

Northwest Pioneer Broadcasters

MEMORIES OF MY DAYS AT KOL

By Art Gilmore

MY life in Seattle all started when **IVAN DITMARS**, the well known organist and then program director at KOL, dropped a post card to me while I was night clerking at Mount Rainier.

He said that there was to be an audition at KOL and why didn't I come down and try out. Well, in those days that was quite a decision. Remember dear friends we were in the depths of the famous DEPRESSION and to leave the job at the mountain and strike out for something as uncertain as an audition was something that took some thinking over. When you left the mountain in those days you did not return - you were gone.



Ivan Ditmars, Program Director At KOL

"Crazy Art" decided to try it and Ed Hamilton (of the old Hamilton Candy Company) drove me down to try out. I blew it - in other words I didn't get the job at KOL. But thanks to a lucky break, Crazy Art became "Lucky Art" and I was hired for a two week stint on KRSC doing a classical music program for **FREDERICK AND NELSON**. Thanks to my musical mother who saw



Art Gilmore, Long Time Skelton Announcer

to it early on that I got to know the composers and how to pronounce their names, I was IN - for 50 dollars a *month*. By the time two weeks had gone by I was called by KOL and went to work there in August of 1935.

My very first day was something I will long remember. I started at 8 in the morning and was set to do 8 hours. When 4pm rolled around I had expected to see my relief come in, but NO SHOW. 5 o'clock came and went, 6 o'clock did the same. Finally, at exactly 6:30 in walked **WENDELL NILES** and said very casually "OK kid, I've got it". That was all he said, "OK kid I've got it". To this day when I see Wen at meetings or anywhere in Southern California, we laugh about that incident. (To learn more about the career of Wendell Niles order his audio history cassettes from NPB)

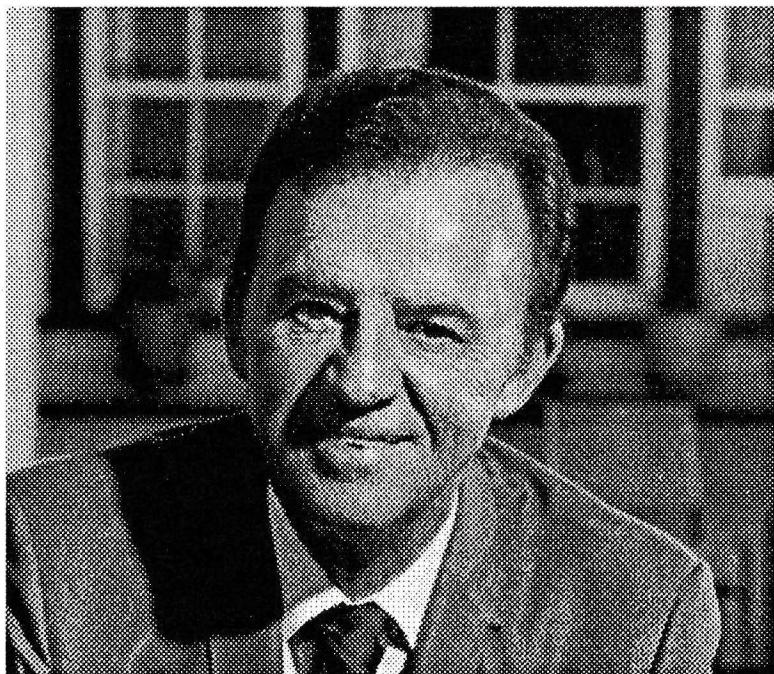
PEOPLE I REMEMBER

I remember the late **ARCHIE TAFT**, the owner of the station. A small man in stature he was always nice to me allowed me to occupy the apartment at the transmitter on Harbor Island, thus saving me 20 dollars a month rent and saving him having to give me a raise.

I remember **DON PRINGLE** - the witty writer and performer who later went to Hollywood and wrote for some big time comics.

FRED RAGSDALE was the engineer who faced me through the glass. He saved my neck one night when I lost my voice. One night we were on duty alone after office hours and we found some 5 inch fire-crackers in the back room. Thinking we would have some fun, we set them off in that cavernous basement of the Northern Life Tower and did they ever make a noise. Out rushed the commentator **JOHN C. STEVENSON** who was readying his broadcast to be piped to

Spokane at 6:30pm. He had his pistol out ready for what he was sure were some gangsters, real or imagined, after his hide. Very VIVID memory.



Wendell Niles, Early KOL Announcer

I mentioned Fred Ragsdale, an engineer at KOL. He later went to California and we were very close until he moved to Arizona. He became a professional photographer and did many of the beautiful pictures found in "Arizona Highways" magazine.

Then there was my dear friend **IVAN DITMARS**. I always credit him with starting me in this business and now that he and I are in the same state for all these years, our friendship has grown. What a talent he is and a super guy.

Then there was **DON ISHAM**, a fine organist who also later went to California. **FRANK ANDERSON** was on our staff. If memory serves me right he was Program Director and Chief Announcer - had a great voice and was lots of fun.

ALICE MURRAY was our delightful red-headed telephone operator and receptionist. The late **JOHNNY FOREST** was our newscaster and resident song writer. We even wrote a song together but actually my name was on the song but I did none of the writing. Just a gift from Johnny.

EDDIE CLIFFORD, the organist who took Ivan's and Don's place, played beautiful music. He was a happy-go-lucky king of a guy who enjoyed life and we had great times together. He made some records with **TUBBY CLARK** in a piano-organ duo which I still enjoy to this day.

I recall one time when **ARCHIE TAFT SR** called me into his office and told me we were going to keep the station on an extra hour every night and I was to fill the hour from midnight to one with anything I thought would be appropriate. Thus was born a program called **MIDNIGHT MATINEE** and with the World transcriptions (remember the old vertical cut of very good quality?) and a few gimmicky ideas, we went on. I lifted the idea from another Tacoman, **MAJOR EDWARD BOWES** (then on the network) to dedicate each program to a town, city, or hamlet and play things especially for them. They ate it up, especially in Canada where their reception was poor until late at night. So it was a gratifying time for me as their letters rolled in along with other things sent to please me, such as boxes of chocolates, deer antlers, salmon - you name it - they sent it. Lots of fun. I even made a "personal appearance" in the town of Revelstoke, B.C. where at the time they were making a motion picture **THE GREAT BARRIER**

REEF with RICHARD ARLEN. Of course, I got to meet him which at the time was a great thrill and I was to recall years later when he and I both resided in Sherman Oaks, California where he was the honorary major and we would meet on occasion at the hardware store.

HOW I WENT TO CALIFORNIA

When July of 1936 rolled around, I was due for a vacation and as I never had been to California, that is where I decided to go. My two companions are well known to most NPB'er: **JERRY GEEHAN and MAURIE WEBSTER.** Both were



Jerry Geehan And His Future Wife

working at KVI where I had done some programs before going up to Mount Rainier to work. We traveled in my 1933 Ford Coupe and stopped in San Francisco where I got to audition for NBC. (When NBC first came to the West Coast they set up headquarters in San Francisco)

Once in Los Angeles we all stayed on - what else - a due bill at the Clark Hotel. Captured by the excitement of it all, I gave the fellows notice that I had decided to stay and try my luck so they got on a bus and went back to Tacoma. I

heard later that ARCHIE TAFT remarked "he'll be back", but I never did.

My first job was at KFWB (Warner Brothers owned station at that time) and later went to KNX-CBS. But the memories of good old KOL remain and it was my springboard. On a visit to Seattle in May of 1988 I tried to find the old Northern Life

Tower and KOL but after a few vacant looks following my questions, I gave up.

Happy Days To You All.

Editor's notes: Art was the founding President and Vice Chairman of our group to the South, Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters. To follow the rest of Art's career, order the Art Gilmore cassettes which are part of the NPB Audio History Project.

Art grew up in Tacoma and actually began his radio work with a show on KVI, Tacoma. He rose to become one of the best talents to ever come out of the Northwest.



Lola Hallowell And Bob Nichols On KOL