



# LAURIE DEYOUNG

## A Reverence For Relevance



**Only the third woman to be inducted into the Country Music DJ Hall of Fame (and attending the ceremony for the first time), Laurie DeYoung first worked several years in her native Michigan, including stops at WSHN/Fremont and Grand Rapids outlets WYGR, WCUZ, WLAV and WKLO. Following a year at KBZT/San Diego, in 1985 she arrived at WPOC/Baltimore, where she is serving her 25th year in mornings. Especially talented at interviewing, Laurie's shared the microphone with Johnny Cash, Dolly Parton, Kenny Rogers and countless others. Her perennially strong ratings, ever-relatable**

**personality, preparation and social media skills have rightfully earned this onetime aspiring actress the accolades of both peers and listeners during her unprecedented run on the stage of Country radio's theater of the mind.**

**My parents were very supportive** of me being in radio. But most are just glad when their child is independent, self-sustaining and isn't calling home for money. I grew up in a musical home: Mom was a great piano player, and Dad was really an excellent communicator. One of the philosophies of my show is "good music, good conversation." I grew up with the love for music, and also for sitting around a meal with people and having a great conversation where you feel like you really

Como, and it was a great introduction to me as a fulltime radio job.

**When I left WKLO to go to San Diego** with my colleague Rocky Marlowe, there was this big media buildup about how my career was doing so well. A year later, they came in one morning and fired everyone. So it was back to Grand Rapids, where I knew I could get work. It was humbling to knock on the doors of those people and say, "Remember me? The big deal

Moody came in, and he was a huge supporter of me. Bob was a great person to call with the news about my being inducted.

**When I had a child** it totally changed women listeners' acceptance level of me. Before, you're the woman taking time away from their DJ or distracting him when he's on the air. There was almost like a sexuality about it; it was threatening to them. But once you have kids, it puts you on their playing field

**Raising three children**, I would hear people say, "You must get used to morning-show hours." I'd reply, "No, I just get used to being sleep-deprived." I'd be playing a game with my child, who would say, "Mom, wake up! It's your turn!" I was never one to go to bed at 8pm so I could get up for that early shift. I always felt, "I'll miss half of my family's life if I do that." Especially as your kids get older and when teenagers don't have any problems until 11pm.



“ THIS IS A GREAT TIME FOR EXPERIMENTATION: TO CONTINUE TO BE FRESH, COME UP WITH DIFFERENT IDEAS AND TRY SOMETHING. ”

get to know and understand someone. I found radio to be this great job that would make use of both of those values.

**We did car-deer accidents** at WSHN, as well as 4-H news, people's funerals, and a bargain hotline to sell your washer/dryer. We played everything from the Rolling Stones to Perry



**Stars & Guitars:** Over the years, Laurie DeYoung has interviewed virtually every star in the business, including many of the legends, except, for some reason, the elusive kd lang. Although she admits to being more of a private person, Laurie is clearly the huggable type, as shown with Johnny Cash (top), Ricky Van Shelton, (above) and Keith Urban (right).

who was going to San Diego? I'm back. Got work?" We had moved in with my husband's folks. As dear as they were, I'll tell you, that'll motivate you to get a job.

**The last words I said to Rocky** before he landed at WPOC were, "If it's a Country station, don't call me," because I knew nothing about the format. As a young woman in radio, men were easy to win over. Women were much harder; they did not want somebody on the air who didn't know what they were talking about. They were ferocious with you if you came off being the stupid sidekick. But Rocky knew a lot about Country, and that was a real learning lesson. The staff weren't particularly warm to us coming in from out of town, as there was speculation we were getting the big bucks, which certainly in my case wasn't true. Doug Wilson, the PD who hired us, was warm and gracious, but didn't stay long. Then Bob



and takes away that element. All of a sudden you're in the women's club.

**Being on the air September 11, 2001** was difficult. It's obviously a moment to connect with people about what they're feeling, but I get very emotional about things and was trying the entire show not to break down sobbing. Sometimes I would crack. I don't think there's anything wrong with that, but you're walking a fine line where you're trying to absorb what's happened while on the radio. Recently, a woman called me off-air and broke down telling me her husband tried to kill himself on Christmas night. I'm genuinely amazed at the level of intimacy on which people will deal with you. I value that immensely, and am always moved by those things.

**A funny moment** occurred when a guy called in so excited because he thought he had won tickets to the "Paul Harvey" Show. He and his wife had arranged a sitter and gone to dinner to make a whole night of it. He came to find out it was for the "Fall RV" show! Someone told Paul about that, and he actually used it on his broadcast.

**When Garth Brooks first came out** and we were doing some Nashville broadcasts, I remember there were stations that wouldn't talk to him because he was a new artist. We did, and always have made it a practice to talk with everyone. Not because they could be a big star someday, but because every person is worth dignity.

**This is going to sound crazy**, but I used to have to be reminded when the ratings were coming out. Here's a motivator for you: when I first got here, our former GM told me he didn't believe Country could be No. 1. So the expectation was that if you make the top five, we're happy with you. The good part about that was that I didn't feel a lot of pressure. As we continued to do better and ended up No. 1, I was just as surprised as they were.

**Now I know every week** how we're doing. In the PPM world, it's impossible not to think about it because you're constantly being evaluated – so much more than you used to be. I don't think for one second that anyone's bulletproof, certainly not in the times we're living in. This is a great time for experimentation: to continue to be fresh, come up with different ideas and try something. I always want to stay relevant and as accessible to as many people as possible.

**The overanalyzing of everything** can be just paralyzing for people. I have to always remind myself that people are drawn to radio because there's something compelling them to listen. When you just play music and end up becoming like satellite radio, that's where you're going to lose what makes you unique. I think people want to have a relationship; that's what radio is about. People feel like they know you – you're part of their morning and part of their life. **CAC**