



A Ray of Sunshine

By Mikell Worley

Like the sun, Nancy Ryan rises early in the morning to brighten the day of approximately 500,000 radio listeners who tune into FM station BOB 94.9 every weekday for the *Nancy & Newman* time slot. Nancy and her on-air partner, Newman, have spent the past ten years working together as one of the most popular duos in local radio.

Though getting up in the wee hours to go to work every morning is challenging, Nancy says on her BOB.com bio that she, “can’t imagine doing anything else in the world, even if I won Powerball.” In fact, it almost seems as if the career chose the girl, rather than the other way around. “Charleston, West Virginia, is my

home town,” Nancy says. “I was 16 when I got my start in radio. I delivered newspapers for the manager of the local radio station. He was impressed because I was very conscientious. He recognized my work ethic and asked me to see him about a job when I reached 16 years of age. When I got my driver’s license, I took him up on the offer and he put me on the air immediately.”

By the time she was a high school senior, she had her own show on the midnight to 6:00 a.m. shift. “They [the station managers] allowed me to take the job, as long as I promised to continue and graduate from high school. One student who worked there

before me dropped out of school and was fired immediately. I was always in trouble in school because I loved to talk, but I continued and graduated from Charleston High School in 1981. I even had to cut my senior prom short so I could be on the air for my shift,” laughs Nancy.

Following high school, Nancy continued to work in radio doing overnight, midday, and morning shifts, while she attended West Virginia State College, where she majored in marketing.

Then in 1988 Nancy moved to Harrisburg and took a job with Todd Jeffers at the radio stations Z 107 and KOOL 94.9. In 1994 she

left the area for a job with a great morning show in a bigger market in Columbus, Ohio. As it turned out she hated it the whole experience and called the general manager at KOOL 94.9 to ask if she could have her old job back. "I returned to the Harrisburg area in 1995 to work at MAGIC 94.9, and was married in 1996 to Brad Rodgers."

The *Nancy & Newman* show did not happen immediately on her return to the station. It wasn't until January 29, 2001, that Nancy met Newman, her new on-air partner. They hit it off immediately and began a very successful and very popular partnership. As it happens, that day was memorable for another reason. "That day I also found out that I was finally pregnant. My husband and I had been trying for more than four years. I didn't know Newman, so I didn't mention it that day, but I did share the news with him later – on the air," remembers Nancy.

"I asked Newman if he could tell by looking at a sonogram whether a child was a boy or a girl. He had two boys, and as he reached for the sonogram, he announced with confidence that he would be able to tell. After looking it over, he said he couldn't tell, and as he handed it back to me, he noticed my name and realized it was mine. Then he exclaimed, 'I can't believe I didn't say "Holy Crap" on the air!'"

Nancy and Newman had great fun with the response from listeners, and they have continued to surprise and delight them for more than a decade. They have shared every aspect of their personal lives. "I had problems with my pregnancy and I had to do the broadcast from home. At one point we thought we would have to broadcast from my hospital room," recalls Nancy.

Her daughter Hannasy was born on August 1, 2001, late on a Wednesday night, at 10:30. Newman didn't know, so she had to figure out a clever way to tell him. Naturally, she used the radio, "I called into the show at 7:30 the next morning, and he was doing a bit with the listeners about naming the baby, discussing different names, and what they meant. I asked if they had mentioned the name Hannasy? He said, 'No,' then hesitated. 'Wait a second! You had the baby!'"

Once again, the listeners were thrilled to be included in the breaking news. "I had several doctors during the course of my pregnancy. [One of them] who had worked with me,

because I was high risk, found out about it in his car on the way to work that morning," laughs Nancy. She obviously delights in creating surprise.

However, the surprises aren't always so pleasant. In fact, less than a year ago, the news that Nancy shared was devastating. "Last year, the Wednesday before Thanksgiving in 2010, I found a lump on the right side of my breast – it was a knot. I didn't mention it to my husband until after the holiday, but fortunately, I knew where to turn," says Nancy.

During the previous summer of 2009, Nancy had begun doing on-air "live reads," which is a conversational, less formal method of advertising. Live reads engage the listeners in a way that traditional advertising does not. One of the live reads that Nancy did was about the Oakwood Breast Care Center in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. In the live read, "we talked about the importance of self-examinations, the yearly mammograms, and other aspects of breast health. I had no history of breast cancer in my family, and the conversations made me uncomfortable," remembers Nancy.

Nevertheless, the information proved invaluable, and because of having done that particular live read, Nancy was prepared for

when it happened to her. "Everything they told me came true. When I found the lump, it was such a relief to know exactly where to turn," says Nancy.

On January 24, 2011, doctors performed surgery. There was no mention of it on the air. Nancy was away from work for more than a week, and her listeners began to worry and wonder why. "I was supposed to be gone for two weeks, but I returned after a week and a half. We waited until after the Super Bowl to talk about it," explains Nancy.

Nancy began a series of six chemotherapy sessions on March 4. "I went through chemo and didn't take a day off from work. My listeners were with me every step of the way. I had an opportunity to educate and support others. One woman had had an order for a mammogram sitting on her desk for two years. She went for her check up.

"I have a strong and supportive husband. When this first happened, my husband talked to a friend whose wife had been through this. Now people are contacting him, and he is giving others support, encouragement, and direction," Nancy observes.

When Nancy's hair fell out, she was prepared. "Hair's not a big thing. When my hair started to fall out, I pulled it back into





a ponytail and my daughter cut it. I got a good wig, and I haven't let myself look like I have cancer. I put on the brightest face I can," she says.

She has had a lot of support from her friends at the station too. When Newman and Nancy celebrated their 10-year anniversary as an on-air team at the BOB Birthday Bash on April 16, 2011, Newman and five other male coworkers shaved their heads during

the bash in honor of Nancy's courage. "They shaved their heads for ME," Nancy exclaims. "I stood next to them on stage, and in front of a crowd of 5,000 people, I took off my wig." It was an inspiring and moving moment for everyone present.

Radio provides an opportunity to lighten and brighten our days. We are richer for hearing the latest songs from our favorite artists, discovering new talent, and

reminiscing to the songs that stir memories from years ago. Through listening to the radio, we can share jokes about the political and economic situation and thereby exercise our shared frustration with it all, as well as learn about community events and resources. When life-saving information is added to the mix offered by radio, it elevates the medium to a different level.

The impact made from Nancy Ryan's willingness to share her all aspects of her life with her listeners is immeasurable. She encourages them to be proactive with their health and comforts their loved ones and caregivers. Nancy, you educate, motivate, inspire, and charm. You make us laugh and fill our days with brightness and joy — Thank you. ♣

Mikell Worley is an artist and writer. She is the founder and president of Mikell's Treasures. (www.mikellstreasures.com) She is the managing editor and feature interviewer for *Women-CONNECT*. Mikell has illustrated several books. She is an advocate for women and children.