



Don & Earl: where are they now?

The morning radio team that ruled the Fargo-Moorhead airwaves during the 1970s and early '80s was composed of Don Dresser and Earl Williams on WDAY-AM. But where are they now?

I see both of these guys in person nearly every third Tuesday of the month at the WDAY Alumni Luncheon. Don is still the “straight man,” teeing up the jokes, and Earl always



Earl Williams & Don Dresser

comes through with a hilarious punch line; tell him an anecdote or fact and he simply can't leave it alone—he tops it off like whipped cream on strawberry shortcake. I asked Earl how long they worked together, and he came back with “All day.” Their show actually ran for over 10 years, an amazing track record for a morning gig in this rather volatile media market.

Don's spouse of 54 years, Eldora, usually joins her husband for the Alumni Luncheon, a gathering of those of us who spent part of our lives working for WDAY Radio and/or TV. Sharon, Earl's wife of 35 years, is also part of the group, along with various news people and broadcast personalities from WDAY's past and present. Some attendees are now employed by rival stations in town but once worked for WDAY, so they too show up. The sharing of memories and laughs, and remembering the good times, is always nonstop.

Along with the late Boyd Christenson, Earl also did play-by-play broadcasts of NDSU Bison football from 1966 through 1981. As a “Voice of the Bison,” he was frequently invited to be an after-dinner speaker at area sports banquets, where he was just as quick with a comeback as he was on the air. For example, as Earl was about to begin one of his talks, the emcee handed him a note that read: “I forgot to thank the cooks.” Earl assumed the fellow wanted him to convey the gratitude of the crowd to the kitchen staff. So, he said to the audience, “I want to thank the cooks.” The audience thought this was the start of one of Earl's jokes and didn't applaud. He quickly fixed the deafening silence by saying, “Hey, let bygones be bygones...and give the cooks a hand!” That was classic Williams.

Don grew up in New York Mills, Minn. On the morning show, he frequently talked about his first job in his hometown: egg candling. Don says it was a very “social” job, as he got to visit with all the farmers who came in with eggs and waited for them to be candled. He didn't see a big future in this, so he left for Brown Institute of Broadcasting in Minneapolis to learn some radio skills. With his mellifluous voice and clear articulation, Don was a natural for the airwaves. His first radio job was at KTRF in Thief River Falls, Minn., and then on to WDAY in 1960, where he was on the announcing staff there for 34 years, retiring on June 30, 1994. His first morning partner was Morrie Carlson, “the Swedish pronouncer,” and they formed a popular team for a number of years until Morrie left for a major-market station. Bob Aronson then helped Don wake up the region for a while until he moved on to start WDAY's and the market's first radio call-in show, “Viewpoint.” At that time, Earl became Don's sidekick.

The late Wayne Lubenow, our area's most popular newspaper columnist at the time, loved to quote some of the jokes delivered by the radio duo, including Earl's “punch line of the day.” In fact, some called Lubenow “Williams' press agent” because he seemed to print whatever Earl said to him. For example, coaches often respond with “Haven't seen the films yet” when a reporter asks how the game went. Earl recalls that, after his marriage to Sharon, Wayne asked him, “How was the honeymoon?” Earl replied, “Haven't seen the films yet.” That remark was in Lubenow's column the next day, giving readers another punch-line laugh.

When I recall the days of waking up to Don and Earl, what comes to mind is the TV theme “Those Were the Days.” And in Fargo-Moorhead radio almost 40 years ago, they definitely were special days—thanks to this dynamic duo!