



# Graham 'Spider' Webb Celebrates 60 Years In Australian Radio

\* Friday March 28 2014 marked Graham's 60 years in radio. Jocks' Journal chatted with Webby about his long career in both radio and television.



## How old were you? Where did you start?

- Well I was 17 years of age and I was delivering telegrams, in the centre of Sydney to all the radio stations, and I can remember playing a trick on one of the actors. **Rod Taylor** actually got me to play a trick on one of the the actors in Tarzan, it was with **Roger Climpson** who was the narrator on that and he says: "you've got a good voice why don't you do something about it?" He says go and see **Brian Bury**. So I went and saw Brian at 2UE who was a panel operator. He was learning from **Eric Wright**. So I agreed and went all the way to Mossman to see him. Eric Wright was doing **2SM** breakfast at the time but he had this radio school and he taught people like **Kevin Golsby** and **Brian Bury**. He wouldn't take me on at first, I didn't know why. But anyhow I decided I was gonna play the harmonica on Australia's Amateur Hour so I applied for that. And **Terry Dear** interviewed me and I played Smoke Gets In Your Eyes (a la Larry Adler style) of course, and I probably came last. So my very first broadcast experience was actually on Australia's Amateur Hour and that was on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February in 1954. The following week I was still delivering telegrams.

## But you didn't give up your desire to get into radio?

- No I went to all of the different radio studios and I thought I might go into Rumpus Room when it was on air with **Howard Craven**. So one of his assistants handed me a script to read, and I read it and I won "best announcer of the night". And I'm thinking this is a good little rort isn't it? So then a couple of days later I thought, "I'll give Teen Time a go." And the same thing happened again, I won "best announcer of the night", and I was invited to be "guest announcer of the week" this was on **Gary Blackbridge's** Sunday morning breakfast program. So I went in and I became the offside to Gary Blackbridge on the Sunday morning breakfast program. And I thought, "this is a good life", and the following week I got a phone call from Eric Wright saying he would take me on, which was wonderful, and that's how I continued to learn from him.

## And your training even took place on trains ...

- Yes I would travel to work by train and I even talked the porters into allowing me to call the next train which was very good microphone experience, as you can well imagine. That continued throughout that year when I was still a telegram boy. But I was still determined to get into radio. Anyway I shot off my audition disc to **2GZ** Orange but they said my voice was too immature. But one day I was up at 2KY delivering telegrams and **Lyall Richardson** said just bring in your audition disc and told me that I seemed to have a good voice for a kid. So I brought it in and he had a listen and said: "That's poppycock. That's not too immature." He added: "I'm from Tamworth, and my father has the sports store up there. He said: "I'll get you a job at **2TM** Tamworth." So on September the 5<sup>th</sup> on 1954 I started at 2TM.

## How was the 2TM experience?

- Well (as a young boy) you can well imagine, by Christmas I knew it all didn't I? Anyway the program director, and I can't remember his name, he sacked me.

However I didn't go home and tell Mum and Dad that I was out of work, because Dad said: "you'll never make it son, you'll never stick with it" and I was determined to stick with it so I stayed on in Tamworth a little longer, then they had the big floods in January of '55 and shortly after that I applied for a job on a metropolitan radio station which was advertised in the Northern Daily Reader and I didn't know which radio station it was. Well I went back home again, and Dad did remind me that I'd never stick with it. But the next thing we know, I've got a telegram from a radio station, turns out to be 4BH in Brisbane, and they flew me up for an interview. And I came back again and then on the Monday I got another telegram saying the job is on, catch the first train. And they paid for my train journey up there and I ended up at 4BH in Brisbane doing weekend work on air, and for the rest of the week I was the junior announcer and I became one of **Bob Rogers'** panel operators. **Norm Llewellyn** was the Program Director there in Brisbane, and Bob Rogers was the big DJ in Brisbane.

## So we're still in 1955 ... but then about three months later you moved on?

- Yes there was a Chandler station and they had this station in Gympie, **4GY**. They said they need an announcer up in Gympie very urgently so could I go up there and they'll get me back later, and I said fine. So I went up to Gympie, started off at 4GY in 1955 and that's when I met a girl and fell madly in "lust" and stayed on and they never invited me back to 4BH. By the end of '56 I was inducted into the national service in the September call up so I did my three months at Wacol army camp, and seeing by now I was 20, I was the oldest in the class, and they were all 18 year olds and I avoided the draft until then, and because I spoke well and I was older, they immediately gave me two stripes, and I became a corporal and I drove around and I was in charge of all the jeeps. I drove what they called was a G2 and I was driving around in the jeep while they were all out on the parade grounds doing all their marching so I got out of all that for quite a time. They did catch me a couple of times on a couple of route marches but boy, I got away with a lot of it and then I went into national service. So when that was completed it was time to come home after I did the three months. I thought what will I do next and I didn't want to stay in Gympie so I went home for Christmas in 1956, and in '57 I had the most amazing year of my life.

## Well let's talk further about that most 'amazing year' ...

- I went from 2CH to 2UE but in the meantime I was doing commercials, I was doing 2KY with Lyall Richardson with 'talk of the town' from Chequers Nightclub and 'toast of the town' on radio with **June Dally-Watkins**. Also in that year of 1957 I had a acting role in Hamlet in the first Shakespearean play on ABC radio. I did the Royal Easter show, with a huge tape recorder for 2CH, I took my tape recorder out on the street to get vox pops for the breakfast program. I remember **Alexander McDonald** was the journalist and he said: "On the 2CH breakfast session Graham Webb bops up hinter and yon like a sport of dolphin."

(Graham's story continues in next Jocks' Journal)



# Graham 'Spider' Webb Celebrates 60 Years In Australian Radio - Part 2

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**Let's continue your journey in radio and television. The year is 1957.**

- Well, I was doing Wheel of Fortune on radio and I was invited by Reg Grundy to do the voiceovers on the TV version. The trouble was Channel 9 had their own announcers and they didn't like any outsiders in there so I lost that job. But I got another job and that was at 2UE and I was told that in the new year that they were going to start something very special that would revolutionise radio - and in March 1958 they launched Top 40 radio. John Laws was already at 2UE and he was reading the news, Gary O'Callaghan was doing the breakfast session, and they brought in from 2SM Tony Withers, and from Brisbane from 4BH they recruited Bob Rogers.

**Well Bob left Brisbane but you also later landed a job on Brisbane radio.**

- I was the number 4 DJ on 2UE but then 4KQ Brisbane offered me the job of being the only DJ. They said "why be a little fish in a big pond when you can come up here and be a big fish in a little pond?" So I thought I'd give it a go. I went up to 4KQ and did a year there, but Brisbane wasn't for me, so I went back to Sydney and started at 2GB and then shortly after they gave me the breakfast session. And then in about 1964 they changed management because Des Foster was not a well man and Ken Taylor from Festival Records came in as the acting station manager. Ken didn't like me very much because I compromised him once by walking in on him and a young lady on the Festival Records 'couch'! He never forgave me for that - so he got rid of me. I got my 3 months severance pay and headed to England. And that's when I did work at Radio Monte Carlo. I also worked on air at RIM in Rome and the Voice of Germany in Cologne where I became a political commentator and then I eventually went to Radio Caroline.

**Tell us about your time in 'pirate radio'**

- Radio Caroline offered me about 30 quid a week so I went looking for an apartment but I couldn't find one that was under 30 quid a week. So I went back to Cologne and I did a bit more travel but eventually ended up the following year at Caroline. I started off as program controller on the south ship and then they wanted me to look after news and so I became news director on both 'pirate' ships north and south. One of my last chores on Radio Caroline was as an announcer, describing a wedding on the north ship of Radio Caroline that was depicted in the movie The Boat That Rocked. You might recall the scene where there was a wedding on board the pirate radio ship and that happened to be Caroline North.

I've even done a two hour program on the event and the movie on my Webby's Golden Years of Radio program. I've completed 52 programs which I've recorded while I still have my eyesight. I'm now going slowly blind with macular degeneration. So I did the wedding on the ship and I came home for Christmas. I'd promised Mum I'd be home for Christmas for '66. I walked in the door of our Homebush home where we lived at 4.30 in the afternoon on Christmas Eve.

**In 1967 you decided you wanted to work in TV fulltime**

- That's right. In early 1967 I put my feelers out for any TV work. I ended up auditioning with about ten other people for Blind Date but I was selected and I did Blind Date for three years recording over 1,000 episodes, and then I did Jeopardy for a couple of years. But because I was on TV nobody else would give me any other work and so I decided to pack up and go overseas. The family moved overseas for about 12 months and when I came back I formulated the idea of putting together Sound Unlimited. The music program was broadcast on Saturday mornings on the Seven Network beginning in late 1974. I was the producer and original host before handing the compère position to Donnie Sutherland 12 months later. We then changed the name to Sounds and went national.

**Was there any other radio gigs you got involved with at the end of Sounds?**

- Well I went to Classic Hits 2UW. I did news in the '70s on Macquarie national news on 2GB. In the 90's I went to 2SM when Ken Sparkes was the PD. I did Saturday and Sunday breakfast on SM. I'd also been doing Webby's Rock 'n Roll road show in all the clubs. But then by the end of '93 I figured there's more clubs on the Gold Coast, so my wife and my two little boys and I packed up in Sydney, and went up to the Gold Coast where I started at Gold FM. I did a couple of weeks there and they offered me the night time show for about a \$100 a shift and I thought, "I'm not going to give up my days just to a shift for a hundred bucks a night." So I continued to do the 'rock 'n roll road show', around the Gold Coast and then I went into the ABC station Coast FM and Bill Gates offered me a job to fill in. I did weekends and other shifts. Then in 1995 a guy called Phil Ward invited me up to Maroochydore, and he wanted to start a station called SUN FM and he put together this automated program and picked my radio brains as to how to place everything and it became the first fully automated radio station virtually ever. There were other \$100,000 programs but this one was only about \$1500 and so it was perfect for narrow cast radio.

**And tell us about your family members who have also had radio careers**

- From my marriage to Peta, our son Byron went into radio. When he was about 15 he was a cart boy at 2SM and he was also doing stuff at 2KY and 2UW and that was in the '80s and he even panelled me at 2UW on some nights. But then Byron went onto NEW FM I think and worked with brother Mike and of course Byron is now the Smooth FM afternoon announcer. Brother Mike began his career at Goulburn. My daughter Cinnamon did come up to SUN FM a couple of times in the '90s and did all of our community service announcements and some computer work which she was very good at it. She would of been perfect in radio but she got herself involved in IT, and that's what she's doing today in Melbourne.

**Was she named after the 60s hit song?**

- No she was named after a character from Mission Impossible and so was Byron. Both names were from the TV show Mission Impossible mainly because the two of them for me was a 'mission impossible'. I was told I was never going to be able to have children. But Peta my first wife and I did.

**And 60 years later you're still doing radio**

- Yes I am. Mostly, the 52 episodes of Webby's Golden Years of Radio which is still running around the country on various stations. I'm on Radio FiveO Plus in Gosford, I also do a program from 7 to 11pm on 87.6 Vintage FM in Campbelltown. I'm also heard on a station in Perth called Magic FM run by Peter Brown. That's from 5 till 11 at night. By the way, my Pirate Radio two hour special is going to air on the 19th of April which also happens to be my 78th birthday and that will be heard on 87.6 Vintage FM. It's going to air on the 19th of April because on Easter Saturday 50 years ago - that's when Radio Caroline commenced in 1964.

**How long were you at Radio Caroline? Does that hold the best radio memories?**

- I was there a little over 18 months. And yes I've got to say Caroline. It was fun to be able to impart my dozen or so years of knowledge for people who hadn't done broadcasting before. I was able to help a lot of young announcers who had no idea how to announce and also newsreaders that I gave jobs too. Some are still working in radio which is amazing. One of them Nick Bailey who still works on a classic FM station in London. So I started a few people in radio in my lifetime. When I write my book it will be 'Pioneering in Radio and Television' because there was so many times I got a first out of it, if you know what I mean.