

“The K.C. Chiefs & Rabbit Ears”

Those from my generation, remember the days of the 12 inch black and white TV screens, with only a few available local channel options, using *Rabbit Ear antennas*, providing a snowing picture, that would fade in and out.

The available home technology, at the time, was stretched to the extreme, when wanting to watch an NFL or AFL game, with their blackout rules in place. From 1961-1972, TV stations could not broadcast an NFL home game, within 75 miles from the stadium, whether the game was sold-out or not. The NFL was afraid fans wouldn't attend the game if they could see it on TV. This resulted in the avid fan, without tickets, going to excessive measures to get a home game TV picture, while listening to the available radio broadcast.

My dad purchased a 12 foot TV antenna and mast to try and pick-up distant signals from Kansas City's Municipal Stadium, located at 21st and Brooklyn Avenue. We targeted Des Moines, Wichita, and Columbia Mo., but because of terrain interference, we could only receive an occasionally acceptable picture signal from KSNF-TV, Joplin-Pittsburg, 158 miles away. The AFL games were televised on NBC stations, and KSNF-TV is part of the same station group, for which I now work, covering all of Kansas, as well as over 200 stations nationwide.

To receive that remote K.C. Chiefs game signal, it required that either my brother, Lew, or myself, climb on our roof and turn the antenna until a faint picture would come in. While mom made the chili, and sisters Susie and Karen helped in the kitchen, Dad would run out of the house and give commands, “Try turning it a few more inches,” or “Go back a few more inches.” It would always take multiple tries, which seemed especially time consuming, if you're the one on the roof, for a cold December game.

I should highlight the high risk, low reward, that resulted from these TV antenna adventures. Someone should have said, “Do not try this at home.” We did have a 2 story home and the antenna was strapped to the chimney, which was another 8 feet above the roof. To turn the antenna, you had to stand on your tippy toes, on a slanted roof, and wait for further instructions. Greater love hath no man than this, to risk their life, or sacrifice the life of his sons, in the hope of receiving an intermittent, snowy, black and white picture of a Chiefs game, from a station, 158 miles away.

The way I remember it, is Lew finally said, “I'm not doing that anymore.” I, however, was younger and wanted to see any picture quality we could receive of a Chiefs game. “Steve, get on the roof,” became our pre-game ritual, regardless of how much, I too hated climbing up on our roof and turning the antenna, for that elusive optimum TV signal.

What I was even more uncomfortable doing, was when Dad would then have me go tell the neighbors, that we had a picture he felt we should share. By the time the neighbors dropped what they were doing, and came over to check it out, that extremely snowy picture quality was no longer at all viewable. I finally drew the line when he said, “Go back over and tell neighbors the picture came back.”

For me, the greatest technology I've experienced in my life, was not *Color TV, Cable TV, Computers, Cell Phones, High Definition, Video Games or Streaming Technology*. No, for me, the best invention ever made by man, was when Dad invested in an remote antenna rotor control dial, that would allow me to stay in the warm, safe confines of our living room, instead of climbing on the roof to try and pick up a distant signal, when the Chiefs played at home. For me, it was equal to the excitement of landing on the moon.

The next technological invention I was thrilled with, is one that almost all kids, at that time, remember as well. We all remember when the only TV remote control, was whichever child was sitting closest to the TV set, and how happy we were when we finally got a TV that came with a real remote control.

Technology and following your favorite teams are inevitably tied together. Speaking of Municipal Stadium and rabbit ears, the Kansas City A's, had a mechanical rabbit holding a basket, that would come out of the ground near home plate to deliver new baseballs to the umpire. For the kids, that was the highlight of a K.C. A's game, along with going out to left field to visit the home stable of the mascot, "Charlie O' The Mule."

I eventually got over the fact that the A's moved to Oakland after the 1967 season. Kansas City went only 1 year without a baseball team, before MLB expanded, and added our K.C. Royals. But the cellar dweller, K.C. A's, caused this 11 year old loyal Kansas City fan to suffer through the team trying to build a franchise with young players. The end result was to have the A's pick up and move to Oakland, where they won 3 straight World Series in the early 70s. That dang old stubborn mule headed Charlie O'.

The A's owner, Charles Finley, also paid *The Beatles* \$150,000 for a 32 minute show on Sept. 17th 1964 at the stadium. He was quite the promoter. Tickets ranged from \$2.00 to \$8.50. My 8th birthday was the week before, and I wish I had whined until we could go as a family, just so I could say, "I was there." Those who are able to say they saw *The Beatles* at the old stadium, are like those who can say, "I was at *Woodstock*."

My brother Lew and I did take the bus from Ward Parkway Shopping Center on a cold Christmas Day, for the long ride to Municipal Stadium, to see the 1971 Chiefs AFL Championship, double-overtime game, against the Miami Dolphins, in what would become the longest NFL game ever. We had lower level seats behind a beam supporting the upper deck, with an obstructed view. Ed Podalak set an NFL record that day, that likely will never be broken, as he gained 350 all purpose yards in a single game, which includes rushing, receiving and kick returns. Unfortunately, the normally reliable, Jan Stenerud, missed a game winning field goal at the end of 4th quarter, and the Dolphins won in double overtime. The bus ride home seemed much longer than the ride to the game.

On the games when Dad and Mom drove us to Municipal Stadium, part of the classic atmosphere was parking in the neighborhood yards. I remember circling the blocks, in a holding pattern, looking for a \$1 or \$2 dollar parking spot in people's front yards, rather than the closer, but outlandish, \$5 spots. The home owners turned their front yards and private driveways, into parking lots, and they would also block you in with the next car, so you would likely have to wait to leave after the game. That is, unless you were willing, like some, to leave the home owner your car keys, which I don't believe we ever did. But, can you imagine how much more trusting of a stranger you could be then.

I've spent my career in free over-the-air broadcast stations, and those of us who have done that, are not pleased with the development of the pay-per-view streaming model for local sports. The NFL is pushing, to find ways to further maximize their revenue, as if they are not making enough. Political leaders normally support free over-the-air broadcasters, and if they don't, there's a good chance the politician is receiving lobbying dollars from a streaming company interest. You can always follow the money.

Local TV stations continue to evolve with more time dedicated to Local News, Weather and Sports. This is every local station's position of strength, and they are not going anywhere. They have a business model entrenched in the local community, with staff and equipment in place.

Newspapers, on the other hand, have struggled to find a business plan that works financially to survive. Who would start a business today that printed yesterday's news on paper, to have drivers pick them up and throw on your driveway. I went once with Charlie Mills, on his paper route. That was fun, but way too early for me to volunteer for that assignment again.

In desperation, newspapers have tried to charge for the same information provided online today, which TV stations make available for free through their apps and on station websites. Delivery systems change, but the local TV station, and the demand for local News, Weather and Sports information, is not going anywhere. But the networks, free sports broadcasts and entertainment, I'm not so sure.

In the early 1980s, I remember attending a media luncheon event, where the speaker made the bold statement that someday, every office worker, will have a computer on their desk and another computer at home. I had my doubts that our world would change that much. I underestimated how technology would change our world, when some said we would all have cell phones sending emails and texts. I thought, "Why? We already have pagers."

In my very first meeting as a manager, in 1988 at KSEE-TV in Fresno, Kurt Carlson, our Business Manager, stated that he felt we might need to consider getting a fax machine, as sending documents in this way was becoming common.

At home and at the office, we all have seen how fast the advancements in technology have changed our lives. Television stations made huge marketing campaigns in the 1960s to promote "*Now in Living Color*." Screen sizes are now 10 times larger, and replacing tubes or taking those tubes to the store for testing, is a thing of the past, like returning Coke bottles.

1966 was the big year of conversion to color TV. Seeing *Batman*, *Bewitched* and *The Monkees*, *Now in Technicolor*, was even more exciting. The first house on the block to have a color TV, suddenly became the popular place for kids in the neighborhood to gather. It didn't take long for all homes to make a color TV a priority, to silence the kids, if for no other reason.

My first job in TV, in 1979, was to use a 16mm film camera with an equally heavy wooden tripod, (with a combined weight of approximately 75 pounds), and then return quickly to process the film in a darkroom back at the station. In reality, the technology we were using in the 1970s in Western Kansas was that more commonly used in major markets in the 1950s, and that equipment either found its way to the remote smaller markets, and was not replaced, as long as the camera was still usable.

My generation remembers well the *One Hour Fotomat* booths, which revolutionized the previous 1 week development process of photos from your local drug stores. Additionally, Polaroid cameras were a trendy advancement for a brief time, but never had the quality of film. Home movies on 8mm film and projectors. Rotary slide projectors all provided the common way to preserve and share family memories and photos. These were later replaced by VHS and Beta tapes and eventually digital files. Like transistor radios, vinyl records, 8 track and cassette players, which were here for a brief time, we were "*Feeling Groovy*" to the music and technology of the 60s and 70s.

The advancements in digital photography caused Kodak's revenue to drop from a high of \$14 Billion to \$2 Billion annually. Kodak worldwide workforce was cut from 120,000 to 5,000 employees before restructuring. When you consider how technology changes our lives and jobs, "I have to laugh when an employee says, "That's not what I was hired to do." I let them know, my first job was to shoot and process film. If we are not willing to adapt to what is needed, we will soon all be out of work.

Once I began managing TV stations, I set aside an hour each week, and look forward to meeting with the Chief Engineer, to try and maintain a basic knowledge of the issues and the equipment upgrades needed, as well as the repairs. I don't know an exact number of the pieces of station equipment from *cameras, vehicles, microphones, satellites, switchers, computers, lighting, HVAC, etc.*, but I'm confident, it is easily in the thousands. And believe it or not, sometimes there are issues with everything working properly.

The conversion to HDTV, was a huge undertaking for stations. Every piece of equipment from the camera to the broadcast signal had to either be replaced or enhanced. HDTV technology was available in Japan, at least 10 years prior to becoming available in the U.S. It wasn't until congress mandated that all stations had to convert nationwide, that the costly transformation began to take place.

We all have technology issues from time to time in our homes, but at a TV Station, we have 5 or 6 positions dedicated full time, trouble-shooting the endless equipment challenges and concerns. The only time most employees even think about the Engineering Department, is when something goes wrong. Then the emergency panic happens, and the 24/7 on duty Engineer, is the most needed man, typically with no ego and plenty of patience, they are often the only ones who have any idea what to do. Here's to the Engineers. Thank you for your service.

I'm proud of all the females and minorities that I have been able to hire and promote in my career, but I was never able to find, or even interview a single female Engineer. They are rare in this business. So if you are a young woman with this interest, there will likely always be place for you.

Engineers also are normally thrifty and tend to be pack rats. "You never know when we might need this," is the motto. Only recently have I been able to convince them, we are never going to need a 100 pound big butted tube TV again. Let's get rid of them. I did create a historical technology TV museum room, so we have a place for old equipment, so everyone, but especially Engineers, can come visit and pay homage to the past, where such items can live in perpetuity.