

# Stan Burford - 50 Years of Broadcasting



## Class of 1990

**Silver Circle Profile**  
By: Kevin Scott Wing

Back in 1984, longtime Bay Area broadcaster **Stan Burford** – who was then in the midst of a five-year tenure as president of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences – came up with an idea.

Based on a concept already in place in NATAS' San Diego Chapter, Burford along with then-chapter administrator **Jack Armstrong**, created the *Silver Circle*. This 'new' award would recognize individuals who had made significant achievements in their careers in Northern California, over the preceding 25 years or more. The SF/NATAS Chapter began inducting members into the *Silver Circle* in 1986.

Little did Burford realize that he – the co-founder of the San Francisco/Northern California *Silver Circle* – would one day be inducted himself for his achievements. He was so honored in 2000.

This year, 2011, is a banner year for Burford. In August, he will celebrate 50 years in Bay Area broadcasting. "Fifty years," he says. "It's gone by like a rocket ship."

Burford got his start in August of 1961, at age 18, working for a small FM radio station in San Francisco. "It was a delightful place to start," Burford says. "I was there for three years. It was a small station. Its audience could fit into a phone booth."

Fifty years and seventeen broadcast and media companies later, today he is most recognizable as the voice of KGO Radio traffic. For the last 31 years, Burford's smooth delivery has been a mainstay on KGO Radio. He's been in the skies, flying high above the traffic congestion splitting his work days so that he can report on the morning and afternoon commutes.

The San Francisco native grew up in the city's Richmond District. He went on to graduate from San Francisco City College and San Francisco State University, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in radio-television-film.

While finishing college, Burford made a giant leap



from the small FM station to the biggest radio operation in Northern California at the time — KSFO. As the saying goes — "It's not what you know, but rather who you know." After three years on FM, he got a tip in late 1963 that KSFO was looking for a traffic reporter. That tip came to Burford through his neighbor, the father of a childhood friend, who was the chief engineer of KSFO. So, he called, and he got the job, reporting traffic on Bay Area freeways on what was then the most popular radio station in Northern California.

KSFO was, without a doubt, the radio powerhouse in the Bay Area in those days, headed up by popular, iconic personalities like the legendary **Don Sherwood** and **Jim Lange**, among countless others.

"It was just unbelievable to be at KSFO, to be with a station that had such credibility" Burford says. "As our slogan went at the time, it was indeed the 'world's greatest radio station.'"

Unexpectedly, his job at KSFO came to an abrupt end in April of 1966, and it had everything to do with Sherwood.

"I got along with him extremely well," Burford says of the iconic KSFO personality. "On the air, there was a particular code of conduct that you had to follow, which was that you'd never do anything to cast a bad shadow on Don Sherwood."

"In an attempt to be funny on the radio," Burford continues, "I said something to Don on the air. It was supposed to be funny. Well, the show went along as usual. But, later that day, I got a call from the program director. Sherwood took my joke the wrong way, he said, but he was Don Sherwood. So, you're fired."

Burford was devastated. He knew he'd made a mistake, but now, it was too late to do anything to salvage his job. So, depart he did.

In 1969, he graduated from San Francisco State University again, this time with a Master's degree in education.

Through the next several years, Burford would work for more than a dozen employers, ranging from other radio stations, television stations, UCSF Medical Center, and a bank (Wells Fargo), running

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their televised training division.

At the university, he worked in the educational TV department, broadcasting medical training programming via closed-circuit television. He also taped lectures and produced programming on medical procedures. Later, Burford would go to work at AMPEX in Redwood City, where he worked as an instructor, teaching clients how to set up closed-circuit TV systems.

A fully packed year followed at Metromedia's KNEW-TV Ch-32, only to have the company shut it down and give the assets to KQED.

Following Ch-32, Burford began a four-year tenure with KBHK Channel 44, as a writer - producer - director. Starting in the station's promotions department, he ultimately moved on to be the station's production manager. KBHK was owned at the time by Kaiser Broadcasting. Burford also worked for six months as the program director for KBSC, Kaiser's station in Los Angeles.

By the mid-1970s, with wife, **Julie**, and two young children, Burford packed up and left the Bay Area. He also left the U.S. mainland. Accepting a job to operate a television facility in American Samoa, Burford was responsible for the simultaneous operation of six different channels.

In 1976, it was time to return to the Bay Area. The Burfords, who had owned a home in San Anselmo and rented it out during the two years they were in American Samoa, moved back in.

Soon, Burford would be hired by KGO-TV to work in its promotions department. He would eventually become the station's Executive Producer of programming, in which he oversaw the work of 22 producers, 19 directors and a dozen production assistants. We were the busiest television production house in San Francisco. "I was having the time of my life," he says.

The station had a huge budget for locally-produced programming, and Burford says, "it didn't hurt that KGO-TV owned the marketplace. We had (**Fred**) **Van Amburg** doing the news. The station was in a great position—and ABC was the number one network in the country."

During his tenure as Executive Producer, the station won dozens of local Emmy® awards, eleven of which went to Burford for his contributions. He

remained at KGO-TV until 1982. By then, Burford was already on the SF/NATAS chapter's Board of Governors, becoming chapter president in 1981. In 1983, he became a national trustee, playing that role simultaneously while being chapter president.

Where Burford found time to do all of this and accept a high-profile position with a San Francisco production company was anyone's guess, but he did. At 39, he joined Power-Rector, a production company headed by **Dick Rector** (*SC'86*) and **Jules Power** (*SC'90*). The production company was based at KQED Channel 9. Rector and Power and their staff produced the long-running PBS series, *Over Easy*, with **Hugh Downs**.

The firm had won a contract with the Walt Disney Company in 1982, one of 12 production companies nationally that each would produce a series of television programs for The Disney Channel.

For Power-Rector, they developed a science program, *Scheme of Things*, and Burford was the executive in charge of production. The show was shot all over the country. In nine months, Burford and his crew cranked out 72 half hour episodes.

"It was a logistical nightmare," Burford recalls. "We had to really plan, because we had crews going everywhere. It was a fascinating experience."

As you may have guessed by now, Burford has held down many positions simultaneously. While the Disney contract lasted only a year, Burford had been doing double duty at KGO Radio two years before he joined the production company. Beginning in 1980 at the radio station as a traffic reporter, Burford would spend the next 31 years giving traffic reports to loyal listeners. As you know, he's still doing it.

Let's not forget that, through all of this, Burford was still chapter president. He stayed on until 1986, the chapter's longest-serving president ever.

While his success on the radio continued, Burford would be reunited with KGO-TV once again. In 1988, he began reporting traffic from Sky-7 during the station's morning newscasts.

Burford was in the air – and on the air – when the Loma Prieta earthquake struck at 5:04 p.m., on Oct. 17, 1989.

"I was in a plane over Berkeley at the time," he explains. "I flew until 1 a.m. the next morning. I reported on what I saw below – the detours, the

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devastation – for days. Those were four days of my life I will never forget."

In the minutes and hours following the earthquake, Burford told listeners what he saw. It didn't affect him emotionally too much at the time. Once he knew his family was safe in Marin County, he admits he became "more

consumed" with the task at hand of reporting the situation.

"It was important for me at the time to get information out over the air.. the status of the Bay Bridge, the freeways... where you could go, where you couldn't go," Burford says. During the Loma Prieta quake coverage, KGO put their broadcast on satellite for any and all to carry, nationally. "We became a national station for days" he recalls. In the months that followed, PBS, BBC and DW-TV [the German English network] all shot specials featuring Burford recreating his original coverage.

The following year, Burford penned a book, *Rush Hour Relief*, based loosely on a three-ring binder of notes and maps he would take with him when reporting on the traffic from the air. The notes aided him in identifying areas that he was flying over. His daughter persuaded him to turn it into a book, and it was published by Globe Pequot in 1990.

Currently, Burford anchors KGO's team of air-borne and ground-based traffic reporters. While he may be mostly known to radio listeners, Burford was a familiar face on KGO-TV for 17 years, doing double duty and providing viewers with up-to-the-minute traffic reports during the station's morning newscasts. Throughout his years as a traffic reporter, the 68-year-old Burford has logged more than 26,000 flying hours.

When not working, he spends time with his wife of 45 years, Julie, at their home in San Rafael, and also helps her with the Ceres Community Project of Marin, a non-profit organization serving the nutritional needs of cancer patients. She recently retired from managing the Moscone Center, before that she was a Principal with Economic Research Associates both in San Francisco. Their son lives in Solano County, and their daughter lives in Connecticut. Between the two, the Burfords have five grandchildren.

Burford, who at one time during his early years had desired to be an architect, also spends time working on house projects, taking the couple's Goldendoodle out for walks and pursues the never ending attempt to learn how to play golf.



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sudden rise in suburban home burglaries." – **Craig Franklin/San Francisco**

"I'm part of four entries. The one I take pride in most is, of course, the San Francisco Giants World Series Parade in the Arts/Entertainment Special category. It was a live broadcast of the parade, from all angles. Doing the 'play by play' is one of the most memorable highlights in my broadcasting career. The excitement was palpable and contagious. You couldn't help but be caught up in all the pride the city was feeling that day. The crew did a top-notch job, from the directors and photographers to the reporters on the street. Nothing like teamwork, both on and off the field!"

**Lisa Kim/San Jose**

"I love the pain. There's nothing like a good long cry at the end of Emmy® night. I've been nominated several times but have never won. I now realize I'll never catch **Wayne Freedman** with his 300 or so Emmy® awards and besides, who has the shelf space? So I'm in it for the pain. Like a long distance runner chasing that endorphin high. I ran for the Board of Governors to learn the secret to winning. They won't give me the code. I've won all the others; Peabody, APTRA, RTNDA, Best in West, even Best Celebrity Waiter. I won a tobacco spitting contest, too. (True). But an Emmy® award? So it's my annual ritual to test the pain threshold. If I ever win, I might turn into the anti-Freedman and stop. Then I'll walk into the newly constructed Palace of Me and kneel before the shrine holding one, solitary, golden Emmy® award. After that I'll dream of world peace." – **Ken Wayne/Oakland**

"Remember 2010? Recession, layoffs, hiring freezes. We thought, "Let's do a show that inspires people and gives them a look inside companies that are hiring right now." *@ Work* was our answer. We submitted it for "Instructional Program." The show featured specific, available jobs and interviews with hiring managers to tell jobseekers how to land the gig. Each episode also featured an entrepreneur to share advice, tips from career expert **Marty Nemko**, and profiles of jobseekers who could 'pitch' themselves. Our team of three put this show together with creative time management and we hope to bring home an Emmy® award!" - **Vicky Nguyen/San Jose**

*New Question:* The members of our chapter work in regions that vary greatly in population, climate and demographics. What do you like best about your market? Tell us in 100 words or less. Email your response to [offcamera@emmysf.tv](mailto:offcamera@emmysf.tv) by March 22nd. You can also post your reply on the Forum at [www.emmysf.tv](http://www.emmysf.tv), or answer on Facebook or Twitter.