

One of the few WNYU part-time professionals was chief engineer student Mark J. Milchman, who consulted with [New York City](#) public radio station WRVR-FM. Mark introduced me to the chief engineer at WRVR. I was hired as a nineteen-year-old part-time engineer / mixing control board operator in 1971 and fired after one year for an incident of sloppy work. My bad. Moving forward, attention to detail was not just a priority but a must!

Never burn bridges. WRVR radio would hire me again as a part-time news writer under Robert Siegel (who went on to NPR). I was also fortunate to serve as a part-time jazz announcer (1975–1976) at WRVR.

“Put it this way: Jazz is a good barometer of freedom. In its beginnings, the United States of America spawned certain ideals of freedom and independence through which, eventually, jazz was evolved, and the music is so free that many people say it is the only unhampered, unhindered expression of complete freedom yet produced in this country.”

—Duke Ellington

Jazz lovers and the listeners of this music on the radio are very passionate. The postal letters would flow into the station. This condensed [note](#) (during my second WRVR run) is from Brian D., addressed to me. Brian did not date his letter, but the postmark on the envelope says 1975:

He says, quote: “People like yourself, who are either lucky and/or skillful enough to be delegated power must be always mindful of the responsibilities and ramifications of that power. Now RVR pretentiously lays claim to the throne of being “the jazz station” of N.Y. You and RVR seem hell-bent on milking it for everything it’s worth.” End of Quote.

Page one of his two-page letter contained some credible criticisms. He didn’t like the new trends embracing his music: jazz fusion, smooth jazz, and disco. The tone of page two of his letter was worse. That’s when the cursing, ranting, and obscenities started to fly.

“Your mindless calling for Pharoah Sanders and Archie Shepp to “climb on the band wagon” almost made me retch and it made you out to be a pimp...” (musicians Sanders, and Shepp are hard-core jazz purists.)

Some listeners just don't have a sense of humor! Other respected diehard players like Herbie Hancock eventually experimented with the changing times!

It's too easy today to get hate mail from the 'haters' who flock in by text or social media. Before internet, listeners with strong opinions had to be motivated to write and communicate by postal mail. Most of the letters I received were upbeat, even at jazz radio 106.7 RVR FM.

Listeners write by postal mail to request songs, to express their admiration for what you are doing and very often to ask you to record songs. I never recorded songs to send to listeners via an audio cassette or tape. They would have to create their own mix tapes!

Fifteen-year-old Pete H. wrote me in a one-page letter in 1982. I won't include his praise for me, but this is the essence of his note:, [quote](#)

"I'm interested in becoming a D.J. Could you tell me how you started in the radio business. For example, what college did you go to? What experience did you have? How would you suggest I get started? I'm in 9th grade, about to go into high school. I call you off and on, every once in a while. But, I'll call you Tuesday at 9:00 pm okay?"[End Quote](#)

Yes, he called me at the radio station. I often got letters like this asking for advice about how to break into the industry. Many of these letters are still in my possession. It's another reason why I decided to [share](#) my story [with](#) you.

After losing the WRVR gig on the first go-around, [Manhattan's](#) WLIB and WBLS were waiting for me further uptown. I performed similar part-time technical duties there, but the desire of being an on-air professional was growing.

A shout-out to several radio pros who had a covert open-door policy at several Big Apple area radio stations. I slipped in to see them broadcast live while learning their methods. This was a thrill. The station policy at most facilities was clear—no visitors, especially at night. Luckily, if you called a deejay by phone and then arrived at the security desk, these good guys (they were mostly men in this era) would grant

permission for you (and friends) to come in and watch. Thank you, WWDJ AM and WPIX FM personalities, for these evening rendezvous adventures!

One of my college buddies, Pete Walton, was a part-time talk show producer at [New York City's](#) WMCA AM, so getting access to see the *Leon Lewis Show* late at night was an easier studio infiltration project. What a “Dyn-o-mite” surprise to see Jimmy JJ Walker as Leon’s overnight control board engineer! This was before Walker’s fame as an actor on television’s *Good Times*.

Other than watching those whom you admire work and taking lots of mental notes about their approaches to the craft, what else could a young person do to break into the radio game?

How creative must you be to land your first dedicated announcing gig when you don’t have a contact list full of industry insiders?

While still a student, I purchased the 1972 *Broadcasting Yearbook* late in the fall. This massive (and heavy) printed directory listed all USA radio and television stations along with their broadcast frequency, programming format, phone number, ownership, and executives in charge. Would this insider resource be my outsider ticket to success?

A 1971 Chevrolet Vega purchased new for \$2,100 was my first (and only) really crappy car. This all-time ‘really bad’ vehicle was on its second engine from a junk yard after only 15,000 miles. The first engine seized.

“Sorry,” the Chevrolet dealership general manager said, “it’s out of warranty!” Maybe this lemon-mobile and a prayer would provide transportation to a small suburban radio station announcing job close to New York City?

Using the *Broadcasting Yearbook*, I headed to the top of the New York State radio listings, arriving in the town of Beacon. This was too far from home, so I passed on calling them. Binghamton was next, 180 miles from New York City, depending on the route. The Binghamton program director was gracious enough to talk with me. Unfortunately, \$3 per hour would not justify dispatching an audition tape to him.

Maybe it was serendipity, but I hit the jackpot by the time I got to the M's in the directory and checked out Middletown, New York. In Orange County, Middletown was just 80 miles from [New York City](#) if you used part of the New York State Thruway to get there.

Middletown WALL radio program director Larry Michaels (real name, Larry Berger, who later became program director of WRIF FM in Detroit and WPLJ FM in New York City) liked my WNYU audition tape and hired me in early 1973. For a great part-time-opportunity on Saturday and Sunday, it was off to 'WALL' land!