









I discovered the world of popular music on the Panasonic cassette radio I received at Christmas, 1972. After listening for hours a day to different radio personalities, I decided I wanted to be a radio disc jockey or at least involved in broadcasting in some way. Also waiting in the wings was a family insurance business. Even then, I knew the risk and reward each career path offered. Little did I know I would be lucky enough to have the opportunity to travel both paths instead making one choice at the fork in the road.

There was no radio station at Deerfield in 1975, my freshman year. Like my fellow students, I was wrapped up in academics and sports all day. And the thought of starting one? I didn't know where to begin. But two fellow youth hockey players knew of my passion. One, Doug Stotz, was a genius and assembled a contraption that broadcast an AM signal to about 20 households. My neighbor Jamie Hanley assisted by hooking up a turntable, and my neighborhood station was live. I was playing the hits for ten dedicated listeners

Hockey became my favorite sport in the 70s and if I wasn't playing, I was watching my neighbors' games with a microphone in hand, calling

the action. Although sports broadcasting wasn't on my radar initially, calling the games and broadcasting them on my station on a delayed basis was great.

After Deerfield, I attended Babson College. I had outgrown the homemade station and wondered what lay ahead. Babson didn't have a radio station either, but I partnered in a student mobile DJ service that played at many colleges and high schools, and my broadcasting fix continued to be satisfied.

Then in 1982 Mark Beaubein '83 and a team of students did the necessary work to get Deerfield a student radio station, and WGAJ-FM 91.7 was born. Beaubien was the station's first student general manager, and he told me the time involved in launching WGAJ made keeping his grades up a challenge, adding "I never slept." He also had at his disposal faculty member and engineer Jim Hemmingway, who was invaluable to the process.

I reunited with childhood friends Tim Hanley '84 and Danny Smith '85 after college graduation, and watched the duo and others spin the vinyl at WGAJ. With their help and Jim Hemmingway's,

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I finally secured an after curfew Tuesday night 10PM show in 1983.

It was always a full house at WGAJ in the 80s. In my first few years, I taught students the ropes of broadcasting. To get a show during the school year was a challenge, but faculty station manager Wes Brown was an ally-helping me access WGAJ and keep my show during the summer. During the summer, I was able to move to "primetime," and it was then that I forged a relationship with Ed Sanborn of Record Town in Greenfield. Since the mid 70s, I charted music popularity with limited access to local record sales. With his help, I combined sales records with station airplay and requests I received, and produced a WGAJ music survey that was distributed at the store. He also donated records and tapes to give away. This was a far cry from what my homemade radio station listeners won: scratched 45s I threw out my window or my half eaten Village Pizza grinder. The 80s were the heyday of WGAJ.

Radio and popular music underwent some unprecedented changes in the 90s. Compact discs replaced vinyl; music formats splintered; country and rap became more mainstream. This wasn't a big deal for WGAJ. One of the truly great things about the station: no format. Lee Magee, faculty adviser after Wes Brown, kept that tradition. But neither he nor anyone in the music industry could imagine what was to come at the end of the decade: music on the Internet and the popularization of MP3s.

At first there wasn't a big reduction in student interest, but I could sense that would change

as the millennium grew closer. As music stores joined terrestrial radio in the fight to stay alive, one casualty was my relationship with Record Town.

As the year 2000 passed, the final station advisors, Sean Terwilliger and Chris Stacy, did everything in their power to keep WGAJ alive. But returning to dorms or home to listen to radio was going the way of the 45-rpm a decade earlier. New challengers to conventional radio, such as the iPod and satellite radio, were becoming more popular. Student interest as radio personalities and listeners declined steadily as the decade progressed, and by the spring of 2008 I was one of the few bodies climbing the stairs of the Memorial Building with music in tow. When Chris Stacy informed me we were going off the air for good this past May, I was disappointed but hardly surprised.

I broadcast WGAJ's last show on May 19, 2009. I had logged 1200 shows over 26 years. In 1993, thanks to my experience at WGAJ, I became one of the voices of UMass hockey. WGAJ never turned out to be the breeding ground for future big market broadcasters, but it helped groom me for what I do now, and allowed me to live my dream. I have been a DJ for more than a quarter of a century, and for that I am forever grateful.

Brock Hines lives in Montague, MA, with his wife Laurie. He is president of the Albert B. Allen Insurance Agency in Greenfield and the Powell Insurance Agency in Northfield and is beginning his 17th season as hockey color commentator on the UMass Sports Network.

