

(Biography Prepared for *Public Broadcasting 30th Reunion*, May 2001)

## The Rhodes\* Less Traveled

[\*Pun in memory of University of Michigan's EDWARD STASHEFF who in the 60's introduced me with something like: "I've heard of putting shows on the roads...but tonight it's vice-versa..."]

The idea for mapping the roads I've taken to this May's PB Reunion came one morning while on my exercise bike. Bored, my eyes scanned a bookshelf across the room and fell upon a faded green government-looking publication - **THE PUBLIC TELEVISION ACT OF 1967** - on its spine. Why had I saved that?

Thankful for a reason to stop, I got it and saw it was a transcript of the Hearings of the Subcommittee on Communications of the Senate's Commerce Committee, chaired by Senator Pastore. Opening it, I saw that the list of witnesses between 4/11 and 4/28 1967 read like a catalogue of educational broadcasting pioneers and public broadcasting founding fathers. [I was happy to see several names of those still able to attend in May.]

Then I saw why I kept it. It included my testimony during a panel on "Instructional" TV dealing with an apparent recommendation of the Carnegie Commission for a separate, comprehensive study dealing with the roles for, and needs for, instructional TV. At the time, I said something that was going to put me on a path for much of the rest of my career:

"The Carnegie Foundation, in their report, said this should be a study within the context of education. The reason they could not do anything with instructional television is that instructional television is not understandable within the context of broadcasting.

It is only understandable in relationship to what it means to the child, the teacher and the school. What is described here, I think, is a study not within the context fully of education and the problems we have in America today but a study within the context of the media and broadcasting and I think the intent of this here is to say we think it has to go further.

We have critical problems in American education. Dr. Lettison last week talked about some of them: problems of the preschool child, problems in the inner-city, problems with continuing education. We have to relate these television to these problems. We have just completed 19 studies through the National Association of Educational Broadcasters with schools, parochial schools, military training institutions, using broadcasting open circuit and closed circuit and the one generalization we could make is that the inadequacies--all the criticism of television today in these schools -- come from the fact that they have no philosophy. They don't understand how this technology relates to their problems. They didn't grow up with the technology. Therefore, they have no feel for it. Its use is a problem in itself, rather than a tool to solve others.

In the words I think of Mr. Minnow and some of the others who called for a study comparable to Carnegie's, I think what they are trying to say is this should be a high-level study that has some people

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with some prestige value behind it who know education, who provide a philosophy, who say to the practicing school man 'this relates to your problems today.' "

Why had I said that? What experiences had led me to it, and where have I gone with it since then in a world in which "ITV" slowly became just one more "AV" tool tossed into the jumble of "nice-to-have-someday-when-we-can-afford it" possibilities for busy educators to juggle.

How did it all start? To the best of my fading memory, my first contact with this new field was in the late 40's when my high school [Sewanhaka, Floral Park, NY] was one of the first schools to have a new 10w FM station. Nevertheless, I didn't get involved since my interest was journalism. Like others, though, in after-school hours I was experiencing the medium in ways that expanded my sense of its possibilities. "Omnibus" comes to mind as an example.

I continued my journalism interest when I moved on to Queens College for two years, but for some reason got involved there with radio. It could have been FRANK NORWOOD's influence who was a couple of year's ahead of me. During that time I began doing the research and writing for a regular WNYC program - "Music from the Theater" [I think I still have some of the scripts in the basement.] It was at WNYC that I first ran into JERRY SANDLER, who in later years would become a colleague at NAEB and the Applied Management Sciences.

I moved on to Syracuse University for my last two years [they've told me that the academic average went up in both schools when I transferred.] There I got involved in a lot of radio production for WAER-FM, had my values shaped by folks like LARRY MYERS, and knocked around with other undergrads like JIM FELLOWS and GIL CATES. [I wonder what happened to them?]

After a 3-yr. stint in the Navy, I came back to SU for their Masters program with an intention of heading into public relations or advertising. As part of that program, I was introduced to CHARLES SIEPMANN and his ideas. A former BBC exec who was a consultant to the FCC and the Ford Foundation, he convinced me that this medium had the potential to engage the human mind in ways that went beyond simple entertainment.

When it came time to leave SU, I sent my resume to all the ETV stations around, and only one manager bit -- JACK MCBRIDE. He had a new grant from the FORD FOUNDATION for the development of combined television and correspondence courses for direct teaching in rural Nebraska schools. [I'm putting Ford in CAPS as a influencer because for the next 11 years my work in a number of different projects was supported by their funds.] I can see now how Jack's leadership style influenced my future directions. First, he sent me off to Columbus, OH each Spring to the OIERT [forgot the right acronym] where I had a chance to network with others involved in these new classroom uses of radio and TV, and to begin my first involvement with NAEB as a member of their Utilization Committee, chaired I believe by GERTRUDE BRODERICK.

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But the second thing he did was to get me involved in schools as part of “marketing” this new medium. I went into that 2-yr. experience thinking that TV could be the “answer,” and came out of it realizing that the problem wasn’t one just of “content” presentation, but had something to do with “teaching” itself. It was at that point that I was offered an opportunity to act on that learning, and to join the faculty of Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, Michigan. There I helped establish the Central Michigan ETV Council which produced and broadcast instructional programs to schools in 40 Michigan counties via commercial TV stations; and developed and taught in-service and pre-service courses in classroom uses for new media, and before leaving six years later, began building WCMU-TV.

Reflecting now on those years, I can see the influence of the two people networks I was directly involved in. One was NAEB, and people like HARRY SKORNIA. The other the Ford Foundation’s Comprehensive School Improvement Project which involved experimentation with all the major variables in the schooling equation - class size, time, teacher role, as well as presentation media. ALEXANDER STODDARD, LESTER NELSON, and SIEPMANN again all added to my insights. I know I came away from that experience having “learned” that I was wrong six years previously. The “answer” wasn’t in changing the teacher, but rather the work setting in which he/she worked. I can see that reflected in titles of presentations I made at NAEB conferences during that time:

- "Time, the Schools, and Instructional Broadcasting", (May 1963)
- "Bruner and Bretz: The Professional Preparation of ITV Personnel," (March 1965)

[One that I presented to a DAVI meeting -- "Technology is the Answer--But What was the Question?" I found did not endear me to them.]

It was about that time that BILL HARLEY entered the picture [influenced I think by JIM FELLOWS] and I found myself in a leadership role in their new Ford-funded Project For The Improvement of Instruction by Television [NPITI] working with DICK BELL and LESTER NELSON. We moved to Washington, found a house near RICK BRIETENFELD in Maryland. [We apparently ruined the neighborhood because he soon moved away.] The NAEB years [‘65-‘68] were exciting since they paralleled public broadcasting most formative years. The NAEB cocoon, at that time contained [in addition to Harley and Fellows] the unique perspectives of CHUCK MARQUIS, JERRY SANDLER, and JOHN WITHERSPOON.

It’s hard to pick out any more of the great minds swirling around in my reflections [I’m afraid I might skip someone who’s still around to come to the reunion], but one does stand out in terms of contributing to the next phase of my learning. That was VERNON BRONSON. Involvement with his work for NAEB in American Samoa taught me the difference between creating an educational television system, and using television to create an *educational system*.

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Again, synchronicitously, NPITF lost its funding as Ford's interest in television for schools shifted, and I was offered a job with the US. Office of Education's "Educational Systems for the Seventies" project.

For the next 30 or so years my pathway took me away from the direct public broadcasting community, although we intersected several times -- for example, when I helped lead the US. Department of Education's Project BEST [Basic Educational Skills through Technology] in the early 80's. My fingers were still in the TV pot however, as I produced some 15 or so nationally-distributed video's for associations and others during that time. I ended my full-time work career at AASA [American Association of School Administrators] as their *Associate Executive Director for Instructional Leadership and Technology*.

Standing now at this point in the road and looking back, how would I summarize the nature of my work over those years with national, state and local programs? Here's how I put it now when asked to consult:

"[His career] has centered on problems that arise when people try to work together effectively in organizations. In recent years this has focused on issues of systemic leadership and management for schools and other community human service organizations. Currently, his work integrates principles of *Collaborative Knowledge-Building* and *Quality Management* with *information technologies* to develop sustainable infrastructures that can support the transformation of organizations of learners into learning organizations."

Sounds good, but then I think back to my 1967 answer to Senator Pastore's question and wonder what's been learned. Were computers today -- like television then -- being offered to schools as means or ends in themselves? Is the current generation so caught up with what the technology can do, that it can't see what it can enable people to do?

My answer can be found in the October 1998 issue of *Converge* magazine -- "[All We Really Need to Know about Technology ... We Can Learn in the Restroom.](http://www.convergemag.com/Publications/CNVGOct98/insights/insights.shtml)"  
[<http://www.convergemag.com/Publications/CNVGOct98/insights/insights.shtml>]

Enough looking backwards...see you in the present in May.

Lew Rhodes