Memories of a Career in Twentieth Century Radio

By Edward Cotter
So my children and grandchildren will know . . . radio was my great love.

Special thanks to my daughter, Marianne Cotter, who brought her editorial expertise to the pages of this book.
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Chapter 1

Childhood Memories

As a child growing up in Chicago in the 1920s, my very earliest memories are wrapped around the advent of radio. I’m not talking about the family gathered around a console laughing at Fibber McGee or listening to FDR’s fireside chats; that came much later. I’m talking about the very invention of radio itself.

It must have been the mid 1920s when I was a child of five or six. I spent the hours after dinner on the living room floor of our walk-up apartment on the north side, playing games and wrestling with my older brother, Bob.

Our father, however, had become engrossed in a nightly ritual. After my mother had cleared away the dinner dishes he would set up an odd-looking contraption on the kitchen table. It consisted of two posts mounted on a wooden base about the size of a dollar bill. The posts were connected by a line of coil that wrapped to the base of each post. My father, who by day was an accountant in Chicago’s stockyards, would place a set of handmade earphones on his head and hover intently over this strange object, drawing a metal rod back and forth over
the coil as if he were conjuring a spirit. Occasionally, he would raise his hand and shout at us to be quiet because he was picking up some kind of sound.

This went on for weeks and was a complete mystery to me until one evening he called me to his side. He took off the earphones and placed them carefully on my head. As I pressed the awkward headset to my ears not knowing what to expect, suddenly, miraculously, my head was filled with the distinct voice of a man talking. I jerked my head around to find the source of the voice. But this man, whoever he was, was not in our living room nor was he anywhere in the house where one could reasonably expect to hear someone talking. Even my father didn’t know the exact origin of the voice.

The coiled contraption on the table in front of me was called a crystal radio and I fell for it that night, heart and soul. And just as I couldn’t imagine the source of the voice, neither could I imagine how the transmission of sound over airwaves would shape my future, leading to a career that always held a hint of glamour, even if I was just the guy selling airtime to advertisers. As radio commanded the attention of the nation, I was just outside the broadcast booth, sealing the deals that brought those distant voices of entertainment and information to life in living rooms across the country.
Chapter 2

A Picture with the Voice

My next big moment in broadcasting came when I was about nine years old. We lived on the third floor of a three-story brick building, sharing the hallway with the Aker family. Donald Aker and I were friends and classmates at the Water Street Grade School in Chicago. One memorable day, Donald’s mother came over and asked my mother’s permission to take me with her son to witness a demonstration of a brand-new invention called television. My mom gave her consent, and while I had no idea what to expect, I was excited to be going on this adventure with Donald.

We took the bus to La Salle and Wacker Drive and then walked a block to the Merchandise Mart, which was the largest building in the United States at the time. It wasn’t a skyscraper, just a massive edifice that dominated the landscape for blocks around. It housed showroom space, studios and offices. NBC studios, where the demonstration was to take place, was located on the top floor.

We took the elevator up to the NBC floor where we joined a group of about ten people waiting to go into
the studio where the demonstration was taking place. Finally, the group before us came out and we were escorted into a small room containing only a table with a blank monitor on top. We gathered around the monitor as a man appeared on the screen and introduced himself as a staff radio announcer. He explained that at this very moment he was standing in front of a camera in the studio next to ours talking to us live. Both the sound and the picture were being transmitted from one room to another. At first we thought it was a joke. By that time radio broadcasts had become commonplace, but transmitting a live picture was another thing altogether.

Next we were taken into the studio next door and standing there was the announcer we had just watched on the monitor. He showed us the camera and microphone and explained how the picture and voice were transmitted together. He left us with the thought that it wouldn’t be long before we all had televisions in our homes just like we had radios and telephones. I pondered this futuristic device on the return bus trip and when I told my family what I saw, they could hardly believe it. Thanks to Donald and his mother, I was one of the first people to ever see a live televised broadcast.

As I grew up radio and television broadcasting continued to stir my imagination. My secret dream was to have a career in the broadcasting industry, even though such an exciting life seemed beyond the hopes of the son of a stockyard accountant.
Chapter 3

THE THRILL OF EARLY RADIO

The period prior to the advent of television was a very exciting time to live in Chicago, especially if you loved radio. The Windy City was the hub of broadcasting entertainment, not the Big Apple as it is today. Most of the major network radio shows originated in Chicago and were broadcast live, creating an excitement you don’t get with today’s taped shows and canned laughter. When I started to work for NBC, the competition with CBS was intense. When broadcasting the audible presence of a live audience was critical to the success of a show, especially the spontaneous laughter that comes with comedy programs. And the public was happy to oblige, clamoring for tickets to all the popular shows.

Later, as an employee of the network stations, I had access to all. The most sought-after show was Red Skelton’s comedy program. People really loved him. While the audience was lined up in the hallway waiting to be seated, Skelton would entertain them, posing as an inept usher, creating a very funny scene.
NBC’s Chicago outlet was WMAQ. Soap operas were an important staple of radio programming. They were commonly aired between 1pm and 3pm Monday through Friday. I was fascinated by the daily production process, which took place in seven or eight tiny rehearsal studios all in a row. The last studio in the row was the broadcast room.

As each actor showed up, he or she was handed the day’s script and sent to an assigned studio to join the rest of the cast for a half-hour rehearsal. In those days each soap opera ran only 15 minutes. As soon as one show completed its broadcast, the cast would file out of the studio and the cast of the next show would step in and start their show. This procedure was remarkably smooth and successful.

All the other major stations, depending on their format, operated in much the same way. One of the most memorable network programs was the two-hour Saturday night live broadcast of “The National Barn Dance” originating out of an old opera house that was renamed the Eighth Street Theater. As young men, if my brother and I didn’t have anything to do on a Saturday night we would listen to the show at home or get tickets and see it live. The Barn Dance was essentially a cowboy variety show that featured different musical acts as well as comedians. All the performers wore cowboy outfits to enhance the show for the studio audience. The show was broadcast to the nation on the network radio station WLS. The Barn Dance was so popular that, unlike most other radio broadcasts, you had to pay an admission fee to be in the studio audience.
Chapter 4

Early Broadcasting Career

After I graduated from high school and completed a few years of business college, I was a young man looking for work in Chicago. In those days, an entry-level job generally meant working as an office boy delivering mail and running errands while you learned the ropes and waited for an opportunity to move up. After a few forgettable jobs, I heard that a New York-based broadcasting firm called Storecast was opening an office in Chicago. I scheduled an interview immediately.

Storecast was a pioneer in the new field of retail broadcasting. Up to that time you never heard background music when you were shopping in a grocery store. When Storecast began installing speakers and alternating music programming with announcements about products in the store, shoppers in the New York area responded favorably, driving up sales for storeowners. My enthusiasm for anything related to broadcasting must have come through during the interview because they offered me a job on the spot. I went home that day walking on a cloud because I had actually landed a job
in the broadcasting industry. To me, Storecast was an example of how deeply broadcasting was penetrating everyday life.

I began working at Storecast just as it was rolling out its operations in the Chicago area. The strategy was to contract with major grocery chains to install ceiling speakers in each store to provide shoppers with pleasant background music interspersed with periodic product announcements. The next step was for Storecast’s sales team to call on the supermarkets’ suppliers, selling them commercial spots encouraging shoppers to buy their products.

The most important part of this service was the work of a team of merchandise men who visited each store in the branch once every two weeks to encourage managers to maintain a full stock of each sponsor’s product, and most importantly, to place those products prominently on the shelves. I was hired as one of a staff of three merchandisers. It was different than any type of work I had done before; I enjoyed it and progressed quickly. After the first month of its Chicago operation, Storecast promoted me to the position of marketing manager.

Shortly thereafter, the general manager of our branch was promoted to vice president in the New York office. I was extremely pleased when I was chosen to succeed him as general manager of our Chicago branch. Along with the responsibility of making the branch a financial success came the management of the radio operation, a challenge I really relished. This is where I met my first wife, Mary, an ambitious office secretary who wrote and produced her own half-hour radio program that aired on Sunday afternoons.
After two years at Storecast I became dissatisfied at the lack of opportunity for further promotion or salary increase. I had gained valuable experience during my tenure there, but I was ready to move on. About this time an industry friend mentioned an opening at one of the most popular and powerful radio stations in the country, WBBM. Based in Chicago, it was owned and operated by the Columbia Broadcast System (CBS). I made an appointment to see the sales manager and was happy to find out that they were looking for someone with my type of experience. I was hired on the spot for the position of sales service manager.

At that time CBS owned and operated five major market radio stations that were served by a division called radio spot sales. As a manager in this department, my job was to follow through each time a salesman sold radio time on WBBM with the client’s regional manager. I had a generous expense account with which to wine and dine these local executives. I would take them and their staffs to lavish lunches and explain the type of radio program their company had purchased on WBBM. I reviewed the details regarding the size of the audience and explained the support I could give them with their clients.

I loved this prestigious work and was successful, maybe even more so than I knew. Each year the CBS radio corporation held an annual meeting/convention in Chicago. The first year I attended, just minutes before the meeting was to open, the sales manager floored me by telling me I would be the first to speak. I hadn’t gotten the word that I was supposed to speak at all. With no time to prepare and about 500 CBS executives seated in
the audience I was petrified. Seeing my panic, the sales manager told me to just go out and wing it. A few minutes later I found myself seated in the front row listening as I was introduced to the audience. When the time came for me to speak I decided not to go on stage. I just stood up, turned to face the audience behind me, said something very brief and sat down again, relieved to be out of the spotlight.

As the other speakers went up to the podium and addressed the audience, I was worried that I had let my bosses down. After the meeting we all went to the company restaurant for lunch, and I was shocked when the vice president and general manager of WBBM plus executives from the New York office all approached me, shook my hand and congratulated me on such an outstanding delivery. Many, many years have passed and to this day I can’t remember a word I said. All I know is that it was short and, apparently, memorable.

But my luck soon ran out. About six months later I requested a promotion and was assigned to the local sales staff. It was a premature move on my part. I was too inexperienced and couldn’t compete with my more seasoned co-workers.
Chapter 5

Learning to Sell Time

The other large network radio station in Chicago, WMAQ, was owned and operated by the National Broadcast Company (NBC) and was located on the top-floor dome of the mammoth Merchandise Mart, the same place where I had seen my first television broadcast as a kid. I was thrilled when NBC accepted my application to become one of four local staff salesmen. NBC was a family-oriented company and I often thought that the fact that I was married with four kids factored heavily into why I was hired.

But the job was not without its challenges. All commercial sales were handled through advertising agencies so I didn’t have much contact with the clients. I learned quickly that you were only as good as the quality of clients the agencies served and, as was common, all new sales personnel were started with the lowest-ranking agencies. My work was cut out for me, but I was motivated and startled my bosses by bringing in clients that were new to the station. The sales manager thought I had promise and reassigned the agency list to give me more
potential. It worked. To make a long story short, I became their top salesman. My monthly sales figures set a record for the department that held up for many years. The company was so pleased they promoted me to the network sales department.

Unfortunately, my luck ran out when NBC decided to bring in a staff of time-study engineers. These “experts” utterly destroyed WMAQ’s programming by abandoning their easy listening format for a rock’n roll format. Ratings plunged and advertisers wanted nothing to do with us. Naturally, management blamed the sales force for the mammoth drop in sales. They fired the entire staff including me.
Chapter 6

John Doremus and United Airlines

During my final days at WMAQ I became acquainted with a radio personality the station had recently hired. His name was John Doremus and he was said to have the best voice in radio. John had recorded commercials for over 65 national firms including General Motors, General Mills and Coca-Cola. He came to WMAQ to host a weeknight easy-listening music program. Television hadn’t yet completely asserted itself, so listening to radio in the evening was still popular. John’s show, with his signature deep voice, was a striking success.

To understand how the radio business works you have to know how airwaves behave in the atmosphere and why the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates the use of those frequencies. Conditions in the atmosphere allow airwaves to travel much further after sundown. Consequently, a small radio station that broadcasts locally during the day can reach a broader audience after the sun goes down. The FCC was formed to regulate the airwaves, assuring that multiple stations do not try to broadcast over the same frequency, especially
at night. They do this by granting valuable clear-channel licenses to the big 50,000-watt stations. Because hundreds of small, low-watt stations dot the map, the ones that operate on the same frequency as the more powerful ones are required by the FCC to stop broadcasting at sundown so as not to interfere with the broadcasts of the licensed 50,000 watters. The popularity of the John Doremus show allowed WMAQ to maximize the advertising rates for its large evening audience, making the show highly profitable.

John Doremus was a very ambitious man. When I lost my job at NBC he asked me if I would form a new company with him to syndicate his music talk show along with other broadcast properties. John’s voice talent combined with my experience on the business side of radio seemed like a good mix so we formed a business called Functional Media. We started exploring syndication opportunities and decided to approach airlines about providing their in-flight audio entertainment featuring John’s show and others we would acquire. Our plan played out like a dream; we soon signed a major contract with United Airlines to provide in-flight programming on all their domestic airplanes. Later, we were gratified to find out that our two-man operation had beat out RCA in securing the contract.

As time went on I began to have misgivings about working with John Doremus. He had dreams of being the president of a large corporation. I had dreams of making an impact on radio. John was a terrible businessman. I soon realized that I needed to end our business relationship and stay focused on radio programming.
The business contract we had forged specified 50/50 ownership with John serving as chairman of the board and me as president. Eventually John’s ambition drove him to demand a change in our relationship that would give him 51 percent of the stock. By that time I knew that John and I, in the ways we conducted our personal and professional lives, were not compatible. I certainly wasn’t willing to hand him controlling interest in the company. Instead, I decided it was time to sever the relationship. We eventually parted ways with him paying me $30,000 for my share of the business plus the sales rights for all our properties.

Finally, I was free to start my own radio syndication company called E.C. Cotter and Associates. John and I remained business associates in a more productive way, and our contract with United Airlines stayed in place.
Chapter 7

Leaving Chicago for Hollywood

Our contract with United called for a complete turn-over in programming every four weeks. As a result we were constantly on the prowl, sourcing new one-hour programs that covered a range of tastes from classical, standards, country, rock ‘n roll to comedy and sports.

We had already syndicated John’s program and one of our subscribers was Armed Forces Radio (AFR), the enormous supplier of radio news and entertainment to American military forces throughout the world. Entertainers of all kinds vied to record programs for AFR because of the large audience they would be able to reach. In one of my meetings with United Airlines’ marketing director I explained our strategy to meet with the director of Armed Forces Radio in California to see if he could assist us in accessing some of their contacts to generate our programming. The United executive thought it was a great idea and wanted to join me on a trip to Hollywood, covering all expenses.

Our meeting with Jack Brown, director of AFR, was very successful and produced a friendship that was to last for over 25 years. Jack told me that he was a close friend of Gary Owens, one of the nation’s top radio disc jockeys and a familiar presence on TV’s “Laugh-In” where he played the bespectacled announcer with a hand
on his ear. Jack set up with a lunch for me with Gary at the famed Brown Derby restaurant, a Hollywood landmark. When I arrived the waiter led me to a private dining room where celebrities could dine undisturbed. Gary Owens and I got along great and he gave me my first real “Hollywood” experience. Each celebrity that entered the room passed our table and they all stopped to say hello to Gary. During that lunch I was introduced to Gary Cooper, Jimmy Durante and others I can’t recall. The lunch was a success in every way. Soon afterwards we signed a contract with Gary Owens to record a series of one-hour music and comedy programs for our in-flight listening service.

I began to realize that the broadcasting business had shifted geographically and that my career opportunities in Chicago were limited. At the same time several of the people I knew at Armed Forces Radio had retired from military service and were forming their own radio syndication company in Hollywood. They asked me to be their sales manager. We inked a deal and in August of 1969 I moved my wife and four teenagers from Chicago to California. In the following months we built a new recording studio on the corner of Hollywood and Vine. I believed in the venture strongly enough to invest a considerable amount of my own money. Unfortunately, I was only on the job a short time before it became obvious that my colleagues didn’t have the management experience or discipline to get a new company off the ground. We were seriously under capitalized and the company shut its doors within two years. Every one of us, including me, lost our full investment.
Chapter 8

**The War of the Worlds: Rebroadcasting a Radio Classic**

Around the same time I was flying to California to meet with Armed Forces Radio, I became aware of a New York-based company called the Longines Symphonette Society, owned by the Longines Watch Company. We were in need of more diversified programming for our airline account, and I knew exactly what was needed: A classical music channel.

Longines specialized in LP releases of classical music programs. I made an appointment to meet with them and flew to New York. At their headquarters in the suburb of Larchmont I had a very upbeat meeting with the marketing director whose full name I have forgotten but I think his first name was Joe. We hit it off right away. I told him about my background in radio and explained what I could do for Longines’ classical music properties. He expressed genuine interest in my radio syndication model and thought it might be a good fit for Longines’ music library.

After our meeting he asked me to wait while he and the Longines executives conferred behind closed
doors. All the signs seemed to point toward signing a deal. But half an hour later they called me in and one look at Joe’s face told me the news wasn’t good. One of the executives explained that while they liked my ideas, their charter would not approve the use of their music for syndication purposes. Later, as he walked me to the front lobby, Joe told me he was as disappointed as I was. On the flight home I kept thinking what a shame it was to lose an opportunity with so much potential. Little did I know that the relationship I fostered with Joe that day would blossom further down the road into the most successful venture of my career.

About three weeks after my meeting with Longines I received a surprise call from Joe. He said was going to be in Thousand Oaks, California in a couple of days with his wife and invited my wife and I to join them for dinner. In the course of our conversation, he hinted that he had something he wanted to discuss.

When the night came we all met at a stake house near his hotel. While our wives became acquainted Joe told me something that he hadn’t mentioned at our meeting in New York: That the Longines Symphonette Society held the broadcast rights to the greatest radio classic of all times, Orson Welles’ “The War of the Worlds”.

For younger people who are not acquainted with the program, “The War of the Worlds” was originally broadcast on October 30, 1938 as a Halloween prank. Adapted from a book of the same name by H.G. Wells, it depicted a fictional invasion of earth by Martians as told from the point of view of a radio announcer interrupting his show to read breaking new bulletins. Even though a disclaimer was read at the beginning of the radio show,
many listeners thought they were hearing real news, not a fictionalized event.

Audiences at home were horrified when Orson Welles broke the news that a space ship had landed in New Jersey and Martians were devastating local neighborhoods. The broadcast sounded so authentic that panic broke out across the nation. As Welles continued for nearly an hour reporting alarming updates of the invasion, frightened citizens across the country were swamping the police, the FBI and the military with hysterical calls. Entire families locked themselves in their basements. Others fled in their autos, tying up roads for miles around. One man ran screaming out of his farm house in his underwear and ran into a clothes line in the dark. The rope caught him across the neck and threw him back. He claimed he had been shot by a Martian death-ray gun.

The next day civil leaders lashed out at the broadcast, accusing Welles of irresponsible use of public airwaves leading to mass hysteria. But the program received massive national news coverage and has gone down in the broadcast archives as one of radio’s greatest moments. The Longines Symphonette Society eventually purchased the broadcast rights and kept the program locked in their vaults for years without rebroadcasting it.

So you can imagine my surprise and delight when the marketing director offered me the rerun broadcast rights, there and then. Naturally, I was ecstatic and accepted on the spot. But later when I sat down to devise a marketing plan I had to admit that I might have bitten off more than I could chew. Times were tough for me just as they were for many people during the 1970s recession. I had no money to properly promote the most important
broadcast property I would ever represent. Joe and his bosses at Longines had put their faith in me to deliver the largest possible audience and I was petrified at the thought of letting them down. It was a career-defining moment for me.

At that time “Broadcasting” magazine was the industry Bible, read by station managers and programmers across the nation. Instead of buying expensive advertising I decided to write an article about the availability of “The War of the Worlds” for broadcast on Halloween night for the first time since 1938. I submitted it for publication, emphasizing the broadcast’s historic significance. They accepted my article and when the issue came out I was pleased to see that the editor, who obviously appreciated the historic nature of the broadcast, gave my story prominently placement.

For contact information I had included only my name and a post office box in the article. After the issue came out I waited a few days and then went to the post office. My heart sank to see that the box was nearly empty. It contained only a small handwritten note, but when I read it my spirits were instantly revived. Apparently the number of responses overflowed the box and had to be stored in a large bin in the back. I went to the front desk to claim my mail and to my utter amazement the pile of letters was so big I couldn’t carry it by myself. I went home and returned with my son’s red wagon, which I filled with six huge bundles of mail. I put that wagon to use many times over the next several days.

The first order of business was to send a demo record to each radio station that responded, along with the broadcast rate for its respective market. With Halloween
rapidly approaching, I recruited members of my family and we all worked from early in the morning until midnight for several days to fill all the requests. In the end about 80 percent of the stations that made inquiries bought the rights to broadcast the show, leaving me with a tidy profit.

That Halloween when I sat down to listen to the broadcast with my family on our stereo console, I tried to imagine the fear it had roused in unsuspecting listeners so many years ago. And while the suspense would never be what it was during the original broadcast, just knowing that I was instrumental in bringing “The War of the Worlds” back to life made it the most satisfying radio experience of my career.

After the broadcast, legal problems ensued due to violations by a number of multi-station owners who broadcast in markets in which another station had bought exclusivity. It took several lawyers to straighten the whole thing out. We thought about doing it every Halloween but in the end we decided that history was best served by making “The War of the Worlds” a once-in-a-generation broadcast.

The experience will be forever with me.
Chapter 9

**Syndicating Ronald Reagan**

At that time Ronald Reagan had just become president elect of the United States, and during the two months before he took office he decided to record a series of five-minute personal commentaries on eclectic topics that would air five days a week. Reagan was a popular, easy-going guy who had grown up in rural Illinois. Before he became a movie actor he worked as a sports broadcaster of the remote replay of the Chicago Cubs baseball games from WHO Radio in Des Moines, Iowa. I had always been impressed with his knowledge of radio broadcasting and thought his delivery was the best.

It was announced that he had chosen a radio syndication firm bearing the name of its owner, Harry O’Connor. I saw an ideal opportunity to join a successful operation. Indeed, it was. Harry offered me the position of staff salesman, and my first day on the job Reagan came in for his first recording session. We had a little champagne and Reagan shook hands with everyone who participated in the production and distribution of the program. The show immediately obtained national distribution
achieving the highest listenership ever for a syndicated show. Harry O’Connor became wealthy overnight and rewarded all of us handsomely. Eventually Harry promoted me to marketing manager.

Working with a president elect was a real education. As an elected government official Ronald Reagan had to travel under the protection of the Secret Service. About two hours prior to his arrival time at the radio station the Secret Service placed guards at the entrance of the 10-story building and screened everyone who came in. A bank anchored the main floor and our studios were on the third floor.

Reagan impressed me as being a regular guy. He would stop in other offices in the building on the way up and shake hands all around. I remember one day in particular he arrived wearing a tank top, shorts and loafers with no socks. He waved all the men into the back office and told us dirty jokes!

After Reagan was sworn in, he was required by law to discontinue all personal broadcasting so we never saw him again. But Reagan’s successful radio endeavor led other politicians to pursue radio syndication as a means to promote their political careers. One was a popular man on the rise, Barry Goldwater, governor of Arizona. Like Reagan, Goldwater aspired toward the presidency. Harry O’Connor wasn’t sure he wanted to commit to handling Goldwater and Goldwater himself wasn’t sure he had Reagan’s gift as a communicator. Harry set up a meeting to explore the situation with the help of one of radio’s all-time great personalities, Art Linkletter.

As a new executive with the firm, I was asked by Harry to attend the studio session, not as an advisor but
to observe the method of deciding whether a new personality would be profitable.

The meeting was scheduled for a Sunday mid-morning session. I was not jaded to the excitement of being in the presence of the nation’s top personalities, especially when I found myself working with them on an intimate basis. I found Goldwater to be an extremely likeable gentleman, and the screening process was fascinating and educational. After many rehearsals and much helpful advice from Art Linkletter it became obvious that Goldwater’s voice personality was not the marketable entity that Reagan’s had been. All parties, including Goldwater, agreed that radio was not Goldwater’s medium.

This may sound like a dull experience but I assure you it was not. I had the privilege of watching three giants in their fields exploring the possibilities of one man’s talent, helping each other along and attempting to reach a major business decision. The whole process took about three hours and it turned out to be the most memorable morning of my life. As we parted Barry Goldwater and Art Linkletter both shook hands with me and said the same words. “It was a pleasure working with you, Ed.”
Chapter 10

Old Friends and KCSN

After many years in the radio syndication industry Harry O’Connor decided to close down his company in the early 1980s. I decided to file for Social Security and stay home and take care of my wife, who was suffering from a long illness. Soon after, she passed away. In retrospect, I realized that I had lived with my parents until the day I got married and then suddenly, after 30 years of marriage, I was living alone for the first time in my life.

At that time I had a very nice apartment on Nordhoff Street in Northridge, California. My kids were off on their own, and I had very little excitement in my life. Then one day I was shopping at the local mall and ran into one of my former colleagues, Jack Brown who I knew when he was president of Armed Forces Radio in Hollywood. Jack was one of the nicest people I’d ever met so I was pleased to find out that he was now retired and living about a mile from me.

We decided to keep in touch with weekly lunches. During our discussions Jack confessed that he was bored
with retirement and wanted to go back to work. We were fortunate enough to live within a few miles of California State University, Northridge (CSUN) in the San Fernando Valley. Like many colleges and universities, CSUN owned a public FM station. It went by the call letters KCSN. Jack approached them with his considerable experience and soon became the station manager. After thinking it over carefully I decided that volunteering at the station would be very gratifying. Jack Brown offered me the newly created position of director of marketing with the understanding that my main duty was to raise funds to support the station’s operations. And they needed the money badly. KCSN’s broadcast range was so low that it reached fewer than half of the San Fernando Valley’s residents. Another problem was that the station had a country music format that did not appeal to the local community.

The station had a staff of five people and during the semi-annual fundraising campaigns each staff member was required to go on the air and give an off-the-cuff solicitation for funds. I did my part with considerably more confidence than when I was asked to speak at the NBC meeting all those many years ago. After my speech I realized that in the 30 years I worked in the broadcast industry, this was the first time I was ever on the air live. It was the most fun I ever had in broadcasting and it a great way to close out a truly gratifying career. I will forever cherish the life that radio gave me.
Edward Cotter was a long-time member of the Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters, an organization in which people who have been involved in broadcasting for 20 years or more gather to socialize, network, and honor fellow pioneer broadcasters for outstanding achievements.