

WGN
RADIO 720

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You've heard that Chicago is America's hottest radio market. Here's a great short story on a great reason why --- WGN's own Wally!

Boyd Seghers



**A MORNING
WITH
WALLY
PHILLIPS**

Wally Phillips

radio's 6-to-10 a.m. Adult Swinger



By Bob Smith

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He found a story he liked. It said that the president of the board of General Motors was retiring from his \$600,000-a-year job.

As soon as the switchboard opened at General Motors in Detroit, WGN was sending its listeners a conversation somewhat along these lines:

Phillips: "Hello. General Motors?"

Girl: "Yes."

P: "I'm calling from Chicago and I'd like to apply for a job with your company."

G: "Well, you would have to fill out some of our forms."

P: "No, I can't be bothered with that. I'm shooting for the top. I hear you need a new board president and I think 600 thousand is a good, living wage."

G: "I'm sorry, sir, but you wouldn't be allowed to apply for that position."

P: "I'm sorry, too. But I'm willing to go down a little. Do you have anything for around 300 or 400 thousand a year?"

G: "I'm afraid I can't help you, sir."

P: "Oh, that's all right. But listen . . . do you know of any good openings at Ford?"

The girl chuckled. So did the Phillips listeners, several hundred thousand of them. It wasn't historic comedy, but it does give you an idea of what happens during Phillips' morning madhouse.

Phillips is . . . well, the best capsule sizeup you'll find on him was printed in the July 31, 1965, issue of Panorama. That was the one that listed the 62

best people in Chicago. Wally made it, of course. His paragraph read:

"Wally Phillips, disk jockey.

Answers questions, talks on telephone, tells terrible jokes, solves problems, plays records, reads commercials, does it all so that it's entertaining. A swinger who's not too far out, comes on as an appealing, unpretentious personality who likes his job and the people who listen to him."

It's all true. The only tribute that might be added is that Phillips works his head off during those 23 hours of WGN time he fills every week.

It flows so smoothly out of the radio speaker . . . Phillips making insane phone calls, his listeners calling him, the witty lead-ins to the records and commercials and the friendly sparring matches with announcer Lloyd Pettit.

And Phillips gets it all on the air as easily as you might wrestle an alligator. His battle ground is a small studio on the second floor of WGN's North Side plant. He sits, in shirt-sleeves, at a large, cluttered desk in the corner. He has three phones, a microphone, a calendar, an almanac, a music schedule and a pile of commercials.

On his left is Pettit, who is there to deliver the news every half-hour and get insulted every few minutes. In front of him is Fred Keller, who handles the three record turntables and what goes on them.

A RECORD (usually of the square, pop school) is playing. Before it ends, Phillips gives a "cut" sign to the engineer. That means "turn the sound off in the studio, I'm taking a call."

Phillips has to get moving on the call because there's a 10-second time lapse between the actual conversation and when it goes on the air. This allows the engineer to abort

any profanity that a caller might use.

Phillips completes the call. A housewife was worried because her baby was premature and, at 14 months, it still wasn't sitting up. Now, as the conversation is being played back, Phillips has a 10-second wait.

During the gap, Keller says, "When your day is colored gray." Phillips is shuffling through papers. He doesn't appear to have heard Keller. But, a few minutes later, Phillips winds up some nonsense with, "I wonder what color it is outside." Bang, a commercial starts. And the first line is, "When your day is colored gray."

By now there's another call. A housewife wants to tell that other housewife not to worry about the baby. This housewife says it takes a premature child four or five years to catch up.

That's one of the charms of the Phillips show. It's sort of a clearing house for information and advice. Wally may drop something like, "I wonder what ever happened to Clyde McCoy."

Perhaps he knows darn well what happened to Clyde McCoy. But, within the next hour, three or four people may call to fill him in on Clyde McCoy. And one of them may add, "Say, Wally, do you know where can I get a stuffed two-headed buffalo?" And, chances are, somebody else will call offering the whereabouts and price of a two-headed buffalo.

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"I can't say that I really like these hours," he says. "But it's THE time to be on."

SO WALLY gets up before dawn, dresses quietly while his wife, Barbara, and infant daughter, Holly, sleep and drives to work ("You should see the Edens expressway at that hour," he says. "It's got three truck drivers, a philanthropist and me"), stopping for breakfast along the way.

During the past year, he had attractive job offers from stations on both coasts. But his contract at WGN runs through October of 1967 and he intends to honor it.

"I honestly love it here," he says. "It may sound cornball, but this is a great station and I can't think of anyone who doesn't enjoy working here."

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"I'm not worried," says Phillips. "I'm number 83 on their list."

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