



BIG JOHN TRIMBLE

The Truck Stops Here

Even before his first job at age 14 in his tiny hometown station of WSIP/Paintsville, KY, John Trimble knew he wanted to be in radio. His live remotes from the original Shoney's Drive-Inn between 1957-1958 were right out of American Graffiti, and John honed his personality skills further in the Army as an MC and stand-up comedian. After several gigs including as PD and afternoon personality at the first-ever fulltime Country FM, WVHI/Evansville, IN, John accepted the challenge of hosting a trucker show at KMO/Seattle. There, and at big-signal KGA/Spokane, "Big John" Trimble became the trusted full-service companion to truckers throughout the Pacific Northwest. That led to hosting a live truck-stop remote show for three years at KWKH/Shreveport, and then 18 years in a similar role at WRVA/Richmond with



his wife Jean as his sidekick. Renowned for presenting numerous Opry-style shows for regional audiences, the 52-year broadcaster anchors mornings on nearby WCLM/Richmond. Remarkably, John's induction into the Country Disc Jockey Hall of Fame will mark his first-ever appearance at the Country Radio Seminar.

As a kid, I'd sit in the mountains and listen to stations from Louisville, Cincinnati, Nashville and Richmond. I'd hear those big voices booming through the radio and it just always fascinated me. In 1947 we got a station in Paintsville, and it was just what I wanted to do. In 1955 I was injured in an auto

been 500,000 watts, you know?

The Shoney's Drive-In show was just like the movie *American Graffiti*. They had built a remote booth right on the lot and called them "Sky Castle Shows." It was 1957 and they had waitresses out there in roller skates and kids outside dancing by the booth. You were like Elvis, man!



I'm just a dumb board from the mountains, and I thought I'd be going to Washington, DC, where I could come home to Kentucky. I forgot all about the other Washington! Next thing you know, my butt's on a Greyhound bus to Seattle. But I started emceeing some shows, doing stand-up comedy, and it was

I was only there a year, but of all the places I worked, I probably did a better job for the drivers at KGA/Spokane than anywhere. They would call me from Whitefish, Montana and it'd be 40 below and 10 feet of snow. Sometimes I'd spend 30 minutes just doing reports on the weather on the passes, telling them when they have to put

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accident and couldn't play sports at school for a year. I had a cast on my neck, and started hanging around the radio station so much that eventually they just put me to work at 75 cents an hour doing a one-hour afternoon teenage show. I played the original rock and roll: Fats Domino, Jerry Lee Lewis and all those '50s cats. It was a little 250-watt station, but that didn't matter to me; it could have

In 1960, I volunteered for the Army to get into Armed Forces Radio, and at the end of basic training at Ft. Knox, KY, the first lie they told me was, "Your school is not open right now. You can either hang around here and train the next group of troops coming through or we can send you to Ft. Lewis, Washington. They need somebody in their entertainment division as an emcee." Now

great. We played service clubs and officer's clubs, but mainly we played off post. We worked old soldiers' homes, hospitals, anywhere they'd requisition us to come do a show. We worked just about every prison on the west coast. I did a show at Folsom Prison before Johnny Cash got there. They were the greatest. I'd walk on stage and say, "It's nice to have a captive audience!"

the chains on. Out there it's a whole different ballgame than truckin' back east.

There were some really good truckin' songs and really good truckin' singers. It all just fit together, and about '74 the CB thing came along and that really kicked it all into gear. I just absolutely backed into it. For several years I also would do a lot of trucker banquets and present live Country music shows, taking the show to different places around the country. Being on 50,000-watt WRVA, I could go to Pennsylvania or Ohio and people knew who I was. Sometimes we'd have an Opry act from Nashville or we'd just do it as our regular cast. Today we do the *East Coast Opry*, sort of like *Prairie Home Companion*. I don't sing or tell stories like Garrison Keillor, but if you've seen that movie, you've seen the *East Coast Opry*.

WCLM/Richmond has a variety format, and I do the Country morning show. Each morning I walk out my back door to where I've built a studio. I turn the power on, do a show, and go back into the house. I used to do it in the house, but I was making too much noise, so my wife made me move outside.

It's a real honor to be inducted. To think that I'm even considered to be in a place comparable to people like Nelson King, Randy Blake and Mike Hoyer is something that means a lot to me. Back in the '50s, you had to start in a small market and work your way up. The main thing I learned, even when you get up to the 50,000-watt stations, is that you can still do it like a small market. That's what I always did. Some newspaper or magazine said the thing that I did was that I brought the whole country down to one county. I always kept that small-town touch, and still do. CAC

I moved around a lot for awhile after the service. I knew it was always time when somebody offered you more money. Back then, you measured your success by the size of your U-Haul going down the road.

I was doing afternoons on KMO/Seattle in 1972, and they wanted me to start a trucker show, as Charlie Douglas was having success with it in New Orleans, selling a lot of advertising. I really didn't want to do it at first. Then, of course, they told me they'd increase my pay and give me a part of the show. The only reason I think they wanted me to do it is because I was the only Southerner on the staff and I guess they figured every trucker out there was a Southerner! Even if you were from Vancouver, BC, you're still a Southern guy — at least Southern by heart. That's true, though, in many ways.

Most of the drivers back then came from small towns like myself ... sort of poor backgrounds. They are the most patriotic people I've ever seen, and I grew up in that era too. We just sort of connected. When I first started doing the all-night trucker show, about the only thing I knew about trucking were the words, "Keep on Truckin'." But then I started reading trucker magazine, discovering their different laws, stuff that they needed, what their gripes were. Then I would put drivers on the air and let them talk about it.



All Stacked Up: Big John circa 1980 with the late, great Eddie Rabbitt.