communications seminars at places like Columbia University and New York University.

The BBC in London contacted us, wanting to do a prestigious broadcast salute to our unique all-news service. Arch McDermid of the BBC voiced a tribute to our ideas that was beamed across the globe on the BBC's World Service. WINS' promotional master Steve Bell had the program transferred to a disk, designed a special jacket with liner notes full of the various virtues of us all-news pioneers, and used the package for years as give-aways to advertisers and ad-agency people. Steve, not to be confused with the latter day television network newsman of the same name, learned enough about the broad spectrum of broadcasting in his promotional slot at WINS to go on to become general manager of a television station in the Boston market.

Our sales efforts were organized, and even choreographed, to make maximum use of our parent Westinghouse's corporate and talent resources. Group W family stars like Merv Griffin and Mike Douglas, for instance, would often be on hand to appear, to entertain, or just to

hang out at dinners attended by potential clients and time-buyers. It was an effective and almost instinctive forerunner of the kind of celebrity-schmoozing events that would become much more common among corporations in the 80s and 90s.

Katy and I attended one of these events on the evening of February 24, 1968, when Griffin headlined a dog-and-pony dinner in New York City for a delegation of key ad-agency visitors from Chicago. Station managers from throughout the Group W chain had been on hand, too. It was a full-blown evening of drinks, dinner, entertainment, flesh-pressing and glad-handing.

We arrived back home at the U.N. Plaza at a few minutes after 11:00 that night. The phone rang.

It was Gordon Lloyd, our general manager at WCPK.

"Mr. Payne," he said, "I hope you're sitting down."

Such milli-moments in life are curious. "I hope you're sitting down." That particular emotional cue can augur either good news or bad. Are you sitting down? You've won the lottery! Are you sitting down? The ratings are in and we're number one!

But the lateness of the hour and the sighing, almost strangled tone of his voice braced me for the bad.

"The station's on fire," he said. "I've been trying to reach you for the last couple hours. It's burned to the ground. It's gone."

Our physical setup had been, we thought, an efficient compound of air studios, offices, recording facilities and transmitter, all unitized and together at a location on the near outskirts of town. The main drawback of this otherwise convenient system was that it all burned up together. Of the hundreds of reel tapes that we were using for airplay, only two were somehow spared. The tapes had been made

from LP disks in New York City by our eldest son, Charles Jr., and an immediate blessing was that the records were still in New York. But the blaze had burned up the results of thousands of hours of his work.

The building housing our station offices and the studios, our considerable investment in broadcast equipment, microphones, tape recorders, amplifiers, production boards, desks, chairs, files and furnishings: all destroyed. So was the transmitter and the municipal-strength power plant that ran it. The tower itself, scorched and fatigued by fire, heat and water, still stood, our skeleton of misfortune. Later I learned that the damage in the office included three new IBM Selectric typewriters, still in their packing boxes, so new that they hadn't yet been added to the insurance manifest.

In those days there was no late-night flight out of New York for Norfolk, or any other part of Tidewater. The Payne family piled into the Olds for our most melancholy drive yet over the 360 miles down the Atlantic Seaboard. But before leaving I had reached the emergency number of the Harris Intertype Corporation in Quincy, Illinois; they promised a shipment, that night by truck, of a replacement transmitter. It was at least some consolation to know that even as the ashes were still piling up in Virginia, we were trying to rise from them. The midnight Phoenix.

There aren't many emotions more intensely impotent than that of being captive behind a steering wheel on your interminable way to look at a personal catastrophe. We arrived at about 6:00 a.m. in a chill and dreary Sunday pre-dawn. There was a limit to the debris-kicking, shrugging and clucking we could do, so we spent much of that long day scurrying around the area to find a mobile home that was convertible as a combination office and studio. We

found a large tractor-trailer, the type identified with 18-wheelers, to set up and house the transmitting equipment near the tower. Later that day I had to make a comatose drive back to New York for the regular work week at WINS.

Operation Phoenix continued over several days as the work crews, the staff and, most magnificently, my Katy, doing everything from shoving furniture to going for box lunches, worked around the various criminal-investigation crews that were stomping around the site. At first there were arson investigators from the county and city, joined soon afterward by F.B.I. agents in view of the federal licensing situation.

There never would be a definitive answer for the cause of the fire. The theories ranged from smoldering closing-time cigarettes to curiosity over some railroad flares reported missing from a Norfolk and Western Railroad shed a few blocks from the station. Another scenario involved seamen from a foreign ship tied up at the Cargill docks less than a half mile away, who may have broken into the unmanned building and maliciously set the fire after not finding anything fenceable. Another theory, unfortunately viable given the station's rapid inroads in a competitive market, was arson-for-hire.

Whatever the truth, the cause was never determined, although the fire chief told us that the fire was inordinately hot at its focus; flames had been shooting 150 feet into the air when the trucks arrived.

The fire had been noted in the trade publications, and that week at WINS I received a memorable call from Gordon McLendon. With his customary consideration he asked, first, how Katy was bearing up, and then how I was doing. Then he asked if there was any equipment we might need to get back on the air. I told him we had the necessary

gear on order. Then he asked if he could send engineers or anyone else to assist. Then he asked if we needed any money to tide us over.

Then as I was assuring him that we had everything covered, it dawned on me that we didn't have any programming left. I asked him if there might be a duplicate tape library at KABL in San Francisco. Could we borrow some music until we could reconstruct our own library?

Unhesitatingly he said, "If there isn't a duplicate library, we'll make one. I'll take care of it."

Three days later, our temporary studio took a call from United Airlines' air freight office, advising that a shipment was waiting at Norfolk International Airport. The shipment was 150 reels of KABL music—flown in pre-paid from San Francisco.

Thus, when our hastily resurrected station got back on the air later that first week, we were able to resume an almost seamless broadcast format with that turn-key programming. Ironically I had overseen most of its production when I had been with Gordon at KABL. Now the music never sounded sweeter or better, mostly due to the kind concern and stunning generosity of a champion human being, Gordon McLendon.

Another big-league Samaritan heard from in that turbulent week was Irving Rosenthal, the Manhattan entrepreneur whose interests included ownership of Palisades Park, the noted amusements complex located on the New Jersey bluffs across the Hudson River from the city. When he had acquired the property, it included a massive radio tower—formerly used by WMCA but no longer in use, and in Irving's view "just sitting there taking up valuable space" on the west bank.

"If you need that tower," he said, "just say the word."

He already had decided to dismantle it and sell it for scrap, he explained, but if it would be of any help in the recovery of Payne of Virginia Broadcasting, it was ours for the asking. As it happened, the tower wasn't adaptable to our needs in Virginia, but the thought of Irving Rosenthal's gesture has stayed with us through the years.

It isn't often you can measure a man's friendship and generosity in tons.

*Chapter 16*

**Tea Dances and Happy Tidings**

The decade of the 1960s began with the shooting down of our U-2 spy plane over the Soviet Union and ended with Woodstock. Everything in between made the decade, in the view of many, the matrix of the forces of change that would sweep through our lives. And by the end of the decade, the man who had flown that star-crossed U-2, Francis Gary Powers, was a helicopter traffic reporter for KNX in Los Angeles.

For me, running one of the first all-news radio stations during this period of profound transformation was something very close to a ringside seat. As good as the 60s were for rock 'n roll, the news business had more hits than the music industry. In 1968 the decade was boiling toward its climax. The Tet Offensive in Vietnam erupted in February. Turmoil spilled across the streets and campuses of America. Lyndon B. Johnson, the eternal politician, announced he had had enough. Assassins added Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy to the casualty lists of the 60s.

The listenership, prestige, ratings and profits for WINS-1010 zoomed accordingly, but my personal counterpoint to the coda of 1968's big news stories was the series of melancholy commutes Katy and I made each weekend, back to Virginia and the scene of the disastrous radio station fire that made big news nowhere, except in the very center of our own lives.

There was too much that needed doing at each end of that 360-mile axis between Manhattan and Tidewater. The inevitable became obvious as that dizzy year wore on: both

responsibilities were going to need our full efforts. Having our own station, at last, was the culmination of two lives' ambitions, but the joys were leavened by the sadness of telling my bosses at Westinghouse that we would have to leave WINS and New York.

It was agreed that July 1, the dead solid midpoint of that portentous year, would be the target date for leaving the station and selling the home we loved on the 10th floor of United Nations Plaza.

One of my last official functions before leaving the station was to attend a luncheon given by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York. It was at the home of Cardinal Terence J. Cooke, in the elegant upper 80s of the East Side. Cardinal Cooke kept a much lower profile than his predecessor, the eminently newsworthy Cardinal Francis J. Spellman, who had died in 1967.

My recollections of the luncheon are of two emotions: one, the poignancy that came with one last chance to rub elbows with an all-star cast of fellow New Yorkers like Helen Hayes, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., and Walter Cronkite; and, two, mystification as to why we were there, what the luncheon was for. There was no agenda mentioned, before, during, or after the event. We just shook hands and had lunch. I did enjoy the opportunity of getting to know Cronkite. That day we reminisced about our mutual backgrounds in Texas. Before his World War II career as a United Press correspondent got him his break with Ed Murrow and CBS, he told me he had been a failed broadcaster at WFAA Radio in Dallas. "They fired me because they said I couldn't read news," said Walter.

New York was, and still largely is, the center of the universe in the media business, which is simultaneously the city's blessing and the nation's curse; critics elsewhere who

charge the media with being too Gotham-oriented are mainly correct. What can you expect when all of the news directors, systems managers and decision-makers of the national media live within a few square miles of each other and make their decisions from a common base of input?

The longer I lived in Virginia (which may be too close to Washington D.C. for honest national perspectives), the more acutely I could sense the insularity of the New York syndrome. But having been a part of the New York scene, I was enriched by the associations with so many key figures in the advertising and broadcast business. I shall always be deeply indebted to the cluster of bosses at Westinghouse Broadcasting for an unfailingly positive, forward-moving, forward-thinking experience in the industry. I had associates, and later friends, at NBC, CBS, ABC and Westinghouse, as well as at Capital Cities Broadcasting Group, the feisty, lean company that eventually would acquire ABC radio and television; the sardine that ate the shark.

My friends, co-workers and superiors in New York were always generous with their conversations, their counsel and their services as sounding boards to many of my ideas. Thus, my years in New York City for Westinghouse, managing the flagship station in the world's most major radio market, provided me a series of unforgettable opportunities and dilemmas. But we never looked back from our more rustic option in Virginia as having been anything but the right decision.

We became citizens of Tidewater Virginia on the first day of August 1968. Moving in one day from sharing a high-rise with Johnny Carson to the 56th market of the country lived up to our most vivid imaginings of culture shock.

In those days the municipal components of Tidewater were just beginning to coalesce into the synergistic state that would give it its identity in the present day. It was a complex of seven cities that fell under the gravitational pull of Norfolk while wanting to keep their sovereign distance from it. Tidewater was part of the ex-urban evolution that was beginning in the 60s and would create these types of sprawling, autonomously blended civic and geographic entities across the country: places like the larger Dallas-Fort Worth "Metroplex," the Florida Panhandle's Emerald Beach strip of loosely connected cities, or the St. Louis metro area, which not only shuffles and anchors the cultures of dozens of suburbs but vaults two major rivers to do it. Tidewater likewise is cleaved by some pretty formidable bodies of water: the Atlantic Ocean, Chesapeake Bay, the Hampton Roads channels, the Potomac, the Rappahannock and James rivers. Whereas in the past these natural obstacles made communication and travel difficult, in the present they serve as common denominators and unifying factors.

The city of Chesapeake, which was WCPK's city of license, had been incorporated only in 1963. But from downtown Chesapeake, where our offices and studio were located near the banks of still another river, the Elizabeth, our transmitter signal covered not only Norfolk but Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, Newport News, Hampton, Williamsburg and Suffolk.

Sometimes our necessary promotional tactics gave me memories of the McLendon days when we filled the air over San Francisco with little white lies from Oakland: in general promotional terms we would use the term "Tidewater," while always keeping in mind that the cities within it were sensitive about their local identities. We often reminded listeners that we were "Chesapeake's only radio

voice." And one of our early tag lines said we were "WCPK—the musical voice of Chesapeake Bay" even though the city of Chesapeake actually has the same amount of Chesapeake Bay shoreline as Bismarck, North Dakota—i.e., none.

We had Portsmouth to the west, Norfolk to the north, Virginia Beach to the east and the state of North Carolina to the south. As our burgeoning market took shape and could reflect the new statistics of this potential listenership, Tidewater vaulted from being the nation's 56th largest market to the 33rd, after the inclusion of Hampton and Newport News along with the four cities south of the James River/Hampton tunnel.

In fairly short order, Norfolk, which had been the area's major population center, was surpassed by Virginia Beach. Although toppled from its perch, Norfolk continued to grow enough so that it edged Richmond, the state capital, to third place.

Our broadcast signal from Chesapeake totally covered the state's No. 1 and No. 2 markets, while providing some statistically comfortable coverage down into North Carolina.

We brought to the AM dial at 1600 kilohertz a formulaic but pleasing blend of "Beautiful Easy Listening" music: big bands, mainstream vocalists and pop standards whose mix I had mastered at KIXL in Dallas and KABL in San Francisco. Our license allowed us to broadcast on the AM dial from dawn to dusk—quite a hindrance in the big picture since we were competing in a market that offered no fewer than 32 station signals for the Tidewater audience to tune to. We were unabashedly appealing to the older demographics, 25-year-olds and older, with a realistic emphasis on 35+. In the explosive growth of rock 'n roll radio and the

wooing of ever-younger radio audiences, WCPK was one of the first to recognize that the older audiences, with their attendant higher buying power for advertisers, were being lost in the shuffle. In a few more years, more stations would recognize the exclusion of this target audience, which, together with the discovery of "Nostalgia," would lead to a major "new" broadcast format: "Music of Your Life" stations.

"What a great idea! They're playing our song!" millions would say in the late 70s. It was what we were broadcasting in the 60s. It was an irony I would contemplate in the 80s, every time I heard the song, "I Was Country Before Country Was Cool." We were the pop-classic version of that predicament.

Something else to remember about the time frame: this was 1968-70, just before the full impact and programming range of FM was to be realized—in fact, it was even before most new cars were coming equipped with both AM and FM frequencies on factory radios.

The station enjoyed good audience reaction beginning with the first day on the air. By the time we were physically on the scene from New York City, WCPK already was showing up in the ratings figures.

Our daytime, weekday easy-listening sound was beefed up on weekends by such special programs as the "WCPK Sunday Spectacular"—an hour-long blend of music and narrative that was freshly written, produced and mixed for airing on Sunday afternoons. A typical program might take the form of a "musical portrait" of Judy Garland, for example, with an interspersed commentary of newsy biographical notes spaced out through playings of her biggest hits.

Other Sunday programming would feature the world of the big bands, and we had them by the score—pun perhaps

intended. There would be in-person, in-studio sessions with such greats as Johnny Long. Later, we aired remote broadcasts from the open-air deck of the famed beachfront Cavalier Hotel in Virginia Beach. It was called "Sunday Tea Dance," and the hour-long broadcasts from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. would feature big bands that happened to be in the area, live. Johnny Long's band played several times. Others brought to our listeners Vaughn Monroe, in one of his last air dates ever; Pee Wee Hunt and his Dixieland Jazz combo, with Bobby Hackett. There were regional favorites too: Don Glasser and his music; the band of Russ Carlyle, who had been the featured baritone with the Blue Barron Band.

On the Sunday Spectaculars we enjoyed a procession of the greats of the music world: Meredith Wilson, who had written Broadway's and the movies' "The Music Man" and such popular World War II songs as "You and I." Skitch Henderson dropped in for live on-air visits.

The Sunday Tea Dances were summertime affairs, the concerts an hour long and featuring refreshments for the large live crowds of big band fans who showed up. The sounds of the surf breaking on Virginia Beach, occasionally the spectacular background roar of a Navy F-14 Tomcat jet from the nearby Oceana Naval Air Station roaring past, the sounds of the crowd, the music: it all made for lasting memories in the ear.

Our Pee Wee Hunt special was an example of how scheduled events became even more special. Hunt, whose Capitol Records' version of "12th Street Rag" had been a national hit a few years earlier, was booked in for two weeks at the Cavalier. What we hadn't known before the Sunday broadcast was that the legendary horn man Bobby Hackett was being added to Hunt's group just for the Virginia Beach engagement. It was a small taste of Valhalla

for big band followers. Hackett had been lead trumpet with Glenn Miller's civilian band. It was Bobby Hackett's horn heard on the solo in Miller's R.C.A. Victor disc of Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." His most recent fame had come from his solo work on the albums of Jackie Gleason's easy-listening and best-selling "Music for Lovers Only." It was Hackett's work on the Gleason album that had brought about the resurrection of an obscure Rodgers and Hart song, "My Funny Valentine."

Johnny Long's band was famous for its amusing arrangement of "Shanty Town," in which the whole band vamped the words to the song over a driving rhythm-section background. One evening during a beach-club broadcast on WCPK, Long beckoned Katy and me and a couple of other revelers to come up on stage to help him sing and lead off "Shanty Town." Such was the power of music from that era that so many people like us knew the words to the songs!

The Long Show had been a formal evening, with cocktail dresses for the ladies and dinner jackets for the men. Just as the band struck up a lively cha-cha, an elegantly dressed and coiffed woman, a total stranger, came up to me and challenged me to dance with her. As we were doing the steps in pretty much the right order, I lifted my left arm to turn the lady under in a normal cha-cha routine. But she was a little taller than I was accustomed to, and as she passed under, my arm brushed the top of her head, sending the hair piece that was attached to the crown of her head bouncing off of her shoulder onto the dance floor. That's why I spent the last part of the cha-cha down on the floor on hands and knees, groping among the feet of the other dancers, looking for the missing hair piece. I finally came back up with it. She glared at me, seized her hair and

walked off without a word. She never asked me to dance again.

Not until we had lived in Tidewater for awhile did the scope of the region's rich musical heritage occur to me. In more ways than one, music was a way of life in Virginia, in North Carolina, and, in general, the Middle Atlantic region.

Newport News, just across the James River from Norfolk, was the birthplace of two great ladies of American song: Ella Fitzgerald and Pearl Bailey. On the river's south bank, Norfolk could lay claim as the home of Keeley Smith, who became the wife and featured vocalist of Louis Prima. Likewise Amy Arnell, a featured singer with the Tommy Tucker Band, had been born in Portsmouth with the name of Amy Stephenson.

About ten miles out of Portsmouth on the Chuckatuck River was the birthplace of jazz-guitar great Charlie Byrd, who was even known in the area as "Chuckatuck Charlie Byrd."

Portsmouth was also the original home of a fine saxophonist who was famous first in the musicians' community, and later a national TV celebrity to another generation: Tommy Newsome, the sax man on the Johnny Carson "Tonight" show band and fill-in conductor when Doc Severinsen was absent. He visited Virginia several times during our tenure there and we had him on the air whenever possible. On one occasion he appeared as guest conductor of the Norfolk Symphony Pops Orchestra.

We wrote and produced a number of shows for the Sunday Spectacular series built around the artists who were from Virginia and North Carolina. Of the latter, Johnny Long was a native Tarheel; along with Les Brown, he got his start on the campus of Duke University in Durham. Other Carolinians were bandleaders Hal Kemp, Kay Kyser and

John Scott Trotter.

We took the opportunity to interview and feature these musical greats on our programs, either when they were visiting in town or else by telephone hookup. Their sheer numbers suggest that the area certainly produced more than its share of big names from a major musical era.

There was another local performer we featured on the air who I believe could have been a musical star had he not chosen the legal profession. Pete Decker, an outstanding Norfolk lawyer, was also one of the finest baritones who ever stepped up to a microphone. He combined his singing and emceeing talents with his philanthropic work, which included his service as a board member of St. Jude's Children's Hospital and their multitude of great causes and projects, along with his friend and fellow Lebanese-American Danny Thomas.

Pete's singing talents made him a regional recording star as well, and his contributions of all proceeds from the sales usually resulted in record proceeds for St. Jude's fund drives. In addition to a popular Christmas album, Pete produced about a dozen mainstream pop recordings that I felt were chillingly good. I always thought his treatment of "After the Lovin'" "out-Engleberted" Humperdinck. As an annual fundraising event for St. Jude's, our station, along with WAVY-Channel 10, devoted time for four-hour telecasts to these fund efforts, which were always emceed by Pete Decker. One of Pete's kinsmen, actor Telly Savalas' brother George, was almost always on hand for these shows. The entire musical production was in the hands of another local musician of note, Pat Curtis. Pat played fine piano, was an outstanding arranger, and fronted a thoroughly professional big band that stayed very busy.

The easy-listening sounds and weekend specials helped

WCPK give southeastern Virginia's radio audience something it hadn't heard before. For news and national events, we signed on as an affiliate of the ABC radio network.

By early 1970 the station had made enough of an impact in the market that it led to some recognition from Larry Bonko, the columnist for the *Norfolk Ledger Star*. Bonko would go on to become a Veteran Observer, but in 1970 he was just starting his career. His picture accompanying that column shows off those handsome 1970s sideburns and polyester wardrobe (in case I ever feel the need for blackmail). As a young gonzo entertainment columnist he apparently felt the need to inject some ridicule in his views of our easy-listening radio, but he spelled our names correctly and got the call letters right. Bonko later told me that one column brought him angrier reaction from our loyal listeners than any other column he had written.

This is what he wrote in 1970:

*I cannot bring myself to tell Charlie Payne that 1947 ended 23 years ago. I fear he would cry all over his Blue Barron recordings. Or worse. Despairing, Payne is capable of cutting his wrists with a silver dollar left over from an old Dr I.Q. radio broadcast. He used to write the questions for that program.*

*Payne is a Texan who, in partnership with Mrs. Payne, owns and operates a radio station in Chesapeake. Payne is in love with the 1940s. He also has a crush on the 1930s.*

*Payne's idea of a fast hour on radio is 60 minutes of Carmen Lombardo singing the Best of Guy Lombardo.*

*Speaking of today's music, the rock stuff, Payne told me, "If there is a message there, I don't get it."*

*Payne bought the station in Chesapeake so he could put on the air music which he liked. "I select every piece of it," he said. "For 15 years in radio, I made a lot of bucks for other people. Three*

*years ago I decided to try it for myself."*

*Payne brought to Tidewater from New York a format which I call Yawn Music. He refers to it as "hummable." I don't think that there is a word like "hummable."*

*You hear a lot of harp music on WCPK. Those letters stand for Charlie and Katy Payne.*

*Payne also brought with him a file of old recordings by Ray Noble, Tex Beneke, Skinnay Ennis and other musicians who were popular in 1938.*

*These records burned on February 24, 1967. It was not a total loss. Announcer Jay Daniels managed to save a version of "Sabre Dance" by the Berlin Promenade Orchestra.*

*Payne, in December of 1967, signed on the air with WCPK. It was the 32nd radio station in Tidewater. A lot of people said Payne was out of his balloon for opening the 32nd radio station in this market.*

*"In that first month our total paid advertising came to zero," said Payne.*

*He left WINS in New York to operate in Chesapeake. Payne was general manager at WINS, a premier station in a premier market. He has been in other large markets such as Dallas and San Francisco.*

*"I don't know an A from an F on the musical scale," said Payne. "But I know what's good. I know what music is listenable."*

*Most of the time, Payne's music is not by Claude Thornhill, Freddy Slack, Tony Pastor or people like that. He saves them for Sunday afternoon. The staple on WCPK is sweet music, smooth. It is at times as inspiring as a railroad crossing.*

*Just once I would like to hear somebody who is far out, like Vaughn Monroe.*

*Speaking of his station, Payne said, "Personally, I like the music." Somebody else must like it, too.*

*Payne recently opened new studios on East Liberty Street. When I asked what the station is worth, he rolled a figure off his tongue which sounded like six hundred thousand dollars.*

*The price includes a clock in the lobby which is ten hours slow. The Corsicana Kid is doing okay in Chesapeake.*

*Payne earned that name Corsicana Kid, when he broke into radio.*

*He first worked for a 100-watt station, KAND, in Corsicana, Texas. It was owned by Wolf Brand Chili. Payne has a can mounted on a plaque.*

*Later, in Dallas, he helped run a station which was owned by Tyrone Power, William Holden and Robert Taylor. In Dallas he met the creator of the Dr I.Q. program, Lee Segall.*

*I got a kick out of talking about radio programs. Radio used to be a lot different from what it is now. There used to be half-hour programs. Sometimes it was an hour.*

*I grew up with such radio names as Mister Keene, Tracer of Lost Persons; Gang Busters; Baby Snooks; Gracie Allen; the Lux Radio Theater and a lot more. Radio was fun.*

*Other people are aware of Payne's love affair with 1947. He said, "A family from Cape Charles called to give us 1,000 mint-condition old wax records, already filed and cross indexed."*

*Payne said there was an original Bluebird recording by Louis Armstrong, Bing Crosby and Frances Langford. How lucky can a guy get?*

*See you in 1948, Charlie Payne.*

Despite feeling "Bonked" by the columnist's satirical charges of living in the past, I couldn't help feeling we were doing lots of things right in staying our stubborn course on the beautiful music and big band formats. It was at about this time that I received a memorable pick-me-up from a story in *Billboard* magazine. The dateline was Chicago and

coverage of a national broadcasters' meeting:

"Stanley Kaplan, president of WAYS, Charlotte, North Carolina, told a meeting of 350 broadcasters that during the period a few years ago when television had put radio in its doldrums, a new breed of radio man came along ..." Kaplan had gone on to point to Todd Storz and Gordon McLendon as broadcasters who had spawned "a glittering band of intelligent pirates who are now operating radio stations all over the nation." He gratifyingly mentioned the name of Charlie Payne at WCPK in Virginia, along with other owners and managers such as Steve Labunski, Bud Armstrong, Bill Weaver and Kent Burkhardt.

"It was men like these," Kaplan said, "who changed the face of radio" with aggressive changes in tactics and promotional ideas to lead radio into a new level of competition with television. "Indeed," he said, "they probably saved radio altogether."

I hope most of us are lucky enough to know how nice it is to have such sincere tributes from our peers in whatever business we may be in. Modesty aside and self-service to the front, I feel several of us did wield tremendous influence in those harrowing days when much of the radio industry relied on its inertia, couldn't see the trees for the forest. Surely some of us were in the right place at the right time and did what we felt had to be done. But I like to think that the continuing healthy state of our industry is partly due to the fact that somebody was doing something right.

*Chapter 17*

**We Interrupt This Life Due to Technical Difficulties**

Many of our loyally indignant listeners took Larry Bonko's jabs more seriously than he may have intended, as the columnist learned from the sputter-storm feedback to his piece. We were grateful for our listeners' spirit; we just wanted to have them in even greater numbers. It had become obvious that, to compete with more impact in our market, we were going to need exposure to more sets of ears.

We thought it was unfortunate for our listeners that beautiful music had to peter out at dusk. Our broadcast limitations were 1,000 watts, 6:00 a.m. to local sunset only. There was no chance of extending our broadcast time on the AM allocation. All that could be done on AM terms was a fine power increase to 5,000 watts—which we in fact were able to do later. Talks with our Washington lawyers who knew their way around the corridors of the FCC convinced us that the only other option for improvement would be to add an FM operation.

Many of the FM stations in the crowded Tidewater market already were losing money, but the potential of the medium was so apparent that no one felt inclined to unload their losing stations. This left us only one other alternative: to find a spot for a new FM station.

While it would seem a simple matter to just write down the numbers of the FM frequencies operating in our territory and pick a number somewhere in between or on the ends, there is a lot more to it than that. This is why there are so many lawyers and engineers making a good living in

Washington D.C.

Frequencies in one market must be spaced out according to a rigid mathematical formula which bears on their distance from other stations sharing the frequency, and including the directional patterns of those distant stations. Local frequencies can't be allowed to overlap on one another. While in conventional numbers there are ten decimal fractions between the 93 and 94 frequencies—93.1, 93.2, 93.3, 93.4, etc—in the mathematics of FM radio there are only five, since in U.S. broadcasting, FM positions are assigned only to odd numbers. Thus you'll find stations in this range only at 93.1, 93.3, 93.5, etc.

Finding a vacancy in the market—it's known in the trade as a "drop-in"—involves an avalanche of technical paperwork, charts, spectrum analysis, comparative energy graphs and so forth. Once again relying on Ralph Dippell, our consulting engineer in Washington, we came up with a glimmer of hope for a possible new FM frequency in the market at 94.9.

Dippell's charts showed a possibility for a station at 94.9 megahertz with a power of 50,000 watts, a full Class B rating. Due to the problem of adjacent channel overlap spacing, there was a likely problem with a station operating to our south, in New Bern, North Carolina. The critical factor here was the mileage distance from the New Bern transmitter to the point where ours would be sited.

In due course, our company, Payne of Virginia, Inc., through our own attorneys and Dippell's firm in Washington, launched the proper paper-storm of filings, briefs, maps, charts and applications in a petition to the FCC. The action requested the "drop-in" of the frequency at 94.9 for a new additional station in southeastern Virginia. In the early stages of the petition the FCC's own inspectors

and engineers evidently saw little problem with our claims and, over the next months, modified the allocation table for the area to conform with our own numbers, thus assuring that there would be room in the market for a new frequency at 94.9.

Thus, having more or less discovered the spot where a new station could operate, we felt confident in promptly filing all of the legal briefs and technical data that the FCC would need to approve our acquiring "our" frequency. In previous times, if you had done all your homework as we had, you were "grandfathered in" and you had the inside track on receiving the FCC's Construction Permit for the frequency you had just uncovered.

But things had changed, and we were required to file a formal application for a Construction Permit. And of course in the intervening months since we had done the research that found the spot, word had gotten around in the industry. The result was that in the same week that we filed for our Construction Permit, so did three other groups: all seeking 94.9.

Under the unbending rules and regulations of the broadcast bureaucracy, this would lead to additional filings by all the parties involved, along with the Broadcast Bureau of the FCC, and then a series of mutually exclusive hearings for each group desiring the frequency.

Once there were filings, there were re-filings. And then answers to filings, and responses to answers to filings. Perhaps the biggest mistake that fledgling radio investors make is not raising enough money to pay the lawyers. In any event, one of the trio of competing groups, a Northern Virginia investment partnership, dropped out of the scuffle fairly early. Of the two remaining, one was a group of four businessmen from Norfolk; the other was the Kellam

Interests, owners and operators of WVAB, a daytime AM station in Virginia Beach.

As time grew near for the full hearings to begin, those two surviving groups met and decided to merge. The good news was that it was something of a relief to know we'd only have to fight one set of adversaries, albeit one that had suddenly muscled up in the merger; the bad news was that this fight would last 11 years.

## Chapter 18

### The Agony of Victory?

Seven cities, one market, 32 radio stations competing in an industry famous for its cutthroat scuffling. It was a brisk arena, which is a positive way to say "serious glut." But on the even brighter side, it meant there were enough of us cutthroat broadcasters around to form a club, and I had the honor of being elected president of the Tidewater Association of Broadcasters in 1971.

My election could only be seen as a salute to the strides the station had made in a few short years. For a string of consecutive months the Hooper ratings and the Arbitron poll had shown WCPK to be a steady No. 1 or No. 2 in the market with audiences 35 and over, which, as we've pointed out earlier, had been our target audience from the first.

Then and now, it was the demographic group with the best set of desirable statistics sought by advertisers. The 35+ listener was the one with the most accessible, spendable income; they bought more of life's luxuries; they took longer vacations; they drove nicer cars and bought the best furniture, clothing, and high-end groceries.

These were the qualities of the customers sought by Tidewater's premier banks, savings and loan associations, finer furniture dealers, leading department stores, and dealers in prestigious cars.

Tidewater was also a younger sort of upscale market, due in great part to the dominating presence of the naval establishments around Norfolk, Newport News and Hampton. The core of this military presence, the career officers and civil-service support and their families, were

youngish, conservative, well-educated and generally discriminating and demanding in everything from vehicles to entertainment. Much of our success in ratings and demonstrable drawing power in promotions and point-of-purchase events was due in great measure to the naval establishment's acceptance of our programming ideas.

That this kind of audience could be delivered by a day-time-only, 1,000-watt station on the AM dial was a source of amazement to ad agencies, and consternation to our competitors at bigger stations.

A point in our favor, I've always believed, was that we weren't afraid to poke fun at ourselves for our initial smallness and our competitive handicaps. Sixteen hundred on the dial is out-of-the-way; you could get a wrist sprain tuning to it. We were so far over on the right, we said—meaning the non-political sense—that we were in the car next to you! We were so far over on the edge, Larry Bonko said, he found us in his glove compartment. Hey, said another version, we're so high on the dial, we're up there with the police calls.

Meanwhile we had made an impact in the market and we intended to enjoy our situation while we could. The coming primacy of FM, whose sound quality would quickly lure much of that same upscale audience we were enjoying, was only a matter of time, as we all knew. Meanwhile, kickin' butt was a fairly constructive way to pass the time while the FCC took its glacial ease in acting on our request for the drop-in FM frequency.

And, frankly, while we waited it didn't seem to be hurting our cause or our prospects that I had the chance to take part in so many civic affairs.

The Tidewater Association of Broadcasters was a strong organization that included the managers and owners of the

area's radio and television stations. It was formed along conventional industry lines, with such institutional roles as making certain that all the member stations adhered to the rules and regulations of the FCC. The group also was a clearing house of data and information of general interest to member broadcasters.

We had regular luncheons, just like the Rotary and Lions Clubs. Several times our luncheon speaker was J.J. Freeman, who was chief regional inspector for the FCC. He was always gracious and generous in giving of his time and assistance, but I'm sure we would have been a politely rapt audience in any event.

At the same time Katy, who was the executive vice president/owner of Payne of Virginia, Inc., served on the board of the Tidewater chapter of American Women of Radio and Television. She was also named to the board of the Better Business Bureau and gave much of her time on publicity posts for United Way and the Norfolk Academy.

We Paynes were proud to have another family connection with the Norfolk Academy: our youngest son George was enrolled in this outstanding prep school that was founded in 1728 by a grant from the King of England. To graduate from Norfolk Academy with an exemplary average would mean open doors to the nation's leading colleges and universities. George had an affinity for math and the sciences; upon his graduation from the academy, he had a choice among Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cal Tech and comparable schools. With an eye toward computers and media, his choice would be the University of Virginia at Charlottesville.

His older brother, Charlie Jr., sailed through Southern Methodist University in Dallas, working at the station during summer breaks and after graduation joining the staff of

WCPK to work in public relations and community service projects. As a marketing major, he brought talents in market research and the planning of sales projects. In those roles he worked closely with our network sales office in New York and with the national sales-rep organization. As well as he did in these jobs, radio didn't hold the same magnetism for him as it did for his old man. He found challenges in other fields and later returned to Dallas in an executive position with the Steak and Ale restaurant chain.

It was a joy to realize that in our first couple of years WCPK had risen from a charred ruin to become a major force in Tidewater life. Some of the glow even rubbed off on me. One day a delegation of civic VIPs from Chesapeake made an appointment to come to my office. They included a district judge, the county tax assessor, a leading banker. Fairly early in the opening pleasantries they got to the point of their visit: "Charlie, would you consider running for City Council here in Chesapeake?"

Only someone who has ever been asked a question like that can know how immensely and rather scarily gratifying it is to hear.

The answer was that I couldn't, because of a large legal detail: Katy and I lived in Virginia Beach, not in Chesapeake. It was understandable that they had thought otherwise: our investment, life blood and working days were devoted to Chesapeake.

However, the residence factor didn't restrict me from doing other things for the city of Chesapeake. I joined the board of Chesapeake College, later converted to the Chesapeake campus of Tidewater Community College. Dick Davis, who would serve as lieutenant governor under Chuck Robb, and Chevrolet dealer Bill Lewis invited me to serve on the board of the Tidewater Tides, a triple-A farm

team of the New York Mets baseball club.

From the Tidewater Advertising Association I also got tapped as a board member of the statewide Virginia Association of Broadcasters.

The Norfolk Symphony Orchestra also named me to the board of directors, where my background in music and knowing the ropes in how to wangle free publicity spots on the air found its uses on the symphony's behalf.

I also served as adviser to the president of Virginia Wesleyan College, a special honor in view of the church membership our family held in Norfolk.

As in Dallas, San Francisco and New York, there were fairly continuous invitations from college media departments to speak before their students on how the radio business and I had grown up together, often with taped mementos of the days I was telling them about. I did these sessions at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, College of William and Mary in Williamsburg and the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

At those UVA sessions, I shared the podium with the likes of network news figures such as Leslie Stahl and Roger Mudd. Some of the transcripts from these sessions actually found their way into printed distribution to broadcast media departments at other universities across the country. The UVA media professor had seen to that, and whether or not its publishing was done as an aid to his tenure ambitions, it certainly made me feel good.

The mutually exclusive series of hearings on our FM fight before the FCC officially began in 1971. We had first filed for the FM frequency two years earlier.

As the case and the dropouts and mergers of our various foes finally had shaken out, it was us against one of the most muscular media organizations in the area: the Sidney

Kellam Group, owners of WVAB, the NBC Radio Network affiliate in Virginia Beach, and innumerable other investment holdings. From the standpoint of the petitioners' personal involvements, I thought the magnitude and diversity of Kellam's holdings might actually work in my favor. WCPK and our hopeful new station would be my primary livelihood; Kellam was so diversified and so busy he barely knew where his studios were.

As the big day arrived, the FCC decreed that since Virginia Beach was now the largest of the Tidewater cities, and had no full-time AM or FM station, the new station that was about to be granted would be licensed to Virginia Beach. We certainly had no quarrel with this ruling: a victory here would allow us our 5,000-watt AM in Chesapeake and, right next door in what was now Virginia's largest city, a separate 50,000-watt FM station.

The thrust of our case, over and above the fact that we had discovered the drop-in possibilities for 94.9, was that our ownership and active involvement, minute-by-minute, day-by-day, would be more beneficial from the FCC standpoint than that of a virtual absentee owner.

This was all taking place in the Hearing Room on the sixth floor of the FCC headquarters in Washington D.C.

Federal Communications Commission hearings are conducted under the rules of administrative law hearings, a system markedly different than in civil law at the courthouse. Lawyers representing the stations must be certified to practice before the FCC; thus, we were prevented from bringing our regular attorney from Chesapeake or Norfolk to the hearing.

On the bench, the hearing was under the direction of an administrative law judge, who oversees all witnesses before him as well as ruling on points of law brought up by a briar-

patch bramble of attorneys who are on hand: those representing the claimant, those representing the opposition, and those present on behalf of the FCC.

I was called as the first witness in our case and was on the stand for a day and half. At this point my growing involvements in Tidewater civic groups seemed an asset to our arguments, while much of the grilling I underwent had to do with our original filed briefs: whether we had lived up to our promises of public service commitments; whether our programming mix had resembled what we had originally promised; whether our hiring practices were progressive and enlightened (the Equal Opportunity legislation was just beginning to take effect).

My answers under oath were scrupulously compared with the years-old affidavits we had filed when first applying for WCPK. My previous connections with KIXL, KLIF, KABL, WINS and Westinghouse were put under the microscope. Thankfully no one asked about money bags for Mexican generals or renegade stations on pirate ships off the coast of Sweden.

After my testimony it was Katy's turn on the grill. It was pointed out by the opposition that Mrs. Payne never before had held a position with a radio station until WCPK.

True enough, but Katy showed her mettle in a day-long interrogation which showed the splendid ways she had handled such management roles as the hiring of personnel and her pioneering system of continuity—keeping track of the station's traffic operations, logging commercials and maintaining a separation between competitive advertisers' spots. Her systems were ingeniously effective even compared to today's computerized systems.

Her secret in being able to set up these programs? She was a bridge player. She used bridge logic in setting up traf-

fic and billing. To my knowledge, our station never missed a scheduled commercial spot, an amazing record.

The round of hearings went on for three days, with both sides ultimately heard from. We awaited the decision of the administrative law judge.

We waited.

We waited still longer.

We waited for six months.

Then at last came the ruling: the winner of the case was Payne of Virginia, Inc.!

Victory in these hearings is different from the winning locker rooms in Super Bowls. There isn't much champagne splashing around, because we know it isn't over. Petitions from the competition were flying back and forth, querulous challenges to all parts of the decision: big things, little things, inconsequential but nevertheless petitionable things. There were a lot of them. Most of them required prompt answers, and more legal fees.

One day a key man on the opposing side called and asked for a meeting in my office. As he came into the office I noted he was carrying one of those big ledger-sized business check books.

"It's a waste," he said. "We're both beating our heads over this and the only ones who are benefiting are the lawyers. Why don't we put an end to it?"

"That's a good idea," I said.

In his next breath he said he was prepared to write a check and pay us off for our expenses up to that point. All I had to do was walk away from the case and leave his group as the sole applicants for the station.

I turned him down, not too gracefully, and, while rulings on the opposing side's petitions held up the final awarding of the construction permit, they filed more peti-

tions. They were able to do this since the proceedings remained technically open because of the other petitions they had filed.

To answer each new filing of their data and exceptions, Katy and I were obliged to make so many trips back and forth to Washington D.C. during this period that we could offer directions on blindfolded driving. Our car could still probably make the trip from Tidewater to Washington D.C. and back without us.

If this was winning, I wouldn't want to know what losing felt like.

And while we waited, we still had a radio station to run.

**Chapter 19**

**Networking Before Networking Was Cool**

Thankfully from our first day on the air, December 17, 1967, we had a contract with the American Broadcasting Company to be the southeastern Virginia affiliate for the branch of its operation known as the ABC Entertainment Network. It was a distinctly different "feed" from that of the conventional ABC programming, with more emphasis on the lighter, softer side of news and a bigger budget of stories about entertainment personalities. It also fed segments of national and international news, commentary and sports specials. Along with the ABC feeds in the morning we even found a way to carry one of radio's venerable morning institutions, "The Breakfast Club with Don McNeil." That show, then in its last stages, had been originating from Chicago before a live audience in a hotel ballroom as far back as the World War II years, brightening the mornings with its daily staples of jokes, music, quizzes, fun and games. The show was so old-fashioned that it was on the edge of anachronism by 1967, but we felt it made sense to air it as our morning show, appealing to an adult audience. We thought that even at its corniest our listeners would prefer it to more mindless prattle from the rock jocks.

We felt lucky to have the ABC association, figuring it as a plus for us new kids on the block in a steaming market of 32 stations.

In 1970 I took a call at the station from Tom White, who was affiliates representative for the NBC Radio Network. Tom said he was in town briefly and wanted to drop by for a chat. That was when he made the offer for WCPK to join

up with NBC.

I felt that joining the NBC lineup made sense for us on several levels. First among them was NBC's long-running prestige as a giant network; ABC frankly was a few years away from the parity it would indeed attain, and its Entertainment Network carried an even less distinguished cachet. And it mattered quite a bit that NBC thought enough of our adult programming, our ratings performance and our potential, to be wooing us.

Last but not least, if we took NBC it would mean that the network would be dropping WVAB, its current affiliate—the daytimer Virginia Beach station that was owned by our adversaries in the FCC case for the vacant FM frequency.

We took the deal, and stumbled into an added bonus. Our contract with ABC still had some overlapping period to run after NBC had departed from WVAB, and so there was a hectic period when we were carrying the programming of both networks, while our competitors had none.

The other station actually filed a "They-have-two-and-we-have-none!" grievance with the FCC after the gambit, putting our side in mind of the fourth and fifth-toe laments of the little-piggy-went-to-market nursery rhyme: "This little piggy had none and cried wee wee wee all the way home."

The FCC eventually chose not to act on their filing.

Again, Katy and I became very active in the NBC family of stations, attending regional and national meetings, meeting many of the NBC personalities and bosses as well as a whole new set of colleagues at other NBC affiliate stations.

One such meeting was at the Sheraton Hotel in Arlington, Virginia. It had been a two-day session with

about 15 member stations from the Middle Atlantic states. Everyone wore the ubiquitous stick-on name tags, but not everyone always believed what they read. At dinner on the last day of the meetings, a fellow station owner almost indignantly turned to me at the table and said, "What is this about the 'Charlie Payne' name? You're really John Chancellor, aren't you?"

With our new NBC connections we added the names of Chancellor, David Brinkley, Joe Garagiola, Tom Brokaw, Edwin Newman, Garrick Utley, Dr. Joyce Brothers, Gene Shalit and Bess Myerson to our daily programming, all real assets in our drive to turn our once tiny daytimer into a Tidewater media gorilla.

Since the Norfolk area and its naval establishments were so integral to national defense topics, I was asked to voice and feed frequent news stories on defense matters to the network. One such story was the keel-laying of the aircraft carrier U.S.S. John F. Kennedy at Newport News.

My new semi-career as a correspondent didn't always deal only with defense. Once when a federal judge in Norfolk was ruling on a legal tactic by the lawyers for Vice President Spiro Agnew, who was facing impeachment charges, I went live on the whole NBC radio network on a pay phone from the Federal Courts Building. It had been a long while since I had felt that great thrumming tension that comes to news reporters before live mikes on breaking stories.

But scratch any old broadcaster and under the veneer of respectability you'll find a lurking promotional guy. In my case I was never far away from the audacious under-currents of my McLendon training. At WCPK we seized every opportunity to tie in NBC's more traditional national advertising and promotional efforts—things like T-shirts,

Virginia Beach beach towels and the like.

But beyond that we tried to use print, billboards and other media to our advantage, as well as the heavy dosage of on-air promotions that are common to every station.

One of our air promotions proclaimed, "... the air is sweeter over Tidewater!" The reference was to the sweet music flowing from the top of the dial at 1600, of course. But when we tried to enforce the slogan by running big newspaper ads printed in perfumed ink, the Norfolk papers (also owners of a competing AM and FM station tandem) refused to run it. Their official reason was that the perfumed ink would be a lingering environmental nuisance in the press-room—which we reluctantly had to agree was probably reason enough. It didn't stop them later, however, from running tons of perfumed-ink scratch-offs for food and cosmetics advertisers.

Newspaper ownerships and power alliances in Tidewater made for some Byzantine combinations. Chesapeake, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth and Suffolk had weekly newspapers; the strong dailies were in Norfolk and Newport News/Hampton. In Norfolk the morning *Virginian-Pilot* and the afternoon *Ledger-Star* both were owned by Norfolk Newspapers, Inc. That company not only enjoyed a lock on the daily print market but also owned the old-line CBS radio affiliate, WTAR, and, until the 1980s, television station Channel WTAR-TV.

It was a not unique, but still pretty awesome, monopoly, although through the fair-minded and far-ranging efforts of individual writers and columnists like Larry Bonko and Lawrence Maddry, competing stations and call letters like WCPK found their way into print fairly regularly.

I managed to combine business with business on a mid-70s trip back to Dallas to join with some ex-colleagues in

buying an interest in the Dallas market's radio station KKDA. While I was in town I picked up a load of fiery jalapeno peppers. Back in Virginia—shades of McLendon's sourdough loaves—we mailed them out to agencies and ad clients attached to reminders that "WCPK is the hot one!"

That KKDA deal involved some of the former stockholders of the old Dallas sweet-music KIXL. Nothing much came of it under so many absentee owners, but toward the end of the decade we sold it to a group that took it to the urban rock format, with great success. They've done well through the years—and so did we on the sale.

Sporadically our promotional campaigns involved heavy buys of television time and billboards, for reasons having to do with one of the paradoxes of radio promotions. To this day many stations seem not to be aware of the contradictions involved in promoting your station *on* your station. They seem to think that's enough, and it's free for the station. But the problem is, the people who are hearing your on-air promotions are already listening to your station. The new listeners you want are tuned to some other station, and they'll simply never hear your spots. It's expensive electronic masturbation.

In Tidewater we used TV advertising, weekly newspapers and billboard campaigns in order to reach the people we knew weren't listening to us. The trick obviously is to entice them into listening for the first time, and thus also take them away from the other stations. Our own on-air promotional schedules were fairly conservative in number; we saw no reason to keep reselling our own listeners after we had them. We were confident that our programming format would keep them, once they came aboard. Too many stations, even still today, beat their listeners over the ears with endless back-patting promos, reaching no one new,

and sometimes succeeding only in driving loyal listeners away.

Many of WCPK's on-air promotions dovetailed with the outside advertising we were doing. One that worked involved a billboard campaign that was a big investment for us. We had a contest offering prizes for listeners who could spot the most WCPK billboards, complete with locations. Each campaign enforced the other.

In one sales effort tied in to a grocery chain and the Virginia Apple Bureau, we offered crates of apples as prizes in a contest to see who would send us the longest continuous apple peel.

Also at the time, the early and mid-70s, environmental concerns were just rising to the public consciousness. Seizing what we thought was a timely opportunity, we tried out a new slogan: "Beautiful music from WCPK ... the delightful solution to air pollution!"

It was an opportunity that would have been better left unseized. Our premise had been to play on the idea of our nice sounds as a relief from the rest of the aural litter on the airways, but we were among the first to learn that environmentalists have no sense on humor on the subject.

There was another misfire that I still think was a good idea. During this period a continuing news story was the presence of Soviet ships—trawlers, submarines, other warships—lurking in international waters but just outside the territorial limits, almost within sight of the naval bases around Norfolk. It was a common gambit of the cold war, and of course our ships were doing the same thing around their maritime borders. But virtually every time there was a sighting of a Red ship, the Tidewater media made a story out of the incident.

I contacted Dr. John Fahey of the foreign languages

department at Old Dominion University in Norfolk. We asked for his help in recording announcements in the Russian language to play on the station:

"Attention Russian Naval vessels in North Atlantic waters now listening to my voice. Your mission may be to observe space shots or to monitor U.S. ship movements, but we at WCPK know why you are really here. You naturally have your radios tuned to WCPK to enjoy, for the first time, the sound of the world's most beautiful music!"

We would run the spots in Russian, with no explanation in English. First, we felt, this would tweak the curiosity of our listeners, maybe even up to fever pitch the longer we ran them with no explanation; and if somewhere down the road a local columnist wanted to print a translation of what we were saying, well ...

I thought it was exactly the sort of impish, intelligent, topical and basically harmless thing Gordon McLendon would have done. But the spots never got on the air. When we ran the idea past our Washington attorney—our FCC case was still in limbo—he had a seizure of sputtering prudence. "Good God, Charlie," he said, "with our case up before the FCC we don't need any of this kind of trouble. They'll take it the wrong way. People will think you're giving aid and comfort to the commies! It might cause an international incident!"

So we abstained. Things were tense at the time, anyway. Along with the ship sightings, Russian Air Force planes were seen frequently off the Virginia coast, skirting the limits while making cargo runs down the Atlantic to Cuba. It was not uncommon to see in the Norfolk media close-up photos our Navy and Air Force planes had taken of the Soviet fliers, giving the high sign and perhaps a few other finger gestures as they flew south.

Another time the military presence caused a problem for us no one ever had imagined, more proof for my rule that in the highly technical, split-second world of broadcast communications, it's best to expect the unexpected.

It was a fine sunny day in southeastern Virginia when a listener called to tell us we had a problem. He was calling from the downtown Norfolk area and reported that our signal was dropping out; something was blanking us out and he thought we'd want to know about it.

I put out a call for our chief engineer, described the problem to him and sent him driving around downtown in his car. He called in before long to report he could find no problems of intermittent jamming, or any other difficulties, on his car radio.

Not being satisfied with the answer, I headed for the waterfront myself.

In the area known as Waterside, a downtown tourist and amusement area, I began to hear the station's signals dropping. The closer I got to the pier district, the more our signal was being cancelled.

I saw, tied up at a pier on Brambleton Avenue, a ship similar to a Coast Guard cutter but bearing the insignia of NOAA—the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The closer I got to that ship, the more our signal was being obliterated. I understood that those guys in the NOAA were into esoteric and secret stuff, but this was my radio station they were stepping on.

Rushing back to the office, I called the local office of the FCC to complain about the problem. They take a dim view of anyone interfering with the transmissions of a legally licensed FCC radio station. An inspector in their office said he'd look into it immediately.

After a half-hour or so and no word yet from the FCC, and still more reports of blighted broadcasts, I called the NOAA regional offices in our area. Next thing I knew, my call was being patched through directly to the officer in command of the vessel that was docked in town and smothering our signal.

I said that, as the owner of the radio station that was being rendered silent by his operations, I wanted to know what kind of broadcast activity was going on aboard his ship. I said I'd already squawked to the FCC.

He replied that it was none of my business. "This ship and its operations are not subject to FCC rules and regulations," he snapped. "I am operating with the authority of the President of the United States. I will explain nothing to you."

I could discern that this skipper was not inclined to be conciliatory, and that his training had not included a Dale Carnegie course.

The only parting shot he left me was my promise to him that I somehow would see that he did shut down his transmitter and stop interfering with my livelihood.

Next I called the bigger NOAA office in Rockville, Maryland, explaining my concern, telling them that I had sicced the FCC onto the case and explaining why.

After another half-hour, I got a phone call from that same ship commander, who was now apologizing for causing the problem and for any inconvenience. He told me that his headquarters had just ordered him "to secure" (i.e., shut down) his radio transmitter on the ship and, furthermore, never to activate it in port again. Later I learned exactly what was happening. One of NOAA's primary missions is the frequent mapping of our coastline, sending sonar signals to shoals, sandbars, islands and the like. To triangulate

its precise position, the ship would broadcast an unmodulated carrier wave with the letter "A" in Morse code—*dit dah*—which in turn was heard by their headquarters for logging purposes. The transmitter aboard the vessel was operating at the frequency of 1618 kilohertz—closer than next door to our 1600 signal; it was on our front porch.

The mischievous physics of radio waves never cease to amaze me. They do strange and unpredictable things. Every month or so, our station would sign back on the air at 2:00 in the morning to broadcast regular equipment tests. Since AM waves travel farther at night and we were broadcasting our tests at an hour when the ether was clear of the stations that filled it during the daytime, we could hop, skip and bounce some immense but incalculable distances. Many of the hobbyists' DX Radio Clubs around the country, and the world, were always searching for transmissions like this. Many of them would tune us in during our tests. In the bare hour that we would be on the air, we would reach sets in a stunning number of distant places. We logged in listeners (by mail and phone) from Halifax, Nova Scotia; Montreal, Detroit, Chicago, Atlanta, New York City. We would hear from these DX listeners, confirming our program content, and then we would send them verification cards for their files. (These were the trophies that radio hobbyists collected.) Often the DX listeners would tape-record our program so that we could actually hear what our signal sounded like in those distant places.

One day the mail brought a stunning surprise. The envelope was postmarked Wiesbaden, West Germany. The listener there had heard WCPK at 1600 AM at about midnight local German time, 5:00 p.m. our own Eastern time. He had heard one of our regular transmissions, citing our musical program, news, commercials. He said that our sta-

tion from Chesapeake, Virginia, was putting one of the strongest signals into West Germany at the top of the dial. The only other station even coming close to our signal strength and clarity was a German radio station broadcasting at the oddball, in U.S. terms, frequency of 1573 kilohertz. With our transmitter being hard by the Atlantic coast, we had a fairly unobstructed vault across the ocean to Germany. There are radio buffs who have experienced even stranger skips than this, but this one was plenty strange enough for us.

## *Chapter 20*

### **End of Tunnel**

There is a world of difference between AM and FM radio. AM—Amplitude Modulation—uses the ionosphere for long-distance reception. The radio signal is bounced from the tower to the ionosphere, often with a result similar to that described in the previous chapter when our AM station was heard quite well in Wiesbaden, Germany. But this phenomenon can only be depended upon on a regular basis by using short-wave AM transmission.

And strange as it may seem, a nice-sounding FM—Frequency Modulation—station, even with 50,000 or 100,000 watts—cannot be heard at such long distances. The signal characteristics of the FM signal limit the usual transmission area to the horizon in all directions. For radio/TV engineering beginners, TV uses both AM and FM transmissions to bring pictures and sounds into people's home. The picture is the result of processing the signal in AM. The crystal-clear sound comes courtesy of an FM signal.

FM broadcasting reached a parity with AM in the mid-70s and seems destined to remain popular well into the future. This is precisely what led us to apply for the FCC Construction Permit in 1969. Ours was a grinding process of disappointments, delays, counter-claims and more delays. But we believed that the headaches, heartaches and nervous fatigue would be worth the ultimate prize.

Washington D.C. is a strange place. I always held the FCC as sacrosanct and believed it was above the politics on the Hill.

I was about to be proven wrong.

Day after day, month after month we waited. Suddenly, the FCC ordered an oral argument on some of the issues of the case, without giving our attorney proper notice. We soon learned that a senator was allegedly pulling strings with an influential Commission member, to the detriment of Payne of Virginia. We also learned that the senator was a lifelong friend of our adversary in the case. The news was devastating.

Almost overnight—and for the first time since our 1969 filing—we found ourselves facing the real possibility of losing the case.

Katy and I were in Washington at the time, and we decided to fight back. We fired our attorney, hired a new one and sued the FCC. Our hope was to get things back on track and win this case once and for all.

Rather than face a charge from Payne of Virginia of mishandling the case, the FCC's legal section asked the judge to remand the case back to the Commission, meaning that they had thrown in the towel. Big Victory!

Katy and I spent so much time in Washington in those days that we knew the back streets of the nation's capital better than we did those of our station's city of operation, Virginia Beach. All we wanted—and felt we deserved—was an FM companion station to WCPK. Meanwhile, the attorneys' fees kept piling up.

More months of waiting ensued. Delay tactics ran rampant. And every time more paperwork was filed, the FCC had to review it. And the legal expenses kept piling up.

Finally, after 11 years and one day of trials and tribulations, we got the word: the 50,00-watt FM station was ours! It was November 6, 1980—a day neither Katy nor I will ever forget. (We later heard that our lawsuit against the FCC helped turn things in our favor.)

Ours would be the only FM station licensed to the largest city in Virginia. And, as time would prove, it was a very valuable property.

And it was a time for double celebration as our youngest son, George, and his wife presented us with our second grandson, Benjamin. He was honey-blond and just as delightful as his brother, Brandon. We had so many reasons to be proud and happy. (George, meanwhile, had proven himself a real computer whiz. He was totally in charge of the computers that controlled the office functions of both stations.)

Next, we had to pick our call letters. We knew our sound would be beautiful music, and we wanted something that would connote that to the listeners. We went through hundreds of call letters before settling on WNRN—to be referred to as “The Winner” in Virginia Beach, which it really was, in so many ways.

Right in the middle of all this, we got a call from our dear friend and former colleague Homer Odom in San Luis Obispo, California. He had just bought a station there with the call letters KATY. He wanted new call letters and wanted to offer us the chance to apply for KATY if we wanted them. Of course, KATY wouldn't have worked in Virginia because of the FCC's long-standing dictate that stations east of the Mississippi start with a “W.”

It would have been such a perfect tribute to my Katy if we could have used those call letters, but the FCC wasn't about to change a 50-year rule for us. So, we went for The Winner, WNRN-FM 95.

But we will always remember Homer's offer as a beautiful gesture.

*Chapter 21*

**Have You Hugged Your Radio Today?**

Our new station sounded great, and there was a reason for that. We bought only the very best equipment. State of the art. Cost was no factor. It had to be The Best.

We knew WNRN's sound and reputation would reflect directly back on us, and we were driven by a maxim from Sir Winston Churchill: "I am easily pleased with the best of everything."

We turned to friends like Johnny Borders and Ken Dowe in Dallas and Ron Ruth at New York's WOR for specially recorded voice tracks and station I.D.s. They were magnificent, and we remain most grateful.

WNRN's programming was unique in many ways. In those days, practically every FM station signing on was affiliated with companies that sent the programs to the stations via satellite. There was no local control over what went on the air. But we always preferred to choose our own music.

Having total control over our music allowed us to pay tribute to the many wonderful artists who called Virginia and North Carolina home—greats such as Ella Fitzgerald, who was born in Newport News. How nice it was to be able to go into our own music files and pull Ella's discs when she visited us at the studio. We were the "Voice of Good Music" in our area, and I know we succeeded. (By the way, hearing Ella sing Cole Porter, backed by a full symphony, was something never to be forgotten. Our tape was running that night, for sure.)

Other visitors included Portsmouth native Tommy

Newsome, the saxophone star who often filled in for Doc Severinson on *The Tonight Show*; and Skitch Henderson, Henry Mancini and Meredith Wilson.

WNRN was really a family affair. George had put all the computer chips to the test, and our oldest son, Charles Jr., flew in from Dallas to be of managerial and promotional assistance. (Charles Jr. graduated from Southern Methodist University; George graduated from the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.)

On May 5, 1984, the big day had finally come, and our station control room was a delightfully busy place. From 6:00 a.m. to 11:59 a.m. we played continuous music—no titles, no commercials, no deejays. Just music. At 11:59, we went silent for one minute. Then, at noon, we played the complete 15-minute concert arrangement of Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." This was how we had started WCPK-AM 17 years before.

Our station had taken to the air at last.

The phones immediately began ringing. After the Gershwin, I made a special announcement, Katy paid special tribute to all who had helped us get the station on the air, and George paid a moving tribute to all of us. We saved the scripts and a tape recording of that auspicious occasion.

Since we were *The Winner*, the second song we played was a Broadway chorus vocal arrangement of "Step to the Rear and let a Winner Lead the Way!" That got *The Winner* off to a happy, rousing start.

To promote the station, we used newspaper ads and billboards to promote give-aways such as "Winner Dollars," in which listeners had to match serial numbers on dollar bills with numbers we announced on the air. We gave away everything from cruises to bicycles to nice dinners at leading restaurants.

Of course, cash was the most popular prize, and we gave away \$95 a pop to call attention to our dial position, 95 (94.9), booming in with 50,000 watts from the top of our spanking new 536-foot tower.

A special word here about the TV announcements we had produced for us in Hollywood, a series that later won national acclaim. A production special effect called "sparkles" would fill the TV screen on cue with a glittering, colorful outpouring of these "sparkles" keyed to easy-listening music. The sparkles appeared to be coming out of a radio speaker.

We had many different scenarios written—including a young couple listening to our music, and a year-old baby being given a bath. With all the cooing and the sparkling, we had a winning production for The Winner that helped us spread the word about our new operation. We bought time on three TV stations, and I still have copies of the "sparkles" series on videotape.

We spent an impressive amount of money on our billboards campaign. To promote the "Winner Dollars" contests, we had a huge dollar bill with a portrait of your author replacing George Washington. The contest gimmick was that every half-hour we would announce another "Winner 95 Dollar" contest. The first listener to call in with a "95" on the serial number of a dollar bill could win any of a number of prizes.

We heard from practically every bank in the area that customers were requesting an unusual number of dollar bills to play our game. It surely did call attention to our station.

Listenership was fantastic and solid for about 100 miles in all directions. Merchants in Richmond—more than 90 miles away—put up special antennas so they could play

our station in their places of business.

We heard from listeners in Annapolis, Maryland, and deep into North Carolina. We could claim a fairly dominant coverage position in all of the Middle Atlantic states—Virginia, North Carolina, the Del-Mar-Va Peninsula, as well as the ships at sea!

The amount of mail, telegrams and phone calls we got was almost unbelievable, and I still have the letters and wires in my files.

One, in particular, caught our attention. The writer, who loved our music, told us that he was a pilot for T.W.A., working out of J.F.K. Airport in New York—a 45-minute hop from Virginia Beach. He told us that he set up his home stereo to record WNRN while he was away.

His normal flight schedule was London, Paris, Rome and back to New York. He told us that Winner-95 never sounded better than when he serenaded his loaded 747 at 30,000-plus feet with the sounds of our Virginia Beach FM station, complete with news and even local Virginia Beach commercials. According to our pilot friend, many passengers commented on Winner-95 music and often said they wished they lived close enough to hear our station all the time. That pilot's letter was one of the finest tributes we ever received.

One day at about 2:00 p.m., we got a call from Gordon McLendon, who had checked into the Omni Waterfront Hotel in Norfolk. Of course, Katy and I headed out as soon as we could to see our old friend. We did not know why he was in Virginia, but we knew we could expect an interesting conversation. And we got one.

Gordon was the kind of man who just naturally kept busy and liked to explore various projects. We learned that he had sold all of his radio stations and, with the money,

bought precious metals—not the paper certificates, but the metals themselves. Gordon had just written a book, *Get Really Rich in the Super Metals Boom*, and he told us about his research. (A note on the book's cover said, "A worldwide inflation is murdering your money and your standard of living. Defend yourself.")

To Gordon, the key was strategic metals—cobalt, chromium, germanium, tungsten and the like, and they would soon be as valuable as gold and silver. He went on to say that our paper money was fast losing its value and that the future was in tangible assets.

Gordon had already appeared on nationwide telephone talk shows with Larry King and several others. We learned that he had come to Virginia to appear on the Christian Broadcasting Network's *The 700 Club* with Pat Robertson, based in Virginia Beach. Via satellite, this program was carried throughout the world. Gordon's appearance on *The 700 Club* went smoothly, and he seemed pleased.

He gave us a copy of his new book and wrote a special inscription:

*"To Charlie and Katie Payne ... dear, dear friends of many summers, who have trod the same roads so often. I shall always cherish your friendship.*

*Your admirer, Gordon McLendon"*

As fate would have it, that was our last meeting with Gordon McLendon, a true 20th-century genius.

## Chapter 22

### It Was What We Didn't Play...

The radio station owners' fraternity is close-knit, and it always amazed me how many friends—some close, some not so close—kept up with our 11-year struggle to land our cherished FM signal. Often people would call with barely concealed offers to buy the station if we changed our minds about it.

One local owner offered us one million for just the Construction Permit before we had begun building. We graciously declined. We heard from brokers, most not willing to take "no" for an answer. Interested would-be buyers flew in to make their appeals. No luck.

But in a weak moment one day, I told an Atlanta broker that while we were not interested in selling the stations at that time, I had arrived at a figure to be treated as the "floor" for any future negotiations. I had kept track of the selling prices of other AM/FM combinations and figured the highest price two stations similar to ours could bring. Then I added 30 percent and a contract not to compete.

A firm condition of any sale was that we would have to have cash out front. This deterred some brokers, but the calls kept coming.

Meanwhile, we were at last enjoying the fruits of our victory after the 11-year struggle with the FCC, and our staff worked hard to keep our musical standards the highest.

We had access to thousands of LPs in pristine condition, and we programmed many tracks that could not be bought in the United States. We got many such discs at record

stores in Bermuda, and friends we had known through the years sent us music from places like Vienna.

Add to that the hundreds of LPs in the London Records FFRR Series (Full Frequency Range Recordings), and you have just a taste of what we sounded like. Of course, we received every release from the major studios, as well.

One Saturday afternoon I got a call from a group owner who had been exploring beautiful music formats in the country's major markets. He and his team had been everywhere from Los Angeles to New York, San Francisco to Atlanta. But it was our station that caught his ear.

His question to me was, "Where do you get your music?"

He was tired of the droning, dull, monotonous sounds his subscription service was providing. I told him we produced our own sound and that I, personally, selected the tunes, the arrangements and the unique blend we played.

He said he wanted that sound for his stations and asked if we could transmit it via satellite. We soon learned that National Public Radio in Arlington, Virginia had spare uplink channels and would be open to negotiation.

In explaining our music policy, I emphasized to the owner that what made our sound so good was not the music we played—it was the music we didn't play. That was always our unwavering policy.

Using mail and phone calls, we kept a very accurate poll of which music was good enough or interesting enough to elicit comments. And we were always careful to remember our credo: *"It's NOT the music we play—it's what we DON'T play that makes our sound different. We choose it. We're responsible."*

Sometimes, we just stumbled onto great music. Once, we got a 45 RPM disc from Columbia Records in addition to

their regular shipment of LPs. It was by a then-unknown artist named Julio Iglesias. In less than 15 minutes we had listened to both sides, dubbed them to airplay tape and were the first station in the Mid-Atlantic region to play Julio Iglesias and his new, exciting arrangement of "Begin the Beguine."

Another time, we got a 12-inch LP by an artist I had never heard of. We could see from the mailer that it came from Garland, Texas, a Dallas suburb. The artist was pianist Jack Melick. Again, we prepared an airplay tape as quickly as possible, and our lines were bombarded with calls from listeners wanting to buy the album. We have since become good friends with Jack, and as members of the Chaparral Club can attest, you've never heard anything to compare to Jack Melick's arrangement of the bolero "Malaguena Salerosa."

Perhaps the most popular utilization of our musical library was my weekly production, "Sunday Spectacular." This show gave our listeners the chance to enjoy tributes to outstanding composers of our day and generations past. The show was very popular and won national and even international acclaim. Some interesting stories evolved around some of our subjects.

Browsing through our "Million Dollar Library," I happened across some recordings by a Viennese composer named Robert Stolz. Herr Professor Dr. Stolz followed in the line of earlier Viennese greats—a latter-day Johann Strauss, many critics proclaimed. When Hitler invaded Austria, Stolz found his way to New York and on to Hollywood, where he became an Academy Award-winning film composer. He wrote countless operettas and film scores, along with some of the prettiest ballads ever put to paper. His "Two Hearts in Three-Quarter Time" was then

and is today a popular standard worldwide.

I decided to tackle a tribute to Robert Stolz—a full hour in the Sunday Spectacular series. The result was most gratifying. The paper in Norfolk ran a Sunday story on the show, along with a picture of Stolz, and listeners responded very favorably.

Sometime the next week, we received an inquiry from the Austrian Embassy in Washington D.C. They had heard about the program, and I sent them a tape of the show. Within a couple of weeks, we received a parcel from Vienna—directly from Herr Professor Dr. Robert Stolz!

We wrote back and forth several times and soon got an actual voice recording of the great composer, along with countless LPs produced in Europe and unavailable in the United States. Dr. Stolz and his family provided us with a treasure trove of recorded material. From then on it became an annual Christmas event to receive, via overseas mail, collections of Viennese pastries from Dr. Stolz and his wife.

The “old country” enjoys many traditions, but honoring their writers and composers ranks right at the top. Music festivals abound, and, of course, the works of Dr. Stolz continue to enjoy top billing. Commemorating one such event was the production of a brass bowl with a special engraving of the first four bars of “Two Hearts in Three-Quarter Time.” Frau Stolz (Einzi) made sure that we received one from Vienna. This tribute still enjoys a most special place in our collections. In July 1990, Frau Stolz, by then the widow of the famed composer, honored Katy and me with membership in the exclusive International Robert Stolz Society. The ceremonies took place in Vienna.

Back at home, Katy and I continued our involvement in numerous civic projects. Thanks to her hard work, Katy was again appointed head of the Virginia Chapter of American

Women in Radio. We also worked with the Better Business Bureau and the Red Cross. Our stations hosted guided tours of our facilities for high-school students, and we found that many were enthusiastic about pursuing a career in broadcasting. Several were later successful.

At the time, J.J. Freeman was the engineer in charge of the Middle Atlantic area for the FCC. Shortly after Winner-95 hit the air, he called to ask if I'd speak at an all-day seminar for new FCC engineers. The plan was to answer any and all questions, based on my lifetime in the profession.

Of course, I was delighted to accept. I think the engineers found it interesting, and I know I did. They came up with many good questions. A few days later, we received a beautifully engraved plaque from the FCC in appreciation of my appearance, and it also has a special place in our collection.

And while that is one of many wonderful memories from my time in radio, there were a few that weren't quite so sterling—in fact, some were downright embarrassing.

Whenever a musical artist came to our area, if the music fit our format, we tried to be the host stations. When Julio Iglesias made his first Virginia appearance, we were anxious to promote it. What we didn't know was that Roseanne Barr was his opening act! She had only recently created a media sensation with her off-key singing of the National Anthem at a baseball game in San Diego, complete with spitting and crotch-grabbing (mimicking baseball players). As "host stations," we were more than a little embarrassed. The New York booking agents just failed to tell us that she was the opening act.

Meanwhile, the brokers were becoming more and more aggressive. Our stations sounded good, and our coverage was super, which, of course, meant that the stations had

increased in value. Naturally, the sales commission to the lucky broker would be higher, too.

It was at this time, though, that we received heartbreaking news from Dallas: Gordon McLendon was gravely ill, suffering from incurable cancer. As the preceding pages have outlined, we thoroughly enjoyed our association with this true genius of broadcasting, first as a competitor, then as part of his team. We maintained warm relations long after I left his corporation for the canyons of New York City, and he was always a true and trusted friend. He died on September 14, 1986.

It seems almost impossible to realize that never again will we be thrilled by his opening line, "Hello, everybody, everywhere—this is The Ole Scotchman, Gordon McLendon."

Don Keyes, Gordon's alert and tremendously talented assistant, called one day to tell me that Ron Chapman at KVIL-FM in Dallas had researched, written and produced an hour-long tribute to Gordon. Don sent me a cassette copy. I wrote Ron to tell him what an outstanding job he had done, and he replied with words that fit my sentiments exactly: "All our lives were magnified by being in the presence of G.B.M. Gordon was one of a kind. There simply won't be another."

But even after such a loss, the family carries on under the expert guidance of Gordon's son, Bart. I see many similarities between father and son, and I think Gordon would be proud of Bart's work. Bart, like his father, is an independent thinker, with the same definite strains of innovation and persistence. And, just as important, he's an all-around nice guy.

## Chapter 23

### Zsa Zsa Said It!

Well, it's about time to sign off now. One of those brokers found a buyer who had the cash and passed FCC muster. We proceeded with the sale.

Dick Hitt, my friend and editor of this book, was on staff at the *Dallas Times Herald* when news of the sale hit the wire. Dick took the opportunity to have a little fun with me in his column by writing something along these lines:

*"While holding down a top McLendon Company post, and when business travel took him to Los Angeles, Charlie always preferred to stay at the Century Plaza. Get it??? The 'CP' on the towels at the Century Plaza—'CP' for Charlie Payne."*

In a follow-up piece, he reported that with the sale of the two stations, *"Katie and Charlie can now afford their own 'CP' monogrammed towels—and then some."*

He also wrote once about a funny incident that involved Katy and me, as well as Gordon, Clint Murchison Jr. and his Dallas entourage.

The locale: the Beverly Rodeo Hotel in Beverly Hills. It was a cocktail party honoring the Dallas Cowboys. In attendance were such stars as John Wayne, Robert Cummings, Lana Turner, Juliet Prowse and Zsa Zsa Gabor. For the affair, Clint had flown in an ample spread of Texas chili with all the fixin's.

Early on, I found myself in the food line with Zsa Zsa. Trying to be Texas-friendly, I said to Miss Gabor, "You've really got to try this authentic Texas chili." She ignored my suggestion like I had the plague. No reply at all.

As luck would have it, I found myself next to her in line

again, and I made the same suggestion. Politely but firmly, she turned to me and said, "Dahlink, vee Hungarians don't like chili mit ... anyteeng!"

Yes, it's been a fun ride, and our hope is that this book has given you a taste both of the early days of radio and of the great time we've had working in the industry. There have been moments of sheer joy and accomplishment, along with some projects that didn't turn out exactly as we had planned. Much like life itself!

Invariably the question arises, "Would you do it all over again?"

Now that you know how we feel, what would you think our answer is?

## *Epilogue*

### **That Sunday in Berlin**

In the final days of World War II, I found myself in a communications unit attached to the armored tanks of Patton's Third Army. In typical Patton style, we were screaming down the Autobahn—all units floorboarded. Our unspoken mission: Take Berlin before the Russians got there.

The honest feeling was that the Germans would prefer to surrender to American forces rather than the Russians. Time has proven that we were right.

But about 100 miles outside Berlin, we got orders to hold steady and await further instructions. When those instructions came, none of us liked them. We were to turn roughly 90 degrees southeast and drive toward the Czechoslovakian border. We wound up at Plauen, a few kilometers from Prague. Meanwhile, the Russian forces from the east entered Berlin, and a fierce, block-by-block struggle ensued. The war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945, and I never did get to Berlin. I could recall my teen-age years in Texas, tuning in Hitler's diatribes on the short-wave, and I could only imagine what Berlin looked like—the Tiergarten, the Brandenburg Gate, the Reichstag buildings. As an adult, I still wanted to see Berlin!

Finally, in 1991, my chance came. Katy and I planned a trip that would include five days in London and a short visit to Berlin, at long last. On November 3, we checked out of the Hotel Intercontinental in Vienna for the 80-minute flight to Berlin's Tegel Airport.

Unable to find a cab, we lugged our bags onto what we

thought was an airport bus that would take us straight to the hotel, but it turned out to be a local bus, and we made plenty of stops along the way. Finally, we reached the Kempinski Bristol Hotel on Kurfurstendamm Strasse. When the young woman at the front desk asked for my credit card, I realized to my dismay that I had lost my wallet!

We had a good supply of traveler's checks, and while my wallet contained no cash, it held my credit cards and my driver's license. Believe me, it's a real downer to find yourself 5,000 miles away from home on a blustery, drizzly, 40-degree Sunday afternoon with no wallet.

Still, we vowed to make the best of the situation, and with camera in hand we took a leisurely stroll through the heart of old Berlin. At last I was there.

Among the many things we saw that day, we found ourselves most curious about the half-destroyed spires of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Cathedral adjacent to the Mercedes-Benz complex. In my best broken German, I asked several people why this magnificent church had never been restored. Several said the bombed-out cathedral was to be left as it was as a reminder to the German people of "past transgressions."

Despite the dismal weather, we had a marvelous walk. The luscious green parks, magnificent fountains and other embellishments hinted at the glory that must have been pre-war Berlin.

Katy and I returned to the hotel about 5:30 p.m. with night already beginning to fall. As we entered our room, we heard the phone ringing. Miracle of miracles, a man had called the hotel to report that he had my wallet!

Turns out I had lost it on the bus to the hotel, and the man's girlfriend had found it. Fortunately, I had placed a

copy of our itinerary in the wallet—along with our medical histories and other pertinent information—and that's how the man was able to track us down.

He agreed to meet me in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. I waited nervously. Finally, at 6:35, the man arrived with his girlfriend, both braving the cold, blustery weather to return my wallet. I had earlier asked the concierge what an appropriate reward might be, and he had suggested a Deutschmark note, which seemed to please the couple. After accepting my warm gratitude, they headed back out into the night.

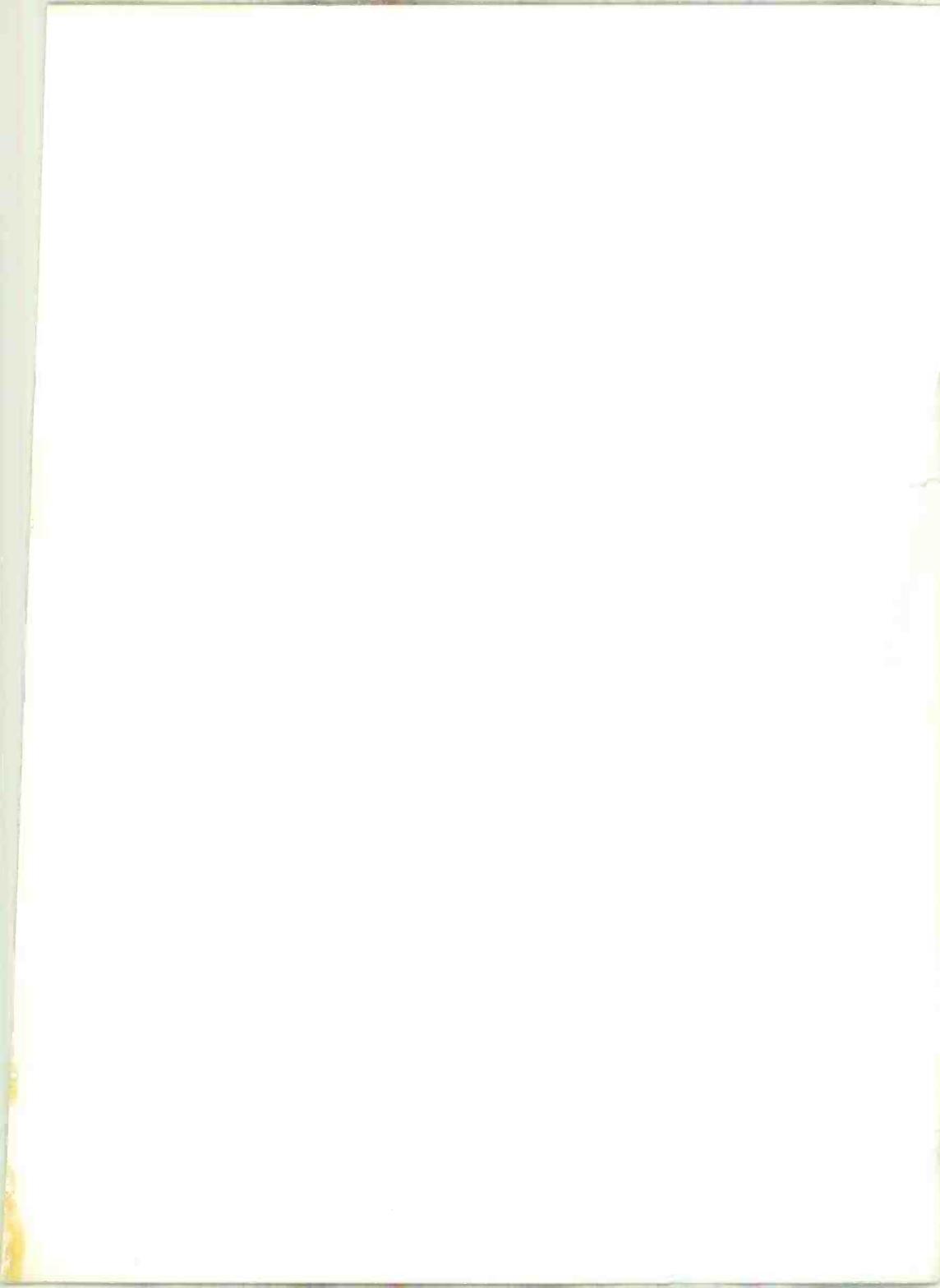
At 8:00 p.m., Katy and I were ushered to our table in an elegant restaurant, just off the lobby of the Kempenski Bristol. Well into our meal, a man began playing at a grand piano about 20 feet from our table. After a few Broadway tunes, he looked at us with a twinkle in his eye and began playing "The Yellow Rose of Texas," "Deep in the Heart of Texas" and other Lone Star favorites. Apparently, he had been inspired by our Texas accents.

Later, he came by to talk, and we learned that he was from Portugal but had recently played at one of the hotel bars at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

So within just a few hours, my first day in Berlin had gone from near disaster to the sheer joy of sharing some Dallas memories with a new friend.

All of which proves—more or less—that even on a cold November night in the middle of Europe—you're still closer to home than you think.

As long as you're from Texas, that is!





Author Charlie Payne and wife Katy at their Golden Wedding Anniversary.

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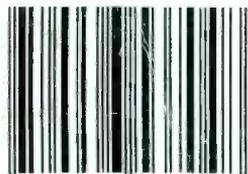
*Al Brumley, Radio Reporter, The Dallas Morning News*

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ISBN 0-9665370-4-1



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