



VALLEY BROADCAST LEGENDS

Issue #118

“Honoring the Past, Sharing the Present, Embracing the Future in Media”

December 2020

President’s Message: Winter Hibernation? Not Us!

by VBL President **Jim Drennan**



As we continue through our virtual holiday season with Zoom Thanksgiving get-togethers, we look forward to the day ... sometime in 2021 ... when we can return to some semblance of “normal” life if a large enough percentage of the population decides to take the vaccine.

It seems like it was in another lifetime that we were able to gather at Club Pheasant and chat to our heart’s

content, buy those “opportunity drawing” tickets, listen to those speakers, reflect on the improvement in the service, and take part of that steak sandwich home for future snacking. But that was less than a year behind us.

Since then, our counterparts in the Bay Area Broadcast Legends have gone into hibernation. Their website says that all activities are on hold “until Covid-19 is behind us and we can gather again.” Meanwhile, as our **Joyce Krieg** puts it, “we are doing our damndest to keep VBL alive.”

That’s meant publishing a full newsletter every other month just as we always have and adding an email update during the off months. Since August, we’ve been conducting a meeting via Zoom on our normal schedule of the second Thursday of even-numbered months. (See adjoining article about our December gathering.) We’d thought about holding a picnic luncheon in a local park, but the city of Sacramento turned us down ... or in the Club Pheasant parking lot, but they said that couldn’t be done either. Well, at least we tried.

But what we didn’t want to do was put VBL into suspended animation and have everybody lose contact with each other. So we’ve decided on the strategy mentioned above. And we’ll hope our darnedest that with summer will come baseball and concerts and packed churches and Valley Broadcast Legends back at the Pheasant Club where we belong.

A VBL Holiday Reunion

by VBL President **Jim Drennan**

In past years, our December holiday meeting has featured good food, lots of chatter, and the Legendary **Mary Jane Popp** handing out candy and leading us in song. This year, it’s going to be a bit different.

We hope Mary Jane will be with us again, but you’re going to have to provide your own food and candy ... and chatter. The other difference will be that the chatter will come from all over the country.

Our December 10 meeting will be courtesy of Zoom, as have our last two. Thank you to board member **Bud Kress** for giving us access to his Zoom pro account, which makes our meetings possible at no cost to you or to VBL. This time we’re going to make it a family reunion with broadcast colleagues who are no longer in Sacramento joining in. We saw how that could work in our October meeting where

former KCRA/3 news director **Bill Bauman** joined us from Orlando, Florida. (Ex-KFBKer **Dave Williams** was supposed to chime in from Dallas but had “technical difficulties.” I promise he’ll be with us in December). After Bill’s appearance, he and I exchanged emails updating each other on what’s happened to us since we worked together. It was a wonderful experience.

It’s up to you to make this national Christmas party happen. Just get in touch with old friends and colleagues who’ve moved on to other markets and let them know that the party’s on for Thursday, December 10 at 11 a.m. Once they’ve confirmed, let our Zoom guru Bud

know they’re coming and give him their email address. (Bud’s is bkress@pacbell.net). Bud will then be able to contact them the day before to tell them how to join the party.

Watch your email a day or two before the December 10 meeting for the Zoom link. No need to RSVP—just click the link at 11 a.m. on the 10th.

We’ve had about 25 members at our first two Zoom meetings, but I hope we can double this amount on December 10. It’s going to be a great way to reconnect with people we’ve loved working with over the years.



“All in the Family”: A True Renaissance Man

by VBL President **Jim Drennan**

Webster’s defines a Renaissance man as “a man who is interested in and knows a lot about many things.” If ever there was a renaissance man in Sacramento, it was our friend **Geoff Wong**, who passed away in October at the age of 80. And boy, did he ever pack a lot of living into those 80 years.

For TV fans of a certain age, he was the host of *Geoff Wong’s Adventure Theater*, which ran old Charlie Chan movies from 1971 to 1975. That’s when KCRA/3 took it off the air when a new show called *Saturday Night Live* took over its time slot.

For 40 years he was a practicing attorney specializing in personal injury cases; for ten years he was counsel to the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union. He also represented NFL and USFL players as well as television anchors in their contract negotiations.

For most of his life he was the quintessential Cal Berkeley fan. Legend **Steve Swatt** remembers Geoff as the eternal optimist while Steve was the eternal pessimist when it came to the Bears’ chances. “Maybe that’s because the Bears won championships in football and basketball while Geoff was attending ... and they never did again after he graduated.”

In his spare time, Geoff wrote two novels, was a partner in the Sterling Hotel and Vizcaya Bed and Breakfast, wrote a monthly column for the Sacramento Bar Association journal, traveled, enjoyed wine, Broadway musicals, politics, reading and walking. He was also a founding member of VBL, serving on the board as legal counsel for the first few months of our existence back in 2001. He came back as our guest speaker in October of last year.

But his most famous caper and one that will forever endear him to Sacramento was rescuing the paddleboat *Delta King* from its graveyard in the Delta and bringing it home to Sacramento where it still rests in all its splendor. And he had to battle legendary attorney **Melvin Belli** to get the job done.

Oh, and everybody who’s spoken up about him says he was a great guy. I second the emotion.

Speaking of class acts, we’re sad to report the passing of **Betty Coppola** on Oct. 20, only six months after the death of her beloved husband **Lou**. She was 84.

Betty’s dad **Willie Groth** would move his family six times in eight years, from Illinois to California to Texas and back to California as he pursued work as a railroad brakeman during the Depression. In the fifties, Betty moved to Sacramento, married Lou and had one child (KCRA/3 alum **Chuck**.) But Betty was not content being Mom. After a 12-year absence from the classroom, she earned her bachelor of arts in geography from UC Davis and 20 years after that, earned her master of arts in teaching English as a second language from the University of Arizona. Betty taught international students at Sac State and in Japan.

In her fifties, she began working as a tour guide for bus groups headed to California’s Gold Country, New England’s fall foliage and Bay Area tourism sites. Soon afterward, she started the Coppola Company that for 25 years provided thousands of California schoolchildren with educational tours and developed curriculum covering California’s Gold Rush, the transcontinental railroad, the legislative process at the State Capitol, and 19th century life in Sacramento.

Betty retired at age 81. A memorial service will be held in the future.

One-time KCRA/3 cameraman and reporter **Gene Chaney** died on Oct. 24 at the age of 84. After leaving Channel 3, Gene formed a home

Continued on next page



Geoff Wong entertaining us at the October 2019 VBL luncheon. Photo by **Matías Bombal**

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**VALLEY BROADCAST
LEGENDS**

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Good News—Dues are Going Down

by VBL Treasurer **Ron Middlekauff**

Hello members. In a normal year, this is the month we start collecting dues for the upcoming year. We'd still like to do that. GOOD NEWS! As promised, dues are dropping from \$35/year to a fire sale price of \$20. We still have expenses each year we need to cover. Not publishing a paper, mailed newsletter saves us a ton of cash.

Please drop a check in snail mail to:

Valley Broadcast Legends

P.O. Box 601861

Sacramento, CA 95860-1861

Our board meets in a few days to discuss using PayPal. I have it ready to go. But we need to tweak things. After we meet and firm it up, we'll make announcement on how to use PayPal if desired. Thank you everyone for helping our "family" stay together in these most trying times.

“All in the Family”

Continued from previous page

repair business. He is survived by his wife Pat. Gene and Pat were known as “The Dancers” because of their talent for smooth dancing. He was a long-time member of the Carmichael Presbyterian Church.

We've also received word of the passing of **David Kleinbart**, who worked as a DJ and later Program Director under the name of **Dave Darin** at KCRA and KGNR radio in the 1970s and 80s. His radio career spanned five decades, most recently as director of underwriting for two major non-commercial stations in the Los Angeles market. **Mary Jane Popp** remembers Dave's talent at warming up the audience during remote broadcasts. “He was great at getting the audience excited about what was to happen.” **Frank LaRosa** recalls Dave's deep voice, “valuable for many of the television commercials I produced for SMUD during those years.” **Don Wright** sums up Dave as “the best program director I've ever worked with.” David Kleinbart lost a battle with Parkinson's at age 72.

Winding up on a happier note, we'd like to salute **Joey Mitchell** on his 50th anniversary in the radio business. During the past half century, Joey has worked for nine stations in virtually every format. His longest gig was at legendary country station KRAK. When he started there in the 70a, he was a New York boy who knew nothing about country music; by 1988, he was named by *Billboard* as the top country DJ in the nation. For the past 13 years, he's



Joey Mitchell celebrating his 50th anniversary in broadcasting. Photo by Steve Martanaro, *Comstock's magazine*.

been a mainstay at K-Hits-FM/101.5, an oldies station. “One reason I've survived,” says Joey, “is by adjusting and being honest with my audience.”

We're hoping to see Joey at our Dec. 10 meeting on Zoom.

The Legends

Membership as of Nov. 30, 2020

Jerry Agresti • Bob Aldrich
 John Archer • Julie Archer
 Jay “DJ Jay” Arnold • Stan Atkinson
 Linda Bayley • Vic Biondi
 Bill Bishofberger • Thomas Blazowski
 Matias Bombal • Mel Boyd • Jim Brewer
 Tom Buck • Dick Cable
 Allen Chamberlin • Don Chandler
 Mark Chiolis • Chris Cochran
 Jim Drennan • Mike Duncan
 Claire Elliott • Curt Foley • Vicki Fox
 Bill George • Gary Gerould
 Dennis Grayson • Cyndy Green
 Michael Guiliano • Kristine Hanson
 Bud Harmon • Fred Harris • Jerry Henry
 Betsy Hite • Tom Hughes • Rich Ibarra
 Steve Jackson • John Jervis
 Rick Kavooras • Richard Kermickel
 Tip Kindel • Jan “Neely” Klevan
 Kim Kline • Ward Koppel • Bill Kreutzer
 Bud Kress • Joyce Krieg
 Eleanor Kuechler-VanAcker • Bob Lang
 Dick Leeson • Dee McCafferty
 Michael McCarron • Jeanne Marie
 Lizette Martinez-Hopkins
 Michael Messmer • Dana Michaels
 Ron Middlekauff • Bob Miller
 Alan Milner • Joyce Mitchell
 Mike Montgomery • Keith Moon
 Ray Nelson • George Nyberg
 John D. O'Brien • Deborah Pacyna
 Mary Jane Popp • Tiffany Powell
 Craig Prosser • Rich Raymond • Rick Reed
 Bruce Riggs • Jay Rudin • Beth Ruyak
 Bill Schmechel • Walt Shaw
 Becky Shephard • Dann Shively
 Ken Shuper • Barbara Souza
 Roy Stearns • Barry Stigers • Bill Storm
 Bob Suffel • Steve Swatt
 Gregory VanAcker • Bob Venditti
 Gregory Virtue • Tom Wagner
 Frank Wallace • Marla Wells
 Dennis Yoder • Jan Young



Charlie Marshall's Battle of Bulls and Bears

by **Don Chandler**

If he was still with us, **Charlie Marshall** would be a charter member of Valley Broadcast Legends. A dwindling number of KCRA relics retain memories of the aging Stetson-adorned balladeer. I am one of those shrinking relics along with **Stan Atkinson** and **Bob Miller**. **Lou Coppola** recently graduated to a higher place. We miss him. He had many stories to share about legends like Charlie Marshall.

Ewing C. Kelly had a soft spot for Charlie and his guitar-picking yarns of the West. Charlie became a regular at KCRA on the radio side. He opened and closed each show with his theme song: *The old home ranch is calling. I see the winding trail ... it's calling me, calling me; come home, come home, come home.*

In his quest for interesting stories of Sacramento and the Gold Country, Charlie discovered the town of Nevada City held a grizzly bear and bull fight on June 14, 1851. A thirty minute block of time to video-tape Charlie's telling of the story was set in motion.

Bob Miller was art director at the time and I had the good fortune of being hired by him. Bob assigned me the task of doing a series of illustrations for *The Bear and Bull Fight*. Two TK42 cameras were utilized, with two easels for visuals and Charlie on a stool to narrate the story. His guitar sat on his lap.



The story told of two huge animals caged in separate pens. Connected by a twelve foot anchor chain secured to their massive necks, they were prodded and teased to an explosive level of anger. When both creatures reached a point of frothing and lunging at the heavy cages, the gates were opened. The two behemoths lunged at one another, growling fiercely and bellowing threateningly. The connecting chain was large enough to hold an aircraft carrier in place in a hurricane, so there would be no escape for the loser.

Bets were flying like confetti. I would put my money on the claws and jaws of the grizzly with the ill temper and power of The Incredible Hulk.

On the other hand, it wouldn't be a casual meander through the woods for the bear. He was facing a creature the size of a bull buffalo on steroids, and skin as thick as a tractor tire. Two red, mean eyeballs and flung slobber with lance-sized horns were aimed at his vitals.

So **Ken Nagle** and **Abe Gibbon** flipped the illustration cards and **Ken Blue** and **Bob Gaylord** handled the TK41s. **Bob Worthylake** created magic with the lights and Charlie Marshall left us breathless as he concluded the story and strummed, ... *The old home ranch is calling...I see the winding trail. It's calling me, calling me;...come home, come home, come home.*

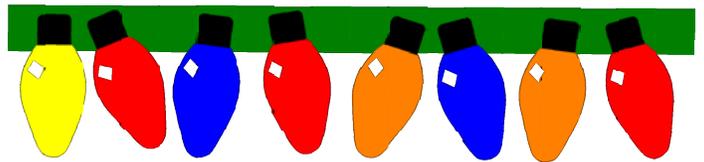
Now Trending on the Holiday Hit Parade . . .



by **Joyce Krieg** (with apologies to **Elvis**)

We'll have a Zoom Christmas with Covid.
We'll be on Zoom just cursing at Covid.
Decorations of red on a green Covid mask,
Won't be the same dear, but there's no choice, alas.

And when those Zoom meetings start calling,
That's when this Zoom season is galling.
We'd be doing all right with Club Pheasant delights,
But we're stuck with a Zoom, Zoom, Zoom Christmas.



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