

Shania Twain Meets Big Bang Theory's Raj

One benefit of working in TV stations, is I was always able to have a TV in my office to keep an eye on the product and what we were broadcasting. At least that is how that benefit is rationalized. However, if there was a ballgame on, I could usually find it.

I was working at KAKE-TV in Wichita and we had a local morning 1 hour show at 11a.m. called "*The Ol' Mike and Mogie Show*." Ol' Mike Oatman was 50% owner of KFDI radio, and a legend in country music circles, as he is in the Country Music Hall of Fame as a D.J. Ol' Mike came by daily with his dog Traveler, and joined co-host Mogie Langston, for our local morning show.

If country music stars were ever in Wichita, Mike had the connections to get them on the show. For example, his good friend Charlie Daniels, was a regular, and Daniels came to Wichita every Spring to host his benefit golf tournament for Starkey Inc. Daniels raised over \$700,000 for the non-profit serving those with intellectual disabilities, by the time of his 20th tournament. He also had a song on the Country Charts entitled "Wichita Jail." I'm not sure if it was autobiographical.

The year was 1992, and I was in my office with the TV on in the background, when Ol' Mike said he wanted to introduce a new country star with her first album soon to be released. Ol' Mike wanted to let us know that this young lady was going to make it big, and we are very excited to have her on the show. "Let's hear it for Shania Twain."

Shania had 2 background musicians with her, and when she began singing, it was like WOW! I turned up the volume on my TV and dropped whatever I was doing to watch. When she concluded, Mike and Mogie said, "What I'd tell you, How great is that. Shania will be back with another song, later in the show."

I decided to go and hear the next song live in the TV studio. Who wouldn't want to go down the hall to hear Shania sing live? When I got in the studio, the 2 musicians had gone out to smoke, whatever musicians smoke at 11:15 in the morning. Shania told them she'd stay, so she and I were standing alone behind the Camera Men and Ol' Mike and Mogie, on the set. I was glad that the "*On The Air*," rule on the set, is no talking. Because I suddenly felt like Raj from Big Bang Theory, and was only able to offer Shania a smile of acknowledgement.

But when the show went to a 2 minute commercial break , and we were free to talk. The appropriate thing to do, would be for me to turn and introduce myself and say some kind words to welcome her, and how impressed I was with her first song. But instead, I got what I call "*The Shania Twain Freeze*." I knew that if I opened my mouth, what would come out, is something like, "You beautiful sing, me like, here good, thank you."

I felt like Shania found my total silence awkward, especially since I should have played the role of a gracious host and welcome her and compliment her on the performance. But given my likely Raj response to the young Shania, even now, all these years later my words would come out as, "Nice sing, hear you welcome, glad pretty, meet you,"

Although my silence may have seemed discourteous, I'm sure I made the right choice in the time we spent together, to keep my mouth shut and just occasionally nod and smile. Still to this day, whenever I watch an episode of The Big Bang Theory, I think of meeting Shania Twain, but being unable to speak.

Crossing paths with A-list celebrities normally only happened a few times a year. But those occasions were super-sized at the biggest yearly showbiz type event of television, the NATPE.

The National Association of Television Program Executives Convention. This is an annual event where Station Managers shop for the TV shows to help fill their schedules. These programs are needed to fill the fringe time periods and hold on to the audience where the Network does not have their news and entertainment programs, and where a station does not run local newscasts. These are the time slots that reruns of situational comedies, game shows, and talk shows run, and you want the best shows to hold or bring in more audience in these time slots.

At NATPE, I was glad Linda could join me, as this is a fun event, and frankly, she has always been better than me at carrying small talk conversations and chatting with strangers. She is a natural and can talk to anybody. Just wind her up and watch her go.

There are comfortable promotional sets throughout the convention hall, where the stars are present, often reluctantly, to promote their shows. So as you walk around the hall, you might catch your self saying, "There's the cast of Seinfeld. Let's chat with them." Everyone likes to talk with Linda, and, I can just stand and smile. There's the Drew Carey Cast, let's go there after meeting the cast of Everybody Loves Raymond." "Wait there goes Ellen, she's talking with Oprah." "Oh my, look at the crowd around the cast from Friends, we couldn't get near them, if we tried." "There's Dr. Phil, Dr. Oz, Entertainment Tonight's Mary Hart and John Tesh. Pat Sajak and Vanna White from Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy's Alex Trebek." "Oh, but wait, we have to go say hello to Tim Allen and the cast from our favorite *Tool Time*."

I don't know if this event is required or necessary to make the right program decisions, but the NATPE was a great experience. Dinner is where you got some time with others in the business and the "stars" would be scattered at various tables. You can tell where you rank by which star is seated next to you. I was seated next to "*Bill Nye the Science Guy*." No disrespect to Bill Nye, but Tim Allen, Jerry Seinfeld or Jennifer Anniston he's not.

I felt very comfortable chatting with Bill Nye, however, who seemed a little shy, at least when attending such an event and seated next to a stranger. Since I carried his show on our station, and I watched his children's educational program, with a smart young son, we would be in the show's target market, and we had great conversation, at least through the salad and on to the main course.

I do have strong, but well-researched views about creation and evolution, that many scientists do not share. I didn't want to miss this opportunity of discussion with Bill Nye, but I've since learned his field of study is actually Mechanical Engineering. I did toss out the statement, that I had recently read where Charles Darwin had said, "To suppose that the eye, could have evolved by natural selection, is absurd in the highest degree." I would have enjoyed Nye's discussion on this issue, but he didn't take the bait, and left me wondering of his response to this day.

Our dinner was interrupted by the very gregarious Regis Philbin, who came by to say hello to our table. He was modestly polite, as he acknowledged each of us at the table one by one, until he concluded, and laid it on thick for my wife, Linda. "Oh my, look at you," Regis said. "You are stunning. What's your name? Beautiful Linda. Is this your husband? What are you doing with him? You can do much better." I'm sure he's right.

I would have enjoyed briefly re-introducing myself to Gayle King and Oprah Winfrey. They would need to be reminded that Gayle and I worked together and Oprah had her picture taken with each member of the Sales Team at WDAF-TV, to help promote and launch her show. On that same Oprah Show introduction tour, I was asked to accompany her and stand near the stage in the role of a bodyguard, to discourage any possible negative crowd behavior.

All of the shows were scheduled at the area shopping malls throughout Kansas City. I attended the first 2, but no one showed, not even Oprah. Originally there were suppose to be 6 shows in the area KC Malls. A scout was sent to each mall, and if there was no crowd, the event was cancelled. Ultimately, only one show remained scheduled, and calls were made so that on Saturday at Bannister Mall, the entire mall was packed with fans and signs, deserving for a welcome of the first female host of a talk show. It's hard to believe now, that until 1986, talk shows were the domain of men only.

That reminds me of a story Dr. James Dobson, of *Focus On The Family* told. He said, the average man uses only 5,000 words a day, while the average woman uses 10,000 words per day, and females are simply much more vocal. Therefore he said, "A happy marriage is achieved when the man realizes at dinnertime, his 5,000 words are used up and his wife still has 5,000 more words left for the evening.

Had people known how huge a celebrity Oprah would become, I'm sure all of the Kansas City malls would have been packed. The extent of my role of serving as Oprah's bodyguard, resulted in me simply standing at the side of the stage and making sure no one approached uninvited.

I and the other members of the Sales Team did get to spend time with Oprah in the station studio, where we had a photo shoot with her to create what we called 1-Sheets of us with Oprah. Promotional sales sheets intended to be given to ad agencies, of the photo with the caption, "We're with Oprah, You Should Be Too!"

Back at the hotel at the NATPE convention, I remember riding the elevator up with Jerry Springer. We nodded but didn't talk, as we most likely had both used our 5,000 words for the day. We got off on the same floor, and I let Jerry walk out of the elevator first, and as he walked down the hall, he said loud enough for me to hear, "I can't believe what they pay for me to do this show! I didn't say it, but I did think, "Neither can I."