

**Al Bramstedt**  
**Nov. 9, 2001**

Interviewed by Hilary Hilscher

**Tape 3, Side A**

Hilary: It is the 9<sup>th</sup> of November today and I'm talking with Al Bramstedt in his office. Al, it was fun listening to the tapes again. I want to pick up a little bit on what we touched on in July, which is that competition was with Augie, first, Channel 11 and to some extent Channel 13. What about the bigger picture of competition as cable started to come in... as there has just been a span of competition here that has changed since you first started out in radio even.

Al: In the early days of television, the radio market was actually sales in radio and the performance in radio was actually pretty good. KENI radio – it's billing was often greater than television. My father and the people he had there were excellent radio broadcasters. Television was kind of like a new member in the family and they were trying to get an understanding (of it). Plus if you go back to the 50's and 60's, in the 50's, in the 60's, and all the way up until '84 everything was on (tape) delay.

Until April 1 of '84... One of the significant dates (in Alaska TV history was when) Channel 2 here in Anchorage got its network programming on satellite. Well, before that, network programming aired on a delay. We had been on a three-week delay with NBC and then we, in 1982, moved that to a two-week delay. But two weeks delay on entertainment programming was very difficult after Christmas. Because the Christmas shows would come in and what do you do with that? Usually we would replace them with some other programming that wasn't seasonally oriented.

The other thing that would happen with all those delays is during the ratings period – Nielson checks all, virtually all, the TV stations across America in February, May, July, and November. Well, during that period, the networks put out the very best programming. Well, we've had a three-week delay and the very best would come mostly after the ratings period.

But what you had back in those early days is a small community, virtually incredibly limited television production for the clients. And so one of the great, I mentioned one of the great moments was microwave. In my view, the great moments in TV were the microwave, which we did in 1958; color television June 18, 1966; and satellite-delivered programming. You know, that began with a launch of Apollo 11 in July of '69. I think July 20, '69. But those were magic moments, which meant a whole lot for the future. And with microwave... they would do certainly and ... we still do the Catholic Cathedral's midnight mass. We would do the First Baptist Church on Sunday, a one-hour program.

We would actually do live commercials, like jewelers, advertisers, retailers live right from their store. And when you think back on that all that you have to go through to hook up a microwave link back to the station (to) do their multi-minute commercial from a retailer live...

We did the Chrysler, Anchorage Chrysler Center, Friday night movie for years, microwave-fed. In fact, I was -- I remember I was on the board -- it would have been, I got my FCC license in March of '73, so it would have been in probably fall of '73 -- and it was Friday and I was switching prime-time all by myself. The staff levels back then were real conservative. They needed to be because there wasn't much income. And we would -- we would run a locally run movie, 16-mm film movie, and we would insert Anchorage Chrysler Dodge live commercials from via the microwave from up the street.

We were 30 minutes from the broadcast, and I had fired up the microwave and the darn thing quit. I was thinking, we were just like 10 minutes from going on air and the microwave quit. I thought damn. And I remember getting a stepladder. The microwave was up at about a seven-foot level on the rack and I remember getting a stepladder, climbing up the stepladder, and looking at it. And there was one tube that was cold and dark. I thought... I remember shutting the machine down, pulling the tube out and taking it back to the rack of tubes, and I found the right tube and plugged it in, fired up, and I didn't even mention what I did or what happened, but I was pleased about that. It saved the Chrysler Center Friday night commercial lineup.

But the microwave, the capacity (with) the microwave and do the live commercials was real important. And then when we went color TV, we developed a 35-mm slide projector where it would have two drums and it would rotate from one slide to the other and you'd rotate through. You'd have a radio announcer (who'd) done what's called "book tape" reading scripts, and the switcher would simply have the audio, which is on the reel-to-reel recording, and you'd simply have loaded the slides and you'd hit a button each time. And that actually worked pretty well, considering what they had to work with before.

Hilary: They cut back and forth.

Al: Back and forth, still color slides. Before that they had a balop (sp?) machine which was a much more cumbersome, a much more difficult process. But those kinds of developments helped a lot, and going color TV was a major moment.

Then in Fairbanks, we had a station up there that didn't have a color film chain, meaning you'd have a color camera in the middle of a rack where you have a system for using the 16-mm projector here; another one over here for commercials on film; and then that 35-millimeter projector device here. And you'd simply hit buttons on the control center and it would flip lens mirrors where the light would come in and shine and go right down into the color camera. Well, that's an expensive set up. Well, in Fairbanks we didn't have that. So what we would do is dupe all of the programming onto two-inch quad tape and shift to

quad tape because they did have quads and the quads could turn color. And so for everything that you would do in the control room (here), everything was backed up on two-inch quad (for Fairbanks), and for our Juneau operation we had these little half-inch Sony reel-to-reel, which were really poor quality. But hey, it's (for) Juneau.

Hilary: Better than anything else they had.

Al: Oh, and when you're switching prime time – I was doing Thursday night prime time and it was really – you're all by yourself. You really plan everything out. I remember as a projectionist – when I first got into the business, they actually had a projectionist, which was a person that would load those little slides. A person that would actually, let's say Best Foods would run a commercial and a local break on film and then they wanted that same commercial to come up in a break following it. What you would do after the commercial break and during the NBC programming, you'd go back and remove that (ad) out of the reel and put it in the new position.

And I remember, as an example, in one situation they had a commercial that ran and just in a couple more minutes you would have to run in a different position. So I knew what I had to do. And I ran back and I quickly did the splicing. It's a hot splicer. And there was a re-winder unit here, here, and then a smaller one here. And the break is coming up. I got just enough time and you know, I'm like 16, 17 years old – and I pulled both reels off and I go to turn like this to run out and I hung the film up on ... I could feel the adrenaline. I really cared about doing my job right. Damn. And I yelled back, his name was Mac, and said, "Mac, I'm going to be about a minute." And I think they sat on a slide waiting for me... like dead air... because of my clumsiness. But those kinds of things happened.

One time I was... I had ... I was still a projectionist but I had watched and done some breaks for the station and one of my jobs was to clean the projectors and the quad head wheel. And they had a real strong product called Chlorothane Nu. It was really toxic, stinky-smelling stuff. Well, Mac was switching and he was a real temperamental guy and I was a clumsy 17-year-old. And we had this radish-colored linoleum floor and by accident with my big feet, I dumped it over and it goes woof, woof across the floor. And we're like two minutes into the break. And he goes, "Oh, God I can't breathe." And he jumps up and he runs away. And I'm in the control room and this stuff is on the floor and it does smell bad. But I'm thinking the break is coming up and all of a sudden the break was there and I thought he's gone. I dumped this over. I've got to take over. And I sat down and that was the first prime-time break that I ever switched. And it actually went fine. And he came back about ten minutes later after I'd cleaned it up and put a fan on the floor.

But you know I suppose in anyone's career in this kind of business, you have those kind of circumstances. And then for me, a big moment for me was I was involved in – I was going to UAA, it would have been November of '74. Bill Walley was the manager and Bill Walley was a great guy in many ways. And I was... I don't know that I told this

story or not, but stop me if I have. I was switching. I was producing the Mother Moose Show for Larry Beck.

Hilary: No, we didn't talk about this.

Al: Bill Walley walks up and he says, "Al, I've got a really good idea. I think it's a good idea, but I think it would be good for you and I think you'd like it." And I said, "Oh, Bill what's that?" It was on a Friday and he said, "Oh, I'll tell you about it on Monday. I'm going to do some more thinking about it and I'll tell you about it on Monday." I thought, Geez, I wonder what this is. And on Monday he, Bill said, "I think you ought to get into sales." I'd never really thought about sales and he said, "You have a technical background." By then I'd been on news, I'd done anchoring newscasts since February of '71. I wasn't even 21 when I started that. And he said, "You've lived here a long time I know you're a smart guy. I think you know you could do well and you could work part-time in that and you know, if it didn't work, you could just stay where you are and if it did work you could on in sales." I thought, I'd never really visualized that or thought about it.

And [*Bramstedt addition: a few days before Christmas*] that year, '74, I got into sales and it was part-time. I worked, let's see, my shift was producing Mother Moose and switching daytime on Fridays and Saturday, Sunday. (I was) doing the Saturday daytime shift and the Sunday religious shift while I was putting together the newscast for 6:30 news for Saturday night and Sunday night news. And what I would do is I'd build a product all day long in between the breaks and then I would be relieved about three in the afternoon and I'd go finish up the product and then anchor the newscast. And then I had, I usually had a day off, and it was usually like, on that schedule, it was Monday off. And so I got into...I and began doing this mixture of shifts and things started to go pretty well on the sales side. And I would get calls while I'm producing Mother Moose from clients: "Hey, I'd like to have you come out and talk to me today about the proposal you gave me two days ago." And I'd say, "I'm really...well, I'm kind of tied up." And I would avoid admitting that, well, I'm actually producing, or doing television switching, and no, you can't come and see me. No, actually not until Tuesday because I had, you know, the Monday off. And this got to be more and more of a problem, and I began figuring I was making so much more money in sales than I could make anywhere else.

In August of '75 I got out of television news and I got out of operations and just focused on sales. But I still... until the company, the new company, came in I was still like anchoring the Fur Rondy coverage. And when the new company came in, we hired enough people in news to work, and I wouldn't have to do that any longer. I actually enjoyed on-air work but (I) particularly liked Rondy coverage.

Hilary: Tell me a little bit about that Rondy coverage.

Al: Well, in February of '68... I started in the business in March 5<sup>th</sup> of '67 with that funny little Sunday night radio shift, and then in May of '67 I got into television. And part of that was studio camera and, you know, loading projectors and doing reel changes, you know, on the TP66, which was the big projector that we would run the network programming on. And a lot of times, for instance, the 5:30 break between, like, *That Girl* and the *Flying Nun* -- those were two examples of two 16-mm color programs. Well, there was a 30-second break and we were back into another program. Well, 30 seconds to change a TP66 is not enough time, but that's all the time there was. So to get on the top of the film change, you'd set the... *That Girl* as an example. It would be cued right up to the right place and you'd stand there and you'd have your hands at the projector and the moment (noise) and you had a certain format of things that you quickly did. You'd pull off the film -- the spent film -- and you'd put up the new one, and you'd shut the gate and they'd start it, and then you'd finish, you know, reeling it out.

One time I was doing that change, and I was getting pretty fast and I was proud of my ability to do the film change way ahead of time. There was an action where you take your right hand and you'd shut the gate -- I believe that's what happened -- and I sliced an artery in my right hand. And it's just spurting blood: squirt, squirt, squirt. And I didn't stop. I was focused on getting my work done, but I noticed that blood was shooting out, out of my right hand -- and I got it done and I went and grabbed a product called Chemwipes, which was a paper towel kind of thing. And I remember the operator got sick at the amount of blood around the projector. I was able to hold it and it stopped, but I never forgot that. And later we decommissioned that projector I went back in -- we decommissioned it, oh probably 15 years afterward -- and I looked at it one last time as they took it away and I remember all those great memories from a youth operating that machine for a number of years.

And I remember Bill Walley was an interesting guy. He was smart and casual, really quite good on air. He had some behavioral traits that... in fact, he was arrested in probably '75 when he was manager for Channel 2 for trying to pick up a prostitute on Fourth Avenue. You may remember that. And, you know, even though that's a really bad thing to do and it is not consistent with the kind of position he was in, there was just something about Bill Walley that was really, a real lovable kind of person. Did you ever know him?

Hilary: I met him. That was all. And I have a mental picture of him.

Al: Yeah, he died about probably six years ago. Back... he was born in July of '36, so he was -- when I look back, he was like 39 or 40 when... he would have been 38 when he came up with the idea of putting me in sales.

I remember one day he said, "You know Al, one of the real advantages that you have with your technical background," he said, "For me, when an operations person tells me the commercial didn't run right because there was a head clog..." A head clog is when

one of the heads on -- there are four heads on a quad machine -- and if any one of those heads clogs up with, you know, any kind of foreign object, it won't run right. And he said, "For me, when somebody says 'head clog' I think of like the next morning after I've been drinking how I feel." And I never forgot that. I laughed about that, but it was a real advantage for me. I could understand that and it's an advantage for me even now.

But you were asking about on-air work and the Rondy. In my first year I was...

Hilary: Diversion is welcome.

Al: Right. In my first year, I was the back trail's radio checkpoint and the second year I was (at) Lake Otis right as it comes -- the trail goes by Lake Otis -- I was at the camera checkpoint there. In different years, I would do camera or announce from a checkpoint depending on what the need was. It didn't matter. I was happy and felt good about doing either one and could do either job.

Hilary: And who were the big names then when you were doing that?

Al: The on-air times?

Hilary: No, the mushers.

Al: Oh, Gareth Wright,

Hilary: George Attla?

Al: Doc Lombard, George Attla. They were just duking it about every year. And Earl Norris. He was even in some of those races. And I remember one checkpoint. I think it was probably my second year, we had -- I was the cameraperson and we had an engineer and we had an on-air talent. Well, back in those days there was a lot of drinking. And when they started drinking shortly after noon and I'll never forget...

Hilary: "They" meaning the camera crew and the radio...?

Al: I was the cameraperson. The on-air types and the technical operator for the operation: they were drinking. And I remember as the teams were coming through, the on-air announcer on radio and TV, he starts talking, "Yeah. that's definitely George Attla. You can tell by that stiff leg that he has." And I'm on the camera and I'm thinking, it's not George Attla. He (already) came through here. It's like.. and I'm thinking... And after he got off the air, I explained that. No. That wasn't George Attla at all. It was the drinking.

But I had the same thing happen... a similar experience for me. I was... and I'll mention the name but you know it's not worth printing... but Thurmond Hamilton, the sales manager for KENI radio. You may remember Thurmond. They called him "Squirmin'

Thurmond” behind his back. I rather liked Thurmond. I thought he was a good guy. Well, Thurmond is my statistician. I’m just -- this would have been in probably ’73 -- and I’m (at the) radio checkpoint in the back trail. Thurmond is out there with me and he’s got this thermos of real steamy hot stuff, looked like coffee. And it’s real important that your statistician is on the ball because if he or she is not, it makes the whole thing look bad. And Thurmond was real sharp with numbers and I noticed and I appreciated his work, but I noticed a pattern at the end of Day One: the more he tended to drink that coffee, the less his mind... I was so naïve I didn’t really put that together. And the next day, the same thing. And on the third day -- it’s a three-day broadcast -- on Sunday, it was really cold and Thurmond said, “How would you like some of my coffee?” And I said, “Sure, that would be great.” And I blew it back out! It’s like, “Thurmond that has been your problem!” It was just some real strong alcoholic drink, and he said, “Oh well, that doesn’t bother me.” And I said, “But it does. No more of that.” On the final day, I finally got a grip on what his problem was. But I remember, just in kind of a dramatic way to make the point, I blew that (out). You can’t do that on the job.

We also did a lot of snowmobile races on the weekends. And I was on the snowmobile races. I was at a radio checkpoint... almost every weekend there was some snowmobile race back in the late 60’s, early 70’s. We did a Midnight Sun 600 race for KENI radio. The television part was actually broadcast [*Bramstedt addition: using the audio from radio.*] You may remember it. They started in January ’69, and it was a race from Anchorage to Fairbanks. The first day was Anchorage to Glennallen, and second day was Glennallen to Tok. Third day was Tok to Fairbanks. It was a long way when you think about the harm to the road system and the danger to the snowmobilers. They did it for three years and then it went to Big Lake where they race around Big Lake. And I think they still might, but I was involved in that for a lot of real interesting (time).

I remember we would... the system we used... Don Porter, our engineer, had these little suitcases that were all packed with the power supply and the microphone and the directions and how to hook it up. And you’d hook it into a phone line and you had, you could dial in. Your little suitcase – you put it in the back seat of your car. And you’d run the microphone up and put it... tape it to the steering wheel with your statistician sitting here. Worked out great. You’re nice and warm and you roll the window down to just get enough of the ambient sound of the snowmobiles and you’re not dying at 40 below.

Well, on the second year I had borrowed my folks’ Lincoln. This would have been in January of ’70. Greg Cartwright is my statistician as he had been the year before. He was good and he didn’t drink. And Greg was one of my best friends. You probably remember Greg.

Hilary: I remember him, yeah.

Al: So I’m -- you’re really busy. Machines are coming in and they’re getting fueled up and then they go on. This was the Lake Louise checkpoint and they’d go -- in the last 30

some miles -- on into Glennallen on the first day. And on the second day, they'd go from Glennallen to Lake Louise, then back up to get the proper amount of miles. And I've got the window down about this far and this guy comes up. He said, "Did you see that stupid son-of-a-bitch? He came through there and he almost wiped out." And he's raving these obscenities and I'm on the air. I remember reaching down with my hand and I just rolled the window up. That's one of the things that I've learned to do in the business -- to focus on what you're doing. Don't let things like that get to you. And I remember just cutting him out and he went away. But that's been something that I learned in my youth: to focus. There's a great quote that I live by, by (Theodore) Roosevelt: "Do what you can with what you have where you are." People tend to get rattled about things they can't even positively affect. And that's been real helpful for me.

But my last on-air involvement for the Rondy was in '77, '8, '9, '80 and '81. I was the anchor for the coverage. And what you have is, you have Charlie Gray in your right ear or your left ear. He's telling -- and then you have the radio broadcast in your right ear -- and you have your microphone and while you're talking, Charlie is saying, "Okay, they've got dogs now at Tudor Road." And you learn to kind of divide your brain into two parts. And that was really a lot of fun. And I still have some of the video tapes from those days. But then in July or June of that year, of '81, we sold and we picked up the staff and I just didn't feel the need to do that anymore. That was fun work.

Hilary: Talk about that when you sold the station and what that meant in the marketplace.

Al: Well, it...

Hilary: Or sold the network, I guess.

Al: Yeah, we sold all seven stations Midnight Sun had: radio, TV in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau. And they had KTKN radio. They owned part of a radio (station) in Ketchikan and they owned one-third of a cable system in Sitka. And for tax reasons, they sold everything all in one year. The last station was sold, I think it was KENI radio, on the 8<sup>th</sup> or the 7<sup>th</sup> of December of '81. But it what it really... there were a couple of reasons why it happened. My dad and his stockholders were... his health wasn't very good. He had arthritis badly. He tried to sell back in November of '77 and we were right five days away from FCC approval of selling all seven stations to a group headed up by Ken Hatch, who was the president of Bonneville Broadcasting and the general manager for KIRO radio and television at the time. And that was really... it was fascinating. I was station manager for KENI TV at the time and Ken came up. Ken was a real big guy, real positive thinker, and my dad and Ken had gone to the FCC and urged them to allow a waiver to the one-station-per-market rule.

Hilary: Right.



Al: They argued that the (Alaska) markets were small and the economics weren't very good. and that this made a lot of sense. Well. there was absolutely no objection. They were five days away. And in November -- like about the 19<sup>th</sup> of November of '77 -- Alaskans for Better Media filed a petition against all of Midnight Sun's licenses, all of Augie's licenses, and a few others -- I even think KIMO -- based on a lot of different things, including an objection against selling all seven to one operator.

And I remember Ken Hatch... Ken Hatch came up with me (to meet) with the Alaskans For Better Media people and Dad and I and Charlie Gray... Charlie Gray was vice president in charge of technical matters for a long time -- he had worked for Midnight Sun since 1955 -- and he had been a real close partner to my dad. And we met with the Alaskans For Better Media people and then Ken Hatch came in for a closed-door meeting, just himself with the Alaskans For Better Media people. And Ken came in, he was typically optimistic (and he thought), "This is going to be great. We'll go in there... I'll go in and work it out with them and they'll drop their filing against the sale." And I'll never forget, he walked into that room and Dad and I... Dad and Charlie and I waited out in the lobby. And the meeting went on for like 45 minutes, maybe an hour. And the door opened up and Ken came out, and was just like a totally different person. His body... his shoulders were drooped and he looked like somebody had sucked his blood out and replaced with a sick person's body. And he ...

### **Tape ends, Side A**

### **Tape 3, Side B**

Al: And Ken virtually said (nothing.) He just slowly walked out of the building and left. And that was the last time I ever saw Ken. I had gone to Ken's station and gone through their books and gone through their system and we had dinner over at his house with his family and...

Hilary: And you never saw again?

Al: I never saw Ken again. He left. He saw it wasn't going to work and why waste the time? I didn't really blame him. And so we, I would have been just 27 when that happened and...

Hilary: How did your dad respond to that? That must have been terribly discouraging.

Al: Well, it is much like in psychology. Imagine yourself being in second grade and you like school but you're really looking forward to summertime, being with your friends and imagine two days before school gets out being told: Tell you what, school is not getting out until the 17<sup>th</sup> of August and you'll only get a 12-day summer break. How would that

make you feel? He was just -- you know, when Ken left and the deal fell apart -- he was just really shaken by it.

Dad was not, in relative terms, that old. He was born in May 9<sup>th</sup> of 1917 and he would have been just 60, but he was really physically debilitated by the arthritis. It was bad. In fact, he went to [*Bramstedt correction: Mayo Clinic*] many times. They X-rayed his entire body. They said it was the worse case of rheumatoid arthritis in their history. They said, "You've had it in your jaws. There's not one joint you haven't had arthritis in." But the guy was such... he loved people and he was such a positive thinker that he would not... He would say, "Oh I got a bum knee today." But I mean, he wouldn't complain but he really wanted out. And they had put the price tag at -- let me think about this for a moment.

Hilary: "They" meaning?

Al: "They", (meaning) Midnight Sun, had negotiated a price of, I think it was something like \$2.7 million for all seven stations. And at that time, I had just been in television for, in management, for a little over a year and we were just, things were just starting to, you know, that million dollar-a-year thing was just starting to happen. And Dad was just wiped out by it.

I had learned from a mentor of mine several years earlier that things work out for the best. If you have faith and you believe that they will and you work hard, they do. They work out for the best. So at a time of disappointment, look for the positive and have faith that things will work out for the best. So my mentor who had taught me that was someone that you probably remember, General Necrasen, Nick Necrasen. He was a great human being. And I thought about Nick and I thought about what he taught me. This is a good way to test that.

So we got our attorneys in, Dick Zaragoza and Grover Cooper, and they came up. And (there was) a whole list of different things that allegedly we had done wrong. Like they alleged, as an example, that we had deleted network commercials because we ran expanded breaks. And Dick Zaragoza and Grover Cooper... I was in a critical position because I had been manager and I had been around the station for a long time. So how can you -- how does that work were you deleting network commercials? Oh no, not at all. What we do is just simply stop the film or tape and run the commercial break and then go back to it. We'd end up running late but, no, we didn't delete anything. Time after time. Those kinds of things.

And so in March of '78, Sandra Moore -- who'd just retired from the company a couple years ago; she was programming director and Dad's assistant -- and I went to New York City and Washington, DC. We first went to Washington, DC. Well I'd never been to the East Coast ever. I had only been on the West Coast and I had been to Texas. Well, Washington, DC: the plane is coming in and I can see the Jefferson Memorial. My arms

are just big, thick goose bumps I'm getting so excited. And, wow, we're there! And we got there on a Saturday and they allowed Sandy and I, like two hours at the Smithsonian Museum of American History. Well, I had never been there so I thought, oh, okay, great. And Sandy said, "Well, I'll meet you right here in 90 minutes." Okay. And I began realizing, you know, I need like a week or two. But you do what you can with what you have.

It was really frustrating on Monday on the way to the FCC from the attorneys' office, we went by the National Archives. And I said, "Dick, Grover." (It's Grover Cooper, Dick and Bram, Sandy and I stuffed into this little cab) I said, "We've got to stop! The Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights..." And I remember Dick saying, "Okay Al, you've got six minutes." It's big long stairs. I looked at my watch. Six minutes nothing more. And I ran up those stairs and I'm literally going like this and luckily there weren't very many people in there. And I looked around -- I eked out every second and came back to the car.

I remember, in the hotel room, saying to my dad as we left New York, saying, "You know, things do work out for the best. General Necrasen was right you know. If this had never happened, we never could have come to New York and Washington, DC." And he looked at me like, "Alvin, it wasn't worth it..."

But the most memorable part of that whole trip was going to NBC, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, way up in the upper part of the building. What they do is that the people that work for the network that get promoted...get higher in the building. It's kind of a status thing. Well, we were meeting with three of the top people in sales at NBC and Dad had had a good relationship with NBC. So we lined up this meeting and we come into this room and there is a real long coffee table with Dick Siracosa, Grover Cooper, Sandy and myself and then there were three officials from NBC: Bill Kelly, a couple other guys. And Dad had known these people. We'd been an NBC affiliate since the summer of 1958. And so Dick Siracosa, who is still our attorney, he's real detail-oriented. (He says,) "Well, as you know, there has been a petition to deny the licenses of Midnight Sun and one of the allegations is that we have expanded the breaks and in doing so deleted network programming. And we hold that we had never deleted network programming and so what we need from you is a letter that states that you granted Mr. Bramstedt and his stations permission to, in fact, expand the breaks."

So let's talk about that policy, how long it has gone on, and how long... when do you recall, you know, giving that permission? And my dad is sitting there and I'm sitting there. All the eyes are on the big NBC guy (who said,) "I have no knowledge of what you're talking about." And I looked over at Grover and Dick. It's, like, this is not what we want to hear. And Dick sort of goes, "Are you telling us that you have not granted this permission?" "Oh, no, we've never had a discussion. I've never talked to Al about that. I have no memory of that." I looked at my dad and it was like... When my dad would get mad, his lower lip would suck in. All his lower lip was sucked in. He was pissed. And Grover said, "Well remember, they're not deleting anything, you know. Would you in

fact give that permission now?" "Well, we'll have to think about that." "Well, remember it's on tape, it's Alaska, and it's important for them to be able to run the extra spots in the market they're in." "Well, I don't know. We can certainly take a look at that." That was basically the end of the meeting. But I remember a bad omen when we sat down at the table: they had coffee cups and the table was vaulted down toward the center and (someone bumped) the whole table (inaudible) and the coffee cups and everything spills. I thought -- my mom was always into the omen thing -- and I thought, if Mom was here she'd say that's a bad omen. And when we left, I thought, hmm, Mom would have been right. When we got in the elevator, Dad was real quiet and (said), "Those sons of bitches, we talked about it. Right when I needed them the most, they weren't there for me." And he never forgot that. It was one tense moment.

Hilary: And how did that finally play out?

Al: Oh, it played out just fine. We -- another interesting story. We had a really great attorney: Carey Barker locally. Carey Barker and I every week negotiated with Alaskans For Better Media for over a year to come together with an agreement which was... It included different things like allowing guest editorials on the station, having a community advisory board, different kinds of things that would appease them. And on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July of '79, we signed an agreement with Alaskans for Better Media, which immediately freed up our ability to sell the stations because they dropped their petition to deny. But I had a really altering experience related to that. You brought back a memory.

So we were negotiating with Alaskans For Better Media. Channel 13's licenses were held up, Channel 11's licenses were held up, and I was told by our attorneys that this was confidential, the very fact that we're negotiating. We shouldn't talk about it. It's a confidential kind of thing, and I suppose what they were thinking is they wanted to get in and get an agreement and not be bound up with what was going on with the other stations, which might delay it -- because Midnight Sun wanted to sell and they couldn't without the licenses. So I knew that it was confidential. What David Geesin -- you probably know and remember he was over at 13 -- he called me one day. It would have been probably only about a month before we were signing. We were coming down to the last details. We had been negotiating for months and months. And David said, "So I heard a rumor that you guys are working on an agreement with Alaskans For Better Media and you're making a lot of progress, so is that true?" I thought, this is confidential. What do I do? What do I say? I don't want to lie and I went, "Ah, no, no we're not. Yeah we're not, we're not doing that." And he said, "You're not?" And I said no. "Oh, okay, just checking." I put the phone down. I was so upset. I had told a lie. I don't do that. Then I got angry. I thought, these attorneys are telling me and I got caught in a squeeze and I ended up telling a lie. And I called our attorney and he laughed. He said, "Don't worry about it. In fact, in college they teach us how to do that. We take a whole semester. He started teasing me and he said hey don't worry about it. It won't matter to nothing. It doesn't matter." "No, it matters the world," (I said.) "I'm not doing that again. I'm upset that I was put in that position. I'm not doing it anymore." And he could see that I was. He

said, "Okay, well I understand. But it really isn't something to get that upset about." I said, "I'm not doing it again" and I never have. That was, like, I'm not putting myself in that position again.

Hilary: Did you ever talk to Dave about that?

Al: I did.

Hilary: Yeah?

Al: Yeah. I talked to Dave about that about two years ago and he just... he kind of remembered the conversation. He just laughed. He thought that was funny. But that was always important to me and it was like one of those big moments (when) I said to myself I'm never doing that again. I'm never going to get myself in that position. It is not happening. I'm not going to lie again. I never have. But it was kind of like, you know, a major moment in your life. I was upset.

Hilary: That's ethical. It is a very ethical pivotal point.

Al: Yeah.

Hilary: Yeah. But so you did sign then?

Al: We did sign. We had been negotiating. I did lie. We did sign and we ended up getting our licenses back. And by then I was on the Midnight Sun Board of Directors. I had gotten on the -- well, right about that time -- and this was a great time for me. My dad and I went to NBC Convention in -- let me think for a moment here -- the first one. He and I went to two of them together and the first one was in May of '79. And it was kind of funny. He was used to more of the social, you know, the contacts and the social (scene.) And they have a big gathering where they do all their programming. They don't do conventions any more. They stopped doing them, but (then these were) huge production with stars and all the executives (featuring) all the programming they're going to have. It's like a four-day convention back then. And I said... in Century City, California at the Wilshire Hotel -- Reagan used to love to stay there. And we were there. It was great. (My) first time ever and I'm almost 29 years old and I'm just listening and absorbing and meeting people. And well, I'm always planning the next day. And I said, "Well, tomorrow Dad we have to get up early to go to the big programming presentation." "Oh forget that, Alvin." He always called me Alvin. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Ah, I don't want to get up that early and it's a..." I said, "No." And I talked him into it and so we get to the, it was the Plitt Theater at the Century City Entertainment Complex. And the turn-out was greater than they thought. And he's on a cane moving real slow, and we get up to this one section and finally sit down. And all of a sudden they say, "I'm sorry for fire reasons this section has to be closed. You'll all have to move." And he's going, "God damn it."

Hilary: Did you move?

Al: We shouldn't have done this. We moved to another section. They moved us again. He said, "Forget it. We're not -- we're leaving." I said, "Dad, I think we can get a place right over there. We've come this far." But he was, like, this was the worst thing. And he started calling the theater a different name that was obscene and he was really fired up. And he... I got him calmed down and we got back to the room.

One thing that I did that I thought was interesting. The amount of alcohol consumption was immense. They would start serving alcohol back then at, like, the midmorning break and I had a little piece of paper and every time my dad would take a drink I'd make a mark on the paper. I wouldn't tell him what I was doing. And that night after a long day, that night we got back to the room about 11:30 and get into bed. He's in his bed and I'm in mine, just turned the lights out. And I said, "Hey Dad, every time you'd have a drink today I made a little mark on the paper. I know how many drinks you had." He said, "Really? How many?" Because he was always interested in that. I said, "Well, let me get up and check." And I got up and I turned the light on and you know how you make the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 - 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. "You had 16 drinks today, 16 alcoholic drinks." And I remember he went, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yeah. Yeah, you did." It was like, ooh, he didn't realize. As it turned out he was, in fact, an alcoholic and we didn't really realize and until he was hospitalized and they weren't giving him alcohol and he actually had one of those...

Hilary: DT's.

Al: Yeah, we didn't know. He never really showed being drunk. He just, he drank a lot, but I noticed and I talked to him about it. We'd have these stockholder's meetings, the Board of Directors. We'd meet in like Seattle and they'd have a trade-out hotel like the Waterfront. They even had the Edgewater.

Hilary: Edgewater, right.

Al: The Edgewater hotel and we'd go to dinner and those boys would drink a lot.

Hilary: And it was hard liquor.

Al: Yeah, hard liquor. Scotch typically, and I would usually have one, maybe two drinks. But they would drink, you know, one drink after another and I noticed a pattern in their in the use of their minds. They're real sharp business people and they're talking carefully about things and as they would drink (they'd start to say,) "Well, God damn it, we ought to just fire that son of a bitch..." and to other extremes. And I remember talking to my dad after that Board of Directors meeting and I'd say, "Dad, you guys ought to watch that. You're representing sixty some stockholders and you're getting yourself -- you're making business decisions on their behalf." And he said, "You think so?" And I said, "Trust me, I

know so.” But it was real hard. It was real hard to stop that kind of behavior. And I think there was a lot of that going on, particularly back then, in America. It’s not that way now. Not nearly like that.

Hilary: And I think what you said about your dad’s arthritis too.

Al: Oh, yeah.

Hilary: You know, you wonder what part that played in that.

Al: Oh, I think it did. I mean he was under intense pain and the booze dulled a lot of that.

Hilary: Yeah. You talked about going to the FCC early on and certainly your connection with NBC. Talk a little bit about how Alaska always got exceptions for things. I mean, we never had to do things the way that they did in the Lower 48, but there was always some educational process.

Al: Right. I’ll address that. One interesting kind of -- one of those things that I never forgot -- (that) we’re working so hard on the details of this defense, you know, in March of ’78. We’re up on the third floor of this big legal office area and Sandra Moore is over here with Dick Bodorf. I’m in another area working with Dick Zaragoza. Steve Harrington is working with my dad and Grover Cooper is kind of involved in that too. Well, it was “ascertainment”. Back in the old days, you had to do community leader ascertainment (as a condition of your license) where you would meet a community leader and ask, “What do you think the big problems in the community are?” And you’d write them down? Well, we hadn’t been doing ascertainment and that was a problem. So we are getting back into these ascertainment, and imagine now the scene. We’re working kind of in little groups and, all of a sudden, I think it was Harrington who came in and said he’d been working with Sandra Moore on the actual paperwork on the ascertainment. He goes, “Bram, you did an ascertainment on, you know, like the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July with Mrs. blah, blah, blah and you left out the time of day that ascertainment was.” And my dad and I are both thinking of the same thing: “Like, so, big deal.” And so, I mean, all these expensive these attorneys... so we need to know what time of day it was. And everybody is looking at Bram and dad takes his finger and he points it right at Harrington, right at his face, and he said, “It was at 1:23 in the afternoon and you prove it wasn’t.” And I remember Grover said, “I think we should just put on there ‘estimated’ that it was in the afternoon.” But it was a good example of how silly all of that was and how expensive and time-consuming everything was.

But to your question: the reason why Alaska got waivers and exceptions to different kinds of procedures and rules oftentimes was based on a couple of different things. The fact that there were so few people, so few frequencies in use, so difficult to make this work up here. Augie started this in -- he was there on 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1946 -- his first trip to Washington and he had made many different trips much on his own behalf but also

representing the needs of broadcasters. And I think it was based on the remoteness, the lack of people, the scarcity of people, and the actual limited number of facilities and the argument of we're just trying to make this work, which is the same argument that we made in the digital conversion. Work with us (we said) because if you don't, this probably won't work. And we did Alaska Day at the FCC in September of '81 and May 10<sup>th</sup> of '96 and listed out the different things we've been involved in and the different waivers and exceptions that we needed.

That one in '81 was a real stressful time for Augie. He was still fighting Alaskans for Better Media.

Hilary: He was not negotiating.

Al: He was not negotiating and he wasn't selling. He wasn't negotiating. He, on principle, wasn't going to settle at all with those people. They were going to basically go away or he would go away. It wasn't going to be a negotiated settlement. And we had long since settled and I think 13 had as well. And we were -- he had his people. I was there representing part of television. He had one of his persons, I think Ron Moore was on the program. He had different people -- Patty Harpel, Jean Henderson from KYAK. We had a group of people, each of us doing a few-minute presentation and right before we did our program it was like, I think, the day before the Media Access Group -- which is the Washington, DC-based group, they filed against Augie as an ex parte communication -- none of his people could be involved in the communication. He couldn't even, I don't think, even be in the audience there. Augie was... I've never seen him that upset. He had worked -- he and I put that whole thing together and he was the big leader on it and he was just -- he was so angry at Media Access Group anyway, and then they caused him and his people not to be involved in this big presentation, Alaska Day at the FCC. I'd never seen Augie that upset. I've probably never seen him that upset even since.

Hilary: That was where you put together the big spiral bound notebook.

Al: Right.

Hilary: And had the pictures in it.

Al: Right.

Hilary: And the program and...

Al: Right.

Hilary: Yeah.

Al: We did that again for the one in '96.



Hilary: Yeah.

Al: Those were real effective. I think we've always been real truthful and established a personal relationship. In more recent years, Senator Stevens' power in the funding levels have been helpful.

Hilary: And what about with NBC? What kind of connection did you have with them and the exceptions or cooperation that was specific to your (affiliation) in Alaska?

Al: When the... it was a forerunner to the ARCS system. It was a demonstration project. It was called the satellite demonstration project, as I remember, and it started in January of '77. Michael Porcaro was involved for a contract getting that set up. And I remember my dad and Augie, myself, I think Duane Triplett was involved in those meetings with the State. Basically, what it was the council wanted to decide was which programs. And then the council would air typically on tape delay, but because the networks were providing this service, they were going to also... the State was going to pay for satellite charges to bring in sporting programs, network newscasts for ABC, NBC, and CBS and time-value kind of programs. All the way to the effect of bringing the Tonight Show in on satellite. They paid for all of that. It was a real value, particularly to the affiliates up here to get much of the time-value programming on satellite. It was what they call the quid pro quo - - balancing out the fact that the State was getting to use all of this programming free. And the networks were getting no numerical benefit from it because there was no rating system in the Bush. There wasn't even Nielsen households for the network in Alaska until probably about '94, yeah, in Anchorage or Fairbanks. Now there are little households right here. There's, like, a couple in Anchorage and one in Fairbanks. And so the network wasn't really excited about it because it would mean recording the programs and then giving them to people that were not really affiliates. They were worried about that. And but my dad and Augie -- Augie even went back to New York and visited NBC and CBS and ABC to assuage their concerns about that.

But one of the downsides to that was my dad -- effective in April of '75, working with NBC -- was able to bring up and, you may remember it, NBC nightly news via satellite. Since before 1965, we would record it off King-TV (in Seattle) and they'd fly it up on a jet and they'd air it before sign-off -- if weather didn't stop the flight. So in April, like April 24 of '75, we zeroed in to land network programming. It would come in at, like, four o'clock and we'd air it at, like, six. It was a major deal.

Well, when the State -- with their funding from oil -- came in with this programming, then CBS and ABC, the whole thing went zero delay to land network. We had had a real leg up. And I remember my dad was kind of sad about that. But it all worked out well and the networks told us, "Okay, you guys are in charge. You protect our interest. Don't let that stuff get misused."

So probably about six years later, I was at my desk and the phone rang and it was my contact out of NBC in LA. A real good guy. Usually he was real friendly on the phone with the typical niceties at the beginning of the conversation. And he goes, "Al, how can it be that a viewer in Akiak got to watch Tricia Toyota?" I think it was Tricia Toyota. She was... I believe that (was) who it was. She was on the on-air talent preceding NBC nightly news on KNBC, the local newscast. "How can this be?" And I said, "Well, I don't know." He said that they're only supposed to be running NBC nightly news on that system. How can they be running KNBC? I said, "I don't know, but I'll find out."

Well, as it turned out, that was the first broadcast of the day. They would take NBC nightly news live and, instead of sitting on (color) bars, they'd be feeding out of KNBC. And they liked the local news, so they just put on the local news. Well, their labor union was like, hey, we're in Alaska, hey. And I called him back to say it will never happen again. But it was those kinds of things: that Alaska is so far away and it's so unique. But I remember him calling to ask, hey, how can that be? "I'll check, sorry."

Hilary: Well. Akiachuk or Akiak or you know...yeah. You mentioned something that I want to go back to, too.

### **End Tape 3, Side B**

### **Tape 4, Side A**

Hilary: (Regarding regulation) over stations in everything from like ascertainment to equal time, my specific question is what do you remember in that span (of) time that you've been in the business in terms of federal regulation of the business (early on) compared to right up to 1996 with the rewrite of the Telecom Act or the Communications Act. There were a lot of changes during that time.

Al: Right. There was a change in the Reagan Era as I recall, where there was ascertainments were no longer needed. There was quite a bit of deregulation that took place. Just recently they eliminated the need for affirmative action programs. That was thrown out.

Hilary: Wasn't there equal time for...

Al: There was an incredible amount of... For instance, as an example of that, back in the days where we were working under the agreement with Alaskans for Better Media, it required any kind of controversial message to be balanced out under the equal time (provision.) It was part of the FCC rules that require opposing viewpoints. There is actually no such thing as "equal time". It's an equal opportunity to present an opposing view. Well, when the oil companies were promoting the goodness of their operation, the Alaskans for Better Media people really disagreed with that. And we went through a very difficult time trying to balance out Alaskans for Better Media interests and being fair to

the oil companies. And we even had some opposing viewpoints against commercials that were talking about the goodness of the oil companies.

But there was equal opportunity, balancing out elements, that has really gone away. That went away probably around, I'm thinking, the '87 era. It has been quite a few years. What hasn't gone away is political broadcast law. And a lot of people, including Augie, they really are against lowest-unit rate and, you know, equal opportunity in the political law. I don't agree with that at all. I think political broadcast law has been a really good thing. As Augie made that comment on this last trip talking about lowest-unit rate. He wasn't talking to the FCC. He was talking to one of the people I think we had over for dinner. I said to him later, "In this country, with the kind of power that you can have as a public trustee, a licensee of a TV station, if you didn't have lowest-unit rate, if you weren't required to provide that same rate to all political candidates, I am absolutely certain there would have been a lot of 'You're my buddy, I'm going to give it to you for basically nothing. We don't like the Democrats so...' And that would not be good." So I think that's been good and it hasn't changed much.

There haven't been many changes with that and the broadcasters have gotten a lot better at understanding it, I think, since the Alaskans for Better Media attack. Even though they didn't attack on that as I recall, actually there was one attack in Fairbanks that I will share with you. But what it caused all of us to do is just be more aware of the law and follow it more carefully.

The interesting thing, talking about my dad's thinking after the sale was killed, actually leading up to the sale, right when the Alaskans for Better Media document came out – big thick play against us on KFQD radio Saturday morning. I lived (tell me if I shared this with you at the last meeting. I don't recall.) I lived right up the street and he – my dad – you know the corner of Brook we lived, Karen and I lived in the last house on St. Elias on the new end, right by the Tobins. And the lead story on KFQD was all about how KFAR radio in Fairbanks sold ads to Egan for more than they sold ads to Hickel. I guess I haven't shared this story with you.

Oh, how horrible it was. It was in the – it was actually I think it was, yeah, it was 1970 campaign and it was Miller (running for governor). My dad was chairman of the Miller campaign and Egan was the Democrat. My dad was a devout Republican. And they mentioned that, in the story, the station was managed by...the general manager for the stations and part-owner Al Bramstedt and head of the campaign. And they sold spots for a lot more for Egan than they did for Miller and it is under investigation. And I jumped in the car and raced over to the house, and I remember it so vividly. I ran in. I said, "Dad, Dad, on the radio..." It was a really clear, cool, beautiful November morning. And I said, "Dad!" Well, he's getting out of the shower. I remember he has got his black cane and he has got a towel wrapped around him and water is dripping off his nose. And he's walking and I'm telling him that the lead story on KFQD is talking about how it was discovered in the Alaskans for Better Media research that KFAR sold commercials to Miller cheaper

than for Egan, and it's making a big deal of it. It's a lead story. "What do you think of that, Dad?" And he's walking and he pauses and goes, "Broadcasting just isn't any fun any more." It was like a magic moment and I started... it was... I was laughing kind of but it was such a magic kind of moment but that's how he felt about it. It just – he didn't know anything about it.

Then we discovered what had happened. A guy by the name of Jim Hafer (sp?) was – it was like his second day on the job. Jim was thrust into selling TV time too, and these campaigns always come to your front door and they come in and they're always in a big hurry. Jim was, like, on his second day there and he sold the Egan people at basically a standard rate. He didn't know.

Hilary: That there's a political rate.

Al: He had no idea. And they didn't check it. It went through the system. Dad didn't know anything about it, but, oh, that's why they did it. But (he said), it just isn't any fun anymore.

Hilary: That's a great story.

Al: Yeah.

Hilary: You know, one of the things that has come up, one of the topics as we've talked has been names of people. When you think about TV and radio in Alaska for the time that you have known it, which is a good deal of its time here, who are the giants?

Al: The giants that have had, in my view, the most pronounced effect: John Tracy certainly. John's an incredible giant. He is such a visionary newsman. He is absolutely dedicated to news. He's a great person to work around and he's an incredible writer and an incredible storyteller and he does a remarkable job motivating his people. John... People generally think of giants as being in the past, in history. But if history is ever known, he'll be a giant, there is no question.

Certainly Charlie Gray, the technical wizard. I mean, Charlie could fix any kind of technical equipment, particularly the tube here. He was a giant.

Cap Lathrop, certainly. Making the kind of investment in Anchorage and Fairbanks far before its time in radio and the kind of service that provided to the people in the hinterland. He was a giant.

Certainly my dad was for a couple of reasons. The time in which he came into it he... we moved to Anchorage in the summer of '55. This station was... Channel 2 was bought from KFIA, "K First In Anchorage". Kiggins and Rallins out of San Diego owned it and

they had done a really bad job putting it on the air. They used a converted FM radio transmitter. It just didn't go right. It was great for Augie.

And so Lathrop finally, my dad's urging, decided to get into the television business. They were concerned about TV being a competitor to the theater business because they were the big theater people. And so, Dad and the family, we moved down and we stayed in Judge Davis' house, that white house right next to the log cabin church. We stayed there for, oh, probably, I'm thinking, we actually came to Anchorage in would have been, like, in November of '55. We stayed at their house until we moved to Turnagain in the following spring.

But they (the Lathrop group) went in and moved their TV station from the basement of the Westward Hotel to the basement of the Fourth Avenue Theater. And they set things up with a lot of live television programming. It was done much like in the theater aspect, with a lot of sets and a lot of artistic kind of things. And Dad would do a Christmas, a "Stairway to Christmas" program and a lot of things like that that were live. They did a lot of live things because they didn't have a whole lot of programming. And they did newscasts reading copy after copy. Sometimes they would have 16-mm black and white film that they would have shot earlier in the day that they would develop for very big stories. No sound, just negative polarity, black and white. But, yeah, my dad would have been... would be considered a giant.

People like Ruben Gaines and Ed Stevens, incredible on-air talents. On-air talent that even was able to get through the alcoholism that they had. In fact, my dad was telling me one day they had a broadcasters' meeting over at KHAR and Ruben Gaines was on the air shift and he came to visit him and Dad noticed a booze bottle beside the turntable at the station. [*Bramstedt: short deletion of inaccurate information.*]

But those two were remarkable radio talents. My dad was too. That is what he was best at. He was about as good as you get on air. Reading, interviewing, charming, charming people, calming those who were really nervous, but he had a way of calming them down. To me, those are (giants). Also Theda Comstock, Norma Goodman. In their own kind of way and in a very different way, they would be considered giants and certainly had a lot of skill on air and provided a real service to the community, particularly born out of an era. Here's a half-hour of nothing going on let's do a live program and do the best we could with it.

Yeah, there have been a lot of giants in the industry. The real changes that came in... You were talking about giants and changes. In 19... in the mid-70s, ABC was doing very well. '74 right through... but when Channel 13 had been reformed, KIMO, on the first day of July of '71, they got ABC. (Prior to that,) my dad was able to keep both (but then) he lost ABC. He was very upset. And I thought, hey you don't need two (networks). Of course, my dad wouldn't quite understand that kind of reasoning, but they got it (ABC) and they did well with it. ABC with things like the *Love Boat* and *Three's Company* and

all those great hits. They were doing very, very well. And NBC wasn't doing nearly as well. And CBS was number two and NBC was number three.

Well, Carl Bracal (sp?) and some other stockholders took over the new station, as I recall, was how that worked. And they put together a sales force and they went after it aggressively. We would get from the FCC percents of billing that you have, in other words, out of the three stations what your billing percentage was. And back in the first half of the 70s, we'd be cruising along at like 22 - 23% and I don't think Augie was probably doing much better. And Channel 13 was pretty much (ahead) in my view because they believed in the power of TV and the kind of money that could be made. I think they were doing pretty well.

And then there was a series of (situations) for Bill Walley. They hired a guy that came up and worked for about twelve days as manager of KENI TV and he didn't like it here and left. And Jhan Hiber was manager for nine months and got involved in a sexual harassment suit and got fired. That's where I got involved. I had been involved in sales from December of '74, and then Jhan Hiber got fired in May of '76. Bill Walley was in charge of Anchorage and Fairbanks and he basically compelled my dad to allow me to be manager of KENI TV. In the beginning, the title was manager, sales manager KENI TV, but was the same responsibility as station manager. And then in November, along about now 25 years ago, in November '76, I became station manager.

And we talked a little about that. What I did differently was to put together budgets and projections, put together a real sales force and have sales meetings, projection meetings and things like that. You know, I love my dad, but they never did... there were never any of those things. They never had sales meetings. They never had projections. And they never really realized, in my view, what they had.

So the station value went up, and they had... I think the price was less than three million for all seven. Well, that sale fell apart, and we began when we got our licenses back in the late summer of '79. We began thinking, well, let's sell this thing again. And I was on the board, and I said, "You really got to ask more. It is way too low. We're doing better now." The price was too low before and I remember it was in our attorney's office Carey Barker's office and it was Charlie Gray, my dad, and Bill Simpson, *[Bramstedt addition: each were board members and shareholders]*. We got into a discussion about what price to put on it and the price that I was suggesting was a whole lot higher than they'd ever imagined. And I said that I really think you can do that. And they put together a total price structure for it ... it was like \$8.7 million for all seven stations and \$4.6 million for just the TV stations in Anchorage and Fairbanks. Hold on a second. It was 4.6 for Anchorage and Fairbanks and they sold them to Zazor and Longston, the two stations.

I went to work as general manager for Jessica (Longston). And we were talking about that. Jessica was a great lady. She was born in November of '07. And when people would ask my dad, "Well, why are you retiring?" He said, "Well you know I'm getting old and

I'm not well." And I'd say, "Dad, do you realize you were born in '17, she was born in '07?" He said, "Yeah, that's true but she has got a lot of vim and vinegar and she doesn't have arthritis." And Jessica was real super aggressive, real – you know – believer. She's the kind of person where she would call and say, "Well, you know I need \$30,000," and I'd say Jessica, "I'm trying to make payroll." She says, "Well, I really have to take the money (because) I've got this thing that I'm doing." And I'd say, "But payroll!" "Al, you'll make payroll. It will be fine. Just visualize: it will be fine." She wouldn't say "visualize", that's my word. "Jessica, you're making me..." "Don't worry about it." And I'll be damned: we always came through. It always worked out.

And she allowed me to do the kinds of things that I wanted to do under Midnight Sun but under Midnight Sun they wouldn't even buy magazine subscriptions. They were up for sale, and I understand. You don't repaint the kitchen if you don't have to. And she came in and we immediately began building up the newsroom and the sales operation and it was really a lot of fun. We went from when she took over – we were probably 28 employees – and we began building up in staff and gradually our programming ratings and our local news. And then by the mid-80s, we became dominant and have been since then – knock on wood.

But she allowed us to do those kinds of things that needed to be done in the marketplace and it was an exciting time. Going live by satellite April 1 of '84. I went to an NBC Convention and met with those people and I said, "The State is tired of paying this. The other stations are going to be doing it so let's be first." And I remember that meeting and (their saying,) "Oh, it's expensive." Meaning C-band satellite, which serves Hawaii and Alaska. There was no service. And in the negotiations I didn't say anything about who would pay for the (earth station) equipment I wanted. A lot of times in negotiations, if you leave something out, the person you're negotiating with will often times think the worst. And then, in negotiating, they reference the worst thing in their mind. And then when they discover it's not that way, it's a victory on their part.

And I didn't say anything about who would pay for the building of the earth station. Charlie Gray had figured out a real efficient way to do it. And I remember he left the breakfast meeting and Bill Kelly, he came out into the hallway of the facility, and he said, "Would you be willing to pay for the satellite (and) for the actual earth station construction?" And I was prepared for the question. I said, "If you will do this (provide satellite transmission) by April 1, if you'll make it available to us by April 1, I'll agree to build the facility." That did it. They agreed to that. And on April 1<sup>st</sup>, we went on the air. Big posters – made a big deal out of it.

Well, we kept that an incredible secret. We didn't want the competition to know because the other networks, they're very competitive – and being first with all programming, prime time... If there is a news bulletin, you've got it right there. And April 1st was like a Monday and the word got to the competition like on Friday. We kept it that secret. We built it the very last minute. And that same earth station (we) constructed – it's still on the

Fourth Avenue Theater, that big old earth station, the same one. And it just... they admitted to me later that it just astonished them. And Augie was able to put his deal together by August of that same year working with CBS, and I think Channel 13 did something very similar. But that was a lot of fun and it meant a lot to the community. And it kind of reminded me of how my dad must have felt when he did the color TV thing.

Hilary: Oh, exactly.

Al: A real similar kind of thing. And what was neat about it, too, is I would be able to... My dad and I were always really close, and he was retired but he would always watch the station. And he would call me about a misspelled word on the (news), which I really appreciated. And I'd come home and we'd have a drink together and talk about business and I will tell him what the billing was and he was, like, "I just can't believe this."

And I remember one time he said to me, "Alvin, you're becoming the premier broadcaster of all the Alaskan broadcasters, you know". He was real proud. I never think about this stuff or get into that, but I could tell he was really proud about how things were going.

To kind of share with you the kind of relationship that I have with my parents: When we decided to sell the different stations to different owners for quicker approval, we put prices on each one of them right after we put the price on Channel 2 – which was I think \$4.6 million for Anchorage and Fairbanks. My folks came to me and they said, "You know we," my mom said to me, "Dad and I have been talking. What about if we just buy the TV station in Anchorage? We probably wouldn't need Fairbanks. We would be willing to take our stock and plow it all into buying KENI-TV. You could run it and it could be our, the family's, TV station. We'd be willing to do that." And Dad is sitting there, Mom is doing the talking and Dad is sitting there. "What do you think, Alvin?"

And I said, "I got to tell you, you guys being willing to do that..." Because they had 24.5% and I had 1% and my three sisters combined had, I think, 1%. And financially that would work. You could take all that money, put it together and buy KENI-TV. And I said, "I really appreciate that. But," I said, "We would have to be... it would be several years before you would really be able to get paid by the company." I said, "We're going to have to replace equipment, invest a lot into it. And there is going to be some risk there." And I said, "I won't..." I said, "Mom and Dad, I won't be able to pay you much for the use of your stock." And I said as much as I would love to do that, what you need to do is sell out, get your money, and run... Live and enjoy the last remaining years of your life – however many years that may be – in a special way. If we did this deal, you wouldn't be able to do that for some years and who knows how much time either one of you have. "Are you sure?" (they asked.) And I said, "Yeah, I'm sure. I know I'm right about that. And I got to tell you, I really appreciate you offering that to me."



If I had done that deal, my prediction was right. It would have been probably four or five years before I could really pay them much. It would have to be stock and it would have been millions and millions of dollars in the end, but he ended up dying nine-and-a-half years after that. And they bought a big place in Hawaii and they lived over there a lot and they had a great time. They wouldn't have been able to do that. So although I'm (coming) from the financial end of it, it was like, wow, that would have been incredible. But when you think about them and how much time they had left, I still think I made the right decision.

Hilary: And think about the difference it would have meant to you in terms of stress, in terms of your whole approach to life. It could have been quite different as well.

Al: Actually the way I deal with stress is I would have been totally focused on the positive. I would have had a total belief in the success of what I was doing. And I don't (worry). I don't. I know so many business people that just go, "Oh, this might fail." I put together a plan, visualize success, and work hard. Don't be thinking the bad things. Focus on the good. Because it is just so taxable to do that. So no, I would have told them I would only give you X amount and that is the way it would have to be. I would have felt difficult about that part of it, but I wouldn't have worried about failure. I know he would have though. I think he would have worried. He probably would have had faith, but he would have worried. But I don't operate that way. I don't do things that way. I don't use my mind that way. I just simply don't. I learned that long ago.

Hilary: Have you been happy that you stayed in the business?

Al: Oh, yes. It has been – there's never a boring day. Every day whips along. You know, as I mentioned, I turned 51 in September. I have been managing Channel 2 for 25 years. I mean, how many people in America... Sure, (the) Channel 2 that I began managing in '76, like, has changed many times. But very few people can say that? But that's not what's really drives me, the fact that I've been here that long. It is just all the different things that I've been involved with. All the changes and the excitement of this business. I know people in my Rotary Club that are attorneys and insurance people and they tell me they're bored out of their minds. And they regret the day they decided to get into the business they are in. When I hear that, I can't imagine, you know, even though the business can be difficult and there are things that are taking place that we talked about earlier in the business that we need to work to avoid the pitfalls of, it is very exciting and it is a very interesting kind of work. And you have the wide variety of different kinds of personality types within the business. You know engineering, operations, sales.

Hilary: On-air.

Al: Yeah, the on-air people, the operations people, the production people, people that make commercials. I mean, there is just a wealth of personality types. And no, I've lived a great life and I think part of that has to be that I ended up getting in this business – learning the

different things that I did in the business and living in this town at this time, this era. Going from tube microwave units, you know— climbing up a stepladder and plucking the dead guy out and putting a new one in – to digital technology, you know, to going to the FCC with Augie twice to talk to them about a plan for all the broadcasters. My goal is to put Channel 2 into the digital era on a stable footing as my dad put Channel 2 into the analog era back in the early days in a way that could make business sense. And I'm not sure how long that will take, but that's what I want to have happen: When I retire to be able to say, okay, this company, this station is stable and can do well in the years ahead. That's my goal.

And there are going to be some really interesting times ahead between now and then whenever "then" is. But I've often thought to myself a couple times in my life – like most people (who've lived through) incidents where you almost get killed in a situation... And I thought about how it was kind of, like, a wonderful life. What would have been different here if I hadn't come here, it's impossible to know. But I can say being in this position that long I've had a lot of effect on a lot of different things, and I think mostly good, and I feel about that.

**End tape 4, side A**