

Acceptance Speech for the Sol Taishoff Award

Before the

Washington Area Broadcasters Association

May 17, 1989

Thank you. I especially appreciate your presenting this prestigious award and eulogy ~~pre~~ posthumous while I'm still around to enjoy it and enjoy your friendship.

This award tonight has a very special significance to me because of my longtime close friendship with Sol Taishoff, founder and publisher of Broadcasting magazine, the bible of the broadcast industry. Incidentally as son Larry knows, Sol was instrumental in getting Lyndon Johnson into radio and TV and under the Johnson regime could practically name his own commissioner.

It generally wasn't known that Sol and I had lunch at least once a month during my first nine years on the Commission. He was my Godfather rabbi early in my FCC career when I really needed one. Even though he owned the book and all surrounding property and more, he was always a reporter. Reporting was in his veins.

Even when acting as a valued adviser and sounding board, he would take out memo cards and jot down notes on the FCC. As a wise old pro, he used the info judiciously -- even mercifully.

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I remember I went to him in my first year at the FCC with a vitriolic personal letter to a well publicized antagonist. I said "Sol, this is controversial, this is scoop-time, you have it exclusive -- advance! It's yours to print as you see fit."

Sol read the letter. "Do you feel much better? Now that you have it off your chest don't bother filing it, destroy it! As a Commissioner now, sometimes called upon to play an adjudicatory role you are above this."

I said, "I'm really not -- I should have a first amendment right to tell that S.O.B. off!"

Sol said "You have a first amendment right to be outrageous, but not so early in your government career. Besides your caustic comments advising he act like a gentleman is like Quasimodo, the hunchback of Notre Dame, giving advice on personal hygiene and grooming."

Next time, I gave him an exclusive advance copy of one of my more masterfully written speeches. I stayed up all night writing it and fine tuned it the next day. (Incidentally, I publicly admit I write most of my own speeches, it saves my staff a lot of embarrassment.) I proudly handed Sol the speech, saying half-kidding but really meaning it, "Sol, this is a self-admitted hit." Sol read it and said hit? You forget the wis "s" up front. It's intriguing and forceful but you don't want us to print this stuff until after you leave the Commission."

(Mention item when press used the lethal device of quoting me exactly verbatim.)

As time went along, I became more resigned to my straight laced role as regulator-adjudicator and less intent on playing the role of an aggressive critic at large blasting the analities of government and media. And Sol became more tolerant and even approving of my viewpoints.

I have many stories about Sol's philosophy and activities, his likes and dislikes, as perceived by someone outside the immediate family. I could tell how he went from an opponent to my initial FCC appointment to an influential adviser, a respected valued friend and now a cherished memory.

This award has a special significance for another reason -- a personal reason. I have been 69 years old now for 6 years, but two weeks ago it caught up with me. Everyone decided to observe an unmentionable chronological milestone in my life. I told the Michigan broadcasters two weeks ago and I'll repeat it here for your benefit that I scowled in the mirror and whispered, "You old bat -- you are 75 years old and probably in the dawn of your senility but as long as you have 70% of your marbles (a good local norm), I'll let you hang in there." Actually, I feel too young to be that old! Someone recently asked me "What kind of a year did you have, Jim? I said "Great! I was here when it started and I was still here when it ended."

But there could be some advantage to age when going through the kind of confirmation hearings they have these days -- with the involuntary celibacy of the golden years, I could say with conviction: "No, I'm not a womanizer -- at my age, I'm now a fantasizer." I could even repeat my old claim that I now play R and X rated movies backwards because at my age, I now like to see people get dressed and go home.

But regardless of chronological age, I am comforted by my delusions of adequacy. Also, I'm guided somewhat by Malcolm Forbes' saying (although I never paid much attention to that old personality until he started dating Liz Taylor, a much younger and prettier old personality. Anyway, Mr. Forbes says: "You are never too old until you admit it or are no longer around to deny it."

On another personal note, I've been lucky in getting annual marriage license renewals for 51 years without any petitions to deny. Mary claims she never considered divorce -- murder several times, but divorce never. Our longevity is a testimonial to the value of a woman's sense of humor. Besides, she was always good at letting me have her way. Let the record show, I'm for marriage. If it weren't for marriage, many men might go through life thinking they had no faults at all. I think I have found the secret to a happy marriage and loving relationship. Whenever you are wrong, admit it! Whenever you are right, shut up!

On a more temperate note, I want to repeat for this audience my favorite classic quote on a positive aspect of aging. It is by that great German philosopher Goethe who said "It is only necessary to grow old to become more charitable and even indulgent. I see no fault committed by others that I have not committed myself."

I try to remember Goethe when tempted to pass personal judgments on others. At my age, an active tennis-playing, call 'em as you see 'em, 75 with over two more years to serve, I'm not looking for anything but decent, effective government in a strong, socially-progressive America.

The Washington Area Broadcasters seem dedicated to this worthy principle.

So thanks again to all of you for adding such a meaningful award and memorable occasion to my lifetime pleasant experiences. I'll proudly display this (plaque/certificate) in my office and will be constantly reminded of my Washington broadcast friends and of Sol, a great broadcast pioneer and inspirational friend, and our mutual goal of the best for broadcasting and America.

I'm honored and so pleased -- I like to think that Sol is pleased too.

THE HONORED PROPHET AWARD

Recipients of the WABA Honored Prophet Award must be past or present residents of the Washington Metropolitan Area actively involved in local broadcasting. Such recipients shall have demonstrated high professional proficiency and success, and shall have contributed importantly to the advancement of the broadcasting industry. Previous recipients of this award include:

JOHN KLUGE
MAX ROBINSON
DAVID BRINKLEY
WALTER CRONKITE
CHARLES OSGOOD

THE SOL TAISHOFF AWARD

Recipients of the WABA Sol Taishoff Award are persons or organizations that have contributed importantly to the broadcasting industry on a local or national scale. They need not have worked in broadcasting, but must have observed high standards of ethics and professionalism, and above all must be champions and exponents of the American system of free broadcasting. This award is named in honor of Sol Taishoff, it being resolved that few persons have served the broadcasting industry more effectively than the late Chairman of Broadcasting Publications Inc. Previous recipients of the Sol Taishoff Award include:

ROBERT E. LEE
SENATOR BOB PACKWOOD
MARK S. FOWLER

PROGRAM

COCKTAILS

WELCOMING REMARKS
Bill Sherard, WABA Chairman

DINNER

THE HONORED PROPHET AWARD
Jim Gibbons

THE SOL TAISHOFF AWARD
Commissioner James H. Quello

1989

**THE
WASHINGTON AREA
BROADCASTERS ASSOCIATION**

The Washington Area Broadcasters Association was founded in 1971 to better determine community needs and interests through common effort. Since its formation 18 years ago, WABA has grown in scope, today providing annual broadcast scholarships to qualified minorities, lending support for local broadcast research projects, organizing Radio and Television marketing teams to increase advertisers' knowledge of the power of the electronic medium, and providing a voice of advocacy for Washington broadcasters. Our membership includes 27 AM, FM, and TV outlets in the Metro Area.

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