

## Airwave Anthology

Todd Maras

This next one goes out to J, who's sitting in her room alone and feeling pulled apart. She has hours of studying left to do tonight – her grades have to be perfect. Still gotta get 8 hours of sleep. Everybody knows you don't look, feel, and perform your best without that. And it's gotta be quality sleep too. Her watch will know if she doesn't get enough REM sleep and it'll send an email to her mom. Then J'll have to spend 20 minutes of time she doesn't have listening to the sleep lecture. Her Mom – now there's a tough act to follow. Phi Beta Kappa, two varsity letters, nurtured three successful kids while building her practice, she's nothing less than the pinnacle of female perfection. Well right about now J's wondering just how successful that third kid's gonna be. Heck, forget about measuring up to her mom – J doesn't even think she's as good as her smart, beautiful, popular friends. Speaking of beautiful, now she's thinking maybe she ought to go for a run to burn off that cookie she broke down and had after supper. That might work – it'll burn those calories, clear her mind for studying, and keep her in shape for the tryouts next week. And there goes her phone again – the texts and notifications never stop. She tried turning it off once but then she missed out on a huge party. Gotta maintain the social life too. Her Mom's phone knows where she is at all times and if J spends too much time alone in her room, she'll hear about that, too. J - take a minute to breathe and listen to the soothing strains of "Bird Song" by the Grateful Dead. I'm going with the Reckoning cut here because while live Dead is always better the boys did tend to ramble a bit. This live version gets the point across without taxing the short attention spans of my devoted listeners out there in our fine little town.

This next one goes out to M, who's coming in from yet another day on the road just in time to start his shift. He's got another rough night of work ahead of him and he's got no adrenaline left. That coffee he's going to drink all night will keep him moving but it's gonna wire him up tomorrow and then he might have to go and burn it off on the road again. M hasn't been in the Middle East for years but when it gets back into his head, he has to drive it out on the roads in West Texas. Sometimes he needs to go out into the desert again just like he did back in the day. He tells himself the sun and the stark landscape calm him down but deep down he knows that isn't true. How relaxed can he be when he's always scanning for roadside IEDs out there? Maybe he misses the adrenaline that flows through your body when you're always just a flash away from death. Maybe he misses his buddies and that feeling of working together to stay alive. Most of them, anyway. The road won't bring those guys back M and you know it. We might be overanalyzing here. Heck, maybe he's just trying to recreate that feeling of being in his twenties. We're all guilty of that from time to time. Whatever the reason, people, don't go judging M for this habit of his – you go through what he did and THEN tell him how to deal. M - take a minute to breathe and listen to "El Paso" by The Gourds, the best band whut that ever come out of Austin Tejas and I'll say that out loud standing over Stevie Ray's grave.

This next one goes out to A ... and also R, who is driving home after dropping off A after their second date. It didn't go well but only one of them knows that. R really digs A but he wonders if she's out of his league so he spent both dates regaling A with an endless litany of self-reverential stories to convince her that he's worth her time. R should realize A likes him or she wouldn't have agreed to see him again. R might know

on some level that he's talking too much but his insecurity is in charge here. He mistook her polite smiles and strained laughter at his humble bragging as signs of encouragement to keep talking. A is alone and confused in her apartment. She doesn't know what to think about R. After tonight she knows all about R's high-stress job, his 10k time and training regimen, and all the features of his new electric car while he knows...nothing about her. Why did he ask her out again if he isn't interested in anything about her? Is she the one who's boring? A, not for the first time, ponders the limited facets of the male psyche. She thinks he might really like her but is overcompensating in his quest to impress her. She wonders if there's anything there worth knowing behind his elaborate personal branding spiels. Maybe he's a narcissist who just wants sex. A is beginning to think males fall into two categories: guys with short attention spans who will never grow up enough to do anything more meaningful than playing video games at their parents' house, or uber-accomplished guys who will never grow up enough to fully participate in an adult relationship. A and R, each of you take a minute to breathe and listen to Marti Jones' cover of Graham Parker's "You Can't Take Love for Granted." You wrote a great song there Grahambo but Marti's a much better singer. Sorry, dude.

This next one goes out to V, who's trying to write his weekly sermon. They're good people, his flock. V is very proud of the work they do for the less fortunate among us. And while he'll put his congregation up against that of any other church in our fine little town, he does find them hard to teach. V could just mail it in every week and tell them what they want to hear but he's young and feels obligated to lead. He still winces when he thinks about the time he went all Matthew Chapter 25 on them. He saw the self-satisfied faces as he talked about their reward at the Final Judgement for feeding and

clothing strangers. For reasons he still can't explain, V paused and said, "What if those strangers were illegal immigrants?" Well, the looks he got made him take an involuntary step back from the pulpit and his composure left him for the rest of the service. That little episode made him question his own suitability for this vocation. Let's be clear on this, people. V's faith in God is unshaken but he may have lost some faith in himself. Is he the right person to lead this group? Can he lead anyone? Who is he to try to tell people what to do? What if his sermons drive people away from the church? That's the last thing he wants to do. Heavy questions indeed for a young guy sitting alone in a small room late at night. V - take a minute to breathe and listen to "I Just Want to See His Face" by the Rolling Stones as they take a break from their habitual hedonism to show us their spiritual side.

This next one goes out to P, who's alone in her room packing for a trip to L.A. Not just a trip – THE trip. She's an actor. They're all called actors now, people. Let's try to keep up with the times. You may have seen her grace the stages with theater groups first in our fine little town and then in Austin. Or maybe you've seen P in local commercials. Then again, maybe you haven't. She tends to disappear into whatever role she takes and she takes them all. P would prefer to go to New York and work her way up to Broadway. She thinks a play performed on the spare set of a stage is the purest way to tell a story. But one of P's many gifts is her hyper sense of self awareness. She knows her strengths lie in the subtle expressions and body language than can only be perceived by the camera. P knows what's she's getting into here, people. She's in for a few years of multiple rejections along with spiritual and material poverty and then she might find limited success as a character actor. Maybe more, but most likely less. She knows she

only has short time to make it before Hollywood's relentless and superficial embrace of the ephemeral takes its toll. P – take a minute to breathe and listen to the sympathetic strains of “California” by Wendy Maharry.

This next one goes out to S, who's alternating between studying a game plan and studying for a math test. S is the captain of the offensive line for his football team. He's worried about this weekend's game and he's worried about tomorrow's math test. Worry is a way of life for S. Academic and financial disaster is always around the corner and only he can stop it by being more prepared than anyone else. If he doesn't spend enough time on the playbook and game film, he won't be ready for the game and he might miss a blocking assignment. He also needs to know everybody's blocking assignments for every play so he can remind them in the huddle because if they mess up it might be his fault since he's the captain. One mistake might cost the game, and that might cost him next year's scholarship and without a college degree he won't be able to get a job and then his life might as well be over. S reminds himself to get his hands up fast after the snap. That nose guard for the other team is scary. He hit S so hard last year that his neck bothered him for weeks – even while he was studying. Back to the math test. S reminds himself that the scholarship will be useless if his grades aren't good enough. You can't study enough for a math test – there's always one more problem to practice solving. S, you obviously need to get with J. The time you spend getting to know each other will be time not wasted on amplifying the problems in your heads. In the meantime, S, take a minute to breathe and listen to “Everything is Moving So Fast” by the Great Lake Swimmers. Great name for a band, by the way.

This next one goes out to ... well, it goes it out to all of you devoted listeners in our fine little town. I'm the owner and sole proprietor of this radio station and I guess I

owe you all an explanation. I've been getting lots of angry, curious, and concerned emails from many of you about the way some of the songs have been introduced recently. Now here's the thing, people. My radio station has always been one hundred percent automated. Up until a short time ago, every voice, every commercial, and every song was recorded or scheduled by me a day or two in advance. That's really the only way to come close to making even a small profit in radio these days. Mind you, I'm not complaining. This radio station has always been more about playing good music and providing a community service than about making money.

Anyway, back to those song introductions. About two weeks ago I updated my automation software and noticed it had a new feature called AI-DJ. The manual said it would use Artificial Intelligence to make it sound like local DJs were spinning records for you just like they did back when radio was good. The instructions told me to provide a recording of my voice and then feed the software with as much written information about our fine little town as I could. I fed it the back issues of our wonderful local newspaper from the last five years along with all of the posts from every neighborhood internet forum I could find. I selected "dedication" mode for the AI-DJ and you heard what happened. I went back and listened to some of those song introductions after I started getting emails from you. I sent the recordings to the AI-DJ tech support group and friends, they're just as mystified as I am. They said that this is what's known among AI experts as a "hallucination." Near as I can tell, that's just a fancy way of saying their software is making things up.

Now, some of you have been insisting that you have seen the lights on at night up in our station's second-floor office in the building with the tall antenna on our town

square. Some of you even claim you've seen a shadow moving around in there when those introductions were played. Now, people, I have to tell you – you're the ones hallucinating if you believe a human was up there saying those things. That office is locked at night and the lights are always off. So, it was either a ghost in the machine so to speak, or ...just a ghost.

Let me just talk a little bit about those emails I got. A small number of them were angry and claimed my station was invading the privacy of some of our listeners and for that reason, I'm going to turn off the AI-DJ. The good news is that most of the emails were full of concern and sympathy for the subjects of those song introductions. Many listeners wanted to know who those people were so they could contact them and maybe provide some encouragement.

I think that's the main lesson to take from this experience. Everybody you see in our fine little town is working through their own set of problems. Some may seem big and insurmountable and others may be small and insignificant - except to the people facing them. Let's all assume the best about each other and if someone does something that annoys you, instead of getting mad, ask them what they're going through. Maybe they just need a sympathetic ear or a kind word. Now let's all take a minute to breathe and listen to the uplifting groove in "Like a Ship (without a Sail)" by Pastor T.L. Barrett and the Youth for Christ Choir.