

US National Standard in Culture

Bill Paley of CBS Background

He did not really like the idea of clubs, he said, his experience was that he was better off without them.

Source: *The Powers That Be*, David Halberstram, 1979



NOSTREDAME: He was not in worship with the power control of the power cabal. He served neither political power, legal power, media power nor money interests.

He more than the other early figures of broadcasting was fascinated by entertainment and programming. He was shrewd and imaginative. He had a devotion to every detail in programming which made him so important in American life, for he helped determine what the nation first heard and then saw in its home every night.

His life before TV. Bill Paley's father Sam had made his money in cigars, the Congress Cigar Company, and indeed the woman on the wrapper of the La Palina was said to resemble Goldie, mother of Bill Paley. He was young and the industry was younger. He had started in the family cigar business, which was very successful, but he was nonetheless restless for some' thing a little different, he did not simply want to repeat his own father's successes. He did not know very much about radio, which was then very new. A friend had one of the early crystal sets, and Bill Paley tried to buy a radio for

himself, but in those days radios were not for sale in stores, and so he had to have one made.

He became a devoted radio listener, the little machine seemed to open up a much larger world, and he often found himself staying up very late at night listening. He also found that many of his friends were doing much the same thing.

One summer in 1925 when his father, Sam, and his uncle Jake were away and he was in charge of the company, he experimented a little with the advertising budget and for the grand sum of fifty dollars a week sponsored the "Miss La Palina Hour" on WCAU, the local Philadelphia radio station. Miss La Palina was, of course, named after the cigar, which was in turn named after the family, Paley, and for the fifty dollars he got not only the singer but a ten-piece orchestra as well. When Jake Paley returned from the trip and very quickly spotted the fifty-dollar expenditure, he was furious; Jake Paley was not a frivolous man and he did not do frivolous things like listen to the radio. He demanded to know what the money had gone for and his nephew tried to explain.

"That's nonsense," said Jake Paley, "that machine is never going to work," and so Miss La Palina quickly departed Philadelphia's airwaves. But in the next few weeks Sam Paley, who was a very smart man and a very good listener, was struck by how many people stopped him on the street to ask what happened to the "Miss La Palina Hour."

He wondered aloud to his son Bill how he could spend half a million on print advertising and get so little response, and then spend only fifty dollars for radio and everyone missed his singer. Soon Jake Paley checked the books and found that sales had gone up because of the radio advertisements.

Shortly after that Miss La Palina went back on the air, and very soon after that Bill Paley went into radio.