

A LOVE AFFAIR WITH BROADCASTING

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At graduation our class had seven civil engineers out of the thirty-five that had started. Only three of the seven chose to make their careers in the field. I was one of the seven, but not one of the three. The idea of building roads, railroads and skyscrapers had great appeal originally, but after four hard years of study, I felt in my bones that I would never be a good engineer.

So here I was packing up to go home in the middle of the great depression with no job and no alternate training.

About four years earlier, my father in his 60's had the traumatic experience of closing down an 80 year old family business. Silk mills and their distribution system had come to the end of their lives all over America. His biggest mistake, in retrospect, was trying too long to swim against the tide, thereby suffering what were to him severe financial reverses.

After a few years he and a friend bought a small 250 watt Philadelphia radio station, WDAS. Since he had to keep putting his hand in his pocket to meet the weekly payroll, there was no room for me to come in. So I became an office boy in a one-man real estate office; then worked underground computing the amount of concrete being removed during the construction of the Broad Street subway; and finally as a department store trainee.

After two years of such odd jobs, while my father was on vacation, his partner, who had always wanted me to come in with them, worked out a deal with me. I was to sell radio time on commission. No sales, no pay. It would cost the company nothing. When my father came home he swallowed hard and let the agreement stand. The first sale I thought I had, after weeks of work on a uniform supply company, the owner said: "O. K. - give me the contract and I'll give it a try". When he tried to sign the pen did not work and he told me to come back the next day. That night he had a stroke and never returned.

Well, hard work finally did bring in some commissions. When my pay reached \$10 a week, I decided to go after the big time advertising agencies in New York. I found I could ride the train to New York, change \$2 into nickels and make 40 local telephone calls. By keeping copious notes, I finally produced a winner. The Lucky Strike cigarette company, sponsor of "The Hit Parade" of tunes, decided to buy time at the top of the hour. The program would say, for

example "It's 7 o'clock and time for #7 on the Hit Parade" and then play the #7 tune. This would come on at several different hours during the day.

This was the biggest thing that ever happened to me. Big advertisers just did not buy time on small non-network stations. And it led me to the idea of broadcasting the

news, every hour on the hour, all day long. I managed to get the N. W. Ayers Agency to sponsor this news for Koppers Coke and they kept it for years, I believe all through the war. This scheduling of news "on the hour" may have been done before, but after this it became a popular format all over the country.

Without network programs and with our weak 250 watts signal (some of our competitors had 50,000 watts), it was hard to get listeners to seek us out on the crowded radio dial. I made a deal with the management of the Morning Public Ledger, a fine old paper that was having difficulties of its own. We would give them free air time for promotion and they would give us free space in the paper. We used that space to run a cartoon series. Each day would appear a cartoon showing someone being left in the lurch because his friend or partner was "going home to listen to WDAS". For example, a traffic cop leaving the scene of snarled traffic or a fellow taking his ladder away leaving his co-worker hanging from the roof, in each case the departing one saying "I'M GOING HOME TO LISTEN TO WDAS". This caught on and we started to build audience and in turn sell more air time. It was an exciting time to be in the industry and those of us lucky enough to be in on the ground floor thinking up these ideas never had a dull moment.

We also had a lot of fun on the side. An old friend of mine, Morris Newburger, a New York stockbroker, was a avid



Bink and Sally – Jaipur, India, a March '93 trip to revisit some war time haunts.

sports fan. He attended all major sporting events and read the sports pages from start to finish. He, like many of us, noticed that Slippery Rock Teachers was one of the teams listed every Sunday in the NY Times, and always wondered what kind of school it was. One Saturday morning after the stock market closed he was having a few drinks with friends at lunch. Passing a pay phone on the way to the men's room, he, on the spur of the moment, called the NY Times sports department. When they answered he said, "I want to report a score" and then realized he had none to report. He stuttered "Plainfield Teachers - 21 (his secretary came from Plainfield), "Regency - 12" (another fictitious college). He hung up and forgot about it.

Sunday morning, reading the sports pages, the score he had reported jumped off the page at him. He told me about it when I was in NY that evening. We had a huge laugh about it and then agreed to keep the idea going. I would report Plainfield exploits in the Philadelphia papers and he would do the same in NY. Next Saturday I remembered our agreement but realized we had not discussed who they were playing or what the score was. The result was that Plainfield played a different opponent in the Philadelphia papers than they did in the NY papers, but of course they won in both cities.

By the third week we were better organized. We knew who we were playing and what the score was. We listed the names of friends of ours on our team, and if we knew a name that someone didn't like, he was on the opponent's team.

Three weeks later the jig was up. Time Magazine reported "Sports Page Error" and broke the story of the great hoax. I had a call from Red Smith of the Philadelphia Record. After insisting on anonymity (I couldn't risk alienating my friends in the newspaper fraternity), I filled him in on the many things on the drawing boards for future news releases. My friend Morris had already invented Johnny Chung, the mythical Chinese quarterback who was the high scorer in intercollegiate football, and owed his success to the special kind of rice he ate between the halves. Red Smith's articles covered such things as the Plainfield "W" formation in which the ends faced the backfield on the offense and another story that was about to break claiming that the music for the Red Army marching song had been stolen from the Plainfield Teachers Alma Mater. Franklin P. Adams, the famous sports columnist of the NY Herald Tribune composed a song to the tune of Cornell's "Far Above Cayuga's Waters" that began "Far above New Jersey's swamplands there's a ghostly college", and when he died that line lead off his obituary. Robert Montgomery

made a TV special based on this story and Walter Winchell and others referred to it for many years. I have a dog-eared album of yellowing clippings that I plan to get out and look over some day.

In April 1942 I entered the Signal Corps as a 2nd. Lt. I was slated to ship out to the China-Burma-India theatre. Kunming, China, I was told. As I was starting to pack, I was advised by a wise friend not to bother with clothing because all I would need would be issued to me when I got there. "Just take whiskey," he said. "You can trade that for anything." So I got lots of felt, wrapped each bottle separately and shipped the footlocker to my APO number. Needless to say, instead of Kunming I was shipped to New Delhi and then to Chabua in the Assam Valley. Though I bedeviled the transportation officer for the rest of my baggage, it never showed up. After arriving back in the states and discharged as a footlocker-less major, after marrying Genevieve Valerie Frances Ryan, after our son A. W. D. III arrived, a truck turned up one day with my footlocker. The lock was broken and it had been crated to hold it together. Inside was the original shipment intact. Of course a great party was held that began by using eye droppers to dispense the precious cargo, the portions becoming more generous as the evening wore on.

After the war my father decided to sell WDAS. It was now profitable but TV was peaking over the horizon. The buyer was Goldman Theatres and because I thought the new owners might think they had to inherit a son along with the purchase, I found a job as sales manager of WPEN. Its new owners and I did not see eye to eye from day one. Within six months I accepted an exciting offer to become sales manager of WPTZ, Philco's pioneering TV station. It was the first commercial television station in the world and I knew we were off to the races. Before going commercial, Philco had been on the air for 13 years broadcasting experimentally to large boxes with tiny screens in the homes of Philco executives. This was the end of 1947. We were the only TV station on the air in Philadelphia and shortly we were the first TV network, even if it consisted of only two stations. NBC's New York station was linked to us by radio relay. The most successful local programming was old western movies. By 1948 there were 80,000 TV sets in operation, mostly in Philadelphia bars in what was then the country's third largest city. We discovered a Trenton radio disc jockey and made him the announcer on a daytime cooking show. One day when the chef on the show did not show up, the DJ took over and was so funny it started the big time career of Ernie Kovaks.

The station was almost in the black when Westinghouse offered to buy it from Philco for \$6,000,000. This seemed like a lot of money for an operation that had yet to make a profit (today I would guess the station would be worth in excess of \$400,000,000.).

We were quite upset. Westinghouse had a fine reputation as a radio station operator. They had owned the pioneer radio station in the U. S. - KDKA Pittsburgh. They knew their business but we thought they were stodgy and slow on their feet; they would cramp our way of doing things. It turned out they liked what we were doing and gave us a free hand. They went on to buy out Dumont TV in Pittsburgh, changing its call letters to KDKA TV, and then KPIX in San Francisco. They already owned WBZ TV in Boston and later we added WJZ TV in Baltimore.

Things were really humming when NBC, owned by RCA, proposed to Westinghouse a trade of their Cleveland station and \$1 million for the newly acquired WPTZ Phila. Westinghouse resisted, but when threatened with the switch of their Phila. NBC network connection to a competitor, they acquiesced, but sued NBC. (Nine years later Westinghouse was back in Philadelphia with a lot of cash added to their bank account by a judge who agreed with them). Westinghouse wanted me to go to their new acquisition in Cleveland, but I did not want to leave Phila. NBC was willing to keep me on as assistant Manager of their radio and TV stations. After six weeks in that job, Westinghouse decided they needed a new General Sales Manager for all their radio and TV stations throughout the country and flattered me by offering me the job if I would move to New York. Once again I clung to Philadelphia and said "no".

Well, when you can't be had you appear more desirable, and after a lot of bargaining I was allowed to live in Phila and commute to New York as long as I could manage it, and was promised a vice-presidency in the near future. The four hour and twenty minute daily commute lasted for about a year, after which I moved to New York. Eventually they put me on three of their boards, made me a Senior Vice-President. I also served on the board of directors of the TV Bureau of Advertising and the Association of National Advertisers.

I frequently worked seven days a week and twelve hour days more often than not. For a boy who had never been west of west Philadelphia before the war, who then went around the world and then almost lived on airplanes for 16 years, I found it exciting and never had a dull day or wanted to rest.

Since I retired in 1973 I have tried to make up for some of the time I missed being with my son, by long talks and hopefully by revealing my deep feeling for him. I noticed recently that he appears to have been bitten by the same bug that bit his father. He is enjoying his work.

After nineteen years of a happy marriage, Genevieve passed away suddenly in 1965. For eight years I was a bachelor and then, in 1973, I met and married Sally Moss Allman. Her three sons enlarged the family in many ways. The house in Scarsdale was sold. I retired and we moved into our new home in Florida. We moored our boat at a dock in front of our house. Sally and I took many sailing courses including those given by the U. S. Power Squadron, including Advanced Piloting. I even did a little teaching! I secured my Commercial Captain's license from the Coast Guard at the age of seventy and we sailed together through most of the Florida waters and nearby Bahamas. We have chartered in the Grenadines and South England, and have crewed our friend's boats in Ireland, Australia, Greece and Norway.

Having recently sold our boat, Sally and I look forward to our summers in Maine, which are regularly spiced with the good company of Ray and Nancy Carter. We also hope to continue our travels abroad.

The Good Lord has been good to us, and we are very thankful for the good health and fortune that has come our way.



Favorite pastime – in Florida waters.