

Impacting Canadian Culture With Christianity

A personal encounter with the power of broadcast technology

BY LORNA DUECK



Photo by Barry Chapman

Media, the strongest story teller in the culture, must tell of the narrative of God

Broadcast technology changed my life. In more ways than I care to admit, I've been shaped through ideas that have flickered into my consciousness. Radios and televisions have carried a legion of voices that have affected the way I act; everything from gardening tips to Bible lessons, fashion ideas to family advice, traffic reports to the things I buy. A massive conglomeration of influence has had one originating source in my life—broadcast technology. We would not

recognize the world void of the broadcast voices and images that have shaped it.

The most powerful in the world rise and fall through this technology. A botched TV interview with CBS evaporated the bubble of awe around vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin. President Obama recruited from CNN when he went looking for a doctor to lead the nation's health care strategy.

But this story is about a more personal encounter with the power of broadcast technology. An old memory of a wardrobe consultant ripping through my closet comes to mind. "You have nothing that works for TV, nothing" was the conclusion. Or choking back tears in an orthodontist office because the smile I'd been born with was diagnosed as needing adaptation for TV consumption. Every missionary has legitimate sob stories of adapting



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to the field they are being called to, and mine are just a little easier to misunderstand.

One of the most common was the dark night of the soul when I realized I was being asked to stand on national television and request people pay me to talk about Jesus. Surely the Gospel doesn't require an on air donation ask? We might as well get this big obstacle out of the way right off the top because this is the common ground we enter on when we broach the subject of using broadcast technology to impact culture with Christianity.

With an expensive and distant product, it's hard to realize that broadcast donations are part of the Great Commission. Rates for talking to a television audience begin at the low end of \$250 for a half hour with less than 3,000 viewers at a speciality channel, to \$210,000 an hour in prime time on a major network; if, that is, you can negotiate for it to be sold. Those opportunities are rare. Thirty-second TV commercials of

your message range from \$50 an airing on the smallest of networks, to \$25,000 to be placed on the top networks in prime time audiences of 500,000. Then add the money needed to produce something that communicates.

If you apply for tax credits (which can carry up to 30 percent of your producing costs) you get an idea of the standards in broadcast spending. For a tax credit supported message, you must be able to prove you have spent a minimum of \$100,000 to create every half hour of content. Christians rarely spend that kind of production money on their message, but that level of investment is considered necessary for quality broadcasting. *Little Mosque on the Prairie*—which CBC is now selling in the U.S. and Europe, is a brilliant show where a mosque outshines a church on the Saskatchewan prairie. Its production value is over \$200,000 for every half hour.

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For me this began very innocently. I had a

gruff voice, a lower tone than any girls my age, and after one bruising adolescent encounter over its uniqueness, my father comforted me with his insight that day: "Lorna, your voice is different than anyone else's and God is going to use it for something special."

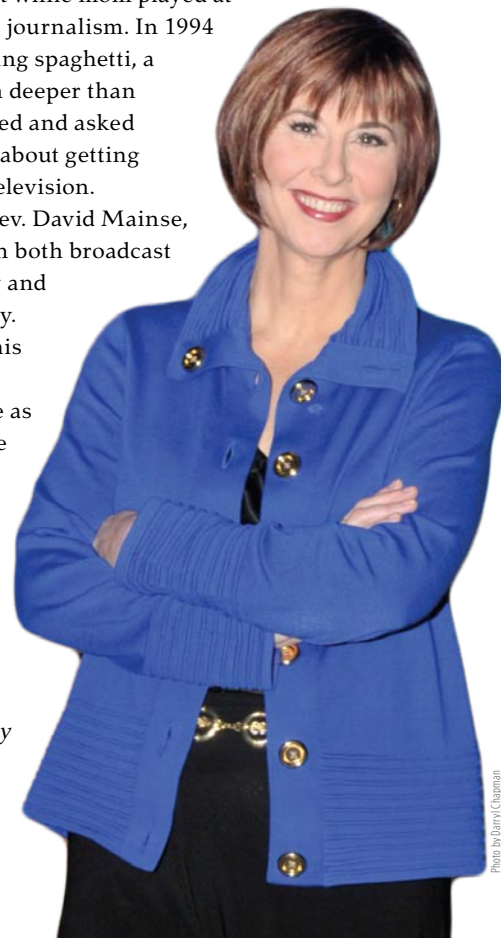
Naturally curious and naturally a storyteller, I wanted to become a reporter as soon as I discovered the profession. A Bible school professor made a referral for me to a radio station where he was on the board, and his influence and that low voice launched me into rural radio at Golden West Broadcasting in Manitoba.

I quit broadcasting early into my first big market of Winnipeg. I was scared, my self-esteem shaken, and I retreated out of fear. One day, praying over job frustrations, I felt the Holy Spirit tell me to apply at a TV station in Brandon, Manitoba. I made a cold call, and at the end of a job interview that very same day, an atheist news director concluded he'd hired a 'Bible thumper', but he didn't know why.

In 1988, when it was time to be home raising two babies and journalistic work was in hiatus, I finally took time to listen to the media through eyes of faith. I thought there wasn't much to be found about God in what I consumed, and I found myself praying "Lord, let me impact the media for you."

I interviewed Christians in action, published a few stories, and two cute toddlers tore the house apart while mom played at faith-based journalism. In 1994 while stirring spaghetti, a voice much deeper than mine phoned and asked me to pray about getting back into television.

It was Rev. David Mainse, a pioneer in both broadcast technology and Christianity. He began his mentoring into my life as I served the next eight years as his co-host at the daily Christian telecast of *100 Huntley Street*.



It was there that I became hooked on using television to communicate the Gospel, not because we were such great broadcasters, but because over 1,000 people a day phoned the prayer line phone numbers that were put up at the bottom of the TV screen. I was stunned to think that any Christian activity could have that kind of response rate from the public, and I was often troubled with the stewardship that called for.

Sensing a Holy Spirit move for new things, in 2003 my friends at *100 Huntley Street* launched me into my own independent TV ministry of Media Voice Generation and *Listen Up TV*. I responded with a yes because I knew the broadcast market was not able to protect and promote Christianity on its own; the capitalism it thrives on doesn't work that way.

There were quite a few test 'fleece' put out to see if this was really a God invitation; one of them was I wanted this media charity's new governance to include my church family. When Dr. Franklin Pyles said he would be the founding Board Chairman of this venture, Media Voice Generation was launched. *Listen Up TV* grew from being a segment within *100 Huntley Street* to becoming an independent show on eight networks, the largest being Global TV, where we purchase time on Sunday mornings across the country at 11 a.m.

The goal is to speak to Canadians who are not in church, and bridge them to Christ through a discussion of news and current events. We look weekly for Christians involved in the news, for a biblical worldview to be taught through subjects Canadians are interested in. Our material has been duplicated into a column at *The Globe and Mail* and at CBC.ca, and we've pioneered a regular faith debate panel for web forums at globeandmail.com. A team of ten of us pray, plan, and produce a weekly half-hour show which is also broadcast on the web at www.listenuptv.com

Wherever you start the story of bringing the Gospel into broadcasting, you'll find an intricate web of Christian community. Like the invisible sound waves that permeate this technology, so it is with the network that launches evangelism into public space. I wish space could tell how many people make this possible and the mystery of how they are all called to play a part on a different day, a different hour, a different way.

Words aren't adequate to say thank you, but they all play their part. There's a supportive spouse and family, a bevy of encouragers, intercessors and Christian disciplers, a donor who kicks it off, and then many more

who build the message with their gifts and accountability and of course, there are those willing to share their story of Christ.

It's that miracle of grace, the amazing stories of God at work in human lives, that keeps us going in this. To see, as Dr. Eugene Peterson describes how Jesus walked on earth, "salvation narrated into being through conversation, personal relationships and compassionate responses."

Media, the strongest story teller in the culture, must tell of the narrative of God. It used to be we could count on people to go to church for that story, but truth is in my generation Canadians have seen church attendance drop from 70 percent of the population attending, to less than 17 percent. (Ipsos Reid 2006)

More than ever we need spiritual conversations for lost people to discover they have a spiritual home in Jesus, and broadcasting needs more than ever for the family of God to take its place and tell their stories to its audiences.

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