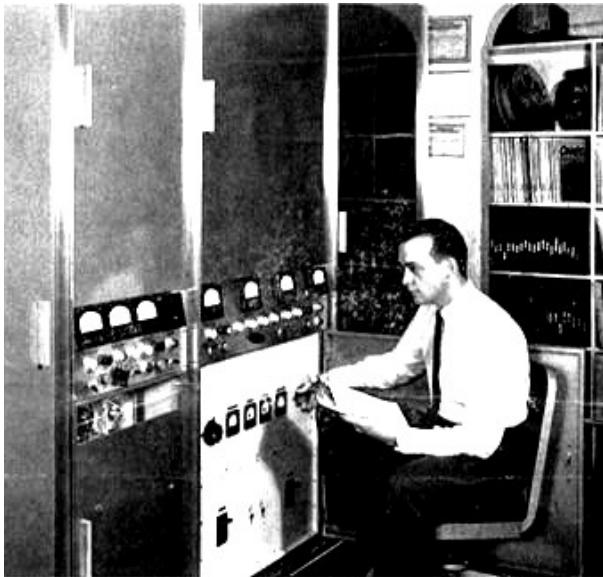


Old Brains Are A Potpourri

People my age speak slowly but carry a big bundle of memories. Their brain can be compared to the hard drive in a computer. It's filled with terabits of memories and it takes a bit of computing time to find the right words to express their thoughts.

That word "potpourri" triggered this essay. It was one of those words in my brain I could not readily recall. Then I remembered an embarrassing moment in my life:

It began one evening in 1960 when I was the program director at the first FM radio station in the Midwest. Omaha Nebraska to be exact. Be patient, it's a long setup:



Here I was, in the middle of the rock'n'roll generation, programming operas and classical music. One of the albums listed a "potpourri" of selections. Presenting this sophisticated programming meant careful enunciation and the classical 150 words a minute delivery.

I was half trained (*just finished my second college year studying the art and business of communications*) and was certainly ready for an evening of live broadcasting. I had already mastered *Bachianas Brasileiras #5 by Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos sung by soprano Marni Nixon* (still available from Amazon).

You may be interested to know that the **T** in potpourri is silent. It's pronounced *Poe* (like Edgar Alen)-*pour* (like a beer) and *-eee* (when women see a mouse) with equal emphasis on each syllable. You can look it up...



...as I did in my ancient, huge but valuable dictionary. It's difficult to remember, let alone look up a word you're trying to remember. Ironically, the modem for my internet connection is behind it. Between the two of them I finally found the word POTPOURRI and the memory function of my brain was torn asunder.

Yes...I proudly pronounced that word with the **T** intact with an emphasis on the first syllable that shattered the FM airways as loudly as a shotgun blast.

As I killed the mike and let the music take over...I heard loud laughter accompanied by barking. It was Bill Dunbar, our chief (*and only*) engineer and his faithful canine sidekick, a huge Boxer. Bill then kindly, slowly and diplomatically explained that the **T** is silent.

Thus began my love of dictionaries.

I don't know why that word eluded me the other day. Maybe I was trying to remember some of the greatest moments I had in broadcasting...albeit none that would earn an award but are the type of memories that make young people wonder why that old guy is sitting there in the corner with a smile on his face.

Let me share some of those moments...

Associated Press and United Press International were the main source of news during the 60's.



The TV network news teams like Huntley Brinkley were known as "presenters" and not "journalists". They read the news. They didn't find it.

Radio stations had teletype machines where either AP or UPI sent hourly scripts to be used by the "rip 'n' read" method. I had to time the classical music programming to allow a five minute break on each hour for the scripts that chattered out of the machine. With just a few minutes to review before reading live on the air, I had to concentrate so my attention was on the script. The desk with the news microphone was placed facing the glass wall that separated the room to keep it almost soundproof. I was in the middle of the news script when I heard tapping on the glass in front of me.

I looked up and saw...



...Bill's Boxer a foot in front of me wearing Bill's Fedora hat, glasses and a lit cigarette in his mouth. I completely lost it. I was laughing so hard I almost peed my pants. Bill had to come in and finish the news with no explanation of what had just happened. The phone lines filled and the mail piled up for weeks after. The owner of the FM station, Jack Katz, laughed just as hard.

The dog's name is another word somewhere in my brain. I may not remember it but I do remember how smart that dog was. Our studios were on the 17th floor of the City National Bank building. There was only one of the elevators that traveled all the way up. As the FCC qualified engineer, Bill was required to stop in frequently to make sure the 50,000 watt transmitter was behaving. The additional equipment included simulcast broadcasting of background music to business clients (*think elevator music*). If Bill took too much time fussing with the equipment, his dog would somehow be found sitting in front of the studio doors instead of in Bill's car in the parking lot where Bill left him with rolled down windows. That's 17 floors up with only one elevator serving that floor...yet there he was. Bill would just smile and let him in. That dog would then jump up and sit in that chair right in front of me...sans Fedora.



"Elevator music" was the station's main source of income. However, once in a while we got a client who paid for a commercial. The Italian car company Fiat opened a dealership in Omaha and asked us to produce and run ads that would make the name familiar. The ad began with **"There's a Fiat didja see it?"** repeated four times with four different voices.

We produced the commercial with voices of Jack, Bill, me...and the building's janitor. Bill's Boxer didn't speak Italian. The janitor got five bucks.

Small salary but big memories included learning how to change the two bulbs at the top of the 30 foot antenna on top of the 17 story building. Seemed more like 300 feet but Bill was sure it was an experience I wouldn't forget...unless I tried to remember the word *potpourri*.

That also triggered the word Fiat and my brain's hard drive continued to spin...



That word **Fiat** kicked in loud and clear when I had the opportunity to buy one.

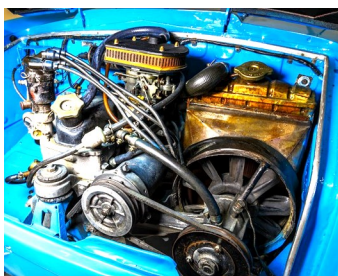


The arrow points to our Navy squadron patch. The car was restricted for sale to only members of the squadron and you could have it serviced by the mechanics that kept our aircraft flying. *Heck of a deal.* It's a 1959 Fiat 1200 Cabriolet using present tense since those mechanics were so good that car is probably still roaming San Diego streets. That's wife Roselee and son Christopher. After leaving the Navy (*and parting with the Fiat*), I had an opportunity to buy another one. That Fiat commercial kept banging away.



Timeline can be seen with son Chris in the middle (*with siblings Susan and Bill*) enjoying the Fiat 750 Spyder. Note: dead in our driveway!

After the engine crapped out (*twice*) I wished I had never remembered that commercial.



The Fiat had a 1.5L 90 HP engine. Now why would my brain spin that out? Maybe because it's the same engine specs in my 1992 Miata that I have been driving *with no mechanical failures* for over 30 years.

I rarely turn on the radio in the Miata. I'm afraid I'll hear elevator music and jinx it.

I'm in my 80's now and can't remember why I was trying to remember the word potpourri just a week ago. My copy of Roget's Thesaurus is as dog eared as that huge dictionary. I'm also fairy grapefruit that I don't have to rely on my computer's spell checker.



I have fond memories of my Smith Corona typewriter. I just wish I could remember where I put it or where it went. Probably left it in a garage with that IBM electric. (*15 moves in ten cities*)

I do remember my first computer. It had a huge 128K memory and you could get over 315,000 characters on each eight inch floppy disk. I remember because the salesman said it so often.



That was over 40 years ago so maybe my memory isn't as bad as I think it is. My kids pointed out that a micro chip the size of my little finger nail can hold 256 gigabits. I'm not sure how big that is but I do know I don't want that information in my brain.



I was very young when I got my first sailor suit. I don't remember it but I sure do remember the one Uncle Sam gave me and sent me to Vietnam...twice. I'd rather not remember some of those memories so don't ask.

Give me a glass of wine and a microphone and I'll share a lot of other memories. You'll find some on my website www.franksiegler.com

Thus ends this potpourri.

