Al Bramstedt

Interviewed by Hilary Hilscher

July 24, 2001

Tape 1, Side A

Hilary: (…with a lot of thoughts on your side about the past.) So, I'm talking with Al Bramstedt. It's the 24th of July. We're in his office at KTUU and, Al, how did you get started in this business – besides the fact it was in your blood?

Al: Well, my first memories of life were always my folks… we're real… it was a real family atmosphere. My mom had a very good business mind. My father, by nature, was more of an excellent talker, an (inaudible) talent. One of the great writers, very charming – an incredible "people person". My mom had a lot of people skills but she was really interested in business. And so Dad would go to work for an eight- or nine-hour day and they had one car. My father, he had arthritis from the time I remember him and she would pick him up in the Buick.

For instance, my first memories (were) riding in the back seat of the '56 Buick. I was born in September of '50, and I remember sitting in the back seat and I would go down to the station (in) the basement of the Fourth Avenue Theater Building to tell Dad that we were there. And he would usually be wrapping up a meeting or packing up work. And sometimes I would hang around the station waiting for him. You need to remember that this is from basically 19… we moved to Anchorage in '55 from Fairbanks. And so I was a regular at KENI Radio and TV. They were both owned by the same company – Midnight Sun Broadcasters, Inc., the state's largest broadcast network. And at that time, it was Midnight Sun Broadcasting Company because it was owned by Lathrop. Later, my dad formed Midnight Sun Broadcasters, Inc. in '59, and they bought the radio and television stations from the Lathrop empire.

So, during that period he was working for the Lathrop Company and I recall kind of a pattern of things that led me, I think, to get involved. One was coming down to the station, and while I am waiting for him, I go into the control room. And oftentimes in small market television, when things go sideways they grab any kind of life form with a normal body temperature and eyes that open and shut, and they put them right to work. Well, I ended up – even at age nine – there would be problems and I'd be in the control room watching television and helping them out. Then I would get back in the back seat of the Buick.

Dad and I would walk up the breezeway and now, when I go to Rotary, sometimes I purposely – when I park my truck – I walk through the breezeway of the Fourth

Avenue Theater Building just to, you know, I visualize and think about my dad. I loved him so much and I loved my mom just as much.

But, I'm riding in the back seat of the Buick and (my mom would say) "Okay Bram, you know, whatever happened to that radio announcer that…?" You know, she's asking him all these questions, and the poor guy was tired of business, and he would answer the questions. And, you know, he'd say, "Okay, can we stop talking about business?" But she was just so hungry to know what was going on. And it wasn't so much because she wanted to be a multi-millionaire, it was just she was just interested in business.

And for him, what motivated him wasn't really so much what motivates modern era broadcasters: to buy a license and make a ton of money with it and sell it for even more and be multi-millionaires. That really wasn't what motivated him. He loved Anchorage. He loved people and he knew that radio and television meant that he could be a part of that with his incredible skills as a writer and a performer. I mean this guy was – he could have been an actor. He could have been involved in the newspaper business or he could have been an on-air talent on television. Well, he chose television, radio and television, and his background had been in Fairbanks, lots of radio programs, a lot of on-air approach, as well as being manager of the station. So he really enjoyed that connection.

And I think how I got started was because KENI radio and TV staff knew me because I had been down there picking him up five days a week. Mom loved to be with the kids. She always wanted one of the kids to ride (along) and I loved being with her and I loved being down at the station. And so. Fortunately. I was the kid that went with her to pick Dad up, plus she didn't want to leave the car in the alley so I ran down to see him.

Well. Dad was, you know, part owner of the company by the time I was 16 and they had a religious program, several different religious program on Sunday nights from 6 to 10 in the evening. And they could not find anyone that would work that shift. And it was a horrible problem. No one would stay. (It was a) boring little half-hour, with reel-to-reel tape programs with live announcer reads, and nobody wanted to do that. And the manager of the radio operations said, "What about Alvin?" to my dad. "Oh, well, no he's…" "Well, we can't get anybody. He seems like he could do that." "No, I don't feel comfortable with that, the nepotism thing." "We… you know, Bram, we really can't get anyone to work that shift. Maybe he would be interested." Bram was really reluctant. I would have been in the 10th grade and finally Dad said, "Would you like to work a Sunday?" It was almost like, "You wouldn't want to do that would you?" And I said, "Yeah." "I mean Sunday night. It's interesting work, plus a job." I was working part-time in a sign shop and I thought, "Geez, Sunday nights I'm free. I could do that." And I began training. My first day of training in the business was March 5 of 1967, a Sunday evening. I remember that date every year – I've put a lot of time there: 34 years –and I began training on radio.

Then in May of that same year, one of our projectionists – which is a position where you load film and slides into the equipment and you work camera for like theater shows and the news, a kind of a low-level, beginning kind of job. Well, one of the projectionist's father died and he lived in New York, and he immediately had to go to the funeral and New York is a long way. So they were desperate for a projectionist. Well, "What about your son?" was the question. My dad is, like, "Oh, no." "Well, you know, he worked for me…" And Dad said, "Okay." And late in May '67 I started working in the television, in the control room.

And over the years (I) learned all of those skills: switching the programming, doing editing, everything in the control room. I loved working camera. A lot of those different kind of things just kind of fell into place in time because in small-market TV they are always desperate for the labor pool. It is a great opportunity, and probably of all my years – and I know this sounds, you know… of all the things I have been involved with, the thing that I remember the most was when Emperor Hirohito and President Nixon came to Hangar 5 on September 26, 1971. Hirohito had never been out of his homeland and they were meeting in Anchorage and it was like one of the major moments in our town's history. And (we had) the pre-discussion and news coverage on that for weeks. The town was really excited. Well, they did pool-feeds for Japanese, American, several different countries for satellite of that meeting. And the day before, we met there and I was selected as one of the pool-feed camera operators. They were five of us and my job was to bring Emperor Hirohito down the ramp, bring Nixon down the ramp at different points, bring them over.

And I remember that so vividly. I still have the little Secret Service pin. I still have the sports jacket that I wore at that event. And I had the videotapes but someone took them, the tape stock, several years ago, which broke my heart. I came in on Monday and somebody had gone through my credenza and they were gone. It was like, "AH!" I got a big adrenalin surge. It was like, "No!" And I looked all over. They are still trying… we had a half-inch reel-to-reel that we gave to AMIPA (Alaska Moving Image Preservation Association) and they are trying to get a stable picture out of it. But that was a magic moment for me… in realizing that literally billions of people, the highest viewership at the time, I believe, of television worldwide, and I brought him down. It wasn't a difficult shot just bringing him down the stairs and across, and I loved Nixon. And I remember with this camera… and I thought, "I'm seeing this!" through the black and white monitor. I have to lay my eyes on Emperor Hirohito and President Nixon… I remember I wasn't… my camera wasn't on and I locked it down. And I remember looking over... I still get goose bumbles thinking about it. And it was such a .....

Hilary: You had a sense at the time of what you were seeing.

Al: I've always, even as a child, had a sense of the meaning of an event in history. I've always been able to do that. A lot of times people involved in something – it doesn't occur to them. That's one thing I can do and I did do that then. They gave each of the staff members a little medal. It's almost like a paperweight. I still have that and (it) gives the date and it shows the satellite and all the stations and countries. It was a neat moment for me.

Hilary: Al, you mentioned something a minute ago when you were talking about the Midnight Sun Company being the biggest network in the state. What made it the biggest network early on?

Al: The expansion of stations. They had radio and television in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau. And then they had a radio station at Ketchikan and part of a cable operation in Sitka. So they were definitely the biggest. They sold in '81. December 6 of 1981: that was the company's last day of operation. My dad actually had that desk and we bought it from them. I said, "What's the history on that desk?" "In 1957 I got that desk from an office company that couldn't pay the bill." That's great.

Hilary: That's great.

Al: And I said to the owner, I said, "When I retire from this business, the owner of Channel 2, I said, I want this company to give me that desk." I said, "I want to take that desk."

Hilary: You don't want a gold watch. You want your desk.

Al: I want my dad's desk. But I remember coming to work on Saturdays and I remember the rattan in front of that desk was always fascinating to me as a child. My dad would say – and my dad was a conservative Republican and he was a real patriotic American. He really loved our country and his father came from Sweden. And he would tell me, he said – I'm like 7, 8 years old – he said, "Alvin, the Russian Communists' goal is world domination. And the way they do that is they infiltrate, through spies, different aspects of American society and one of them is real important to them – is the media, in fact, radio and television. And he said, "Almost certainly there is probably a spy or two that works for Channel 2, KENI radio and TV." And I'm like 7, 8 years old. "Really, Dad?" "Oh, yeah, really." "They work here?" I said. He said, "We don't know for sure. We don't know who they are, obviously. If we did, we wouldn't allow them to stay working for us, but that's how they operate 'cause they want to control the media, be involved in it."

So when I'd go to work with him – so often I'd go to work with him on Saturdays and people always introduced themselves to me – and every time I'd meet an employee, I'd look at them and I'd look at their hair style and I'd listen to their voice. I'd look at their shoes, check out their clothing. And finally after doing that, I went back to my dad and I said, "I think you're wrong dad. I don't think you have any spies." He said, "Why do you

think that?" I said, "I've met most of your employees. I've checked them out and none of them have accents. They dress like we do." And I went on and I said, "I don't think you have any spies." He said, "No, Alvin, they train them to have American accents and they dress them, which is easy to do in American clothes. That's the first thing they do. "Oh," and I was like, "So I guess maybe there might be a spy there." When I tell that story (it was) like he was kidding. But no, no: he believed that.

Hilary: Well, that was the Cold War mentality.

Al: Oh, yeah.

Hilary: At the time that was… I mean, that's what the whole McCarthy era was about. Good people were that convinced…

Al: Right.

Hilary: That they were everywhere.

Al: Right.

Hilary: Yeah.

Al: But I remember riding in the back seat of the Buick and hearing Mom and Dad talk about business and I remember one day in 1958 he said, "We're bringing something really important to town that's going to be really historic for television broadcasting." And he said, "It's a machine called a microwave." And I remember him saying that. I remember that so vividly. I would have just been, you know, not quite eight but he said that this is a machine called a microwave. And he said what it will allow us to do is be broadcasting something from one part of town back to the station with a real picture that is happening right at that time. And they brought that in in the fall of '58. And, in fact, if you look at that picture on the wall, you can see it at work there. That's June of '60 and you see that KENI TV camera. That's out at Elmendorf for Eisenhower's arrival.

Hilary: Right.

Al: Right. And that was revolutionary in television here. They did a lot of incredible things. Boat races, presidents, when Kennedy came to town as a senator in September of '60 they did a – he was out at the Idle Hour Restaurant that burned. Live coverage of his speech there. They did live stuff all over. When we went to live satellite or live microwave truck, we got the satellite truck, they were saying, well this is the first one ever, you know, for the people here. And I said, "No." I went into the file and I dug up this photograph, which I'll bring over to you. I said no, no, it's this single one. This is the first one. This is the first microwave truck. Of course that picture was taken in 1978 and

by now this – that was purchased in the fall of '58, this is '59 bread truck, Ford bread truck, but this is the microwave unit that they bought. By now you can see the worn paint on the RCA microwave and…the microwave as if, you know… you look at that as somebody in an intersection: "Micro…what the hell is that?" But it meant a lot to Midnight Sun.

Hilary: You didn't have a microwave oven in your house at this point. Microwave was amazing technology.

Al: Right.

Hilary: And very foreign.

Al: Right. And it's from the development of this microwave that the actual microwave oven was developed. Because the people that were developing this technology – one of the guys was… had a Hershey bar in his pocket and the waves melted it. Ah-ha. And that is how it developed. And this is back in the, I think, the late 40's but that significantly changed television, live coverage, the Catholic mass. They would actually do live commercials from retailers' stores with that setup where… Before, one of the big problems in the growth of television here was: What are we… how are we going to present our clients? They would before come down to the studio and they'd do live commercials or they had eventually they ended up having color slides shot – but to be able to go right out to a jeweler's store and do a live commercial! For the Rondy (Fur Rendezvous) coverage, they used that. It was remarkable.

Hilary: Al, this brings up a whole other subject. When you were age nine, or when you were in 10th grade, and first starting to work at the station, you talked about sort of growing up doing all the different jobs but as you learned the technology was changing. You saw a huge span of technology. Talk a little bit about that. What you started out with and what you ended up learning. Certainly microwave was a huge step but there were others.

Al: Right. The, I think, the big technology steps: Microwave in '58 was just remarkable. Another big moment – I think I may have mentioned this story to you before – it was in probably September or October of 1965. I have an ability to remember dates. I'm sure that's right. My dad came to me and he said, "Alvin, something very big is coming to Anchorage next summer, summer of '66, very, very big. Can you guess what it is?" So I'm 15 years old, just turned 15, I think. "The Navy is coming in. They're going to put a Navy port in Anchorage?" And my dad looked at me like 'what a great guess'. He said, That's really a great guess but it was wrong. So guess again." He said, "It's really big." "Well, Dad, I can't guess." He said, "Well, I'll tell you but he said you must keep this a secret. You can't tell anyone, not even your best friend – no one – because it is confidential. We're bringing color television to Anchorage!" And he said, "Remember

that color television you saw at that hotel in San Francisco?" We drove down Highway 101 back in January of '62, and he said, "We're going to bring that to Anchorage."

I remember that, and he said the reason why I don't want you to tell anyone is I don't want Augie Hebert to hear about it because Augie is, you know, in this business, and he would feel compelled to try to bring it on the air first. And it takes a lot of months to develop this and we're working on it right now. Oh, wow! So in early spring of '66 they got in the color film chain. Real complicated back in those days, a color camera. You actually projected the image from a machine – it was called a TP66 projector – into the pickup of the camera. And there were three color tubes and each one had to be registered every day. I learned… that was one of my jobs later after they would sign off.

Typically television stations back then would sign off like at midnight and they'd sign back on like eight or nine in the morning. So they would sign off at midnight and then like two or three in the morning, they'd crank back up (when) everybody is asleep. Nobody is watching at all. Nobody knew at all. It's like in March or April and they're tweaking and testing, and I remember my dad, my three sisters, and I – two of my sisters and I, we had bedrooms upstairs and dad would call us from the foot of the stairs – it would be like three in the morning on a school night. "Kids, there's color television on the TV, come on down." And we would come down. And I remember it was like in April of '66, we'd be gathered around a color TV and it would be a fill-film. One was about cranberries that were raised in Wisconsin. And I remember everybody is looking at the TV, and I remember – kind of the third-person concept – I remember looking at my mom and dad and my three sisters and watching this TV and I remember looking out the window. The sun was coming up and I know it was like a weekday. I thought, "This is amazing what's going on here!" And I could tell – and I could see how excited he was about it.

Hilary: But this is before anybody in town...

Al: Nobody knew.

Hilary: What was going on.

Al: The only people that knew were the insiders at Channel 2.

Hilary: But it was being broadcast.

Al: Being broadcast but everybody was asleep. Nobody would be up watching Channel 2 at three in the morning, because it had signed off hours ago. So the very first broadcast was a special demonstration with a big color TV over at the Chamber (of Commerce) meeting. They had their Monday luncheon meetings even back then. This would have been in late May of '66. And I remember that day and I was talking to my dad later about

that whole thing and how he did it. And I said, "So Dad…" He said, "Yeah, we did a preview for these business people. It was great. It went really well. We had this color TV and we broadcast it over the air and (showed the) picture there at the Hilton Hotel. It was actually the Westward then. And I said… he said it was a big hit. I said, "Oh, so what did you broadcast?" He said, "Adam Ant". I said, "So wait a minute. This was your first premier broadcast of television, all these captains of industry and you broadcast Adam Ant?" "Yeah." "Dad, why Adam Ant?" He said - paused for a moment, "I don't really know why, but it went well. I just - inside it was just…" That's incredible, Adam Ant for all these people.

He flew to Seattle in May of '66 and, because there was no live studio color cameras and there – that was just the dawn of videotape, 1966 – he flew to Seattle and had filmed on 16mm color film, which I still have, him introducing color. He had Mayor Sharrock too – it was videotape of Mayor Sharrock supposedly flipping the switch to color with a black-and-white camera and all of a sudden there was Dad. So that was June 18, 1966.

Well, earlier that morning Dad had called us from the foot of the stairs about the birth of his first grandchild. Susan, my sister, her daughter was born on that day. Very exciting day. Dad would have been just 49, so he would have been a year-and-a-half younger than me (now) and he – the day started out with a birth announcement of Lisa. And my best friend and I, and Jan, my sister, and her boyfriend – we decided to go motorcycling that afternoon. There was a kind of ramble area (Earthquake Park) on our bikes, motor bikes. And I remember that day, the presentation of going color was like six in the evening, six or seven in the evening. And I wanted to definitely be there with Dad to watch that. Dad was going to be home alone watching this magic moment. So we went biking – and I'm a punctual person. I thought, well, we'd need to get back with a 20-minute margin before the big event. I walked in, alone, he's alone, sitting in his chair in the family room, color TV on. "Alvin, where have you been?" "Dad…"

Hilary: Ten minutes still...

Al: Yeah. I'm not quite… I turned 16 that fall. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Where have you been?" It's almost like 15 minutes before the big moment. And I said, "Dad, 15 minutes. I'm here." He said, "Yeah, but I thought you'd be late and miss it." I said, "But I didn't. I'm here." He was so worked up over that. I thought, later I thought, well it's nice that he was that interested in having my presence there to be with him during that magic moment. Man, it really was. It was an incredible moment for him and really for the industry: going color television.

I talked to Augie later about that and it was like Augie was just reeling from the earthquake and Augie had just… that summer was relocating to Spenard, summer of '66. So he was up to his gills in expenses and then, "Oh, God, Al has got this color TV" and he knew to be competitive he'd have to do that and it wasn't cheap. And…

Hilary: But you caught him by surprise. The secret didn't get out.

Al: It didn't out. I never told anyone. Nobody talked. Augie was totally surprised. And I had known Augie since I was, you know, the beginning of my life, and when Dad mentioned Augie, he'd go, "Well, that's interesting." Dad was a friend to this guy but in the competitive spirit, trying to get a leg up on a competitor. It is an interesting concept to me.

Hilary: That you can be friends in the same town…

Al: Yeah.

Hilary: But be still competitors as well…

Al: Really care about each other personally and still be competitors as well. I thought that was interesting. But the thing that really made, I think, Augie and Bram different was the fact that it was a totally different way of looking at the business. So often, I think now companies invested in the stock market and they do things on the short-term to maximize the apparent value of their companies. I can tell you my dad and Augie – and I'm sure Patty Harpell and other people – their sense was more of a deep love for their community and real love for the industry that… theirs was a connection the industry had with its people. And my dad with his on-air talent and his people skills… From the business standpoint, he was always complaining about those bankers and how unreasonable they were. And when I got into management – I became manager of KENI-TV in May of '76 – the previous manager was terminated over an employment dispute with another employee. And Bill Walley was the manager of Fairbanks and Anchorage radio and television stations and his immediate supervisor was my dad. And Bill said, "You know, it was an abrupt termination of the previous manager of KENI TV." And I was a sales person back then. See, that would have been – I was a full-time sales person – and he said, "I want to put your son in the position. You start him off as sales manager with general manager responsibilities and, if it works, as station manager." And Bram said, "No way." He didn't like the idea. He said, "It doesn't look right. It's nepotism…" and blah, blah, blah. And Bill Walley said, "Look Bram, I'm up against the wall." He said, "You've asked me to run these four stations, the two in Anchorage, two in Fairbanks. And," he said, "That's what I want to do. I think that will be a good thing." He said, "That's what I want to do and you need to let me do it." Bram thought about it: "Okay."

He did that, and you know I was 25 years old and it was pretty…it was a major moment for me, being in charge of one of those stations, really the biggest of the Midnight Sun stations. And Midnight Sun had a practice of turning out monthly – seven stations – P&L's in one booklet. They had no budgets. They had no income projections. They had no expense budgets. They had profit-and-loss statements, which would itemize each

apparent line item, but there were no budgets. And I thought, hum, odd to me, although I had never been involved in a budget process or being involved in managing, but I had been in sales.

I certainly had my own income budget projections. And when Greg Cartwright and I had a woodcutting business, we had projections on what we expected we would do in the woodcutting business. And I thought seems like you ought to have an income-and-expense budget projection.

And so in 1977 I put one through, which was really the first one ever I put together – an income projection – and I expected what our expenses would be. I projected that and I think it was that fall, I'm quite sure (that) I got a call from Jim Davis, who was the accountant for the seven stations and he said, "Al, KENI TV is going to do a million dollars this year," in this incredible amazed voice. And I said, "Actually, Jim, that is true and KENI TV should have done a million dollars several years ago." He said, "You think so?" And I said, "Oh yeah. No, it should have." And about an hour or two later, my dad calls 'cause Jim had talked to him. "Alvin, we figured out that KENI TV is going to do a million dollars this year." I was all ready for it. I said, "Yeah, I know."

End of Tape 1, Side A

Tape 1, Side B

Al: Now I actually got it – it will and it should (have happened) several years ago. What happened with my dad when I got into sales (was) there were two elderly gentleman that were all of the local sales effort and one of them helped to coordinate national sales. That was it. They had extreme break length. Their breaks, because they were tape-delayed programming, they had the ability, which still is the ability now, to stop the program and expand the local breaks. It's legal. And what they would do, though, is they would have major sales in like October, November, December and incredibly scarce activities (in the other nine months of the year.). They would have sponsorships at the Rondy working for Bill Walley.

I was in sales. I was also involved on air and during that period I helped to… I was one of the checkpoints during Rondy coverage I remember in February of '76. We were selling these things (sponsor packages) ten sponsors for the Rondy. So I'm a real detailed kind of person and I'm out there selling these things (packages) and it was going pretty well. And, well, we had sold them all out. I'm not just saying that I did, but the sales effort and the station sold a 1976 Fur Rondy coverage out to 10 sponsors. And I said, "Well, Bill, we're sold out." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, we sold the 10 sponsorships." And I listed them out and showed him whom we had sold them to. I was just a sales person at that time. And he said, "Oh, no, no we're not sold out." I said, "Oh, but we are. One through ten sponsorships. See?" And I showed him the 10. He said - he

put his right hand to his forehead and he said, "Oh, Al, we're not sold out." I was never good at math. "We'll make it eleven 10's. He said, I just don't understand math. We can sell one more." And we did, but that was kind of the approach: just go ahead and sell more if it's not illegal or immoral. Now forget about whether that's really in the best interest of the advertiser, the clutter factor, just sell more.

Hilary: Or the listener.

Al: Right. Yeah, the viewer. You don't want the clutter factor effecting retention of the, you know, the communication, which I was always concerned about. No, no, just sell, sell, sell. I thought that's not good for the advertising, not good for the viewer. It's like – and I remember saying to myself – if I ever get into management, two things I'm going to focus on: Having a production company that could actually produce quality commercials, that will effectively move these goods and services for our advertiser.

'Cause I'm out there with a 35-mm camera taking pictures of my clients' products myself, I'm writing the copy myself and I thought that's not real efficient. I can make more money if I'm out there selling rather than also writing and producing. I was even doing the on-air copy. I'd write the copy, I would produce the audio in my own voice. I thought this isn't real efficient.

Hilary: And you're talking silent film at this point.

Al: We're talking about slides with an eight-track tape card for audio and I thought that's not efficient.

The other thing I'm going to do is try to get a handle on the number of commercials. We're just floundering in – we're selling too many too cheaply. So in May of '76, I actually fell into that with the manager getting fired. And that fall I lopped one 30-second spot off the inventory and it is now like 3:30. So the fall of '76 I limited it to 3:30. (By) the fall of '77, I kept lopping one (more) 30-second off and I planned – I knew it would take years 'cause for every reduction in inventory you got to offset it with more cost-per-spot in a very gradual way and I brought it down to two minutes and ten seconds probably by about 1980, which we're still at now.

But I remember looking at that and we went out and we hired sales people and we trained them and put together budgets and we had sales meeting on a weekly basis – things that we do now.

Hilary: New concept.

Al: Yeah, that was never done. In fact when Bill Walley – I was switching in a control room back in December of '74…I had just finished my fourth year at the University of Alaska

Anchorage – and Bill Walley, I was switching – I remember producing Mother Moose Show and switching. And I also anchored weekend newscasts. I started that back in February of '71. So I had a wide variety of different things. Totally out of the principle of filling in a desperate situation of work, of employment, you know, the labor pool. And I'm switching away (when) Bill Walley walks up. He says, "I've got an idea for you." "Oh, what's that Bill?" He said, "I'm going to think about it some more over the weekend but I've got an idea of a job for you and I think you'd do really well at." "So what is it?" "Well, I'm going to talk to you about it." By then I really (felt) befriended (by) Bill Walley and I think we had a lot of respect for each other and I thought over the weekend I wonder what Bill is talking about. And on Monday I came in and he said, "The idea that I have is for you getting into sales. You can start it part-time." I'd been involved in production, control room. I had gone away to Seattle and got a first-class FCC license back in March of '73 and I'd been involved in news production and on-air anchoring and a wide of variety – I'd been involved in radio, but I had never been involved in sales at all.

Hilary: But at this point you knew both the technical and the on-air side?

Al: Right.

Hilary: Of both radio and TV?

Al: Yeah, my technical background, you know, although I have a FCC first-class license which was required back then in order to. Typically a lot of times at night (in) a TV station back then in our market, the only person in the building was the guy that was doing the switching. Well, you had to have a first-class FCC license on the property. So you always wanted to have, particularly your nighttime switcher, to be the actual first-class holder to save money.

So I went to Seattle and went to school, where I got my FCC license. It actually was a school that frankly if you were good at memorizing taught you the answers to the test. It wasn't so much learning all the theory although I learned some of it. It was really a matter of passing the test by learning the answers. Multiple choice test. There were like six different tests so you had to learn a lot of questions and answers. And I went to school and the class was eight weeks.

They had a trade-out at the Roosevelt Hotel and the school was down near KOMO-TV and this was in February of '73. And I went there and I studied really hard. Couldn't study on the weekend because they wouldn't let me take anything home because they were afraid you'd make copies of it. And I got done in four weeks and I took the test. The quickest anybody had taken the test (before was) like in five weeks. And they said you might not pass, and I (said I) think I can do this.

Then I went into the Federal Building there in Seattle to take the test, the FCC. You have to pass your second-class. You take…there are two tests. The second-class and a first-class. If you take the second-class and fail it but you pass the first-class. you have to start back over again. But before you'd know whether you passed the second could take a couple of weeks. I didn't want to return. So she asked, "Which test would you like?" I said, "Both the second and the first." She goes, "You want the second and the first today?" I said, "Yeah, I want to take them both today." She said, "Well, remember if you pass the first and fail the second you got to start over." "I know, but I want to take them both." "Okay." And she gave them to me and I knew all the answers to those tests because I had been trained that way.

The room was filled with these people (using) slide rules – *[Bramstedt addition: coming up with their answers using]* slide rules and everybody is cranking through with their slide rules and just working, thinking and I'm blasting through the test. And I start looking around at people and I'm getting like done in no time. And I thought you better slow down this looks a little strange. So I remember playing with my slide rule and pretending to be thinking. I've enjoyed acting and I got done quicker than anybody else in the room there.

And I remember leaving Seattle there… leaving for Anchorage that afternoon and (thinking) "Oh my God, what if I failed?" You start these second thoughts. Then I remember the agony…took like 15, 16 days, maybe three weeks before you got the test results back. Every day I'd go to the mailbox and finally one day in March of '73 the envelope from the commission. And I remember opening the mailbox holding the envelope.

Hilary: Not wanting to open it.

Al: I don't want to have to go back. I don't want to go back to school. I'll feel really bad if I failed, but I thought to myself, "Stop it, just open the envelope, have faith." And I remember the adrenaline, opened the envelope, my license was in there, which I still have. Wow! And I remember calling my dad and he said, "Well, let's go out, let's go to dinner tonight and celebrate." And we went out to dinner at one of the trade-outs and celebrated getting the FCC license. That weekend I did a board shift with my license all alone in the building, but it was a major moment getting that FCC license.

The other real major moment that should be noted is -- you've gotta remember -- the television news was actually on the air by tape delay. Midnight Sun began in, I think, 1965 on its television stations in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau. They would have taped in Seattle off air KING's NBC nightly news and they would put it on Northwest Airlines (or) Alaska Airlines, and they would get it up and we would air it after the Tonight Show like 11:30 at night and we'd air it again in the morning. Sometimes it wouldn't arrive because of weather problems. But even when it did arrive it was old, it was late (at) night

that evening. They did that beginning in, I think, 1965 and usually there was a problem of about once a week with that delivery of that program. Then we'd take the actualities out of those newscasts and we'd put them in our newscast the next day at six o'clock. So now you had actualities, reports from reporters in Channel 2 news at six o'clock that were really more than 24 hours old by then. It worked because that's all there was.

So it's kind of like when I show people my Model T Ford. It's a 26T, which I've had since I was 19 up at the garage and I say this car cruises at 45 miles an hour – or 30 miles an hour and its top speed is 35. Well, I say, think about it: what were they used to? They were used to wagons, oh yeah, slower than 20, moving along slower and cruising speed of half that. And so it's all in what they're used to. The viewers were used to old news.

Dad had a real good relationship with NBC – and in April of 1975, working at NBC, they were able to bring in live satellite coverage (of the) NBC nightly news. It was an amazing moment and way before any of the other stations and he was really proud of that. We had an arrangement with – hooking (up) with Alascom and other sponsors where NBC would actually allow us to delete the network commercials (and replace them with local ones) to be able to bring that NBC Nightly Newscast on the air. And Augie was the first one to bring live sports. It was an NFL playoff game, like in '71. The very first live coverage was the launch of Apollo 11 (in July of 69). But it was a major moment: getting that live newscast every day seven days a week for all three Midnight Sun stations.

Hilary: And what was astounding was the arrangement.

Al: Right.

Hilary: That the Alaska stations had with their networks.

Al: Right.

Hilary: To allow them to do that.

Al: Right. Well, it was so expensive the satellite transmission that you couldn't sell sponsorships in it normally. They are not for sale, only adjacent to it, which we did. But to be able to sell within those live sports and within the actual newscast. But we did (it) exclusively from April of '75 until the Rural Alaska Television Network, the experimental project. They brought that in. They replaced it in January of '77. They brought NBC Nightly News and dad was kind of sad because he knew now that Augie and Duane Triplett (of KIMO) the competition would have network news (too) and he'd put that thing together (first). We had just dominated with it during that period from April of '75 until, I believe it was January of '77, we began getting programming through the

State like NBC Nightly News. So did Augie and so did KIMO. But that was a real proud moment for him. And it was big. It was a big moment.

Another (thing) as I think about my memories that was so fascinating…My dad had this way he would be in the evening. He'd come home from work and he would have a couple Scotch-on-the-Rocks, he called it, with cheese slices and liverwurst. No wonder he died of a stroke. He loved that and he'd have a couple drinks and we'd have a great time together in the evening. Then he'd take a nap afterward. And then he would get up around nine or ten and he would stay up pretty late.

Well, by 1968 I was in high school and I was working about 35 hours a week at KENI Radio and TV. And I'd come home from work on a school night, usually around 11:30. Well, Dad would be sitting in his chair waiting for me and we'd talk about how work was that day and we'd just talk about things in general.

And that evening I came in – and it was 11:30 on a school night and I'm sitting on the couch. It would have been probably in '68 or '69 – the date can be verified because I'm telling him, you know, about things that went on that evening and I said, "Oh, yeah, Dad, we at the station there this evening…we picked up (on) Channel 11…we heard…and sure enough. Patty Harpel went on the air and announced that they were going off the air because they just couldn't make it as an independent station." I'm sorry, not 11, but Channel 13 KHAR-TV that went off the air.

I said it in kind of a "You know by the way…" And he said – he sat up in the chair, "What did you say?" I said, "Oh well, we'd heard a rumor earlier in the evening that Channel 13 was going off the air and so we tuned in Channel 13 at the appointed time and we watched Patty Harpel. She gave a little presentation about how they have to sign off and why." "They signed off permanently?" I said, "Yeah, that's what she said."

"That's great. That is great." And I could tell his eyes were like, whoa, the victory. And I thought, look at this guy. You know, normally a gentle sort of loving person. He is so happy about the demise of a competitor and all their employees down the tube. I thought, whoa, such a cold-hearted… but yet he is still smiling. It is like victory: the competitor is dead. And I thought, that's really an interesting side of this guy.

Later I came in business to understand how he could take such joy about, you know, killing a competitor. But for me it was kind of sad. You know some of the employees and they lost their jobs and this nice lady talked about how she couldn't make it as an independent TV station in a market that small without a network. And that Channel 2 had NBC and ABC both, and she made that point.

Of course Dad with his strong relationships both with ABC and NBC – they were an ABC and NBC combination because when he got into the business there was no third

station so he had them both and he was able to keep both, even though Channel 13… Channel 13 went on the air on Halloween 1967. And he was able to keep Patty Harpel and Bill Harpel from getting those stations, from getting a network for their station.

Finally in July 1, 1971 we lost ABC. We had to give one of them up. Channel 13 came back as KIMO and picked up ABC. That was a real dark day for him. And I remember I had a shift at the TV station when we shifted over to just NBC. He was so happy about that (demise of Harpel's station), just a major moment in his life.

Hilary: I want to take – let's go back to those, those are the best, the funny quirky ones.

Al: Well, the thing about... and you never…oftentimes you never realize – and even I didn't until much later – what an interesting business this is, and in the modern era it's different than it was because it is getting more driven toward the bottom line, and you got digital conversion and a lot of factors. But it doesn't take away from the interesting aspects of it.

And I have friends in Rotary and different businesses and they talk to me about how incredibly bored they are and they wished they had not gotten into that kind of business because it's so boring. They have nothing to do. And I think that's just amazing because in my day and in my job at this time – and really at all times – I never get everything done. No, that's not possible. There's always much more to do than you can get done. Sure, I could hire a full-time assistant, and I don't want to spend the money for a couple reasons. But the point is, this is a very interesting business for a lot of reasons. It's entertainment. It's a business. There's the technological aspect of it.

My sisters and brother-in-law own PIP Printing. And we talk about their business and we talk about this business. And it's a much simpler business because you've got technical aspects of it. You've got production. You've got keeping clients happy. I look at the whole business of television as being a pyramid turned upside down. When I give talks in the school system or at the university, everything rests on the point of that pyramid upside down. All of the superstructure rests right at that point and that point is effectively moving the advertisers goods and services. That's why I every year lopped off 30 seconds to be able to get people to remember the commercial they saw so they could go out and buy it from that retailer. Because if it doesn't work when we go to get a renewal it doesn't happen because it's not working.

Hilary: Ultimately it is business.

Al: Ultimately it is a business. There is no question and it is that pyramid upside down, right at that point, everything balances on: moving the clients' goods and services. When I mention that in the school system, the people in junior high they kind of go, ah, commercials. You never see me on the air trying to raise money for Channel 2. It's all in the commercial. It's an obvious point to an adult but even sometimes adults don't think

about that yet. We work very hard. When John Tracy says, "Coming up in the next half hour we've got a story about a duck that flew all the way from…" where ever it is, John does that because he wants you to watch…because he is proud of what he does. But ultimately it goes back to that upside-down pyramid. It gets the clients to stay through the commercial break and watch that commercial break motivated by the clients. That's just inherently fundamental to our business and really this whole concept of broadcasting (even from) when Augie started. Augie probably never had a boring day. I've never had a boring day. The only downside to it is it really makes time go by fast and before you know it 25 years in the same (place) – although the company that I (work) for is different and the station is very different. (Though) it has changed many times over the years, it's the same fundamental business. It has gone by like a couple years.

Hilary: And the technology has changed.

Al: The technology is improving.

Hilary: And the programming has changed. Yes, you're in the same business, but it is not the same business at all.

Al: No, it's completely different in many, many ways. But for me, because I started out in radio and I quickly became involved in television and then in the control room in doing on-air you know Rondy coverage, different kinds of things like that. I used to do sled-dog or some of the race coverage on the radio, a whole lot of different things. There have been a variety of funny little things that have happened that you end up never forgetting.

One of the things that happened to me that wasn't funny, but it just shows you this kind of style that I think people had back then, (more) than they do now. So it was in the summer of 1967. Well, Theda Comstock did the weather, you may remember, through a glass plate. Well, if you look at it – and I love how people remember things– if you look at it on your TV, the glass plate Alaska looks like it does, sheet behind it. Well, if you've got a brain you realize that on the backside of that it is backwards so she has got to be really smart to be able to figure everything out and write backwards. And, in fact, I had a viewer when Theda died – Theda and I were really close – she said Theda was like a Chink because she could write backwards. She learned to write everything backwards. And I said, "So that's your view of how she did that?" "Yes, she was so smart she taught herself to write backwards. Because on the TV screen it was correct so for her it was backwards." And I said, "I really – Theda was smart and I hate to burst your bubble in a sense but actually what happened there was that there was a deflection switch in the camera that we could switch where, in fact, to the camera it is backwards. We could flip the switch and everything was reversed. So for Theda it was actually correct." And there was a pause, and I wondered… and then she said, "Oh really." And I said, "But Theda was smart, she was smart."

So, well, to flip that switch these were TK31, the technology. It would have been the mid-50's – really excellent image, orthicon two cameras, black-and-white and real tough, lots of tubes, high voltage. And to keep them cool, the company would keep both bay doors wide open. So they're wide open and I had been on the job for a month, which felt – I had a lot of experience at 16 years old and I gotten to the point where I could flip that switch without looking, I thought. And I'm setting up, getting weather ready, and getting the camera all set and one of my jobs was cleaning the marking off the weatherboard. And right next to me was, for instance, the weather set, there was a sport set, and a doorway. My camera was right here and there was a curtain right here that you could pull back.

Well, Mike Janicek was setting up the actual little ceramic numbers for sports. No character generation back – then it was all ceramics. He's standing here, there's a curtain here, I'm here, the weather set is here, I flipped the switch – and I put my hand on the high-voltage circuit of the camera. I am stuck to the camera and my jaw jammed, all the muscles are frozen. And I'm thinking, "How am I going to get…" My brain is working well, but all my muscles were locked up. And I went, "Um, um, um…" and finally Mike Janicek, real smart young guy, who was a couple years older than I was, and I remember he looks at his feet to make sure he didn't have any nails or tacks in his shoes and he reached up and punches me in the side and blows me away from the camera. And I'm laying on the concrete floor.

In fact I was back in the Fourth Avenue Theater Building this spring. I was over there giving a presentation for the Downtown Rotary Club on the digital conversion. I went down to the basement and I stood in what used to be that studio and a flood of memories of things that happened in that studio came back to me including that one.

So B. G. Raddlett and Mike Janicek, they picked me up and they laid me on Theda's cooking set table and from the third person, imagine what that looked like! I'm lying there totally lifeless. They listened to my heart: it was pumping normally. I couldn't move anything. My legs were shot and I remember hearing B.G. and Mike talk about, well, his heart rate is normal. "I think he is just kind of shocked from the voltage. And if he doesn't come around like in 15 minutes we will call the hospital." "Call the ambulance," I'm thinking. "Well, you guys are taking a really relaxed approach here." And I'm thinking, "I hope I can move." Nothing will work. No - there was no, like, commanding your fingers. Nothing would work. I was totally paralyzed, but my brain was working very well as I lay there. They would come back, you know, like every five minutes.

Hilary: And check on you.

Al: After about ten minutes, I began to be able to move my toes and my fingertips and then about five minutes from then I was able to walk, stand up, and I went back to work. I

didn't have any burn marks but apparently there is this high voltage thing that has the capacity to paralyze muscles, but it is not of the same electrical rhythm of the heart so I didn't have a heart failure.

Hilary: That would have done you in otherwise.

Al: Another kind of funny story was I was setting up…we were going to do an interview of a real high Catholic bishop. He was in town and he was going to be interviewed and the news talent was about to come in and they said, well, go ahead and get the thing set up. Well, we had audio inputs at selected places. And I decided to put this high-ranking Catholic official in a mike location, but what ended up happening is the mike was pulled tight. *[Bramstedt edit: There were cords attached to each side of the mike, and then the cords went around to the back of his neck. The mike cable had a]* a span of about 20 feet actually between the two camera positions. I thought it should work. Technically it should work fine, going back and forth between the two cameras. This is during the setup period. I tripped over it like hard and I turned and fell. I said, "Oh my God, this wonderful whatever he is." I'm not a religious I didn't understand the structure but I knew he was important. I remember looking up and he is going cough, cough - he's choking because the mike cord had pulled tight around his neck. And I pulled him forward and it choked him. And I remember going up to him and apologizing. And he was so kind. I was so embarrassed…a clumsy 16-year-old.

Another thing pops so vividly into my mind. It was really one of those (things that) to the day I die I will never forget. Ed Stevens, one of the great on-air talents. You probably heard that name Ed Stevens. One of the great voices, really good-looking guy, with a great voice, an incredibly nice disarming sort of personality. Well, he had gone to work for KFAR during the war years and worked for my dad. And dad told me that he fired Ed Stevens on Christmas Day 'cause he didn't show up for work. And he said, "You know. I knew it was Christmas Day and I knew if I fired him I'd be the one working his working show. I was so upset with him being late and not coming into work on time."

End of Tape 1, Side B

Tape 2, Side A

Al: So they hired Ed back in the mid-60's to do two things. One, weekend news and also to do a tape program called "News In-Depth". It is a 15-minute, probably a 10-minute reader editorials, comments, news in-depth kind of thing. Frankly, in part it was kind of a filler for the big one-hour newscast. You got to remember back then there was no real – electronic news-gathering equipment (other than the microwave equipment.) They only had 16-mm black-and-white mag(netic) stripe film.

Hilary: And optical film before that, because I remember shooting that.

Al: Is that right?

Hilary: Yeah.

Al: Yeah. This is a negativity polarity. You'd reverse the polarity.

Hilary: Exactly.

Al: Maybe that's what you're referring to. That's certainly what we had. That was the only thing. We developed our own film. It was a real low-income, low-budget operation. Well, Ed would do these news in-depth and Ed and I had become friends. We liked each other a lot. And he's to me an old person. He would have been probably my dad's age and remember this is 19…this would have been 1968. I started in '67. It would have been in late '67. So he was 49 years old but, to a 16-year-old, pretty "old".

Well, Ed was anchoring the half-hour newscast on the weekends, like 6:30 in the evening. Don Porter is the switcher and I'm the cameraperson and I get the camera, everything set up, and Ed would normally walk in last minute, sit down, and I'd cue him. And those newscasters back then were long readers. You know, lots of reading. You'd probably read more in a half-hour newscast back then then you'd read in an hour newscast all week (now). Most of it was reading. And my nature is not - I tend to be a planner. I tend to be a pre-visualizer and I tend to worry about details.

So, Don Porter's on the other end on the headset and we're in the commercial break prior to the newscast. I said, "Don, Ed's not here." He said, "Yeah, I see that." I said, "What should I do, Don?" He said, "Well why don't you go look for him?" So I make a real quick swing through radio and the news operation and I come back around "Don, I can't find him," I said. And all of a sudden right at the words "I can't find him", all of a sudden through the door walks Ed Stevens. Now Don has started to run a 16-mm colored fill film reel of PSAs. There's 30s and 60s PSA's. He's here, okay. Ed slowly sits down. I cue him. Ed looks up. "Good Evening. Today in the news Governor Hickel…" The words were like 1/20th of normal speed – 20 times slower – and I said, "Don, I think Ed's drunk." And Don says, "Yeah, that's pretty obvious." I remember him saying that. And I'm like reporting and Don Porter can see this through the monitor. I said, "Don, what do I do now?" Don pauses for a moment and he said, "I'm going to dump out of this. I'll go back again with the PSA reel and we'll put up a film filler." He said, "You're clear now. Just go up to Ed and gently tell him to go home." And I said, "Oh, okay."

Hilary: Ed?

Al: Tell Ed to… Don told me to tell Ed to just go home. Remember, he's someone I really cared about. I'm 16. I remember locking the camera down and (thinking), how do I do that? I love this guy and this is a big moment. He thinks he's on the air and I'm going to go up to him and that's… and I thought for a moment. And I remember standing there watching him slowly reading and I stepped up on the riser and I put my left hand on his right shoulder and I put it there and he stopped and looked up at me. And I said, "Ed, Don says you can go home." And he looked at me and he said, "Oh, okay." And he got up and he slowly left. And for me it was a real also… a real lesson about alcoholism and what it does to great talents.

So Ed continued on. And then in the spring of 1968 – you know, several times a week we'd do these 10-minute, news in-depth programs and I was the camera operator. This one day was like in April of '68. When Ed got done he came – he stood up from the desk. I was – we usually had some necessities (to take care of since) it was a Friday evening and we'd say something, "Have a nice weekend", like people do. And he said, "Alvin, I just wanted to tell you how much I've enjoyed working with you. You're a really fine young man and you're going to go really far in this business. I just wanted you to know that." I said, "Well Ed, thank you for that. I appreciate that. I've really enjoyed working with you." And he got up and the way that the studio was -- I remember this so vividly. There was, you may remember, there was a set of swinging doors right there. The control room entry was here. The set was right here for news in-depth. The news set was here, weather, Theda's program, another interview down there. And he got up. I locked the camera down and I remember standing there watching Ed slowly walk to the door. This took like 10 seconds. I didn't move. I just stood there like the passing of a great friend. And I stood there, beside the camera, I didn't say anything, he didn't look at me and he walked out. I remember watching those doors go back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And I didn't move away until the last movement of the two doors.

And I had a strange feeling about Ed because of what he told me. Well that, evening we went up to the lake and the routine at the lake was that we'd come up on Friday evening and I would always go with my folks. And dad had his chair in the corner and there was a phone by the chair and he'd get up, have a cup of coffee, and my bed was in the loft. There was no wall and the phone rings really loud. And it woke me up. And I remember dad saying, "Oh, no. I'm so sorry to hear that. Okay. So this morning, all right. I appreciate that." And dad hung the phone up. He's sitting there. I peered up over the edge of the balcony and I said, "Dad, that phone call was that Ed Stevens died." And dad goes -- he looked at me just like how did you know that? I said that I just knew that and Ed knew that he was going to die yesterday and I told him about that. But it was…and he died of heart failure from… he didn't kill himself, he just died of natural causes. All those years of alcohol. But it was such an amazing moment for me.

I saw a picture of Ed in one of the collections of KFAR photographs and it brought back all those memories. What a neat person.

A couple of other little things. We had a real intense news director, Darrell Comstock. That's obviously who became the husband of Theda. And he had a routine during these long hour newscasts. We'd do a Texaco and Safeway commercial breaks and each like - each commercial in the break lasted at least 30 seconds. So you'd have at least a full minute and he liked to smoke cigars. So Darrell would quickly light up a cigar and he would put his feet up on the set and he would smoke a cigar. I probably told you this story. He'd smoke a cigar and he'd nurture the time and, wow: that day one of the two sponsors canceled -- weren't there. It's only one 30-second. Well, they didn't tell me. I didn't get to tell him. And he's by now at the beginning of the 30, he's right in the most enjoyable moment in this 60-second pause with his feet up there. And the control (room cues him.) Darrel, he sits up, he flips the cigar into the air, it hits the concrete floor and he starts reading. He is blowing smoke out of his mouth -- shooting out the side. I remember that so vividly. And I remember looking down at the cigar and big fat cigar smoke is coming up. I thought this guy is pretty remarkable.

Hilary: Pretty good.

Al: And about a couple months later, they would use these cameras out during live retail coverage and they'd bring them back. Big, heavy Houston Fearless tripods and the cameras were, oh, probably, I'm thinking 170 pounds, the top half of it. We had two cameras and we'd do basic simple shots of the anchor reading and reading and reading. For some reason that day, Darrel is right in the middle of… it was a medium shot of Darrel and he is reading along and for some reason, unannounced, the camera falls off one (of) its tripods. So it goes (noise) just like this and big pop sound. The camera is still operating and Darrel figures out the monitor is there. He can see what happened; he can see the camera. And he goes just like this and he is reading perfectly on it. You could not tell and he just keeps reading until the commercial break. He's like several minutes - wow, remarkable. He just keeps reading at an angle.

But those are the kinds of things, you know…there are still people in that spirit that are doing that now. There is a great quote that I live by, by Teddy Roosevelt: Do what you can with what you have and where you are. I had learned that about four years ago and I've lived by it on a daily basis. I explain that quote to people and remind them of it. But that is what Darrel was doing. Doing what he could with what he had where he was – at an extreme angle.

Hilary: We're talking funny stories, anecdotes of early television. Are there others of those?

Al: There are a lot of those, but one that particularly comes to mind about a series. Theda Comstock worked for Midnight Sun from 1962 until I personally ended the program that she had on the air back in, I think it was January of '85, and that was a real tough business decision on my part. But when I first started in television one of my jobs was to

work camera on her program. I would get out of school at four o'clock and rush right down to the station and at 4:30 she was on the air with a half-hour program called, "The Woman's Touch." And Theda and I we really enjoyed working together and she was really an incredible professional. She had incredible skill in adapting to the rules that I will quote and which she had probably never heard. But she was able to take on the most difficult situations and, to the viewer, you'd never even know that there was all this problem going on.

Well, as an example she would… she would sit down on the set at about 4:15 and her guest would typically show up. That was when I showed up. I'd turn the lights on. Got the camera set up and got the cameras adjusted and ready to go, check the mikes and the program would go on the air. Once in a while, the guest would show up late and very infrequently, but once in a while the guest wouldn't show. So she'd start looking toward the door and at about six minutes before she'd go on the air with a half-hour program she would go, oh, my guest isn't going to show. And she would mumble something about the guest. And she would turn around - she had a big drawer about that wide, about this thick, and about that wide of recipes, press releases, totally disorganized, just a big drawer filled and she would literally be throwing these things over her shoulders you know looking for things. And, "Theda, we've got three minutes," and she is just going through things, mumbling things and throwing papers. They're hitting the concrete floor. They're flying through the air and she'd be just in a huge apparent panic putting this program together. "Okay, 30 seconds." And at about 10 seconds she'd turn around. I had the program up, I'd cue her to say Good Evening or Good Afternoon. "We got a great show today, some incredible recipes…" and blah, blah, blah. You could never tell. It was like she had produced and written that program all day long. In fact, she had put it together in the last six minutes. The commercials for Maytag and Carr's Quality Food Centers, Sunrise Bakery, they were extra long those days. But I remember cueing her and watching her go on the air so smoothly and I thought, "What a professional. This woman really can speak so clearly and she doesn't panic. She focuses on doing a good job."

Another incident on that, she had a Mexican chef that she would have on from time to time. And he would cook really spicy food. One day – the chefs were always having her taste what they cooked. And we would particularly… Theda would be reacting…then she said the name of the chef and her eyes started…I zoomed right in. Tears were dripping off her chin. "Oh, that is really hot, that's spicy…" and she is going on and on – (tears) dripping off her.

And I was always interested in eating what was left over. 'Cause these chefs typically wouldn't take anything with them. It was one of the benefits of the job before the next live production, which was news. There was time in there when I could eat the leftovers. And Theda was gone and her guest was gone and there was the Mexican dish. And got a big scoop of that in my mouth - GAA - and I remember no one watching and I jumped to the water faucet and tilted my head and washed it out with cold water. And I thought if I

had been Theda, that's what I would have done on the air. But because she was such a professional she handled it differently.

Hilary: Tears coming down her cheeks.

Al: She was pretty remarkable. And when I ended up in '86, it was January of '86, killing the program. And the last program was Theda interviewing me about why it was (ending) and what was going on. It was a real positive program and we had a good talk. But that was real difficult. You know, in business sometimes you have to do things that probably make good business sense but are real painful. And a couple years later she told me that she was worried that what I was really going to do is cancel the program for a couple months and bring back a younger woman. Bring back a younger woman. I said, "Come on, Theda. I told you the truth. That never even occurred to me." She said, "Yeah, I figured, but I worried about it." I said, "You didn't need to."

Hilary: Al, you talked before about Augie and Bram being friendly competitors and it sounds like from what you've talked about with your dad they also had a very different orientation. I mean, Augie was Mr. Technical coming from the engineering side and your dad seems to be much more the talent, the programming side. How did those two work? I know they butted heads a lot, but how did that sort of - that friendly competition work from your perspective because you had a number of years to watch it.

Al: Yeah, I really don't think they butted heads. I never recall a period where my dad ever said anything negative ever about Augie. Augie picked dad up at the train station on January 17, 1940. Dad took a steamship to Seward and then took the train and Augie was my folks' best man at their wedding July 16, 1940. And during that period until Augie left the Midnight Sun and that was probably in '49, '51 I think it was, '51, yeah '51, Augie got some money from the Lathrop Estate and then went off to start television. Lathrop was slow to get into that because (it was) competition in the theater business. But Augie wanted to do that and did. And during all that period they were really close.

Augie did move down to Anchorage to put KENI on the air, but they were still very close. But that period from 1940 until Augie came down to put KENI on the air, my folks -- Augie didn't get married until March of '47, I think the year was, '47, yeah. Yeah March of '47. During that period they were thick as could be. Photographs, Augie is a great photographer. There is a library or just barrels of 35-mm colored photographs of the three of them palling around. And I could tell they were real close but they never butted heads.

I don't think there was ever a time when, at least my dad, had a negative feeling about Augie. Yet he respected him as a competitor and dad would… my first real income earned from (inaudible) broadcasting was when I was like eight years old, nine years old, and was logging commercials. I would write. Dad would say, "I'm going to pay you 50

cents an hour to watch Channel 11 and write down all the commercials." As soon as I could write I was doing that. I never really understand why. He would pay me 50 cents. I'd say, "What a great job. I'm watching television and I'm getting paid for it." But he was keeping track of what Augie had on the air.

Hilary: I mean "butting heads" more in the sense of being competitors and then eventually, when they were both here, they were obviously after the same dollar and they were trying to - like your story about outdoing each other, one getting color, one getting…

Al: They didn't have any ratings system back then. There was no competition as it related to cost-per-rating-points or, you know, a rate card that was structured that way or making representation from a ratings book about how programs are doing. There was none of that. None of that existed really until the mid-70's. That is when the ratings -- you know, Arbitron -- came in and began doing that, which brings to mind another kind of interesting story about Arbitron.

So you didn't have that fierce sales competition for two reasons. They didn't have the ratings. The other reason is my father and, in my view, Augie -- they didn't weren't big budget-driven… got to make this kind of money, we've got this goal, drive, drive, drive. They didn't do business that way. My dad -- and I think Augie was similar -- the focus was doing good things for the community and the community would return that by allowing their business to do well. When in fact, I know and I still have all those P&L's from Midnight Sun. It was real nip and tuck. They were not a financially stable company. They just weren't. And they weren't -- let me just speak for Midnight Sun, and I can't comment about Augie. I'm assuming that Augie was similar.

They didn't have that drive, drive, drive - sales, sales, sales, get out there. Sure, my dad was involved in sales and Augie made sales calls, but these were two guys that loved their community, loved the business. Augie was from a technical standpoint. Augie also understood the importance of having quality talent. My dad was talent, great on talent, one of the best ever, great writer, charming.

People loved my dad. It took him… He didn't go to cocktail parties to network. I was thinking about that this morning in talking to you. My dad never did that -- where a lot of people going to -- going to network. He went because he loved people and people loved him.

Augie was not as comfortable around people and still isn't, but Augie is much more charming than he thinks he is, which is a real nice thing, rather than the opposite.

Hilary: How come you're in the business, given all the changes?

Al: I really… the goal that I have and for (have had for) some time is kind of… well, jumping back one step: things have gone well for me in the business. I've enjoyed it and it seems to have gone well. It has been a great life. I was thinking about when I had that surgery, that there is a certain mortality rate for that kind of surgery. It is not great but there is a percentage that they have identified that won't make it through the other side six months later. And I thought to myself, you know if I was to die in that surgery, I would feel good about having the opportunity to live to fifty years and having the two greatest parents a person could ever have and to be in a business that is as exciting as this one.

And I think back to my Rotary friends and ah, this is boring, nothing here. I'm thinking you know, I've had a great life. So I got into the business sort of as a - I got into the business as an employee filling in a labor pool with the ability to enjoy doing what I did and I think because I was enthusiastic with a positive attitude. I was probably pretty good with what I had. I'm not saying that I was the best or whatever it was that I did over the years, but I think I was quite employable.

And I've also had, I think, a sense of history of broadcasting. One of the major things that I was involved with when I worked with NBC in '83 and in April 1 of '84 we became the first station to bring on a daily basis all programming by satellite from NBC. Big deal. That was a giant deal. We kept that a big secret. I was really proud of that. We've done a lot of different things as a company that have been quality rated, very successful. We've dominated the marketplace since 1985 and, yeah, I'm proud of that.

And I thought to myself, well, if I die I can feel good about what I've contributed. I would regret not spending another period of time in the business -- dying at 50, and then going to heaven and seeing people that I'd miss and care about. I went into that surgery thinking, "This is great. I've got nothing to (regret). I can feel good about what I did and I'll get to see my best friend and I'll get to see my folks and several other people that I miss that are in heaven." When they were getting me ready, they shave your body. They've had so many bad experiences with people right before surgery panicking and their hearts are weak anyway, but the guy that was shaving me said, "Boy, you're really calm about this." I said, "Ah, I have no fear. I have no fear." He said, "That's unusual." But I didn't have fear because I felt good about where I had been and I was actually if I had to cash it in, going to heaven.

My goal in life has always been to -- when I'm packing it in, whether it's tomorrow or 40 years from now when I'm 90 -- I want to be able to look back on life and feel like I used this opportunity having been granted, the ability to be a thinking, breathing human being in this era, that I use those days well. I think having diabetes has taught me that you don't have an endless amount of time and to use it well. And I've tried to do that and I've tried to enjoy each day. And I've tried to develop a reputation for being a person that does what I see to do and try to enjoy what it is we're doing. Primarily we have three goals -

produce a quality product, efficiently produce that product, and have fun doing it. Three things.

And so I'm in this business because it has now become what I know. And I can say I enjoy the business and now we're -- my goal is to when I retire is to be able to get Channel 2 firmly in the digital era. My dad got it firmly in the analog era. He became the first manager, er, he became the second manager of the station. It had been on the air for a year and went total disaster. And he brought it up and helped to standardize it in the analog era. My goal is (that) I've brought it along in the analog era and I want to be able to turn it over when I retire in the digital era on a stable footing. He was manager technically of Channel 2 from December 26, 1954 until he retired in December of 1981. So he was manager for 27 years and he was by far the longest manager. And now I've been 25, so it's really in the last over 50 years. Technically he was manager, general manager, while I was station manager. So that's my goal is to try to turn this over to whomever when I retire, as a stable business in the digital era.

But really it has been a great thing. I've done well financially. It has been a great time. I'm never bored. Every day is exciting. And I can't imagine really, as I look back on my life from my childhood all the way through, I can't imagine a greater life. It has been a wonderful life. And the neat thing about me is I don't take things that most people do for granted, like being alive, being born in this era, having a brain that you can think with. People just take it all for granted and they shouldn't. If they'd just pause and give thanks. Thanks that they don't have breast cancer. They don't have a brain tumor. And I know that people I've lost -- and my feet aren't numb.

And I visited the mother of one of our employees when I was selling Rotary roses, fundraiser for Rotary, one fall. This woman had had diabetes for -- since 1974, four years less than I had. She was four years older than I was and she is in the hospital, heart failure, she was blind, kidney failure, on and on and on. Well, Melody, the accounting manager, was going out of town, was out of town during the rose sale delivery. Well, I had sold a dozen roses and Melody asked if I would deliver them to her mom. I said sure. I heard a lot of good things about this woman and I'd like to meet her. So I went to the hospital with my roses. Well, she could smell them. She couldn't see them. And we talked about the disease and all the difficulties she was having. And I'm not kidding you, Hilary, we talked for like 25 minutes and… (she said:) oh, my kidneys, my heart, my nerves, my eyes, on and on and on. And I went blind seven years ago. I went on dialysis that's six years ago. My heart is congested. They're trying to do bypass. This is a couple of years ago…

End Tape 2, Side A –
Nothing on Side B