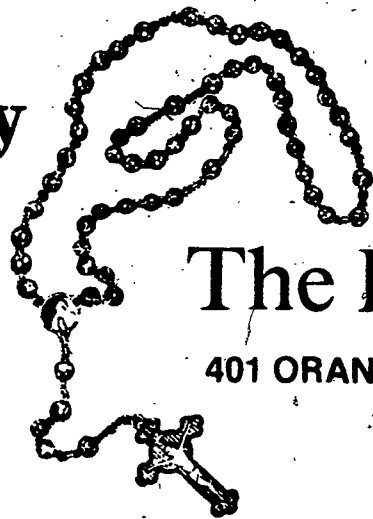


A Tribute to Our Lady of the Rosary

Third of a four-part series
By Msgr. Joseph A. Cirrincione



The late Gordon Brown's Buffalo radio station, WNIA, was sold before WSAY and the new owners received approval for the sale from the FCC in April 1980. I had heard of the sale of the station but remained my usual unruffled self until I received a call one morning from the new station manager. Once again, the shock at a now familiar message which, like falling into the Atlantic, you never get used to. In crisp, businesslike language, he said, "We are going to create a new image for our station which is now WECK. We are changing the format completely and have no room in our schedule for The Family Rosary Hour." I inquired, still in a state of shock, when he wanted us to go off. "How about Friday?" he said in a tone that belied the form of a question.

This was Monday. We had no contract. After the first few years, Mr. Brown and I had never bothered with contracts. So I had no choice but to agree.

If Elmira had been a challenge because it was so far away, Buffalo was doubly one, not only because it was so far away but because it was in another diocese. And only five days in which to come up with another station. It never occurred to me to quit the Buffalo area because after four years on the air there, we had built up a fairly large audience of listeners, some of whom were extremely generous in their contributions. Because of the low rate we had been paying the station and our use of the cheapest kind of broadcast line, we had been close to meeting expenses.

This time, I turned to my friend John straight off. He got out his directory and made call after call for me with the same monotonous and dreary response: negative. Friday came and still no station to jump to. So in my last broadcast, I mentioned we were leaving WECK and asked our Buffalo listeners to watch the newspapers for the name of the new station. I prayed that there would be a new station.

There was! And again, the hand of Divine Providence was clearly evident. A daytime only station in Buffalo had requested permission from the FCC to go on the air 24 hours daily and expected its license within a few weeks. The sales manager, seeking to sell time in their expanded schedule, decided to tentatively consider our request for time. Temporarily, as they awaited their license, he offered to put our program on the air at the last half-hour of the day. That would be 8:30-9 p.m.

Daytime only stations have to go off the air when it gets dark. But this was Spring and the days were long. What our time slot would be when they received their license was left up in the air, though I thought I had reason to believe it would be our regular time, 6:30 p.m.

The rate was much higher than we had been paying at WNIA. We also had to order a more expensive broadcast line from AT&T. And, of course, our program would be on tape, not live. Still, if we wanted to go back into the Buffalo area, we had no choice but to agree, which we did. We went on the air on WXRL the first week in May. We advertised extensively in the Buffalo papers to inform our listeners.

Early in September, the owner of the station and the sales manager paid me a visit. They were very apologetic. They had actually announced publicly in Buffalo that they would have their license by Sept. 1. Now they learned that it would not be forthcoming until the first of the year. The problem this presented was that they would be off the air before 6:30 p.m. in October and so would not be able to broadcast the tape until the next day. They suggested 11 a.m. until the first of the year. This was less satisfactory than ever. Listeners would be hearing the Joyful Mysteries on Tuesdays, the Sorrowful on Wednesdays, etc. But again, it was either that or abandon Buffalo. So I agreed.

The license came through in January of this year. The sales manager had left the station, so it was the owner himself, Lou Schriver, who called and told me that on Feb. 2 (Feast of the Presentation) we could go back on the air in the evenings. And the time? "10 p.m.," he answered. "But your sales manager led me to believe we would be on live at 6:30." "I never told him he could promise you that," he replied, "and he is no longer with us."

WXRL is a popular country music station, and the very thought of interrupting country music for a religious broadcast at 6:30 p.m. seemed to be in the same category as heresy or treason or betrayal; something unthinkable. We should have been consoled that at 10 p.m. we would be the first religious program to be aired in the evening.

Once again, a reluctant consent. Once again, advertisements in the Buffalo papers, flyers printed to be passed around in nursing homes, back of churches, etc.

Our fiscal year, in step with the Pastoral Office, closes at the end of June. Frank Wolfe, whom I referred to earlier, is my chief financial adviser. Like clients of E.F. Hutton, when he speaks, I listen. But as I prepared the books last July to give them over to him for preparation of our annual financial statement, I knew there was one decision I could make on my own. We had lost \$8,000 in Buffalo in 12 months. Significantly, we had done rather well our first six months on WXRL. But from the time we went on the air at 10 p.m., the gap between income and expenses began to widen ominously. The hour was just too late for the type of listeners who make up our audience.

Sadly I called Lou Schriver and dropped the bomb. We had

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Watkins Glen (104FM); WSEW, Seneca Falls (99FM and 1110AM); WOIV, Syracuse (105FM); WYRD, Syracuse (1540 AM), and WXRL, Buffalo (1300AM).

run out of money and were dropping WXRL from the network on July 31.

For days after July 31, letters and phone calls kept coming from Buffalo. Even the editor of the TV-Radio section of The Buffalo Evening News called to inquire why we had gone off the air there. I explained and she wrote it up in her column two nights later. A friend sent the clipping to me. It was very well done. But to me it was like the curtain coming down at the end of the last act of a play.

For some days, I walked around with a heavy heart. Then one night, I awakened from a sound sleep with the thought so

clear it might have been written in neon lights, "God permitted it, so it was for the best."

I turned to go back to sleep, freed of my sadness and murmuring to myself, "I'm a lot smarter asleep than awake."

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