

Michigan State University Reception
Crystal Room, The Williard Hotel
May 12, 1999

As a very senior "has been" Commissioner and Chairman, I'm honored with your presence today for the most observed birthday of my lifetime.

Just about everyone here contributed in a timely and important way to my political, regulatory or mental well-being over the past 24 years.

There are too many here to even start acknowledgments. But I want to acknowledge the congressional leaders who took time from their hectic schedules to attend (List).

Remember one of the initial advisories I give to all new commissioners: "Add your oversight senators and congressmen to the Fourth Commandment. You will find it is a good idea to honor them."

Now first a word about our sponsor, Michigan State University, and the communications center, before before starting my other brief comments.

As for my hectic career with its trials, tribulations disappointments and accomplishments, I can appropriately quote an old classic "all is well that ends well."

Naturally, I salute Michigan State for such a gratifying career ending. Mary and I consider it the ultimate honor that our names are destined to be associated with our beloved alma mater in perpetuity with the establishment of the James H. and Mary B. Quello Center for Telecommunications Management and Law. For me, it is the paramount capstone of a long varied communications career that originated with the Michigan State News and at WKAR, the 5,000 watt college radio station. So, I'm taking this opportunity to express thanks to Michigan State University and also to the generous contributors to the Communications Center for presenting us the memorable, gratifying and most enduring of our lifetime experiences.

Now back to the graceful aging process.

I read an article last week that could be encouraging to 40 or 50 year olds, but didn't do much for me. The article advised that if you take their herbal pills, eat your veggies, exercise regularly, you would live to the ripe old age of 85! So here I am over-ripe! Why didn't the SOB say 95! I didn't need another reminder that I really am a fugitive from the actuarial tables.

At the recent NAB convention, I was pleasantly greeted by dozens using the old phrase that I associate with the last phase of life. You know – youth, age and finally, “You look Great!”

I tried to sell that the birthday numbers got mistakenly transposed from 58 to 85 – but no takers. So, I settled for “85 and you look Great!”

Well, I feel OK but I no longer buy three year magazine subscriptions or store green bananas. I now resort to psychology to beef up my declining tennis game – When missing a tough shot I yell “Hell, when I was only 79 I would have killed that shot. Also, as far back as 16 years ago, I either regaled or shocked audiences with “Now with the involuntary celibacy of the golden years, I .”

A bright lawyer and a positive personality, professionally and personally, Kathy Zachem, said you not only look great but you have the spirit of a 25 year old! I replied thanks but I wish I had the non-spiritual attributes of a 25 year old.

Actually, getting old isn't all bad. With greatly advanced seniority (“greatly advanced” is socially correct for “old F”) you are considered venerable. With venerability you get credit for virtues you never possessed – that explains how I became the oldest and most awarded SOB that ever graduated from the FCC.

As you may recall, I also referred to my awards as pre-posthumous after I reached the age of 75. When a broadcast association presented me with an engineering award I confessed the award went from pre-posthumous to preposterous. But I nevertheless appreciated the sentiment.

A few months before my retirement, Tom Murphy, ABC Chief Executive, personally presented me with an IRTS lifetime achievement award at the annual luncheon. For some of you who may not have heard it before, Murphy told the audience “if Commissioner Jim Quello had kept his capital city stock, he would now have 23-½ million dollars in stock – “so every year he served on the FCC cost him over a million dollars!”

That represented a big stake for me, an ordinary working stiff manager and VP. But no one could ever foresee that a broadcast stock would split 2 for 1, twice, and then 10 for one. I replied “Murph, the Lord did not ordain me to be a wealthy man, he wanted me to be a beleaguered, besieged SOB and that's what I have been at the FCC.”

However, in my own way, I have been very successful – very successful – at eluding wealth whenever it came too close to me.

But monetary wealth or no wealth, I have been truly blessed.

Personally, I'm cheerfully confronting the dismal prospect that I have lived 5/6 of my life. I have no regrets and I'm grateful for whatever generic vigor that remains. I'm a happy camper from a career standpoint.

I really had a great run in life with three exciting careers – army, broadcasting and the FCC. My late in life (age 59 to 83½) FCC career was the most important, exciting and gratifying. I'm honored that Mary and my name are destined to be associated with our great university in perpetuity.

And a final message as you face the tribulations, disappointments and triumphs of life -- remember that in the final stages of life what really counts along with some sense of accomplishment, are good health, reasonable economic sufficiency and the affection and respect of family and friends. I am blessed and fulfilled by your friendship and your presence today.

Thanks to all of you for enriching my life.