



Jim Lange



Class of 1993

Silver Circle Profile By:
Kevin Wing



Many would likely agree that Bay Area broadcast legend **Jim Lange** leads a charmed life. He's worked in radio and television since the late 1940s, he's hosted countless game shows that qualify his standing as an American television icon, and he is married to a former Miss America.

Lange, who was inducted into the NATAS San Francisco/Northern California Chapter's *Silver Circle* in 1993, turns 77 this month. He does not look his age, and his voice still sounds much like it did when he was on the Bay Area airwaves. During a recent visit over breakfast near his Marin County home, Lange told me he is grateful for how blessed his life is, and feels very fortunate.

"Boy, I've been lucky," Lange says. "When you're young, you decide you want to do certain things with your life, and I did them all. I did the Marine Corps, I did network television, I had a great radio show with all that freedom, and to top it off, I married Miss America. Not too bad, right?"

To look at Lange's resume is to look at a storied career. He started in radio in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1949. In 1954, the military came calling, and Lange signed up with the U.S. Marine Corps.

Lange, who is best known around the country for his long-running stints as host of television's *The Dating Game* and *Name That Tune*, had the bright lights of fame shining on him even before America discovered him. He began his radio career in San Francisco in 1958, and continued actively working in it until his retirement in 2005. During that nearly 50-year span, Lange also enjoyed success in Bay Area television as host of KGO-TV's *A.M. San Francisco*.

"I was stationed in Hawaii for two years, right after the Korean War," Lange says.

In 1957, he was discharged to Treasure Island, and decided he would stay in the Bay Area, but he couldn't get a job. He had experience — he had started in radio at age 15 — but he couldn't get past the switchboard operators at the city's radio stations. So, he returned to Minnesota, knowing

that one day he would return to San Francisco.

Two months later, a friend who had just been hired at KGO Radio told Lange the station was looking for "an all-night guy," and gave him the name of the man Lange should call. Coincidentally, it was someone Lange had worked with in Minnesota.

Before he was hired over the phone, he was asked if he knew anything about "rock and roll," **Elvis Presley** had hit the scene two years before, and rock and roll was here to stay. Lange knew plenty about rock, and the job was his for \$10,000 a year. KGO Radio remained a rock station for the next nine months until 1958, when the station switched formats and fired everyone but Lange. He stayed on as a staff announcer and presided over his own music show in the evening. For the most part, however, he became the voice of the station, doing station ID spots, and doing double duty for KGO-TV as well. He was so popular at KGO Radio that San Francisco's government officials named him "The All-Nite Mayor."

About a year into it, Lange decided that "the place to be in San Francisco was not at KGO, but, at the time, it was KSFO." He was hired at KSFO in 1960 and worked with the likes of **Don Sherwood, Al "Jazzbeau" Collins, Carter B. Smith, Dan Sorkin** and **Gene Nelson**.

A year later, Lange and Sherwood would compete in a highly-publicized, 24-mile footrace from Stinson Beach to the San Francisco Ferry Building via the Golden Gate Bridge. As an ex-Marine, Lange was in top form, beating Sherwood handily to the delight of 100,000 listeners who turned out for the race.

While still with KSFO, Lange was hired as the staff announcer and sidekick to "**Tennessee**" **Ernie Ford** on Ford's new ABC-TV variety show, which originated from San Francisco. Lange played the urbane straight man to Ford's country homespun brand of humor. First called *The Tennessee Ernie Ford Show*, it was later changed to *Hello Pea Pickers*. The program remained on the network schedule until 1965.

That same year, Lange began hosting the game show, *Oh My Word*, for KGO-TV. That was during an

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era when stations produced their own game shows. "It's my all-time favorite of the many shows I've hosted over the years," Lange says.

1965 was a monumental year for Lange's career. Game show producer **Chuck Barris**, known to a later generation as host of the popular 1970s program, *The Gong Show*, hired Lange to host a new game show for ABC-TV, *The Dating Game*. On the show, a bachelorette would question a group of three bachelors who were hidden behind a wall, then choose one of them for a date. The questions on the show were often of the double-entendre variety, allowing for unlimited comedy. The show became an instant hit for ABC and remained on the air until 1973. During its run, Lange became known for blowing kisses with the contestants to the audience at the end of each show.

The show featured contestants who would later go on to become superstars, including **Arnold Schwarzenegger**, **Zsa Zsa Gabor**, **Tom Selleck**, **John Ritter**, the **Bee Gees**, **Farrah Fawcett**, **David Letterman**, **Joe Namath**, **Wilt Chamberlain**, and a 12-year-old **Michael Jackson**.

"I would commute from San Francisco to Los Angeles to tape *The Dating Game*, Lange says. He was still working at KSFO, and still hosting KGO-TV's *Oh My Word*. Before long, Lange was hosting four TV shows and eventually a nighttime version of ABC's *The Dating Game*. Lange hosted 16 game shows in all during his TV career, including a syndicated version of *The Dating Game*, and, of course, the immensely popular *\$100,000 Name That Tune*.

In 1974, another opportunity at KGO-TV was about to change his life. Lange was hired to host a new local morning show, *A.M. San Francisco*. It would eventually follow ABC's entry into the network morning news race with the short-lived *A.M. America*, and then, *Good Morning America*.

KGO-TV auditioned two women to co-host with Lange: Bay Area native **Suzanne Somers**, who would go on to prime-time fame with *Three's Company*, and **Nancy Fleming**, 1961's Miss America (Miss Michigan). The chemistry on the show with Fleming worked very well. But, their co-hosting stint would be short-lived. At that time, Lange was doing afternoons on KSFO, and morning man Sherwood

was about to leave again. They asked Lange to be the new host of the morning show, so he left.

"Nancy was so dedicated to that show," Lange says. "She prepared for every show. If an author made an appearance, she would read the book, cover to cover."

Even though they co-hosted only a short time, Lange got to know Fleming very well. It started out with a lunch date, and then, they started dating, finally walking down the aisle in 1978. Lange admits it was a very interesting way to meet his future wife. They had met briefly in the 1960s, when Lange interviewed Fleming. Fate brought them together again.

Almost always on television hosting a show, Lange was also on the air on radio — a part of the Bay Area radio landscape for four decades. He has fond memories of his nearly 25-year career at KSFO. The legendary Sherwood, who was an extremely popular morning personality on KSFO throughout the 1950s and 1960s, routinely quit the station, only to return every time. But, when Sherwood was absent from the KSFO airwaves, Lange would step in to take over Sherwood's morning time slot.

At that time, KSFO was operated by Golden West Broadcasting, which was owned by country singer and broadcast pioneer **Gene Autry**. Lange's contract specified that Golden West could place him wherever they needed him. They moved him, briefly, to Los Angeles to work at sister station KMPC. After a year, he returned to the Bay Area.

"I was at KSFO a long time," Lange says. He remained with the station until 1983, when the station was sold. Lange returned to Los Angeles to work once again at KMPC, this time until 1990. He would be back on Bay Area radio that year, working at KFRC-AM's "Magic 61" for three years. That was followed by two years at San Jose's KKSJ-AM, and finally, to San Francisco's KABL-AM/FM, where he stayed from 1997 until his retirement in 2005.

These days, Lange is enjoying retirement in his beloved Marin County, where he has lived since moving to the Bay Area in the late 1950s. In fact, he and Nancy are planning a trip to Europe in September. Together, the two have traveled all over the world.

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For everything he has done — and one look again at the resume would tell you that he nearly has done everything — Lange has always considered his radio career to be his No. 1 profession.

“Television was secondary,” he says. “It’s something I did if I had time. People still remember me from *The Dating Game*,

but that’s not what I want to be remembered for.” While TV was fun and rewarding, radio was even more so. It gave him “personal satisfaction” that he helped make other’ lives “a little fuller.”

The humble gentleman that Lange is, he adds, “In the end, I’m going to think, hey, I did something that was a little worthwhile.”

Millions of Jim Lange’s fans and admirers through the years, from Minnesota to San Francisco, Hollywood and beyond, would likely say he may never fully realize how extremely worthwhile and valued he has been to the American radio and television industry.

On the Move

Former KSTS San Francisco acting general manager **Cesar Angulo** has been named president and general manager at KTNC, an Estrella TV affiliate airing in San Francisco and Sacramento. KTNC, which Pappas Telecasting lost in bankruptcy proceedings, is owned by Titan Broadcast Management. It serves both markets from a signal broadcast at Diablo Peak.

Former CBS 5 Anchor **Barbara Rodgers** returns to the airways on KKGN Green 960-AM with *Live From San Francisco, It’s Barbara Rodgers!* Saturdays from 12 noon to 2 pm. Chat with Barbara and her guests by calling (866) 960-5753.

Geoff Roth is joining the journalism faculty at Hofstra University in New York. Geoff’s been the News Director at KSEE Fresno since July 2007, and has also been ND for another Fresno station as well as in San Diego, Salt Lake City, and Ft. Myers. He’s also worked in Pittsburgh, Washington, Denver, Miami, Richmond, and Jacksonville.

Meteorologist **Laura Skirde** moves to the top 20 as she becomes morning meteorologist for KOVR-TV in Sacramento. Laura leaves KXAN in Austin, Texas where she was weekend meteorologist.



There was an active competition to manage 10 stations for the secured lenders that are expected to be the new owners of bankrupt **Young Broadcasting**.

Gray Television came out the winner with a credit bid of \$220 million. **Judge Gonzales** ruled on July 28 that the proposed sale to the secured creditors was in the best interests of the debtors, their estates and creditors.

Gray has 36 stations in 30 markets, mostly middle to smaller DMAs. The Young stations should be a good fit for Gray, industry analysts and observers said. Gray’s affiliation agreements are largely with NBC and CBS; Young’s are with ABC.

“The reorganized Young Broadcasting group will have five board members, including **Vincent Young**, two current members and two members recommended by the buyer’s CEO,” said KRON 4 GM **Brian Grief**. “Young, President **Deborah McDermott** and CFO **James Morgan** will continue to manage the company. However, most of their daily attention will likely be focused on **KRON San Francisco**, **WATE Knoxville** and **WLNS Lansing**, since the other seven markets will be under the new management contract with Gray Television.”

Young’s painful ordeal started when the company outbid NBC and bought KRON for a staggering \$823 million in 2000, hoping it would become the station group’s flagship.

Instead, after NBC pulled its affiliation, KRON became a liability for Young. This and the economic downturn dragged the station group into bankruptcy in February.

For station employees, the deal provides clarity about who their new boss will be. For the secured lenders, it should help expedite the stations’ return to a more normal operating climate without the pressure of continued draconian cost-cutting.

The secured lenders include Wachovia Bank, Highland Capital, Eaton Vance, Credit Suisse and Oppenheimer.