

" The Golden Days of Radio"

I had a wonderful 2 1/2 hour lunch with Rick Burnett the day after Christmas 2014. Toward the end of our luncheon gathering, Rick asked if I would bring to you a few of the memories that I want to recall through my over 25 years of broadcasting in and around the Twin Cities.

I've never had any intentions of writing "the Great American novel," so Rick, at your request and hopefully that some of the people reading this will be blessed, I will do so. Oh, and one more thing, I'm the kind of guy that loves to give credit where credit is due. And so with that little forward, let's get started .

I believe it was Charles Dickens who in his book "A Tale of Two Cities " said it best. It was the best of times, It was the worst of times.

This whole broadcast love affair began about 1956 when I was asked by a very good friend of mine from high school, Jim Eckert. to engineer his Saturday morning radio show on WMMR, the campus radio station. Can you imagine this college fraternity brother getting up at say 5:15 in the morning to engineer for my friend Jim?

After a couple of Saturday mornings, Jim asked if I would like to make this show a two headed show, meaning that we would both be active announcers. Well what do you know, six months ago I couldn't even pronounce announcer. And now I am one to quote an old adage.

I can't begin to tell you of the many, many times announcers would try to crack each other up. For brevity sake, I will only give you 1 or 2 what I thought were rather funny incidents.

We had our news coming in from the United Press International teletype machine, which was housed across the hall, in a broom closet. We lovingly said "and now here's the latest news from the WMMR broom closet"

A very funny guy by the name of John Poulos, or John Paul as he used for his radio name, did the "rip and read" newscast from the UP I wire service. It was about 2 1/2 to 3 feet in length and John started to read the top of the news without ripping it up meaning that the whole thing was a scroll under his microphone. As John started his newscast, another funny guy by the name of Tom Kilbride came into the studio and lit the corner of his newscast on fire. Well needless to say John started to speed up his newscast as fast as he could, and finally said out loud there's a hot time in the old news tonight and turned his microphone off. Probably no one else caught the break up, but those of us who were around were laughing our guts out. I remember we had a young newbie announcer who was trying to read a PSA, a public service announcement, which started out "for travel, a trip abroad, buy United States

savings bonds. Well, the announcement came out for travel, .. a trip, a broad, ò Buy United States savings bonds. Apparently, he never finished the announcement and I don't think he ever stayed with the station.

The best part about this station was that we had, I believe, almost 12 guys who were working for other Twin Cities radio stations ò Almost an unheard of background for broadcast training. For instance we had a wonderful guy by the name of John Grimes who worked weekends at KST P radio filling in during NBC's Monitor program. At that time, John could hardly get through on 3 1/2 minute newscast without several fluffs. By the way, he was our chief announcer at the time, and he graduated that year only to be picked up by the ABC information network and you heard him coast-to-coast on ABC information news. Great Going John.

I was then put in as chief announcer after John's leaving. This has nothing to do with bragging rights; it was to say to you that I had the privilege of giving the very first broadcast job to a guy by the name of Lou Riegert. Don't know that name? It turns out that Lou changed his name to Lou Waters. More on Lou's career a little later on.

WLOL-FM Radio

My first commercial radio job was a classical show host announcer for WLOL FM. My very first afternoon show started off with a bang. I was to introduce a symphony by Serge Prokofiev. As I opened up the microphone, I started off by saying welcome to the afternoon concert classics ò For our first symphony we are going to hear from Serge Profacuff, procafuff, Pro .. turned off the mic and said what's the last name to the program director in the studio said Prokofiev I opened up the mic and said Prokofiev closed it and thought for sure I just had my first hour on the air and I was going to get the pink slip and they were going to fire me. As it happened that was one of the stations that actually did let me go. Off to a great start Huh!

KDWB Radio

I won't go into the work at a couple of other radio stations, but I did want to tell you of one incident that I said earlier I would share with you. I found myself doing a summer newscaster job at KDWB radio. Why? It certainly wasn't my kind of music, but as I was broadcasting the news, guess who was doing the actual show ò It was Lou Riggert who I told you before was the young man that I hired to start his radio career at WMMR the campus radio station. But that's not the end, Lou, who at some point, changed his broadcast name to Lou Waters, then went to the West Coast and worked at their sister station KFWB in Los Angeles. Not sure you heard of that, try Lou Waters, the afternoon news anchor on CNN television for many many years. Good going Lou.

KUXL Radio

I joined the team at KUXL radio in 1962. This is where I met Hugh Cardenas who would become a lifelong friend along with his wife Patty.

The station started out about a block away from the Golden Valley water tower. One of the only incidents that I remember was when I was doing ~~an~~ afternoon drive+, during the three minutes a song was playing, I went to the rest room. It was a hot summer day in July, and I was the only one working the station at that time. Wouldn't you know a gust of wind blew the door to the studio closed and it was locked. What to do? The only thing I could do was to break down the door. I'm sure that left an indelible mark on the folks at the station. I'm sure I was the talk of the town for a few days anyway.

KROC Radio and Television

Somehow, I got a call to join the staff of KROC radio and TV in Rochester. Apparently Bill Ingram who was the 10 o'clock Newscaster, on KSTP TV in the Twin Cities was let go or whatever, from KROC TV. They called me down to have me do the afternoon traffic radio program, and be the 10 pm news caster. Well, much to their surprise, I was not much of a typist. So they moved me onto the 10 pm weather slot, and hired Ed Karow to be the 10 PM news anchor. I might tell you at this point that I was not a meteorologist, but during my stay in Rochester, I took up flying lessons and became a private pilot, one of my lifelong ambitions. But back to the weather show, because of my flying information and my study of whether circumstances and situations that might be present in weather, I guess I was somewhat informed.

The one story I remember about this station was that Rochester had a 13 week drought that summer. It was a very serious situation for the farmers in the area. Well after several months of doing the same weather forecast on a nightly basis, I decided to ham it up a bit. I started coming on with an umbrella, raincoat and any other silly thing that I could think of to give the weather show a slight (hippie dippy weatherman type of feel). I guess it worked, because people kept watching the 10 o'clock weather.

At this point I'd like to digress a bit. To know me is to know that I'm a pretty modest fellow, and not given to stardom or trying to be in the limelight. This first was noticed when I would go into a grocery store or the drugstore and all eyes in the place turned. This bothered me greatly, and I found myself hiding from the public. More about that later on, as I tell you about my recollections of Dave Moore WCCO TV newscaster forever almost.

After a year of doing afternoon drive radio, and the 10 o'clock weather, I was hauled into the manager's office to tell me that because I was the only single man on staff at that time, and

because they were having an economy move— whatever that meant, I was asked to terminate my employment with them. Ouch, that was the second time that I was actually let go from a radio or TV station.

Time to hit **“The Big Time”**

Now that I had been let go from my work at KROC, I decided it was time to head for California. I had two reasons— One to visit my one sister who worked in San Francisco for the Family Circle Magazine. The other reason was to bring my resume and see if there was anything I could do to hit one of the major broadcast centers in the nation. My start up was rather dismal. I hit a couple of the big stations with the common answer “no we do not have any openings at this time— Don't call us we'll call you. Needless to say that was very frustrating. So I said to self— “Self you've already been turned down by a good number of the big stations, why not go for broke and hit the networks+. First try was the ABC television network. They at least gave me the courtesy of filling out perhaps a six page resume application. Again don't call us we'll call you. Well that sure went well. So I made my next call on CBS. I believe they were stationed in Burbank, and it was like a modern theater entrance with the box office where the operator gave me another six pager and pointed me to one of these one arm chairs like the kind you saw in grade school or high school. After an hour or so, I delivered my application only to find out that once again “we'll keep it on file+. So I curled my tail behind me, and went back to plan my last and only possibility the NBC television network. This time I did my homework. I found out who was the HR or human relations or hiring/manager. Don't ask me how I did this, but I found myself being sent up to the second floor of the NBC television network also in Burbank. As it happened, because I was a private pilot, and this gentleman's office was papered with many airplanes both commercial and private, we struck up a conversation that lasted some 2 1/2 hours. Not only was I stunned at this acceptance, but the gentleman then told me as he turned around to show me the credenza behind him and a stack of perhaps 2 feet of applications. He was so impressed, or so I believed, that he told me “John these are the last months applications alone (which stood as I said about 2 to 2 1/2 feet in height). And as I can remember and I quote "John as far as I'm concerned, you are number five to be hired on here at NBC. “Can you hold on and call me next week+. I did so and he informed me that he had hired the number fourth man and now there were three ahead of me. I was told to call again in a week and much to my amazement the third man was hired leaving only two ahead of me. He told me that when I would be hired, I would start most likely as a pageboy, then they would move me on into the film department in those days, and from that point on I might then be utilized in any of my talent areas. Well one more week past, and I heard from him that the number two man was hired, so hang in there. Then I decided, well there's going to be at least another two weeks or so, so I decided to head for San Francisco.

It was always fun to spend time with my sister in one of my favorite cities in America at that time San Francisco. However, two more weeks was like and eternity for me. I was running out

of funds, time away from home, and perhaps a little bit of patience as well. One last call to NBC produced this resultõ We're down to one person ahead of you to be hired on, and your next. Well with much deliberation and whatever, I decided enough was enough and I decided to get back to Minneapolis.

One highlight of the trip back, was traveling through Rochester on my way up to the Twin Cities and stopping by the TV station to just say hello. I could not believe what I heard from the then program director of the TV station whose name I believe was Bill Lampman? He told me that they had the largest mail pull in the history of that station, asking where's their weatherman. You mean after all of the shenanigans I put on the air, õ and they wanted me backõ I can only say what a warm fuzzy that was for me as I continued my final journey to the Twin Cities.

WCCO Radio and Television

It wasn't very long, when I got a call from Bill Carlson asking me if I would like to do weekends on WCCO radio. Well I jumped at the chance and thanked Bill profusely. Bill was one of those very special men that I had the upmost respect for. He was kind, always courteous, and always making you feel warm, accepted, and appreciated for your talent. I must tell you WCCO radio, and WCCO television, had a policy that no talent from one station would ever work for the other. I don't know why but they tried to keep the two stations apart. The reason I mentioned this fact is that only Bill Carlson, and yours truly, we're the only ones that actually worked both stations. Oh yes, I haven't told you this before but I did booth announcing at WCCO television part-time for about 11 yearsõ Introducing the Dave Moore views, announcing upcoming events, doing commercials etc., and doing a final newscast before signing off the station in the early morning hours.

At this point I might mention that as I got to know Dave Moore very well. It was said that he would ride a bus down to the TV station to do the news, and saying to himself %will be on those peoples TV sets this very night+. Having known Dave, he was not one to "magnify" himself. If he found himself in a restaurant, he would try to seat himself in the corner of the room, and perhaps holding up a newspaper to read as he was having his meal.

By the way, as a public service, both Dave Moore and Dean Montgomery did a 15 minute newscast called %World Church News+, which aired on over 384 stations across America. During vacation time, Dave asked if I would fill in for him, and also Dean requested the same. That was quite a treat for me, working with both of these great broadcasters was a very special blessing.

Now onto WCCO radio. It was not only a great and special part of my life to be the show host on the Hobbs house music show, from the years 1965 through 1967, almost 3 years. But after a year or so, the station management asked if I would do my own Sunday night radio show I

called "Musical Showcase". Because I was the show host during the late hours of Sunday night and early Monday morning gave me perhaps, and only a guess, that my ratings on the station might have gone even higher. Why? Maybe not because I was anything special, but because of a very unusual circumstance. Most radio stations in the country use those same hours to pull maintenance. and go off the air. Not so with WCCO, ð (must have been some special engineering on their part). Consequently I was the only game in town so to speak. I even had a regular listener in Nome Alaska.

So many wonderful things happened to me during those special %Golden Years of Radio+. It would take volumes to even scratch the surface. Thus, I will only refer to a couple of events. One night as I was just finishing up playing a Four Freshman tune, I got a call from a listener in Oklahoma. He thanked me profusely for bringing back a great memory through that song. Who was he? He was actually one of the Four Freshmen. How's that for cool.

£CO Radio would host special events for celebrities. One of my favorite events was hosting Andy Williams, and Henry Mancini at one of the fine hotels with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. I must have spent at least a half hour alone with Henry. What a wonderful and personable gentlemen. You may not have known this but Hobbs House theme song was "Smoke Rings" by Henry Mancini and his Orchestra.

Sad to say life marches on, and I had to do the unspeakable thingð and that was to give my goodbyes to the wonderful people that I had known, loved, and worked with for those three years. I had been told that perhaps over 300 guys would give their right arm to have a position at WCCO. Why did I do it? No, I was not being fired. Val Linder then program director, told me that they were grooming me for daytime radio. I mean who would give up a position like that. Well, to tell you the truth, I had just started a family and my very first daughter Sheila was born. Working all night radio certainly had its sleep challenges as I was engaged in full-time employment, and I was in the throes of starting a new production business, "Dial Communications", which was active for almost 40 years (It's part of my biography which I gave to Rick Burnett)

A few facts about WCCO. It was told to me that WCCO radio had the largest nighttime radio audience in the entire nation. I give credit where credit is due to Franklin Hobbs four his 22 years with £CO. Another interesting fact was that WCCO radio had made its entire overhead by 7:30 AM each morning. The CBS radio network ranked WCCO as the number one station in the country for major market penetration. At the time of my association with them, we held a 62% share of audience, which meant that of the other 20 some stations, they had to share together the rest of the 38%.One last fact about CCO. They held the number two position from the CBS radio network for providing the highest commercial revenue of any of the other CBS affiliates.

I could spend the rest of this memoir or memories speaking about so many wonderful

experiences with both WCCO radio and WCCO television, but I must put a capstone to this gathering of my many memories over the 25 years I spent in the broadcast industry.

As I told you in the beginning, I always choose to give credit where credit is due, and I leave you with this very special life changing event.

Remember when I told you of my association with Jack Hyatt from KUXL radio. Well one of his closest friends was a guy named Todd Craven, and I would say about the both of them, that they were both party animals, and quite the lady's man. Because I was not a total extrovert, nor a total introvert, but probably somewhere in between, I found myself getting asked by either one of them to go to some party or whatever. So picture in your mind if you will, these two highly charged partygoers, asking me to go with them, seemed like quite a treat. Now comes the very best part. One time I called Todd to ask if he'd like to go out and have a couple of drinks at some establishment, and he said to me, "John are you sitting down, ... I said well yes I guess I am. He said to me "can't make it that night, and I said well what's up. He then said "you won't believe what I am going to tell you." Okay I'm all ears what? "I am going to a bible study that night." Well, I practically fell off the chair I was sitting in and said "What you of all people." "Yeah, would you like to join me." Well I politely excused myself and said oh I'll take a pass. So once again perhaps two or three weeks later Todd and I were conversing, and the question came up let's get together after work. And believe it or not the same thing came up again. "John, I'm going to that same Bible study again, please come with me will you." This time I agreed, and we went to a home in Edina, where there were approximately 15 to 20 gentlemen sitting around the fireplace.

Well having grown up with a religious background, three years in a Catholic grade school, and DeLaSalle high school taught by the Christian brothers, I was very open to what was being shared.

I noticed there was something very special about these men, sort of a peaceful joy in their presence. They all seemed very successful in their business endeavors. As the study was drawing to a close one of the gentlemen asked me if I had any questions. I said well this was very interesting, tell me more. So they asked me John, what are your impressions, and I said to them "you're telling me that if I accept Jesus Christ into my life as my personal Lord and Savior, that I might enjoy a more abundant life in the here and now, and ... I would also have the assurance of eternal life in heaven if I chose to live this new way of life. They said yes. I then said to them as I was kind of analyzing (I held up two fingers) and said, well if even only one of these is true, I guess that's good enough for me. "I'll take the deal." That was the way I put it at that time. Several men then came over to me, placed their hands on my shoulder and arms and prayed for me.

You might think that is the end of the story happening. It was not. From that day forward in the fall of I believe 1966, I felt a brand-new relief in my life. I could not describe it except to tell

you that my life totally changed that very night and it has been the most wonderful, most joyous, and contented feeling that I had never quite felt before. I cannot express the gratitude, the thank you's, and appreciation to Todd for what he did for me. What a very special man in my life.

Oh for sure there have been many trials and tribulations and being an overcomer, I had to learn how to walk through these incidents as a way of growing in the Spirit.

So my final giving credit where credit is due must go to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to the Righteous, Holy, Heavenly Father who has taken care of me all these years. My last parting thought to you is, may you be joyously blessed from these memories that I have just shared with you, and perhaps, help you along the path of life.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read these memories of the past... **“The Golden Days of Radio”**

Sincerely yours,

John Sewall

PS, as a side note, I have a couple of additions to add. First, in the year of 2009, I attended the annual Pavek Broadcasting Museum, because I was donating 2 to 4 microphones, and secondly, to attend this night's Hall of Fame to honor two very special people in my life, namely Nancy Nelson, wife of Bill Carlson, and Tom Jones, owner of KNXR (97.5 FM), good listening radio station in Rochester. He had known me since the early days of Rochester at KROC radio and television, and hired me to do a full-time Radio show in the year of 1984-1985.

If you are interested, and if Rick Burnett chooses to add my biography, you will notice a couple of other major events that took place in my life.

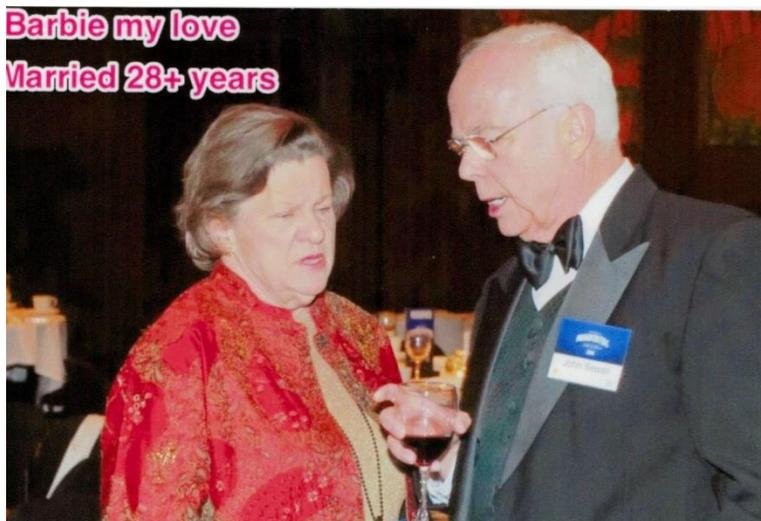
John Sewall's Biography and some photos follow below:

For over 25 years, John was a professional broadcaster in and around the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. His voice was heard coast-to-coast over WCCO radio, and was a show host for the largest night time radio audience in the nation. At one time, John was heard on over 384 radio stations as a newscaster.

During his years as a broadcaster, John set up his own production company called Dial Communications. This company, set up in 1969, was responsible for producing sound tracks for many of the nation's largest companies during the time when audio visual slide presentations were the state of the art media.

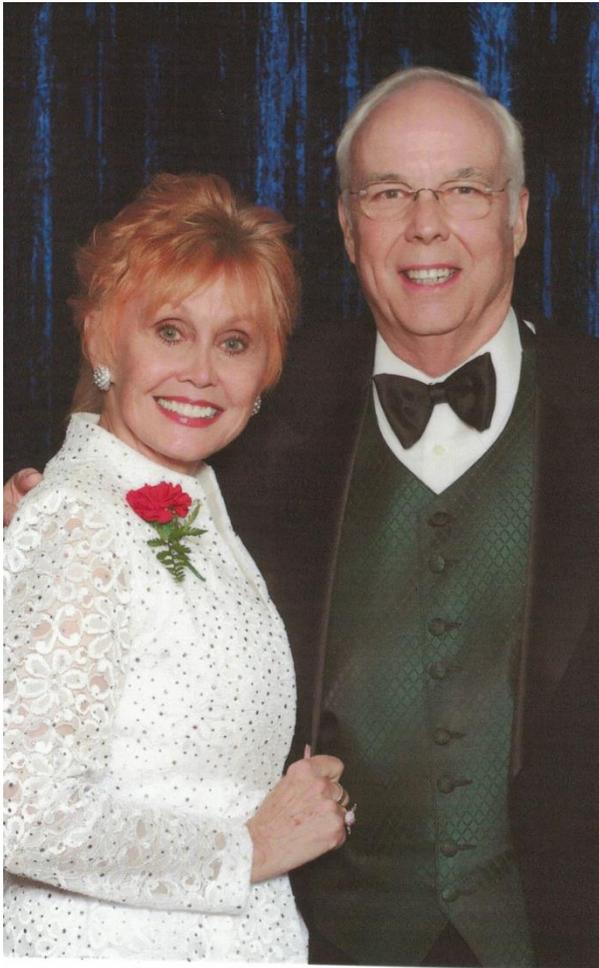
It was in 1976, that John was contracted to produce the entire King James New Testament, and The Psalms and Proverbs in dramatic format, with the use of superbly selected music, special sound effects, and many professional voices, including his voice. They were marketed throughout the entire English speaking world, with well over one half million sets sold.

During the early -70s and into the early -80s, John had a call placed on his life to start a high-powered UHF Family Christian television station in the Twin Cities. This station, after going through several changes in ownership, and millions of dollars exchanged, is today Fox Channel 29.



Mr. and Mrs. Sewall at Pavek Museum of Broadcasting Hall of Fame Dinner 2009

See More Photos on Next Page:



Nancy Nelson and John Sewall at Pavek Museum of Broadcasting Hall of Fame Dinner 2009

See Additional Photos on Next Two Pages:



Nancy Nelson

[Nancy Nelson on Vimeo](#)

Minnesota Broadcasting Hall of Fame

Nancy Nelson

Inducted 2009

One of Minnesota's best-loved personalities, Nancy Nelson began her 45-year broadcasting career while still in high school, hosting KMSP TV's teen dance show *Date with Dino*. Working with Mel Jass on WTCN TV's *Mel's Matinee Movie*, she interviewed Don Stolz of the Old Log Theater, leading to nearly 20 years on the Old Log stage. As WCCO TV's *Saturday Night Weather Girl*, she appeared between Dave Moore's *Bedtime Nooz* and Bill Carlson's *This Must Be the Place*. She was also *Princess of Prizes* on Don Dahl's *Bowlerama*. As Miss Minnesota, she was first runner-up to Miss United States. In 1970 she married the love of her life, WCCO TV's Bill Carlson. In 1972 Nancy began a 13-year run as host and producer of *What's New?* on WTCN TV. Next it was on to Los Angeles, where she anchored the news at KTTV for three years, earning several Emmy nominations. She did a talk show at KABC Radio in L.A., covered the Academy Awards and the Rose Parade for international satellite, and hosted a dozen nationally syndicated television shows. Nancy did one of the country's first infomercials, and to date has done nearly one hundred. CBS News dubbed her the *Queen of Infomercials*, seen in nearly every country in the world daily. Nancy says, *I've been so fortunate. It's a privilege to do this work. I'm grateful. I love this business.*

<http://www.pavekmuseum.org/nnelson.html>



Tom H. Jones

[Tom Jones on Vimeo](#)

Minnesota Broadcasting Hall of Fame

Tom H. Jones

Inducted 2009

A strong childhood interest in music and radio established Tom Jones's destiny as a radio broadcaster.

In 1952, he started Tom Jones Recording Studio, and in 1960, he received the Medal of Commendation for his installation of Radio Station KURE at the U.S. Army hospital in the Huachuca Mountains.

In 1965, he built radio station KNXR operating at 97.5 FM in Rochester, Minnesota. Since December 24th of that year, KNXR has continuously broadcast quality programming, including the John Doremus program, *Patterns in Music*, that is enjoyed by listeners as far away as the Twin Cities.

In 1994, Jones moved KNXR and Tom Jones Recording Studio into the newly completed, award-winning building he designed. In 1999, he formed a new non-profit corporation, Rochester Public Radio, and his second station KRPR began broadcasting full-time from the new KNXR building, continuing Jones's mission of uplifting people for a hundred miles around him with the power and the universal language of music.

<http://www.pavekmuseum.org/tomjones.html>

