

## 50 Crazy Years in Broadcasting by Bryan Norcross

### A Science and Radio Kid in the 60s

I was a nerdy kid. That's me with the computerish machine I built for my eighth and ninth-grade science project. I called it a *Voltage to Digital Converter and Binary Adder*. The chart below the crooked title sign was about "Residue Arithmetic," which the "computer" used to do the calculations. None of judges knew what I was talking about, and my display was cheesy.



It was an early lesson that communications trumps function. In spite of it being a clever and novel system, the fact that nobody got it was the bottom line. I didn't win.

I also had the radio bug. Ever since I rode my bike to elementary school in Cinnaminson, New Jersey with WIBG (Wibbage, baby) from Philadelphia rocking my transistor radio mounted on the handlebars, I was hooked on the rhythm, the patter, and production of Top 40 radio. I felt like I lived in Wibbage-land, as the disk jockeys called the Philadelphia area, and it felt good.

In radio it's called programming. In television it's called producing. Both are the same art: mixing the raw materials of the talent, the music, the news, the ideas, and the production to craft something bigger than the sum of the parts.

My parents moved us to the Melbourne, Florida area in 1962, as the Apollo land-a-man-on-the-moon program was cranking up. The local Top 40 station was WKKO 860 AM from Cocoa, about 20 miles away. The hit music, the jingles, and 20/20 news became the soundtrack of my mornings on the school bus and weekends at the beach. But KO-860 was a daytimer. When the sun went down, they went off the air, and the AM radio dial exploded with the royalty of radio. Fifty-thousand-watt radio stations from big cities in the North and Midwest came booming in.

A combination of the favorable atmospheric conditions of the 1960's, and far fewer stations on the AM band than there are now, let me tune in and learn from the great Top 40 stations in the eastern U.S. WLS boomed in from Chicago, KAAY from Little Rock, WOWO from Ft. Wayne, WKBW from Buffalo, and the big one, WABC, lit up my radio from New York City.

We still went to the Jersey Shore during the summer into the mid 60s. There I could switch from 77 WABC (with the greatest jingles ever) from New York to the Philly sound of WIBG, the "Big 99." And beginning in 1966, "Famous 56" WFIL started playing the hits and competing with Wibbage. There was magic coming out of my Penncrest seven-transistor AM radio.

If you've never heard Hy Ski O'Rooney McVoutie O'Zoot, the amazing Hy Lit on WIBG, start his show every night with, "Calling all my beats, my beards, my Buddhist cats, my big-time spenders, my money lenders, my teetotalers, my elbow benders, hog callers, home-run hitters, finger-poppin' daddys, and cool babysitters, we work from now till 10 tonight," treat yourself on YouTube. You'll hear that and more in this interview.

### **[Hy Lit on WIBG in Philadelphia](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74eZghrhpLM)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74eZghrhpLM>

Hy Lit said Philadelphia in a way that you knew the city was great: FFFIL-a-DEL-phia. He and his like were artisans, and their medium was syllables. Amazing.

The disk jockeys had rhythm. The radio station had rhythm. It was more than just the music. Together they had a soul.

I only got to listen to the greatest disk jockey of them all during summers at the Jersey Shore – he was on in the afternoon from 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM, and WABC didn't skip from New York to Florida until after dark. But I was always thrilled with Dan Ingram lit up my radio.

### **[Dan Ingram on WABC, New York on June 25, 1966](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4bZnbj5OY)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4bZnbj5OY>

There were other greats, of course, like the Real Don Steele on KHJ in Los Angeles and others, but none were as consistently great for decades like Dan Ingram. He was an inspiration to everyone who loved the magic of Top 40 radio.

An epiphany occurred to me during my Top-40-listening years: all radio stations *could* play the same music (more or less – payola notwithstanding), but some radio stations simply sounded better than the others. Certain programmers had the touch. They were artists. They sweated the details.

This realization came into play years later when I got involved with television news. All TV stations *could* cover the same news, so the art had to be in the choices managers and producers made. And indeed it was.

These ideas blossomed when I got to Denver in 1975. But in high school, my mind was on radio, and how I could become an artist, also known as a disk jockey.

**[Click here to continue.](#) Up next: The Radio Years**