

Bonner Remembered

IT IS ENTIRELY FITTING and proper that a verbal memorial to Bonner McLane be couched in loving, whimsical terms, because Bonner was such a man. True, Bonner did almost single-handedly bring the Texas Association of Broadcasters to a position of pre-eminence among all other state groups, and yes, he did establish the first completely full service ad agency in Austin (and the biggest, too), and correct, he did educate (in the classroom and elsewhere) most of the people who are or claim to be prominent in the field today.

THERE WAS A LIGHTER SIDE of Bonner, though, complete with a twinkle in those rich blue eyes, and a hand to reposition that wavy head of hair which would have done justice to three men. It's with this thought that a number of us have collaborated on some of the more interesting tales and adventures of Bonner.

BONNER MCLANE WAS A DELIGHTFUL MAN both as a friend, a partner and as a citizen.

WHEN A GROUP OF US, including former U.S. Treasurer John Connally, Ambassador Edward Clark, Bob Phinney, Willard Deason, and others, formed KVET Radio Station in Austin, we were surrounded by young talented friends who exemplified the spirit of "KVET". All 10 of us were veterans, and we were one of the first stations in the country to coin the phonetic name from our call letters.

ONE OF THE EARLY announcers was young Bonner McLane from Dallas. He had a rich baritone voice, curly hair, and a "twinkle in his eye!" It was contagious to be around him, and he immediately made us a lot of friends individually and on the air.

LATER, when some of us left the radio station to pursue our own individual careers, Bonner joined us in an advertising agency. Here again he was spirited, effective, and worked hard. As a partner and a friend, he contributed a great deal to that agency's activities.

I ALWAYS TEASED Bonner that he sounded like Broderick Crawford with a rapid fire response and signed off like a "10-4" announcement!



WHEN I WOULD TELL HIM one of my "tall Pickle stories" about some practical joke, Bonner would embellish it. And, when I would hear the story, it would sound much more like a best seller than when I told it to him.

OVER THE YEARS, he had always remembered this association. And, at least once a year, Bonner would come to Washington representing the Texas Association of Broadcasters and bring "Tex-Mex" food all the way from Austin to serve our staff! I don't think he missed a single time in the past 10-15 years!

HIS REQUEST of this office--or any office--was always proper, polite and understanding. He never pushed. He was just a good friend and a good man whose friendship I will always cherish.

--Congressman J.J. Pickle

IT WAS 1968, early spring to be exact, and my candidate, Gordon McLendon, had dropped out to leave just nine Democrats to fight over the Gubernatorial nomination. Waggoner Carr had two years previous been upset by John Tower for the Senate and was trying to build back his political fortunes from a very limited

Bonner Remembered

financial base. Eugene Locke ("...should be Governor of Texas," etc.) had just returned from Saigon and was blasting away with 300 gross rating points of TV each week in the top nine markets of the state. Dolph Briscoe figured getting the farmers out of the mud in the 50's would certainly pave the way for a stop-over at 12th and Colorado in the 60's; history would confirm this, but in the next decade. Fresh from six years as Lt. Governor, Preston Smith had chits in his pocket from over 200 of the state's 254 county judges. John Hill was picking up support from previously disenchanted liberals and some of the young folks. The first, original Don Yarbrough was destined to get 30% of the vote in the primary, but was equally destined to lose in the runoff to any of the others. All in all it was a horse-race the likes of which Texas had never seen.

ALTHOUGH I HAD ONLY met Bonner briefly in 1961 (while producing a spot for one of his clients at KNOW Radio), he was a living legend among the aspiring broadcasters and ad men of that time. Winn-McLane was thought by all to be the biggest and the best in town. So I looked forward to moving into a desk at Bonner's shop when Gordon called to announce six weeks of campaigning had done him in and he was going to Sweden to recuperate while I did what I could for his old friend Waggoner Carr.

NECESSITY HAS ALWAYS been the mother. Bonner's inventions during the Carr campaign kept us in the 10% to 15% range in the polls. We all knew the conservative opponent for Yarbrough would glean less than 20% of the primary vote, so our shot was as good as the next candidate's. Gordon's contribution to the campaign was ten dynamite radio commercials; unfortunately, we didn't have any money to get a one on the air, even in Taylor. For three weeks Bonner and I poured over media plans, schedules, and the like, but to no avail. Finally late one afternoon, he looked up from my latest listing of "where we should put the money if we ever got any," and announced as how he had just invented the free radio spot. With that patented McLane twinkle in his eye, he outlined his devious scheme for getting Waggoner Carr's name and voice on nearly all the major radio stations in the state, and do it daily, and most importantly, at no cost.

THEREAFTER, every Sunday afternoon at

one, Waggoner would come into Bonner's office, fresh from church, and would tape prospective audio bites from each of ten to twelve prepared speeches to be delivered the following week. I promptly transferred these to cart and wrote the "wraps". Starting Sunday night each week I would feed stories about Waggoner's attack on spending at a barbeque in Caldwell, his revolutionary crime package just unveiled moments ago at a Kiwanis luncheon in Tyler, and his good neighbor policy over tamales (we didn't have fajitas then) in Del Rio. Bonner had me literally making fifty-two feeds, three times a day, six days a week; each time with the signature close for the station receiving the feed.

THE SCHEME WORKED well through the last eight weeks of the campaign. Only Carl Brazell (now head of Metromedia, but then news director of KTRH) raised hell. By then five other candidates had misappropriated Bonner's idea. Brazell's way of getting rid of all of us was to put us on hold, and leave us there, forever.

SO WHEN SOMEBODY writes the definitive history of Texas political campaigning, Bonner will surely rate a paragraph or two for his wily invention of the free radio spot. By the way, Preston Smith's county judges staked him to 19% of the primary vote and he buried Yarbrough in the runoff. Gordon came back from Sweden, and I went back to the business of Radio.

--John Barger, Senior Vice President, Clear Channel Communications; and President, Texas Association of Broadcasters.

THE TAB HAS THE NATIONAL reputation of being one of the best broadcast organizations in the country. I'm sure that much of that respect can be directly attributed to Bonner McLane.

I NEVER HEARD a harsh or critical word about anybody from Bonner. Every broadcast association executive in the country knew him, respected his experience and knowledge.

WHEN I FIRST CAME BACK to Texas in 1968, one of the first things I did was join TAB. I attended my first meeting in Galveston...Roy Bacus was President. When Bonner greeted me, I was treated like an old friend...he said "Welcome, we are glad to have you as a member. What

can I do for you? Do you know your legislators yet?"

THAT WAS BONNER...he always wanted to know what he could do for you. And you know, the first thing I concentrated on was getting to know my legislators. He was the perpetual glue that held us all together...big market guys, small market guys, radio guys and TV guys...and that is no easy task. He succeeded. Bonner McLane helped to make Texas broadcasting and broadcasters great...probably much greater than we really deserved. I miss him!

--Rush Evans, TAB Past President

A Day With Bonner McLane

7:45 a.m. Bonner McLane arrives at the office, laden with mail from the P.O. box...

7:55 a.m. Mail sorted and distributed, Bonner answers the phone...a TAB call concerning advertising bingo on radio...

8:15 a.m. Bonner begins typing memos to staff, clients and TAB execs...sends to Marie for translation and distribution...

8:35 a.m. Interruption by staff member with questions on a client proposal...

8:45 a.m. Bonner signs out for 8:45 meeting across town, exactly where is undecipherable from the signout sheet...

10:00 a.m. Bonner returns, grabs a cup of hot chocolate and starts returning phone calls from broadcasters, clients and legislators...

11:45 a.m. Bonner heads to Airport Haven to pick up lunch for himself and the staff--for BMC, a burger, small fries and a chocolate shake...

12:05 p.m. Bonner returns, takes two quick phone calls and joins the staff for a hot game of Liverpool rummy...

12:20 p.m. Lunch interrupted by a call from station re: political disclaimers...

1:00 p.m. Bonner meets with a student looking to get into advertising...

1:30 p.m. Meets with Marie to discuss upcoming TAB meeting...

2:00 p.m. Answers phone calls from broadcasters re: ad tax situation...

2:30 p.m. Bonner leaves for a 2:30 meeting across town, destination again undecipherable...

4:00 p.m. Back in office, Bonner digs through stacks in his office to locate a tiny memo with name and number of potential TAB speaker, finds it in exactly 30 seconds...

5:00 p.m. Meets with Marie re: tomorrow's schedule, types memos to staff to work on first thing tomorrow...

6:00 p.m. Collects work to read over at home and heads out for a 6:00 meeting at Headliners--plugs in Mel Torme tape on the way...

6:20 p.m. With a brandy and coke to sip on, Bonner discusses the future of advertising in current economy...

7:00 p.m. Bonner heads home to pick up Johnnie for dinner and a movie...

10:00 p.m. Ready for bed, Bonner reads through trade journals for TAB bulletin material, other publications for info to staff and clients and polishes the evening off with a science fiction thriller...

1:00 a.m. Bonner turns in early...

This is the Bonner McLane I knew and worked with for over eight years. I'm sure each of you can relate to some aspect of a day with Bonner and I hope this will bring back fond memories of a great man who will be sorely missed by a great many.

--Michelle Fail, Past employee of McLane Marketing

I AM ONE OF BONNER MCLANE'S greatest admirers. You had to love and respect him for his total (although sometimes brutal) honesty, his wonderful dry wit and his ability to see the bright side of life.

HAVING KNOWN BONNER professionally for many years, I felt I really only got to know the real man on the golf course in the last ten years. It was on the links that his ability to be patient and optimistic was sorely tested. When Marie was able to help me talk him into a rare weekday game, he always insisted on "talking business" on the FRONT NINE ONLY while we're just "warming up to the task."

BONNER WASN'T ONE to use many expletives, but if anything can make deletion of such words very difficult, it's golf. I'll never forget taking him to play the new Austin Country Club course designed by Pete Dye.

I GAVE HIM a half a dozen golf balls and tried to give him a stiff drink but he refused "because we might talk business on the front nine." After going through my golf balls and all those in his bag in route to a triple digit round, he finally decided a stiff belt was in order. Then, quite uncharacteristically, he turned to me and said "Rogers, I don't know whether to say thank you or _____ you!"

HAVING LEANED ON BONNER a lot in my early years of radio management and being fortunate enough to be his friend over these past few years, I'll miss him more than most.

--Ron Rogers, General Manager, KVET/KASE, Austin

BONNER MCLANE...what can I say?

A PERSON with whom I have worked for for many, many years. A wonderful, thoughtful person--who always had time to help others.

MANY FUNNY THINGS happened during those years--too numerable to mention--but one thing comes to my mind more often than others. The most recurring incident that happened during our travels together--seemed always to be when we would be going through airports--and I would invariably be pulled to one side when going through security--for an additional check. Bonner would look around and see me being held--and he would take off as though he never knew me.

I MISS HIM terribly--and there will never be another BONNER MCLANE.

--Marie Venable, Administrative Manager, Texas Association of Broadcasters

IN REMEMBERING BONNER, there was one thing that he and I had a little joke about. It was that he always mumbled so much on the phone that I had a hard time understanding what he was saying. I never could figure it out if I was hard of hearing or he was really doing that much mumbling.

BUT ONE DAY I told him that if he didn't mumble so much, I was going to question the fact that he was ever in radio. He got a big bang out of it and from that time on he would call and talk to me for a while and he would say "Am I mumbling too much?"

ON THE SIDE, "remembering Bonner" is like remembering a big brother who always made you look good and always took care of the details that you were too busy or didn't think of--always being even tempered and listening to both sides and trying to make a fair judgment.

--Don Chaney, President/General Manager, KTBB/KNUE FM, Tyler

McLane Scholarship Fund Nears \$10,000

THE TAB OFFICE REPORTS that the Bonner McLane Scholarship Fund is just \$2,000 short of reaching its \$10,000 goal.

IF YOU'D LIKE to make a contribution to the fund in memory of long-time TAB Executive Vice President, Bonner McLane, send your donations to: Wendell Mayes Jr., P.O. Box 50030, Austin, TX 78763.

Calendar of Events

- March 2-5: Radio/TV Sales Seminars featuring Darrell Solberg in Longview, Midland/Odessa, Austin & Dallas.
- March 10: "March on Austin" featuring individual meetings w/legislators.
- March 10: TV Day Reception 6 p.m.
- March 11: 10th Annual TV Day in Austin, with lobbying training by TAB new full-time lobbyist Ed Howard.
- June 18: Second "March on Austin" if legislature is still in session.
- June 19: Radio Day in Austin.