

SHATTERED HOPES

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

I was probably 13 years-old before it really settled in my mind that being a professional baseball player was not in my future. Considering the fact that I had never walked and, barring a miracle, would never walk without crutches, it seemed like a safe conclusion.

Now that my first dream was not to be realized, I set my hopes on another career. By this time I was at least smart enough to consider an occupation that would be practical for someone in my physical condition. For some reason, I decided to become a radio and television announcer.

Throughout High School I took extra courses in creative writing and speech. During my first two years of college I majored in speech. I was doing everything possible to refine my communication skills.

Upon graduating from Junior College, I was faced with a very difficult decision. The State of Colorado was providing tuition for me to attend school as a part of their rehabilitation program for people with physical disabilities. I had to choose between attending the University of Denver or enrolling in radio and television school. The state said they would pay for one or the other but I must decide before continuing.

By attending radio and television school, it seemed that a career in broadcasting was just around the corner. It was a nine month course of study. However, the short-term was not as appealing as the fact that the radio and television school had their own radio station. I would be on the air in just a few months, gaining valuable experience.

I started evening classes with a group of seven other hopeful media celebrities. We were all very anxious to have our first experiences in front of the microphone.

Classes started at a rapid pace. We were quickly placed in simulated radio and television situations. The school provided excellent hands-on training.

The radio station that was affiliated with the school was a very obscure FM station. The owner of the station and the school had been in possession of the broadcasting license for years. He had never developed the station to its potential, using it primarily as a training tool.

At that time, the radio station was broadcasting "soul" music. All of the artists were black and the playlist consisted of musicians like The Jackson Five (including a very young Michael Jackson), James Brown, and Stevie Wonder. It was a culture that was totally foreign to me.

Not only was I the youngest student in the class, I was also the only one who did not have a day job. This was to my benefit since it allowed me to work during the day at the radio station. Within a very short time I was made the afternoon newsmen.

Our newsroom came completely equipped with nothing. We did not have access to any news services or networks. The news was pirated from other stations. I was expected to have a short newscast three times per hour. In between, I would record other stations, rewrite their stories, and edit their tapes for sound bites. Not only did I learn how to speak on the radio, I learned a great deal about news writing and editing.

Funky Frank and I were the only two non-black voices on the radio station. He decided to give me the nickname of "Terrible Terry." I don't know if it was the only adjective that he knew which started with the letter "t" or if he was offering an opinion of my work.

During election coverage one year, our station received an award for the best news coverage by an FM station. We sent students to various campaign hot spots and I stole election returns from other stations. By this time I had developed a system that allowed me to record, rewrite and edit a story in a matter of minutes. Our newscasts even featured the voices of winners and losers, all recorded from other stations.

With the coming of graduation I was encouraged to find work at another station in order to make room for a new crop of students. Somehow I secured a job at radio station KSLV in Monte Vista, Colorado. It was a small town, deep in the San Luis Valley of the Rocky Mountains. It was four hours from home but seemed like four years.

I was offered a job with a salary, rather than an hourly wage. This seemed prestigious until I realized it meant they could work me long hours without extra pay. I went to work early in the morning and stayed until late in the evening, six days a week.

We played country music and I mostly did the news and other features. One of those features required reading the daily hog prices. I was handed a sheet of paper covered with numbers that meant nothing to my city way of thinking. I am sure that no one listening, even a hog farmer, could decipher the meaning of my hog reports.

After two months, I experienced the merciful hand of God. A man who had previously worked at the station wanted his old job back. Since I was considered to be on "probation," my employment was terminated. It was the first time I had ever been fired from a job, but it was a great lesson in the harsh realities of the broadcasting industry. There has never been an announcer who has not been fired several times.

That was the end of my radio career for several years.

Several years later, after returning to college to finish my studies, I had the opportunity to support myself by working at radio stations. I was first employed at station KVOP in Plainview, Texas. It was the most disorganized situation I had ever experienced.

The walls of the studio were filled with racks and racks of records. There was no playlist or any other guidance about the music to be played. Each announcer grabbed favorite songs and made up his own program. At the time it was the only radio station in town and that is the only way to explain how it stayed in business.

After working for about a year, I asked the station manager, Tut Tawater (I did not make up this name), if I could have time off to go home to Colorado for spring break. He said it would be fine and I enjoyed a week's vacation. Upon returning to Plainview, I stopped by the station to check the work schedule. Not finding my name, I assumed he did not know I was back in town.

Over the next few days I continually examined the schedule but never did find my name. Finally, I went to see the station manager and asked straightforwardly, "Do I still work here?"

He said, "No!"

I left and began a search for another job.

Several months later, two of his announcers quit and he was desperate. He was having to fill the entire day with only two disc jockeys. When he called to ask if I wanted to go back to work, I agreed to meet with him.

As I sat in his office, Tawater explained his predicament and offered me a job. I indicated that I might be interested but there were certain requirements concerning days off, hours, and pay, that would have to be met.

Out of desperation, Tawater agreed to all my demands. I must admit that I was little bit surprised. However, I did not allow his "generosity" to affect my decision and I quickly answered, "I'll have to think about it and let you know in a few days."

That was our last conversation. Perhaps it is wrong to be proud of such a tacky response but it was one of the rare moments in life when you get to give as you have received.

I did have one other job at a radio station but it was simply to bide time while Sharon finished her degree so we could leave for seminary. By that time my hopes of ever being a major player in the world of radio were totally gone.

It was a dream that had begun ten years earlier. Even though our dreams are not always realized, they play an important role in life. Often they are the motivating force that

carries us toward excellence. Real fulfillment comes only when our dreams are in line with God's plans.