

# ON A TURNTABLE Monkey

living on love  
& leftovers in  
local **radio**



by Ken Keller

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What They're Saying About  
*Monkey on a Turntable*

"...hilarious"

-- Mark Jordan, *Mt Vernon New*

"...laugh outloud funny"

-- Candy Brooks, *This Week Worthington*

"...full of amusing tales"

-- Joe Blundo, *The Columbus Dispatch*

"...wonderfully crafted treasure trove...Keller's easy free-flowing writing style is impressive."

-- James Fowler, *Toledo City Paper*

"*Monkey on a Turntable* isn't just about the life of a radio broadcaster, for in his sometimes comic descriptions, Ken Keller demonstrates how some of life's setbacks can result in new directions and unexpected successes."

-- John Haueisen, *Newsroom Magazine*

"Anyone who knows Ken Keller knows that he loves radio, but they may not know why. *Monkey on a Turntable* explains it all, with passion and humor. This valentine to local broadcasting is filled with anecdotes about the offbeat characters who inhabited radio in its heyday in Columbus, Ohio."

-- Tim Feran, *The Columbus Dispatch*

"This is a helluva book. I laughed my tail off."

-- Bill Gray, author (*Boxing's Top 100; The Greatest Champions of All Time*)

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## FOREWORD

There were three great changes affecting the broadcast industry in the mid-1950s, and if you owned or operated a local radio station, they were all bad.

To begin, network radio was disappearing. Programs that had charmed, entertained, amused and sometimes terrified Americans for more than two decades were either leaving the air or moving to that upstart young medium, television. And with them went a galaxy of stars who had allowed radio to make them this nation's first family of entertainment: Bob Hope, Jack Benny, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Amos 'n Andy, Arthur Godfrey, Jackie Gleason, Lucille Ball, Red Skelton and Milton Berle, to name only a few.

Also departing radio for the tiny screen were a host of long-time favorite programs such as *Brighter Day*, *Dragnet*, *Death Valley Days*, *Our Miss Brooks*, *Your Hit Parade*, *Gunsmoke*, *Guiding Light*, *The Lone Ranger* and *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

Accompanying this migration of talent to the new medium went an avalanche of advertising dollars – the second unhappy change affecting the broadcast industry at this time. Prior to 1950, TV was a curiosity. All stations were local and usually didn't sign-on until late afternoon. Pretentious discussions of local issues, a self-conscious newscaster, and an ill-prepared and tentative interview of some local celebrity or politician would bring the evening's fare to its climax, an old and grainy and dark movie. Sign-off was usually about 11 p.m.

But all this changed in 1950. That was the year AT&T completed a microwave relay system between New York and Chicago, installing towers at distances of no more than twenty-five miles, and true network television was at last a reality (a year later the towers reached to the West Coast).

No surprise, then, that it was also in 1950 that *Your Show of Shows* starring Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca and Carl Reiner premiered. Suddenly there was a new topic of conversation around the nation's water coolers. With a young writing team that eventually included such future luminaries as Neil Simon, Mel Brooks and Woody Allen, *Your Show of Shows* officially removed the entertainment crown from radio and placed it atop the skyline of skinny antennas that were soon clogging the horizon in all directions. All of which was not lost on advertisers.

The final blow to local station owners and operators was the emergence of FM broadcasting. As noted later in this book, FM was developed during World War II, and when, after the war, licenses became available, it was, for the most part, owners of existing radio stations that bought them. Because they had no idea what to do with their new licenses, it became common practice for owners to broadcast the same signal on both their AM and FM stations, a practice referred to as simulcasting. But the Federal Communications Commission soon let the owners know that this was not what it had in mind when it granted them licenses, and began insisting that the two services be programmed independently for more and more of each broadcast day

And herein did all the storms converge: With the disappearance of network radio programming, owners were forced to hire more people locally to fill their broadcast days

with sound. And thanks to the FCC's ruling on independent programming for AM and FM stations, they were being forced to fill, not one, but *two* stations with sound. Finally, because of the flight of advertising dollars to television, they were having to staff their two stations with less income than at any time in recent years.

What station owners desperately needed were would-be broadcasters whose starry-eyed romance with the industry made sometimes intolerable working conditions seem like a grand adventure; that caused air shifts that stole generous portions of family time seem a small price to pay; and who could somehow turn a blind eye to the near absence of income in their paychecks.

What they needed, in short, was ... me.

Not yet married, my eyes filled with the requisite amount of stardust, I arrived in broadcasting in the fall of 1958. Nighttime network radio was dead, and daytime radio – soap operas, or soaps – was on life support. *Backstage Wife* hung on just through the end of the year, succumbing on January 2, 1959. *The Romance of Helen Trent*, the Queen of the Soaps, lasted twenty seven seasons before completing its 7,222<sup>nd</sup> and final, broadcast on June 24, 1960.

With that, except for the occasional five-minute feature program (i.e., *Dear Abby*) and newscasts that the networks fed at the top of every hour, the broadcast day – and night – became the local owner's responsibility to fill. Now, since it's an ill wind that doesn't blow some good, the owners' dilemma became my delight, ushering me, and a host of other mostly young men, into the chaos and comedy of local radio; a brotherhood

of underpaid and, as you will read, overworked young dreamers held captive by our individual fantasies of life as a network announcer.

This book, then, is about local radio as it was “made” in the middle of the last century. But far more importantly, it is intended as a tribute to the thousands of local broadcasters who never made it to “the nets” but entertained us every day as they tried.

## CHAPTER ONE

### SIGN-ON

It had been snowing for several days. Not the snow of recent Columbus winters that largely melts on contact with roads and sidewalks, brewing first a soupy slush and later, after freezing, a moonscape of coarse, uneven ice. This was serious snow, the kind that makes curbs disappear without a trace and leaves a fire hydrant's snow-capped dome barely visible above a surrounding sea of white. When street lights reflecting from the frozen surface shatter into millions of tiny, crystalline stars, and a sound, any sound, travels forever without growing fainter.

The year, 1959, was brand new, and Ohio State University (a later branding initiative would add "The" to the university's name) had all but shut down in deference to the mounting drifts that clogged sidewalks and closed intersections. At the Phi Delta Theta fraternity house on Iuka Avenue, the brothers scoffed at the school's alarm but greedily anticipated that tomorrow's classes would be cancelled, automatically freeing them from any need to study that night. Some went off in search of an appropriate way to celebrate their pardon; I prepared to work my second shift of the day at WMNI Radio.

Since the preceding fall, I had been living my boyhood dream of becoming a radio broadcaster, with courses at Ohio State sandwiched in when time permitted. My parents would have preferred reversed priorities. Growing up in Toledo, Ohio, I had listened with fierce attention to network radio's Golden Age, absorbing countless hours of comedy, mystery and drama that flowed from my bedroom radio in a river of words that still winds through my mind and memory.

I was on intimate terms with Don McNeill, Arthur Godfrey, Jack Benny, Bob Hope, The Great Gildersleeve, and Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, and I determined at a very early age to find where they lived and join them there.

My detour to Ohio State turned out to be no detour at all but rather a marvelous springboard into broadcasting. As a fraternity pledge, I was expected to identify some campus activity and become part of it. When I was slow to take this step, an active brother named Phil Brewer suggested that I accompany him to his extracurricular involvement: a student-staffed campus radio station that I will describe in more detail later. My experience with student radio was just sufficient to gain an audition at WMNI - then a brand new commercial radio station in Columbus - and my willingness to work an impossible, part-time split shift for minimum wage sealed the deal.

There is one other player in this small drama that needs to be introduced before this chapter can proceed. During the preceding two summers I worked as a sheet metal and roofing laborer at The Fred Christen and Sons Company in Toledo. The company was founded by my mother's father and run then by three wonderful uncles who took delight in seeing one of their nephews endure the same trial-by-roofing-tar they remembered from their youths. With the money saved from this employment I had purchased my first car, a 1952 four-door Chevrolet.

Following family tradition I elected to personify my car, choosing for a name the current Broadway musical, *My Fair Lady*. It was, as it turned out, an ill-advised name, if by "fair" one means evenhanded, just or equitable. MFL had proven as temperamental as a tenor and as prone to breakdown as Maria Callas.

In the short span of time I had been at Ohio State the car had broken a timing chain, stranding me in Marion, Ohio in the middle of the night at the center of a thunderstorm; decided on another night to stop recharging its battery, causing the headlights and assorted other amenities to grow increasingly dim before shutting down altogether and depositing me on yet another unfamiliar berm. In addition, MFL often refused to recognize a perfectly good door key, leaving me hammering in loud and vulgar frustration on its solid gray roof.

Still, its newest peccadillo left me in open-mouthed wonder that any machine was capable of such evil. Once the temperature approached freezing, engaging the emergency brake was an invitation to remain where you were for the rest of the winter.

The brake shoes, once solidly in contact with the wheel drums, were very apt literally to freeze in that condition, preventing any forward movement of the car. Curiously, and for me inexplicably, the car would back up. It just refused to move forward so much as an inch.

There was one prescriptive solution to this dilemma, albeit a radical one. A mechanic had told me that you could open the trunk, rummage around for the jack and handle, jack the back end of the car as high as you could, and then, by pushing the car sideways off the jack, hope that the resulting crash would break the ice and free the brake shoes from the drums. Astonishingly, it sometimes worked.

Now, as they used to say on radio, back to our story. It's was 9:30 on this frosty winter's eve and time for me to leave the Phi Delt house for the drive downtown to go on the air at 10 and work the last hour of WMNI's broadcast day. For this service I would be paid an hour's minimum wage of one dollar.

The drive would normally take twelve to fifteen minutes, but I planned to leave early that evening in order to deposit my then-current Ladylove at her residence hall well before her 10:30 p.m., pull-out-your-fingernails-if-you're-late curfew.

*My Fair Lady* was parked, as usual, adjacent to the fraternity house on a short but sharp incline. In order to have parked safely, setting the emergency brake was clearly the correct procedure. I, of course, knew better. Unfortunately, knowing better is not the same thing as remembering. Tumbling into the car, I backed successfully out of the parking space, down the incline, and into the street. It was only when I shifted into first and let out the clutch that my forgetfulness became instantly and horribly evident. MFL chugged once and stopped dead, as if a giant unseen hand held it fast to the pavement.

Experience told me that there was no use trying again for it intended to remain in the middle of the street until a snowplow, or spring, changed its wicked mind. Jumping out of the car, Ladylove bolted up the hill in search of help from a brother while I grabbed for the well-used jack and attempted the prescriptive solution. Once: crash! Twice: crash! A third time: crash! No use. The few additional minutes I had allotted for driving Ladylove to her dormitory had come and gone and I was still miles from where I needed to be.

*OK, I thought. Car will not go forward. Car will go backwards.* After all, I had just demonstrated as much backing down the drive. *If I can back a hundred feet, where is it written I can't back the four miles or so to the radio station?* No time to ponder consequences, I decided to give it a try.

Summoning Ladylove back into the car, we began inching up Iuka Avenue, around the traffic circle in front of the fraternity house, then down Waldeck to 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Turning right

on 16th, then left on High we arrived at its intersection with 15th, which was then the geographical and emotional heart of the campus. Next we turned right on South Oval Drive. Oval Drive was “temporarily” closed to vehicular traffic during the campus riots of the Vietnam era and has remained so since.

The snow fell heavily on MFL’s un-wipered rear window, making forward visibility difficult. I opened my door with my left hand, steering with my right, and by shaping my body into a corkscrew, I was able to squint forward into the swirling flakes. Ladylove did the same on her side of the car. We backed past William Oxley Thompson Memorial Library and out onto Neil Avenue - not the most direct route downtown but apt to be less traveled that night than High Street.

The street lamps on both sides of Neil Avenue created a tunnel of light in the darkness. Looking south as far as I could see there were no cars in motion, only mounds of snow bearing faint resemblance to automobiles lining both sides of the street. I was briefly troubled by which lane of traffic to choose: the right lane, appropriate for southbound cars, or the left lane, appropriate for north-facing traffic. I solved the dilemma by backing down the center of the street.

Eventually, the tall stone walls of the Ohio Penitentiary filled the rear window, and the half-light of street lamps and frantically churning snow filling spaces between its rough-cut stone blocks created a mood as Gothic as the structure itself. If O. Henry were still in residence at the prison, as he was for five years at the turn of the last century, I wondered what he would have written of our strange parade.

Past the penitentiary I backed left onto Spring Street and began climbing the gentle rise from the Scioto River into downtown. We'd been fortunate not to attract the attention of Columbus' finest, but two people hanging out the open doors of a car backing down the center of a street through a major state capital in a snowstorm might not go unnoticed forever.

The hour grew late but so far I was still employed. I backed right onto High Street and passed the State Capitol where Lincoln once addressed the citizens of Columbus from its steps. A few more blocks and the great brick box of the Southern Hotel heaved into view. It was the Great Southern Fireproof Hotel when it was dedicated in 1896 and is the Columbus Westin Hotel as I write, following extensive and much-needed renovation, but in the mid-50s it was just the Southern Hotel. WMNI's studios were in the penthouse. It was going to be close but I thought I might just make it.

I compounded my other misdemeanors of the evening by parking MFL in a No Parking alley adjacent to the hotel, and my underage Ladylove in the Southern's lounge while I hammered repeatedly on the elevator controls, stupidly hoping to hurry the ancient cage on its descent. Eventually it appeared; I jumped in and began the pokey rise to the penthouse. Rushing breathless into the studio, I gasped out the call letters of the station at the 10 p.m. break, then allowed my weight to sag into the Play button on one of two temperamental tape recorders to begin a 30-minute prerecorded program that would see me halfway to sign-off. I fell into the chair at the console and hoped thirty minutes would be time enough to catch my breath.



*Architect's rendering of The Great Southern Hotel and Theatre at the time of its construction in 1894.*



*The Columbus Westin Hotel today. WMNI's studios were located in the penthouse.*

The hands of the clock crept once around the dial, and at long last it was 11. I read the station sign-off, played the National Anthem and turned out the lights. Racing to the elevator, I again hammered on the buttons, then paced back and forth as it dithered its way down to the lobby. Locating Ladylove in the lounge, I guided her unsteady footsteps out the door, pretending interest as she described the number and types of drinks that were purchased for her while she was waiting for me.

*Please, God, let the car still be there. (It was.) Please let it move forward when I let the clutch out. (It didn't.)* I threw open the trunk, ripped out the jack and handle and reattempted the prescriptive solution. Once: crash! Twice: crash! A third time: crash! But this time the car rolled forward a few inches. I threw the jack and handle in the trunk, leaped behind the wheel, and began a high-speed, white-knuckle run north on snow-clogged High Street while declining, politely, to sing harmony to *Heart of My Heart*.

Peeling into the parking area in front of Bradley Hall, one of Ohio State's two '50s-era Virgin Vaults, I steered Ladylove up to the front door and waited in terrible silence for Mrs. Brown, the dorm mother, to arrive, seething, at the blacked-out entrance and open the door. I let Mrs. Brown deliver just enough of her "you're-going-straight-to-hell" speech to take some of the heat off Ladylove and raced back to the car.

Driving the cursed Icemobile back to the Phil Delt house, I climbed up to my room, threatened bodily harm to an assortment of brothers who, in my absence, were using my room as a saloon and who protested their expulsion with lurid threats, fed my monkey (we'll talk about him later, too) and fell, exhausted, into bed.

Some kinda night. And all for a buck.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REHEARSAL

The year, I'm guessing, was 1949 or '50. That would make me ten or eleven years old. Once again the season was winter, or at least the start of one – the opening act of another gray and windswept five months in the lives of my considerable family of parents, brother, aunts, uncles and cousins in Toledo. Hanging onto the western end of Lake Erie by its fingertips, Toledo is just able to withstand the Alberta Clippers that come raging out of Canada each winter to skim the wind-driven froth from the lake and dump it as snow on Cleveland, Buffalo and points east.

My mother and I were setting out that afternoon on what was by then a familiar Friday routine. Dad had driven our only car to the office that morning as he did each workday. To meet him for an end-of-week celebration Mom and I would board the Old Orchard bus for a trip downtown and dinner at Grace Smith's Cafeteria, after which we'd all return home in the family car.

The whole operation had a military precision about it that I know gladdened my father's Teutonic heart. Born and raised in Toledo, he was one of eight children of an immigrant German father. His mother, born in Chicago, was herself first generation American, also born of German immigrants.

Adding to Dad's enjoyment of our weekly troop movement was the fact that he served as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in World War I.

Once, when it was necessary for us to locate the car downtown without him, he left a series of chalk arrows on the sidewalks leading from the cafeteria to our car parked at a curb several blocks away. But this day, for all its planning, the rendezvous failed. As we walked into Smith's Cafeteria, Dad was nowhere in sight.

My mother assumed, correctly as it turned out, that Dad had simply been delayed leaving the office, something that seldom occurred in the life of the Director of Health and Physical Education for Toledo Public Schools. But what to do with her restive young son, who was eager to be in the cafeteria line savoring the newly-won privilege of filling his own plate? Ever inventive, with a conviction that rules, while good, did not always apply to her, Mom determined to fill the time until Dad's arrival by leading me out of the cafeteria, up the block, through the street door and up the dimly lit stairs of the business immediately adjacent. Though I never thought to ask her in later life, I'm confident she had never been there before nor even knew what the business was or did. The locus of our impromptu visit turned out to be the broadcast studios of WTOL Radio.

Now, more than a few winters have passed since the one of which I write, but I remember the scene that greeted us at the top of the stairs as if I had seen it this morning. We were in a lobby – small, unoccupied and unlighted owing to the lateness of the day. In the middle of the lobby was a round, high-backed sofa, its cushions facing outward, so that someone sitting on it was able to view what was happening in the surrounding studios.

Directly beyond the sofa, behind a large glass window, a man holding a sheaf of papers sat at a table, reading aloud. In front of him, a microphone hanging from a boom was capturing his words and bringing them, amplified, into the lobby where we stood. The realization that it

was also bringing them to hundreds, perhaps thousands, of other listeners at that same instant thrilled me to the very center of my being.

The man at the microphone was part-narrating, part-acting an adventure that I knew well. It involved the perils of Santa Claus trying to free himself from one villain after another in order to be aloft with his sleigh-full of goodies on Christmas Eve. Presented nightly in serialized form (and annually without much change), it held the rapt attention of Toledo tots for many years and helped to speed the days before Christmas.

Coming suddenly face to face with broadcasting like this had a profound effect on me and surely set the course of the next twenty years of my life, though for the first ten of those years I could do little more than dream about someday being that man behind the microphone.

But every so often the dreaming took on more tangible dimensions.

When I was about twelve or thirteen, I was rummaging through a storeroom at my uncles' roofing company. Under a pile of cardboard I found a military surplus intercom system. Awash in green camouflage and remarkably heavy owing to its vacuum tube technology, it permitted the person seated at the base unit to send his voice over wires to one or more remote speakers that could, in turn, become microphones for returning voice messages. It wasn't precisely radio but it took my imagination closer to broadcasting than it had ever been before.

I don't remember how I extorted the intercom from my uncles but I did, and before long I had built a makeshift studio in our garage. On a picnic table sat the base unit of the intercom, its power cord plugged into an electric socket dangling by a cord from the rafters overhead. Twin braided-copper wires ran away from the base unit, passing out the garage window and up to a speaker wedged into the crotch of a large elm tree in our backyard. With the volume turned up

full, it was possible to hear a voice to a distance of perhaps twenty feet from the speaker, just short of what I'm sure would have constituted unacceptable infringement on the rights of my parents and our neighbors.

Next to the intercom on the picnic table was an RCA Victor 78-rpm tabletop phonograph that my older brother Ted had coaxed my parents into buying. With his collection of records, and I'm certain without his permission, I assembled "the stacks of wax" that mimicked the disc jockeys I heard and admired on WJR Detroit and CKLW Windsor. A windup alarm clock completed the studio appointments. When "the old hands on the clock" said it was time, I wedged a short piece of dowel onto the transmit/receive switch on the intercom to lock it into the transmit mode, spun my theme song (Les Brown's *Leap Frog*), and welcomed all my listeners to *Ken's Den*, an hour of recorded music "for all you guys and gals out there."

Just what I said during those "broadcasts" has been lost to memory but I'm pretty confident that my chatter was borrowed intact from things I heard J.P. McCarthy say on WJR Radio or on CKLW's *Make-Believe Ballroom* with Eddie Chase. For the commercials I read advertisements from our newspaper, *The Toledo Blade*. And for the next hour I actually became one of my heroes – a real-life radio broadcaster. Happily, this was before the day when a well-meaning parent recording the whole thing on home video could, in later years, reduce these happy memories to the foolishness they undoubtedly were. I'm grateful to be able to remember these moments without the benefit of clarity.

High school passed without my coming into contact with radio, although a classmate of mine, Bill Blinn, landed a one-hour show on WTOL. Bill was two years ahead of me in school and I remember listening to his show on Saturday mornings, usually while completing one of my

father's interminable lists of chores for his second son. One Saturday I was assigned to wash the kitchen walls, a task I completed by pacing myself to Bill's broadcast – one wall every fifteen minutes. If I felt any envy for Bill at the time - and I'm sure I did – it was soon erased as Bill's remarkable gifts became evident.

Moving to Hollywood and working as William Blinn, Bill wrote for such memorable TV series as *Rawhide*, *Bonanza* and *Gunsmoke*; created the TV series *Starsky and Hutch*; developed the series *Eight Is Enough*; won a Peabody Award for the 1971 TV adaptation of *Brian's Song* and a 1977 Emmy for the TV mini-series *Roots*. At this writing he remains active in his craft.

Fall of 1957 brought me to Ohio State and a month or so later to the door of WOIO Radio. Unlike Ohio State's professionally staffed Telecommunications Center, including WOSUAM/FM/TV, WOIO was a purely student enterprise. I presume that there was a faculty representative somewhere but I have no idea who it might have been; I never met him.

Located in the basement of Derby Hall, WOIO was part classroom, part radio studios. Walking into the complex from the dimly lit hall you first entered a conventional classroom, with a desk at the front facing a number of chairs with attached writing surfaces. Difficult to squeeze into, impossible to write on if you were left-handed, these chairs were nevertheless standard issue in every high school and college classroom I ever entered. At WOIO they were also never occupied, except by mounds of coats and books.

Leading away from the classroom to the right was a door that opened into a sound lock for two studios. A sound lock is simply a small closet with additional doors opening out from it. By closing one door before you open the next, you create a dead space for sound so that outside noise doesn't follow you when entering a studio that might have a "live" microphone.

Passing through a door in the right side of the sound lock you entered a room that bore a passing resemblance to a network studio capable of producing radio drama. In addition to a pair of microphones hanging from booms, there was a sound table consisting of four 78-rpm turntables with five separately controlled pickup arms. Each arm was capable of reaching one of the turntables and three of them could be used on either of two tables. The practical effect of this arrangement was that a recording of night sounds (crickets, wind, etc.) that might only last two minutes could be made to play indefinitely by simply cross-fading from one pickup arm near the end of the recording to a second arm that had been placed at the beginning of the same recording. Other effects (a coyote howling, a dog baying) could be introduced as needed from recordings cued and ready on the other tables.

Making use of the sound table and a recorded effects library, a skilled operator could create the combination of sounds needed to evoke even the most complex scene in a listener's mind. Orson Well's sound technician convinced thousands of Americans that they were hearing Martian spacecraft in his infamous *War of the Worlds* broadcast. All that was required of the listener was to close her eyes and open her imagination.

The only problem with this wonderful studio was that it was an anachronism.

By the latter half of the 1950s, nighttime radio drama was dead and daytime drama ("soaps") was dying. I remember taking a course in broadcast law about this time that bore little resemblance to what was happening in the industry at that very moment.

A closer approximation of radio in a mid-sized market at the middle of the last century was located across the sound lock from the network studio. Turning left out of the lock you entered a tiny "combo" studio. Here there was neither room nor need for actors, directors,

announcers, engineers and sound effects technicians. Here, one person and one person only was the whole show. Combining all the responsibilities for studio operation, this one person was announcer, news and sports director, music librarian, host and engineer. In later employment I added to the tasks above the roles of telephone receptionist and transmitter engineer's assistant (I've made up the latter title even as my management made up the task, which required the logging of electrical valuations I never understood every thirty minutes to fulfill the station's licensing requirements.)

There was a third door leading out of the sound lock, this one to WOIO's tiny music library. And perched like a small safe on the floor of this room was the station's transmitter. WOIO did not broadcast its signal in the conventional sense but rather piggybacked it onto the electrical current produced by Ohio State's very own generating plant. This meant that in order to hear the station, you had to a) own a radio that was powered by electrical current, not batteries – not too much of a reach in those pre-transistor days, and b) have the radio plugged into a socket that made use of OSU- generated electricity. Most of the dormitories did, though probably none of the fraternity and sorority houses. The signal was supposed to be heard below standard broadcast frequencies at, say, 510 kilocycles. Owing to the fact that the transmitter was seldom serviced, it merrily threw out its signal at all of its harmonics as well: 1020, 1530 and a few others in between, making the station roundly hated by most dorm residents who frequently could hear no other station on their radios.

WOIO signed on each weekday afternoon at 4 p.m. and off each evening at 10. It was in the late evenings, following sign-off, that many of us made our audition tapes that we hoped would win us a job with the commercial stations downtown. WOIO program content included some news, some sports (emphasis Big Ten), and lots of record shows. Students who were

interested could become broadcasters by simply presenting themselves to the student station manager and receiving a shift assignment, say Wednesdays between 5 and 6 pm. The station manager to whom I presented myself was a splendid upperclassman who wore a permanently bemused look tinged with melancholy, as if someone had just stolen a girlfriend he didn't much care for.

Dick Murgatroyd was quiet, capable, and made for a career in broadcasting. Among his many post graduate positions were stints as producer, director or talent with AVCO Broadcasting, Bob Hope Enterprises, Taft Broadcasting, Multimedia Broadcasting and the ABC, CBS and NBC television networks. For many years he was famously the producer of the Ruth Lyons and Bob Braun TV shows, which originated in the Cincinnati studios of WLW-T and were networked to WLW stations in other cities. He is, as I write this, the Kenton County (Kentucky) Judge/Executive.

Dick's most endearing quality was his absolute unflappability. Wandering into the WOIO studios after 4 p.m. he might spend a moment exchanging pleasantries with the staffer on duty, who was busily filling the afternoon with music. As Dick turned to leave the tiny combo studio he might remark, "You *do* know you aren't on the air, don't you?" thereby reminding the staffer that he had forgotten to turn on the transmitter at the start of his shift.

My most memorable brush with Dick's equanimity came a few seasons after our year together at WOIO. I was then employed by WOSU Radio, where my tasks included doing the colorcasts of Ohio State football games for the Ohio State Football Network. Dick was a producer/director at WOSU-TV, and was preparing to telecast the Ohio State men's home basketball season. I was asked to provide color commentary, Darrell Wible would do the play-

by-play and Dick would direct the telecasts from WOSU-TV's antique remote bus parked outside and adjacent to the school's St. John Arena.

During one game, my attention was drawn to the fact that we were covering the action with only one camera.

At best we had only two cameras at our disposal: one, a follow camera to provide close-ups and a second camera that at any given time showed the active half of the floor. The director's task was to call for cuts back and forth between the two cameras to provide the viewer with seamless action without revealing the follow camera's sometimes frantic search for who-the-hell had the ball.

Assuming, I suppose, that my news would come as a surprise, I picked up the telephone that connected Darrell and me, seated at a small table close to the rafters inside the arena, with the remote bus parked outside and below us. Dick answered the phone. Mildly mocking what I remembered him saying to others, I said "You *do* know you've only got one active camera, don't you?" Dick let out a melancholy sigh and replied, "I do, and we hope to do something about it, just as soon as someone puts out the fire."

A goodly portion of the inside of the bus was in flames.

There was another reason why WOIO was not held in high regard by the dorm rats at Ohio State, and this had to do with the music played by the station. It may come as a surprise to younger readers to learn that, at a point within even the writer's lifetime, the favorite music of children and their parents was one and the same. Composers, lyricists, performing artists and orchestras were mutually enjoyed by two and sometimes three generations in the same family.

And the all-time arbiter of what constituted our favorite music was the weekly radio broadcast of *Your Hit Parade*.

The program made its debut over NBC in 1935 and each week artists such as Buddy Clark, Frank Sinatra, Eileen Wilson, Doris Day and Dinah Shore presented live performances of the top songs in America “as determined by *Your Hit Parade* survey, which checks the best-sellers in sheet music and phonograph records, the songs most heard on the air and most played in the automatic coin machines – an accurate, authentic tabulation of America’s taste in popular music.”

In 1950, *Your Hit Parade* moved from radio to television, still sponsored by the American Tobacco Company's Lucky Strike cigarettes. But change was occurring that would bring about the end of *Your Hit Parade* in 1959, and underscore the dorm rats’ displeasure with WOIO.

Some credit Elvis Presley and some The Beatles, but whatever the fountainhead, young people had found a sound of their own and they were no longer content to sit by their parents’ side and wait to learn which song “the survey found in first place.” They already knew, and to give the matter added attraction, their parents hadn’t a clue. Rock ‘n roll was not only here to stay, it was also delivering a final and fatal blow to the multi- generational music of *Your Hit Parade*.

At the time of which I write, the music of the young was recorded almost exclusively on 45-rpm records and the music of their parents on LP albums. WOIO’s music library was filled with nothing but albums.

Because it was the music we played, it also defined the artists whose careers we followed.

And so, on learning that Mantovani and his Orchestra would be coming to Columbus for a concert, and that he would be appearing the night before in Youngstown, Ohio, it seemed entirely appropriate to think in terms of a road trip to interview the great man. Properly done, the interview would air on WOIO the day of the concert, thereby scooping the other local media who would have to wait for his arrival before they could hope to talk with him.

For most of the middle years of the last century, the radio interview of popular recording stars was one of the supremely successful symbiotic relationships. The promoter of a concert or dinner club booking such an artist was eager for the publicity to encourage patronage of the event, the cost for which was usually nothing more than a pair of comp tickets or dinner for the interviewer. The recording artist, too, wanted “good numbers” to assure repeat bookings and to fatten his or her agent’s bargaining power with other promoters. Then, too, an interview afforded the artist the opportunity to “plug” the newest recording, thereby adding to the couple of cents the sale of each record would put in his or her pocket. Finally, the radio interviewer desperately wanted the cachet that went along with interviewing a big name talent to demonstrate his or her ability to play in the big leagues to station management and listeners alike.

Armed with just such knowledge I brought up the subject with a couple of fraternity brothers at dinner. “Hey, how’d you like to drive with me to Youngstown tonight so I can interview Mantovani for the radio station?” Jack Eby and Dave Underwood were active members of the fraternity, whereas I was still a pledge.

Normally, this sort of temerity on the part of a pledge would earn him a night of shining the actives' shoes. But Jack and Dave were transfers from Case Western University in Cleveland, and for reasons I never understood, were regarded by their active brothers as something less because of it. More than a pledge, to be sure, but less than an indigenous chapter active. To me, Jack and Dave were just very accessible upperclassmen and I formed a close friendship with them; Jack would one day be a member of my wedding party.

Because he had an advanced calculus midterm the next morning, Jack wavered on hearing the invitation but his few feeble protests were quickly brushed aside. We would be back in plenty of time for him to take the test, and he could have the whole back seat of the car for the trip. Bring along a flashlight and his calculus textbook and it would be as good as studying in his room. Within a matter of minutes we were off to WOIO to pick up a tape recorder and then onto the highways for the 170-mile trip to Youngstown.

As Dave navigated the darkened, pre-Interstate roads, I began to address a couple of considerations for the first time. Given the distance to be driven and the lateness of the hour, we would arrive too late to get our interview before the concert, and maybe even to hear the concert itself. The best we could hope for was to speak with the great man afterwards, perhaps at his hotel. Which raised the second consideration: I had no idea where he was staying.

We followed our headlights through the night, arriving in Youngstown shortly before 11, and immediately set about finding the biggest and best hotel in the city, reasoning that this is where the great man would choose to stay.

Exactly how we did this and when we finally located him I don't recall, but find him we did. Or rather his entourage. He was dining, we were told, and would not be available for an

interview. But such was the strength of the relationship between promoters, artists and the media that we were offered an alternative interview – an opportunity to converse with Charles Stanley “Stan” Newsome. It was almost as good as talking with the great man, himself.

Annunzio Paulo Mantovani was born in Venice, Italy in 1905. The family was in England, where his father was playing with a touring opera company, when World War I broke out. Unable to return home, the family settled in, and at age fourteen the young Mantovani began studying the violin. Improbably, just two years later he was leading his own quintet. Shortly after, the group became a fixture at the Hotel Metropole, London, where it began to broadcast regularly. He became a Decca recording artist in 1940, and in 1951 formed the New Orchestra of forty musicians that would make his name famous in both England and the United States.

Often associated with the phrase “cascading strings,” the Mantovani sound was slow, string-filled and syrupy. It was also very popular. And, at that moment, it was being heard on the radio at almost every turning, thanks to its recording of Victor Young’s theme from the Mike Todd movie spectacular, *Around the World in 80 Days*.

Against a barn-full of violins, the main theme was sung by a high, inordinately clear solo trumpet. Stan Newsome played that trumpet.

A short, wiry and white-haired pixie of a man, Stan Newsome loved the idea of participating in our interview. Or rather, he loved the camaraderie it instantly provided - three new companions to share drinks with before and after we talked. To steady his nerves, Stan drank one during the interview as well.

I asked the usual questions and Stan must have provided the usual answers – I don’t remember anything particularly revealing coming from our discussion – and the interview was at

an end. As we were packing to leave, the interviewee began interviewing us: where and how did we live at Ohio State? My companions provided all the relevant information. We said our goodbyes and then it was back to Columbus, arriving about 4 a.m. I fell into bed for a few brief hours of sleep, then grabbed the tape of the interview and set off for the station. As quickly as I could, I cut the interview into logical segments, separating them with selections from Mantovani albums and concluding with “the” recording of *Around the World in 80 Days*. By the time the station signed on that afternoon the interview was ready to air. I pitched the tape to the announcer on duty who agreed to air it, stuck around long enough to hear it actually broadcast, and then headed back to the fraternity house.

Jack had missed his midterm. In later years he would write me, “I was so exhausted after being up all night that I was unable to take the exam and threw myself on the mercy of the instructor. He found the tale I related about how I had spent the previous night and the bad company that I had been keeping so bizarre and creative that he excused me from the exam and accepted my course average to date as the score for the exam.”

This small academic setback didn’t hurt Jack’s career.

He went on to hold a wide range of positions with Ford Motor Company between 1964 and 1995, retiring as Executive Director of Corporate Strategy. He was responsible for recommending and coordinating Ford’s global strategies and overseeing mergers and acquisitions. Previously he had served as president of Ford Japan. As I write this, Jack is president of John T. Eby & Associates, a management consultancy in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, that includes Sony as a client.

But the story is not over. Whatever my social or academic responsibilities for the balance of the day, I was not able to crawl back under the covers as I desperately desired. Now, late at night, as I wearily climbed the stairs to my room in the fraternity, I became aware of a riotous party going on somewhere in the house. Not for me- not tonight. But on reaching my door, I discovered the party was in my room. Half a dozen brothers and twice as many bottles of amber liquid were squeezed into the tiny space I shared with my monkey (really, I will discuss him later in this memoir). They all had their backs to me as I tried to wedge my way into the room.

The focus of the brothers' attention was none other than Stan Newsome, himself, who was holding court while seated on the edge of my bed. He had used the information provided to him the night before to find his way to the Phi Delt house following the concert. I smiled weakly, greeted everyone by name and accepted a glass of something and-ice. Within minutes the white noise of conversation, the warmth of the drink and the endless hours without sleep began to take their toll and I could no longer keep my eyes open. Carefully, I moved to the foot of the bed, easing my body between the wall and Stan's back. In a matter of seconds I was fast asleep.

I have no idea how long I was out when I was rudely shaken back to consciousness. As my eyes focused, I saw Stan hovering over me, his face a mask of scorn. With elaborate precision so as not to spoil the moment by slurring his words, he pronounced the ultimate condemnation:

“Keller, you're a helluva host.”

CHAPTER THREE  
**SEX AFTER SIGN-OFF**

I don't remember his name, and I don't suppose he remembers her name, but the two of them were caught in Cupid's embrace on the boss's sofa and that's how I got the job at WMNI. That was the thing about radio in the middle of the last century: you were either doing three things at once or nothing at all, and either could get you into trouble, as this chapter will explain.

The subject of the above paragraph, like I, was a student at Ohio State working part-time in broadcasting. He had already made the leap from student radio to commercial radio; I was waiting in the wings. Lured, I imagine, by the promise of large blocks of free time during a weekend shift, he had brought a lady friend to the studio to keep him company. He had not counted on a surprise visit from the boss.

Such diversions were not uncommon among announcers. I'm told that NBC network announcers in New York played a form of "chicken" during the twenty-nine minutes between their golden-throated orations. Forsaking the announcers' lounge they would ride the elevators up and down Rockefeller Center, hoping to arrive back in the announce booth with exactly no time to spare before the on-air light flashed on.

The boss in our story was William R. Mnich, erstwhile car salesman who had diversified his investments by starting a new radio station. That last sentence deserves a closer look. When I arrived in Columbus, conventional wisdom held that the city had all the AM radio stations its crowded dial could accommodate.

To his credit, Bill somehow managed to get the Federal Communications Commission to agree to license a new station at 920 kilocycles (later kilohertz). The “W” in WMNI denotes a radio station located east of the Mississippi; the remaining three letters are the first three letters of Bill’s last name (pronounced mih-NICK).

With license in hand, Bill set about building a studio and staffing his station. In both cases, no expense was too small. Because he had had to mortgage his house, as well as borrow a great deal of money to launch his fledgling radio enterprise, Bill’s new station had to make do with cast-offs and hand-me-downs. Take the tape machines, for example. In those pre-digital days, professional quality tape recorders, referred to as decks, were a vital part of any station’s list of studio equipment. They were used both to record and playback program content and commercials. Because they frequently needed to be activated by the announcer from his seated position before the microphone, the best decks had remote start/stop/record buttons, as well as silent start-up.

WMNI’s, by contrast, were a mismatched pair of used machines never intended for studio use. Neither could be started or stopped except by getting up from the microphone and planting yourself firmly in front of them. One, a Crown, was built for home use and required a massive amount of force to engage its drive mechanism. The other, a Magnecorder, was built for editing and featured an exposed playback head. It had the distressing habit of coasting after you stopped it, making an announcer sound foolish if he lead to a tape, only to have the playback start several seconds into the first sentence.

A practical demonstration of these shortcomings will follow.

I mentioned earlier that in broadcasting you were either too busy or not busy

enough. Let's take a moment to consider the former.

On arriving at the station for a typical shift, Job One for the announcer was to select the music to be played that day. To do this, you entered the music library and began assembling a mix of 45-rpm records and LP albums, literally building "a stack of wax" (actually vinyl) according to the station's music policy. Such a policy might dictate that a male vocalist was always to be followed by an instrumental selection that in turn would be followed by a female vocalist, a Broadway cast or Hollywood soundtrack selection, a group vocal, and finally a novelty number, and that this sequence was to be followed in endless rotation. Program directors made their livings, and reputations, by developing just such arcane formulae. But even as I entered broadcasting in the late 1950s some stations were abandoning a full music policy for a top-40 formula that literally reduced the size of the music library to a wire rack holding no more than forty 45-rpm records.

Once you had "pulled" your show it was time to check the news hooks. Day and night, teletype machines delivered an endless highway of yellow paper filled with news, sports and feature items from United Press International and Associated Press into newsrooms across the country. News directors separated the stories by tearing the endless feed of paper against the edge of a concrete mason's trowel or metal ruler, then spiking the stories on hooks according to their content: national, international, state, city, sports, weather, features. Feature material ranged from updates on the lives of celebrities to simple human interest stories. Announcers who were about to be faced with hours of airtime to fill wanted all the feature stories they could find.

Finally, armed with as many recordings as you could carry, you entered the studio to become the "sound" of your station, usually for a period of four to five hours. Weekend shifts could last much longer; I once worked sixteen hours straight.

Recordings of the day lasted about two and a half minutes per track. Here's what you did during each of those 150 seconds. To begin, if you had just read or played a commercial or public service announcement you had to enter that fact in the station's broadcast log. You did so using up to twelve digits, indicating the hour, minute and second it began and the hour, minute and second it ended (3:15:20-3:16:20). If you happened to run two commercials back-to-back you were looking at as many as twenty-four digits. Next, you selected the piece of music to follow the one that was now playing, placed it on the turntable and, using the cue circuit, rotated the turntable to find the start of the recording, then back-cued it half a turn so that it wouldn't "wow" on start-up. Then you checked the log to see what was to happen during the next break. A recorded commercial? Locate and cue the proper disc, tape or tape cartridge. A live commercial? Look it over and rehearse any tough words or phrases. A weather forecast? Phone the weather bureau for the current temperature and humidity. News headlines? Leave the studio and race to the teletypes, grab the most recent stories to read but also spike the earlier stories for various feature broadcasts, such as farm prices and stock reports. Without time to read, much less rehearse, the headlines before reading them on-air (a practice referred to as "rip 'n read"), you prayed there were no typos; no unfinished or ungrammatical sentences; no six-syllable or foreign words; no Russian names that were suddenly in the news that would betray the fact that you and your audience were coming across this information for the very first time – together.

By now the recording that's been playing is into its final seconds. But the telephone is flashing and you're expected to answer it (it could be the station manager calling in to complain about something you said or did. If not, it's probably a listener on the same mission). The transmitter readings are already late, meaning you'll have to fake them yet again. Up ahead three or four minutes is a tape program you have to locate and cue or else leave "dead air" while you

scramble to do it then. And you still haven't found the time to pee, which first became an issue almost an hour ago.

In radio, in the middle of the last century, in middle America, when you were busy, you were very, very busy. Management believed that downsizing (a word not yet coined) was its only defense against the flight of commercial dollars that were quickly abandoning radio for the new, exciting – and for the moment inexpensive – medium of TV. This elevated a willingness to work long hours for little money to the very pinnacle of a radio announcer's employment credentials. It also set to burning the fires of my personal hell – Saturdays on WMNI.

The mornings would begin calmly enough with several hours of a record show and the occasional break for news and sports. But about 9:30, a strange assortment of people carrying a variety of large suitcases would start filtering into the hall outside the on-air studio. I would know they were there when some would actually come into the studio, greeting me with questions or a request to leave their suitcases – actually instrument cases – in some unoccupied corner, the hallway already being clogged with same. The fact that I might have the microphone open seldom deterred them from extending to me the heartiest, and earthiest, of greetings.

These were the students of Whitey Lunzar, music shop proprietor, teacher, and by reason of payment to Mr. Mnich, owner of two hours of Saturday morning airtime on WMNI. In keeping with Mr. Mnich's frugality, there was a miniscule production studio adjacent to the on-air studio, its plywood walls only partly covered with sound-absorbing acoustic tiles. As the hour approached 10, I watched through a small plate glass window as the production studio filled with an assortment of guitars, mandolins, fiddles and accordions, each in the grasp of its earnest and sometimes terrified owner.

Once on the air, Whitey became the host of his program, introducing his charges with glowing praise for their musicianship and extravagant claims about their futures in show business. My on-air studio now became a control room, and my task was to “ride gain” on the fledgling stars. Riding gain meant controlling the volume levels for both voice and instruments - no easy task when a single microphone had to suffice for both. Sending too “hot” a signal to the transmitter could trigger a limiter that would quickly (and ruthlessly) drop the broadcast volume, making the performer appear to disappear from the radio for several seconds until the limiter decided it was safe to restore full volume. Sending too low a signal to the transmitter would effectively produce the same result.

Once a performer’s volume was set, I chanced running out to the teletype to grab a handful of news and sports for the next report, praying that this particular rendition of “Red River Valley” didn’t contain a whoop or a yodel that would send the transmitter into overload. Back in the control room I’d actually have a chance to read the news to myself before reading it on the air.

And so, with many assorted clunks and bonks as accordions, banjos and various body parts collided with the microphone stand (less expensive than a boom that would have kept the mic out of harm’s way), Whitey Lunzar’s two hours of showcasing his students and plugging his wares came to a close. For me, the day was just shifting into high gear.

Now, an exquisite ballet was about to begin during which I would conduct an afternoon record show (note description earlier this chapter) while, at the same time, recording the Notre Dame football game of the day from the ABC Radio Network for delayed broadcast. At a fully staffed station, I would have conducted the record show while a studio engineer recorded the

football game. At a fully equipped station, I would have conducted the record show while the football game, in its entirety, was recording on a single ten-inch tape at 3.75 inches per second. But the careful reader will recall that WMNI did not own a studio quality tape deck capable of recording a ten-inch tape. What I had at my disposal were two bloody mismatched machines that could record only on seven inch reels at 7.5 inches per second. As a consequence, every half-hour or so, regardless of whatever else may have been happening at the moment, I had to leap up from the microphone, run to the tape decks and switch one machine off while I switched the other on, hoping I did so during a brief pause in the play-by-play. Then back to the records, the log, the commercials, the news headlines and weather, and the telephone.

And so the afternoon passed in a flurry of activity while I sought to reassure the listeners with my voice that, hey, everything's cool and isn't it great to be laid back and listening to these tunes together.

Eventually it became 4 p.m. - time to end the record show and begin the rebroadcast of the Notre Dame game. With luck, the game was over and both tape decks were available for playback. In those pre-TV days, before commercials made a game run all afternoon, this was at least possible. But sometimes the game was still in progress, meaning I had to use one tape deck for playback while still recording on the other – a sticky proposition when it was time to segue between the decks to achieve a seamless broadcast. If the first playback tape ended and the second machine was still recording, it was necessary to cut the volume on the first machine at the console in front of the announcer's microphone, race to the first machine, rip the tape from its spindles, put the second tape on the same spindles and thread the tape over the playback head, roll the tape and race back to the console to bring the volume up on the new tape. At best this

was a fifteen-second enterprise, rather a long period of dead air between “He’s at the thirty, the twenty, the ten” and “Touchdown!”

For good measure, I was responsible for inserting local commercials over the network commercials during the rebroadcast. To do this, I needed to be alert to the play by-play announcer’s sometimes hurried decision to cue a commercial break: “We’ll be back to Norte Dame football after this message,” or words to that effect. In the 1950s, the pace of a football game was still determined by the opposing coaches, not by a TV producer, and broadcasters had to find commercial breaks where they could. Was there an injury? An equipment problem? A dog on the field? Cue the break and hope nothing of consequence to the game happened in the next sixty seconds.

Once a break cue was given, I had to cut the audio from the tape deck while I read a local commercial in its place. To make sure I rejoined the network broadcast cleanly - that is, in the moment of silence between the end of the network commercial and the resumption of play-by-play - I listened to the audio from the tape deck (the network feed) in one of my two earphones while I listened to myself reading the commercial in the other. I became fairly adept at concentrating on what I was saying while still reserving a small portion of my consciousness for what I was hearing. It was an exercise that went a long way toward preparing me to be a husband and father of two.

The nightmare scenario in all of this is as follows: the game has run long; you are still recording on one machine as you playback on the other; you’ve started reading a commercial when, in your earphones, the network feed disappears because the playback tape has run out. Now you must a) complete the reading of the commercial; b) cut your mic, leap up and race to

the tape deck carrying your earphones with you; c) rip off the used tape and replace it with the next playback tape, carefully threading the tape over the playback head; d) start the tape as you jam your earphones into the machine to listen to the playback; e) fast-forward through the remainder of the network commercial to the start of the play-by-play; f) race back to the console and bring the audio back up. With luck, you've pulled the whole thing off with only thirty seconds of dead air, an eternity in radio terms.

The odds against all this happening at the same time were very great. It's a wonder to me, therefore, that it happened as often as it did.

Eventually, the game came to its end and with it my Saturday shift. I would leave the station feeling as if I had run a marathon. But if Saturdays were non-stop, balls-to-the-wall activity, Sundays were the exact opposite, bringing with them another cause of exhaustion: boredom.

By contrast with Saturday's crowded hall, Sunday's was quiet and unoccupied. I used the space as a walking track to try to relieve the tedium; there was little else to do. Following sign-on, Sunday's log was filled with half-hour paid religious programs requiring only that I make a station break every thirty minutes. Because they were recorded, I wasn't even responsible for keeping the volume constant. Sometime during the morning we went live to a local church for an hour's coverage of its services but all that meant was that I didn't need to make the station break on the half-hour. The morning crept by with exquisite slowness.

At noon I was free, but not for the day; I was scheduled to work the last three hours of Sundays as well. Early on a wonderful and breathtaking idea began to form in my hormone-ravaged mind. WMNI's studios, as I mentioned, were on the top floor of the Southern Hotel.

Beneath them were floor upon floor of rooms for rent, most of them unoccupied. Since I needed to be back in harness a mere eight hours later, why even leave the hotel? Why not rent a room and invite Ladylove to come and use the time to study with me? Biology, I hoped, would be our subject of choice.

And so it came to be. As I entered the hotel on Sunday mornings I would request a room for the day from the clerk in the lobby.

Faced with inventing a name for the register, I settled on one that had just a touch of familiarity so as not to seem as if I were hiding anything. No John Smith for me. Adding a bogus middle initial to the name of Princess Margaret's former lover produced a name that had the added advantage of employing the initials of my fraternity, which went along nicely with its address, which I also used on the registration form. And so Peter D. Townsend became a frequent Sunday guest of the Southern Hotel.

Ever hopeful that an afternoon of "studying" might actually include some studying, Ladylove would meet me with an armload of books when I picked her up at her dormitory. And maybe that first time alone, together, in a hotel room, we actually opened a book or two. But in a tiny room dominated by a bed and containing little else, we were drawn to it with all the passion of youth. And there, surrounded by the biggest and ugliest flowers ever inflicted on harmless wallpaper, I discovered the most beautiful architecture of all of God's creation: the rises and falls, the flat places and curved, the light places and dark of a woman's body.

More than forty years later, while doing genealogical research, I discovered that the consortium of immigrant German businessmen who built The Great Southern Fireproof Hotel and Opera House was headed by my great uncle, Nicholas Schlee.

I lost my virginity in Uncle Nick's hotel.

To the extent that Ladylove got any studying done, it was during the three hours that I worked before Sunday signoff when she was left alone in the room.

Those may have been the longest hours of any shift, knowing that she was only partly dressed and just a few floors below me. One cold and lonely night I reached for the tape that was to fill the last thirty minutes of the broadcast day, only to discover that it was nowhere to be found. Remembering that curfew that night for Ladylove was still ninety minutes away, and being very much in need of additional studying, I called the engineer at the transmitter and suggested that, absent a program for the final thirty minutes of the day, we might just as well pull the plug and go home. He readily agreed, I read the station sign-off, played the National Anthem and took the elevator down to my Ladylove's waiting arms.

The next day I was summoned to Mr. Mnich's office where I was, appropriately, read the riot act. What had I been thinking? Even given the missing program I should have filled with music to the end of the broadcast day. Didn't I know that signing off early might attract the attention of the FCC and put the station's license in jeopardy? I fully expected such a chat and decided in advance that whatever the consequences it was worth it, though I confess I hadn't thought of the possible consequences to the station. I may have grown a bit that day.

As the holidays approached at the end of 1958, a series of events conspired to create a week that will live a lifetime in my memory. Our afternoon man, Bob Linville, had somehow attracted the attentions of a woman who was living in the hotel while some fire damage to the kitchen of her home was being repaired. Because she would be in the hotel for an extended stay, her insurance company had agreed to put her up in what passed for a suite at the Southern.

I don't remember her real name but I do remember that she had aspirations of a career in radio and was prepared to call herself Jill Jarvis.

Both divorced, Bob and Jill became instantly attached at the hip and, I was soon to learn, at various other points of their anatomies as well. With many real and imagined staff illnesses, as well as planned vacations for the rest of the announcers, Bob and I became almost the entire air staff of the station from Christmas to New Year's Eve. When one of us wasn't on the air, the other was. Between shifts, Jill's suite was our clubhouse.

As I think of that incredible week it isn't just the countless boxes of pizza from Papajacs that I remember, or the still life of multi-colored beer and bourbon bottles, some upright, some on their sides, that littered every surface of the suite. It isn't the constant pulsing of high-energy activity followed by physical and mental exhaustion, only to be followed by the need to once more find the energy to perform. It isn't even the heady presence of Ladylove meeting me and loving me at all hours of the day and night, something heretofore denied us. I remember most the dawning of the wonderful and exhilarating and terrifying realization that my youth had finally and irretrievably ended, and, ready or not, my adult life had begun

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