Introduction

I grew up surrounded by the television industry. My mother, who had been a political activist in her early years, was an award-winning producer of *Down You Go, Conversation*, and *Of Many Things*, three of the most intellectually satisfying programs in the history of broadcasting. Despite her own success she was convinced that broadcasting, as a commercial mass-market medium, would never achieve true excellence.

My father, whose style and temperament were far more conservative, was the independent packager and producer of a series of staggeringly successful and highly commercial shows, including *Quiz Kids, Stop The Music*, and *The $64,000 Question*. A man of exceptional intellectual curiosity, he was convinced that broadcasting was capable of becoming the greatest source of news, education, and entertainment in the history of the world.

In 1955, the year before I entered prep school, my father went to work for the CBS television network. Though he loved the independence of his own company (in his great uncle's phrase, having his own pushcart), he joined

CBS because he believed in the two men at the top, Board Chairman William Paley and President Frank Stanton, and he believed that they, too, were committed to excellence. His first achievement as Vice President for Creative Services (he told us that that amorphous title meant that he was in charge of the keys to the men's room) was to help develop *Captain Kangaroo*, a show that seemed to prove that a network job could be truly meaningful.

CBS was very much a part of our lives during those years. A specially carpentered six-foot long cabinet housing three television sets, which made it possible for my father to watch all network programming simultaneously, dominated my parents' bedroom. We called it the "three-eyed monster," but our attitude toward the industry itself was more respectful.

Though Mom remained unconvinced, we tended to speak the names of Stanton and Paley with reverence. It was customary for CBS executives in the fifties to model their dress after Paley's blue-suit elegance, and Dad did so with pride. So did I. When home from Choate on vacation I would wear one of Dad's ties, with a design composed of dozens of CBS eyes.

Though we had always been part of the show business world, the glamour and perquisites intensified when Dad was at CBS, and particularly when he became president of the CBS television network in 1958. At Christmas our downstairs closet was always filled with boxes of cosmetics, toiletries, jellies and other gifts—most of them extravagant but useless to us—from people who did business with CBS. Twice during summer vacations I, along with my brother, Paul, and one of my sisters, Liza, accompanied Dad on trips to Los Angeles, where we had our picture taken with Elvis Presley, who was then filming *Love Me Tender*; went to a barbecue dinner with television star Donna Reed; dined at the Brown Derby with Desi Arnaz and his two small children; and flew to Las Vegas, where Dad had business to transact with Red Skelton.

Probably none of this should have impressed me. Mom and Dad had often told me the story of a famous film world couple who, after having been the toast of Hollywood, faded from view when he became incapacitated. Their friends stopped calling and quickly forgot them. Their experience became for us a kind of fable with a simple moral: power and popularity in the entertainment industry are ephemeral, and one shouldn't be misled by instant flatterers.

Dad was forced to resign from CBS in the fall of 1959 in the midst of the quiz scandals. No one, including CBS, accused Dad of impropriety, and it was generally agreed that he had been used as a scapegoat, partly because before coming to CBS he had created *The $64,000 Question*. Though *The Question* was not at the center of the quiz-show investigation (most attention focused on Charles Van Doren, who had been on NBC's *Twenty-One*), it was the first of the big-money quiz shows. In CBS's terms, Dad had outlived his usefulness.

So had Dad's friend Edward R. Murrow. In its quest for purity, CBS had concluded that Murrow's *Person to Person* interview show was "rigged," since it was not totally spontaneous. On what happened to be the eve of Murrow's twenty-fifth wedding anniversary CBS sent lawyer Ralph Colin to England, where Murrow was on sabbatical, to ask for a public admission of wrongdoing. Murrow refused to comply. He said CBS would have to fire him. And after Murrow threatened to go public with his critique of the industry, CBS backed down.

Though Dad was deeply wounded by his experience at CBS, he was never bitter. He did not return to the television industry, but as a professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, where he helped to found the *Columbia Journalism Review* and the Columbia-Dupont Awards for Broadcast Journalism, he continued to try to find ways to induce or prod broadcasters to achieve greatness.

As for Mom, she felt, sadly, somewhat vindicated by

Dad's experience. During the last thirteen years of her life she worked for the National Council of Negro Women, devoting most of her energies to the civil rights movement.

Though Dad and I spent literally thousands of hours talking and gossiping about broadcasting, much of what I learned from him was through emotions or osmosis. I respected his continuing faith in the possibilities for broadcasting, while sharing Mom's skepticism. By close contact with the inside of the industry, I learned that when a company acts most sanctimonious, it is likely to be most deceptive. I learned that outside forces—citizens' groups, journalists, award committees, public-interest lawyers—have roles to play in keeping the industry honest and purposeful, but that the industry is so fragile and timid that pressures intended to be constructive can ultimately be self-defeating.

And I learned something else as well. I learned that a man of exceptional taste, integrity, and creativity, with a lifetime of experience in the industry and wonderful skills in diplomacy and personal persuasion, could not, even as president of a network, change the course of television. Dad used to teach a seminar in media management, and each year he would begin the class by drawing a symbol on the board—an S with two lines through it. A dollar sign. Like it or not, profits are at the core of the industry.

In the early seventies, I, too, became involved with the television industry, but from a different perspective. I developed a specialty in communications law as a practicing attorney and as a member of the U.C.L.A. faculty. In the spring of 1975, I was asked to serve as a legal consultant to Norman Lear and the Writers Guild of America in their fight against the Family Viewing Policy—the "self-regulatory" scheme that declared that "entertainment programming inappropriate for viewing by a general family audience" would not be aired between 7 and 9 P.M. Eastern

Standard Time. The ensuing lawsuit provided a unique picture of the backstage workings of the broadcasting industry and the federal government.

When my parents died, together, on November 18, 1976 —two weeks after the judge handed down his decision in the Family Hour trial—William Paley sent flowers to the funeral home. A handwritten note was attached to the flowers. So far as I know, it was the first time that he had made an effort to communicate with the family since Dad, in my sister Holly's phrase, "was resigned."

The note said: "From all their friends at CBS." It was signed "Bill Paley."

The television industry is exceedingly complex. It is not always easy to tell one's friends from one's enemies or to know what is right and what is wrong or what is possible and what is not. But I have tried to get as close as possible to the truth in this book, which I hope combines the insights of a skeptic with the vision of an optimist.

"Now, you may not think that censoring a few jokes, or postponing a few gunshots for a couple of hours, infringes on anyone's freedom of speech, but as frivolous as it seems, a joke is an expression of thought. If a joke can be censored today, then a political cartoon can be censored tomorrow—and the next day a political speech. It does violence to the Constitution.

"As parents and as responsible adults we should hate to see the broadcasting of wanton violence and tasteless humor. But as citizens of a constitutional government that guarantees freedom of speech, we should hate censorship even more. It's no laughing matter when they take our jokes away."

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