

Williamson CLUSTER PAPER

Faith & Values

WAY-FM's Jeff Brown

DJ finds faith, then a new career

By Art Toalston

Jeff Brown went on the air at a Top-40 radio station in Indianapolis soon after finishing six-month of study at a small radio school.

But nine months later, it seemed like his first radio job might be his last: He got fired.

Now, Brown calls it “the first domino to fall in my finding God.”

He also found a career path that now places him at Franklin’s WAY-FM contemporary Christian radio station. He’s the station’s operations director in addition to co-hosting the aptly named “Jeff and Stace” morning show with Stace Whitmire.

The Sunday after he was fired in 1988, “I was in church because that’s where you went on Easter Sunday and maybe Christmas.”

But there was something about that Easter sermon that propelled Brown, then 22, to kneel by his bed that afternoon and ask God “to make himself real to me.”

“I also asked that he show me specifically the career path he would have me choose.” That night, Brown also listened to a local Christian radio station, Love 98, for the first time.

Two days later at his dad’s service station, where Brown began working after his firing, Love 98’s sales manager came by to talk about trading radio ads for gasoline fill-ups.

“All I heard was, ‘I’m Dick Sickels from Love 98.’ ... This was my sign, what I had prayed about. I had a tape and resume in his hand the next day.” Two weeks later, Brown was on the air at Love 98.

Now at WAY-FM, Brown helps in shaping “what we’re about musically” – whether “we have the right songs on the air.” And he’s involved in “what goes on between the songs, what’s called ‘imaging,’” including the listener-supported station’s on-air promotions and business announcements.

Brown voices amazement at the daily positive response from WAY-FM’s listeners – something that “has never happened in any other radio station where I’ve worked.”

“When you see some of these [e-mails], you see people realizing that suicide wasn’t the way to go, or cutting themselves wasn’t the way to live their lives. ... [H]earing the positive songs we play or a



ART TOALSTON

Jeff Brown, morning co-host & operations director at WAY-FM.

particular message in a specific song ... was the thing that got them out of that bad situation.”

Yes, there are negative e-mails and phone calls, but Brown’s tally of the positive outweighing the negative is “20 or 30 to 1.”

Among the “coolest” e-mails: those from parents enthused at how WAY-FM reinforces what they’re trying to teach their kids at home and at church or parents who had been uncomfortable with their kids “singing everything they’re hearing” on other radio stations.

“Music moves people,” Brown reflects, “and we’re purposefully playing music that impacts lives in a positive way.”

While Brown and other WAY-FM personalities may talk about “American Idol” or whatever may be generating an “everybody-is-watching-it” buzz, he notes that they “strive to find that ‘sweet spot’ where faith and culture mix.”

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