



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

Radio War Stories

Diddums R.I.P.

By Sean O'Neel

[September 2010] Many stations have mascots, even "house pets." Of course, it is important that they not go into places where ... erm ... they should not go, lest they assume room temperature. But, just try telling that to a cat!

I was either a party or a witness to some fairly auspicious WDVH moments - some of them hilarious, others not so much fun – but still vital to the legacy of the station. One such moment was the untimely passing of Diddums, the Station Cat.

SUNDAY MORNING GOING DOWN

It was on a Sunday morning in late 1978. I was on my third stint at "The Ranch" and was, by that time, Program Director. The late Kelly (Godwin) Wynn and I were engaged, and she was working part time at the station. Since she had not yet passed the Element 9 for Broadcast Endorsement, Kelly was, under the FCC Rules of the day, not permitted to read the transmitter meters and sign the log.

I was more than happy to take care of the operator duties – those Sunday mornings gave me the opportunity to work on music and any number of other administrative tasks.

On this particular Sunday, the usually well-behaved Diddums was simply running amok. I do not know what had gotten into him but, at one point, he climbed into the back of the big, antique green radio in the front lobby. I fished him out, and he slinked off into more mischief.

SILENCE

About ten minutes passed and then, as I was typing away, the on-air monitor housed in the green radio went dead.

I heard noise coming from the radio, but no signal. So, I got up and dashed across the lobby, and could see Kelly through the plate glass window – gesticulating and cursing, not knowing what was going on. I stuck my head into the control room and asked if the program was still "on."

When Kelly answered "yes," I instinctively hit the "Plate" lever on "Big Mac," our Main transmitter. As I tapped that lever, I heard a familiar, yet uncharacteristically plaintive "meow."

That was *not* a good sign.

THE STATION COMES BACK

My heart began to sink as I fired up the then new RCA Ampliphase Transmitter and switched the router over, getting us back on the air as soon as possible.

I just knew that poor Diddums still was somewhere within the high-voltage maw of that beast we called Big Mac – and that I had to begin the grim search. Kelly was crying and generally freaking out, and I was quite upset myself. But I collected myself enough to shut down what I thought was the main breaker to the stately old Gates transmitter.

I began to tentatively open a seemingly endless series of compartment doors, when finally I saw those two little, grey feet – the worse for wear having touched a big, copper strap resting on a ceramic insulator. I instinctively reached for the discharge rod to try and drain any charged capacitors *before* retrieving the kitty. My payback was a huge spark.

Something told me to try again – and again there were more fireworks. A third touch, another fireball. I told myself that the \$200 a week I was earning definitely was *not* worth enough to meet Diddums on the "other side." This was a job for "The Old Man."

Thus, I called our Chief Engineer, George Fogle, and he somehow managed to recover Diddums without getting himself fried.

POSTMORTEM

The following day was awkward indeed. There was a funerary atmosphere throughout the station, for Diddums the cat was as beloved as any of the two-legged critters who had ever darkened the WDVH door.

Kelly always felt that she was to blame for Diddums' demise, but it was really nobody's fault – he was simply being a rambunctious cat that day. If there is any blame to be laid, it falls on my shoulders since I was the "operator on duty" and should have kept the door to the transmitter room closed.

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Sean O'Neal never had another cat fry on his watch, but he says he will never forget Diddums. Sean's email is seano@concerts.com

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