

## *Tune-In Tonight* **Introduction**

Every life is a book worth reading, with experiences longing to be told. This collection of stories is for those who may find these memoirs an intriguing adventure, and at times, bizarre tales from a chosen unique life, business and career.

There's something here for everyone. Those who want to reminisce and shine a light behind the curtain of television's golden era, they will find it here. Those friends and family members who want to share in the humor of the success and failures of my career, that too is here. Those who, for whatever reason, wondered, how does that peculiar guy survive so long in this business? There's plenty here for you too, with no attempt to change your opinion. Although, even my critics will admit, these lifelong exploits have made for an interesting and uncommon life, to experience vicariously.

One of the first practices I learned in Journalism school was for writers to answer the 5 W's — Who, what, where, when and why. The chapters that follow will answer those questions.

- 1) **Who** was squeezed up against me and Barbara Walters for an hour in the dark?
- 2) **What** did I do that upset Heavy Weight Champion Mike Tyson so much?
- 3) **Where** was I with a young unknown Shania Twain trying to start her career?
- 4) **When** was I assigned to be a Security Guard for Oprah?
- 5) **Why** was Michael Jordan on his knees letting my dog lick his face and bare chest?

Television news and entertainment is a non-stop, around-the-clock endeavor, always in search of an audience, when you either want it or need it. An industry that is freely invited into everybody's home, this common family experience is shared by the average household, for better or for worse, approximately seven hours per day.

The book *Three Blind Mice: How The TV Networks Lost Their Way*, came out in 1992. The Networks have struggled for many years since to regain their previous dominance, for the most part, wandering aimlessly, having left behind their moral compass, as they abandoned most of their core principles and, along the way, their audience.

The "Big 3" networks of my 1960s childhood, in an effort to not lose any audience, attempted to adapt to compete with lesser competitors in cable networks and social media. A profession founded on journalism integrity and strict standards, committed to ensure factual information, became at the network level, divisive arms of political parties, with the driving purpose to

attempt to influence public opinion and, with it, all but abandoned the standards and pursuit of truth.

The confidence our nation had when hearing Walter Cronkite's, (who was born in St. Joseph, Mo), nightly sign-off, "And that's the way it is," left us all comforted and assured, knowing that Cronkite told us the truth. Today, sadly, that confidence too often seems buried along with Cronkite, in Kansas City's Mount Moriah Cemetery. A cemetery that is across the street from where my elementary school, no longer stands. As one viewer complained, a more accurate network news sign-off today would be, "That's the way we want you to think it is, now Good Night."

Entertainment programs, once a home to traditional family values, increasingly became written with subtle, and not so subtle, agendas of the chosen current "progressive" social issues of the day. Issues that Andy would have never allowed to be mentioned in Mayberry. A profession founded on journalistic news integrity and traditional family entertainment values, increasingly became divisive arms of political parties, parading as the bearers of unquestionable truth, that in reality had evolved in the attempt to influence public opinion and, with it, allow shaded and framed facts from their chosen point of view. Sunday Night staple, "The Wonderful World of Disney," somehow became a world too old fashioned for this perceived enlightened generation, surely current primetime shows would embarrass both Mickey and Disney himself.

At the local level, TV newsrooms can still be, for the most part, a trusted source to relay accuracy in fact-based presentations for individual evaluations and for the good of the community. However, there is no better example of how the national networks have lost their way than evidenced in what has become of late night comedy programs. The nation's daily anticipation of Johnny Carson, Doc Severinsen, and Ed McMahon engaging in humorous banter and legendary guests, have been replaced with political-party talking points. Carson himself warned, "When a comic becomes enamored with their own views and foists them upon the public, they lose not only their sense of humor, but their value as a humorist."

For TV station employees to survive and advance in, what some would call, this once noble profession, they soon learn that in News and Management, you've entered a real-life version of *The Hunger Games*. Better yet, "You are about to enter into another dimension, not only of sight and sound, but of mind. A journey into the wondrous land of imagination. Next stop, the *Twilight Zone*."

In this new world, whether in front or behind the cameras, the game is played with a set of unpublished rules. Advancement, most likely will require entering the nomadic life of a broadcasting gypsy. I had hoped for an occupation that would be interesting and exciting, and it was. Credentials to enter and advance to the next level are earned with a willingness to start at the bottom, which I definitely fulfilled. Moving forward requires a passing grade earned with the

willingness to relocate from coast to coast as needed. This too, I and my family endured many times, searching for Mayberry.

Ultimately, my goal was to lead a team to serve and help make a local community better, and I did my best. There are only 3 or 4 of these jobs in each TV market. They are hard to get and hard to keep. Warren Buffett's advice to the young is: "Write the obituary you would like, then figure out how to live up to it." And speaking of Warren Buffett, I did have a photo op with him, when a furniture company Berkshire Hathaway owns opened a store in Las Vegas. What a pleasant gentleman. Linda was with me and took the photo. Buffett asked, "How would you like us to pose." I responded, "Well, I'd like a picture with you giving me your wallet." The jovial Buffett said, "That sounds great. I've never done that. Let's do it."

Pursuing opportunities, in reality, was much more arduous than expected. Demanding, not only for me, but for my family. Abrupt, unanticipated, continuous life transitions; moving your family to a new town, new schools, new church, new barber, new neighbors, new co-workers. If this happens a few times in a lifetime, it is a challenge. Now, imagine the personal sacrifices placed on my wife, Linda, and our son, Travis, after over 40 years and double-digit relocations. Their sacrifice cannot be overstated. This career is a family commitment, whether you intend it to be or not. You and your family pay a heavy price. You learn, in television, this is what is expected.

Repeatedly moving everything you own does help scale down your belongings. As does the unexpected theft. There was a silver dollar collection in a passed down family cedar chest. The movers put the chest on the truck, but the silver dollars never arrived. So we then learned to put valuables in our vehicles and move them ourselves. But with that, we had our car broken into at a hotel overnight in transit. Other items if not stolen, will be broken, and even those with only sentimental value often hurt the most.

From college graduation to retirement, the cities and moves required read like a really bad travel itinerary: Garden City, KS., St. Joseph, MO., Kansas City, North Carolina, California, Wichita, Cincinnati, Las Vegas, Kansas City again, Michigan, and back to Wichita, Kansas.

In 1979, I began my career at the Garden City, Kansas, NBC affiliate KGLD with 13 employees. Shortly thereafter, KGLD was automated; now it is run totally out of Wichita, so that no employees work at that Garden City NBC affiliate —new call letters, KSNG.

A comparable career course would be in the life of an athletic coach, who moves frequently as they gain experience and, if they have success, they can keep moving on; if not, they step back and try again, while most grow weary of that grind and quit, in order to try some other profession. Along the way, there are no shortage of opinions, wanting to tell a coach what they are doing wrong or could do different, that would improve their team.

In addition to the frequent moves, one should expect there will be covert and stealthy headwinds from members of the press, the viewers, competitors, social media, co-worker betrayals, subversive saboteurs, and unbridled egos that combine to test your own determination. Human nature, magnified at its best and worst, is on display in local broadcast stations across the country, and those persistent headwinds increase with each step up the career ladder.

More than once, whether from ownership changes or business politics, I found myself out of work and feeling, for a time, like I had been kicked to the curb, in a city where our family didn't even really want to be. You learn that those who celebrate your successes and encourage you through your failures, are your true friends. Those who enjoyed contributing shade on you or take silent pleasure in your defeats, you wish them the best. Cliches reveal the truth they hold within — “Stay on the high road, it's far less crowded,” and “You either get better or you get bitter.”

Motivational speaker Zig Ziglar pointed out, “They've never erected a statue for a critic.” And it was Winston Churchill who said, “Success is going from failure to failure without the loss of enthusiasm.”

This life is only the practice game for our eternal life that waits ahead. We've all been blessed and we all have been loved more than we realize. We all fall short of the glory on our own. I'm thankful for the joys of others and sympathize with their defeats, as I share mine here. It's not a competition, except with ourselves. But those who try and pull you down are clearly beneath you.

It may not surprise some, but I seemed to have more than my fair share of critics, due in part to the fact that the most prominent management style of the day was micromanagement through fear and intimidation, and this style was far too prevalent for my liking.

Empowerment and encouragement of others, I believed, creates a more organic environment to reach maximum team performance, and this was my default comfort level. This approach was not always welcomed by the powers that be. Applying the Golden Rule of treating others as you want to be treated needs ambassadors now more than ever.

Kansas proved to be more receptive to this Midwest management style. If lasting in a career couldn't be done with that mindset and approach, then I preferred to do something else and remain true to myself.

Most people have had some interesting encounters with the famous. At the risk of being a name dropper, I plan to share some of my favorite, knowing that meeting celebrities is of interest to most people and, in almost every instance, it was simply a case of just being at the right place at the right time.

Some of the encounters I share include Oprah, Michael Jordan, Mike Tyson and Robin Givens. KC Royals like Ewing Kauffman, Buck O'Neil and most of the players in the 80s. KC Chiefs like Lamar Hunt, Len Dawson, Joe Montana, and Marcus Allen. Dinners with Judge Judy, Regis Philbin, and Spencer Christian, and lunch alongside Steve Martin. An hour in the dark squeezed between Diane Sawyer, Barbara Walters and Hugh Downs. Jerry Springer, Walter Peyton, Stevie Wonder, Shania Twain, The Ladies of The View. I could once keep the volume up on that show in my office; that was until Barbara Walters left and along with her, any evidence of journalistic integrity, some might say. Also Senators, Secretaries of State, and Presidents. Enjoyable human interactions with a wide historical array of American icons.

At the risk that some may see these stories as bragging, I relate these events for those who may find them interesting and worthwhile. There is no embellishment or the need to exaggerate. Including interactions with the famous does tend to make for more interesting storytelling. This element of show business is part of what differentiates this industry from a routine and monotonous job. So I share my stories, unless one would prefer to review revenue and expense budgets along with Nielsen TV program ratings.

Through college, I worked 6 nights a week at Shenanigans Disco in Lawrence, KS., and it's still one of the favorite positions I held. To take advantage of the disco craze, this very nice college student night club opened in the fall of 1976 in Lawrence and I was the club disc jockey. I had little prior experience, other than some time at KU student station KJHK, where fellow 1979 Journalism Graduate, Steve Doocy, now of Fox News, gave me a brief overview. After that, you were on your own, in a room playing records, wondering if anyone was listening.

I did have a comfort level with putting music playlists together to create a party atmosphere. Bill Pfeifer joined us as a DJ shortly after we opened, and he and I had a good time nightly, while unknowingly and indirectly working for the KC Mob — More on that later. Disco was growing as the short-lived dance and party music of the day, correlating exactly with our college years, and Bill and I got to lead the celebration.

I was willing to start my post-college career at the bottom, and filming news and commercials using 16mm equipment, and then quickly processing them daily in time for the 5pm news in the small Western Kansas town of Garden City, is about as remote as a market can get. We still had the Pony Express.

I made a transition into Ad Sales at my next stop, KQTV in St. Joseph Missouri. I had just started the week before, when the charming Business Manager walked in my office, in a beautiful green side slit dress, wearing white pearls and white high heels, that made a light pitter patter as she came down the linoleum hallway. She was stunning, and surprisingly she came in and sat on my desk, looked me in the eye and said, "Get your calendar out." So I did. Then she said, "Now you pick the date, and put my name down for the day." She sold me with that. Now over 40 years

later, she's still my bride, telling me what to do and managing my business, for which I'm still thankful. Well, most of the time.

Linda would tell me shortly after we met that she was programmable. That was a key selling point. Linda is beautiful, a loving mother and grandmother, very adaptive, joyful and always supportive. But programmable, that would be stretching the truth quite a bit.

To persevere in any career is challenging, but to do what we chose to do, year after year, without having Linda and our son Travis is unimaginable, and could not have been done.

I enjoyed working for 5 years in the 80s for WDAF-TV in Kansas City, along with our sister radio stations 61 Country and KY102. The radio stations had an outdoor keg party every Friday at 4pm. The end of the week was always something to look forward to on Signal Hill, with the radio staff. They had more fun than those of us in TV.

WDAF-TV Local Reporter, Gayle King, and I worked together. She, of course, hosts the national CBS Morning Show. She wouldn't remember my name today, but I'm sure she remembers the guy who she would repeatedly meet daily on the way to the restroom at 9:15 am, like clockwork. Through Gayle King, I was asked to serve as a bodyguard for her friend, the first ever female talk show host, who was coming to Kansas City as part of the promotional tour to launch her show. That future host, unknown at the time, was her friend Oprah Winfrey.

At WDAF-TV at the time, we were the flagship station for the Kansas City Royals, where we televised the games and distributed them to 17 cities across the Midwest. I was fortunate to handle the Royals promotion account for the station and ultimately became a Royal Lancer Ambassador. The Royal perks were really special, under Ewing Kauffman. Including trips to Spring Training with the team and a surprise inclusion in his last will and testament which gifted us a Mediterranean cruise as a thank you, to all past Royal Lancers. Ewing Kauffman was an impressive man to meet, and his book, "Prescription for Success," is a good read.

Working with the Royals was especially exciting during the 1985 World Series, also with the arrival of Bo Jackson at that time. Rush Limbaugh was also the Promotion Director before he then went on to some other career, or so I heard.

Then came the moves for management —North Carolina, California, Wichita, Cincinnati, Las Vegas, Kansas City, Michigan and finally coming back to the same NBC station group out of Wichita that I started my career with out of college. Now, that is what you call full-circle. 10 markets in over 40 years, a move about every 4 years on average.

So here we are, almost 50 years since graduating high school and following a dream of being in the media. I want to share my most interesting experiences and life lessons, and offer them to family and friends who might find this journey interesting. Someday, I hope my grandsons will

want to know and read about these tales. They are still young enough to think grandma and papa are somewhat cool. Well, at least we don't seem to embarrass them too much yet. I hope they will learn from my mistakes and values learned along the way.

Managing TV stations, which have on average 100 employees, is like being a doctor, it takes a lot of patients. The personality differences between News Talent, Sales People, Engineers, Promotion Members, Traffic and everything behind the scenes, encompasses the full gamut. Each department would like you to micromanage the other departments and employees, but not themselves.

All employees feel they are under appreciated, and they are right, as much as I do appreciate each of them. You try to make them feel valued, but all efforts fall short of the dedication each employee brings daily. They all feel the stations couldn't survive without them, doing what they do, and they are right. However, I can say, of all the stations I worked at, they all did somehow survive after I left. We were all working on behalf of something that is bigger than ourselves, that continues after we are gone.

This career requires a dose of fortitude and perseverance to walk a path that is clearly in the world, while doing your best to stay true to your beliefs and convictions. You won't find perfection in a fallen world, but endeavoring to represent the Christian faith—to be in the world but not of it—should bring each of us an appropriate level of pride, knowing that you did your best to run the good race and fight the good fight. If you believe this world has always been in spiritual warfare that is now reaching culmination, as do I, then clearly, a career in broadcast television is choosing to be on the frontlines.