

ROCKING IT AS A RADIO GUEST

BY

Merrilyn Williams (aka Mel Menzies)

A novelist starts with a blank piece of paper; a radio writer with silence – so says Horstmann.

I don't recall my first radio broadcast – there have been too many to count – but I know I loved it! Even as – perhaps especially as – an introvert! Because no matter how many listeners had tuned in, it felt as if I were addressing an individual.

But I'm jumping the gun. Unless you're so well-known as an author that you've already come to the attention of radio producers, you're going to have to write to them with a proposal in order to be on one of their shows. So how do you go about approaching them with the hope of being invited to take part in a programme? Well, actually, the prep is little different from that of writing a proposal for publication. Obviously you need to tell them about the books you've had published, or the link to your profession, and their relevance to each show. All of which requires a little analysis as follows.

BEFORE GOING ON AIR

- **Know your market.** You need to listen in, and to like the programmes you're aiming for. Define the difference in style and listeners according to the time of day and season of the year. Yes! It does make a difference.
- **Know your listeners.** Analyse the stations and the people they appeal to. What age group and culture are they from? What gender and profession? Are they locals or tourists?
- **Know your material.** Are you writing to inform? To educate? To entertain? To persuade? To amuse?
- **Know your competition.** What makes your offering different to anyone else's? What can you add to well-known topics?

Boring, boring? Been there, done that? Sorry, but it has to be said.

ON AIR: GCSE

So how do you begin? Well that's obvious, isn't it? Just as with your story-telling, you need to hook your listener in. Isn't that what I've done here? I would hope so, if you're still reading this. The difference between a book and the radio is that, if you fail, your listener can switch to another channel or, indeed, switch off - without any cost to him/herself. So here's how you go about it.

- **Grab** your listener with that first sentence. Make it relevant to how you intend to continue.
- **Clarity:** Your material needs to be arranged logically, accurately and sequentially. Never assume listener knowledge. Explain everything, but not laboriously. Remember your listener can only take in your message in the order in which you deliver it. He/she can't look back or ask questions.

- **Signpost:** Ensure that your listener understands the direction in which you're moving. In other words, the motive behind what you have to say on your particular subject. Are you for or against? Are you intending to inform? Inspire? Or encourage?
- **Embrace:** Or KISS - Keep It Simple Stupid. This is a journalistic approach in which you a) Tell your listener what you're going to tell them; b) Tell them and c) Tell them what you've told them. In other words, remind them.

MANNER OF DELIVERY: PAINS

Have you noticed that I've been using a fairly casual approach in this presentation? This was deliberate, and is something you need to consider if you are going to retain the attention of your listeners.

- **Personalise:** Don't use passive voice or statements such as: *All the aircraft that left in the morning returned safely.* Better: *I counted them out and I counted them in* - Brian Hanrahan.
- **Approach:** Remember what I said earlier: speak intimately, as if to an individual, a friend. Use the word 'you' rather than 'listeners'. J.B. Priestley said: *What holds attention is genuine sharing of feelings and views.*
- **Imagery:** Remember your listener is 'blind'. He/she only 'sees' what you tell them, so conjure a picture for them. Use the five senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. Depict the scene with vivid single words where possible i.e. 'pigskin' shoes rather than 'soft, brown leather'. Use similes such as 'the size of a golf ball' rather than trying to give an accurate measurement.
- **Natural:** Be yourself. Don't put on an act. Abbreviate naturally – I'd / she's. Devise your own punctuation – dashes or bullets - for ease of speech. You need to come across as fluid and spontaneous.
- **Simplicity:** Use short, simple sentences that are easy for you to read or recall, and for your listener to follow and assimilate.

THE ACTUAL BROADCAST

I've been interviewed live a number of times before very large audiences – by Steve Chalke at the Princess Theatre, Torquay, by Edward England at a writers' conference in Bath and elsewhere. I've also been interrogated on national and regional radio programmes, as well as on TV, and by internet. All these events have been in respect of the issues raised in my books: marriage, stepfamilies, debt, divorce, drugs, death, bereavement, and AIDS.



Sometimes this has been as a panellist answering questions from listeners, with all of us scattered around the country, linked – either by phone or via our local broadcasting station – with that of the region putting on the programme. With no body language to see and interpret, I was not alone in finding it difficult to know when to speak and how not to interrupt one another. Much more enjoyable were the times when there was a direct line between the presenter and listeners, such as the programmes in which I took part with Janet Kipling of Radio Devon. Here are some of the points on which I was advised, and others I picked up.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Noise:** Don't talk loudly once in the Ops Room, and try not to rustle papers, scrape chairs or bang the microphone.
- **Smile when introduced:** You may not be seen, but it makes a difference to how you come across.
- **Microphone:** Sit about 6ft away. Don't use it as a public address system. Think of it as allowing you into a listener's home or car.
- **Shorter is better than long:** Base your timing on a delivery speed of 150-180 words per minute. Don't gabble. Pause between sentences.
- **Statistics:** If you must use figures, then rather than giving complicated detail such as 1,794, round them up (or down) thus 'nearly 2,000'.
- **Open answers:** If you're the one conducting an interview, don't use *closed* questions which elicit a 'yes' or 'no' response. The same applies if you are the one being interviewed. So if you're asked 'I understand you like cold rice pudding,' rather than responding with a one word positive or negative, you could say, 'I loathe milk puddings of any sort.' Or, 'Yummy. Bring it on.'
- **Beware:** You may occasionally find yourself a little alarmed at the attitude of the presenter, or some of the questions put to you. Remember, you're never alone.

Here's an example below – taken from a magazine article I wrote later – which occurred during a broadcast I made on BBC Yorkshire back in the 1990's, following publication of my book, *Stepfamilies*. The presenter declared herself 'shocked' at discovering that the book had a Christian content, and said she found it 'deceitful' that this had not been declared on the cover. She then asked me to justify myself. Once I'd reminded her that (in those days) authors wrote books and publishers put covers on them, I proceeded to elucidate.

'There is a great ground swell of feeling across the board,' I said, 'from government level, through the education, judiciary, and welfare systems, that what we need, as a nation, is to return to some moral base.' The issues of commitment, communication, contrition and conciliation had already been quoted from the book as being necessary components in building and maintaining relationships, so it didn't take a great leap of logic to convince her that these are, also, the ethics of Christianity.

The end result was that the presenter came back to me after the programme had finished, apologised for springing the question on me, and said she thought I had given an excellent answer. Little did she know that I had an outstanding, unseen Advocate whispering in my ear. The Holy Spirit!

And so have you! So go on. Get your voice out there. Christians have been silent for too long. Put yourself forward to broadcasting stations, and Rock it as a Radio Guest.

AUTHOR BIO

A multi-published author since 1983, with commissions from Hodder & Stoughton plus a **Sunday Times No. 4 Bestseller**, Merrilyn Williams has written under several *noms-de-plume*, most recently Mel Menzies for her Evie Adams series of novels, set in the Westcountry. Once

secretary to American author, Paul Gallico, she has been a member of ACW for over forty years, and not so long ago had the privilege of being Chair. An inspirational speaker with a lifetime of rich and painful experiences to draw on, she has also led writers' workshops, and been keynote speaker for the Salvation Army at The Hayes, Swanwick. Through her website, An Author's Look at Life www.melmenzies.co.uk, she offers resources to inform, inspire and encourage in all walks of life and blogs regularly on creative writing, speaking, faith and relationships. With the outbreak of the Covid19 pandemic, she set up a website for the ACW Writers' Group she has led for decades, having had a vision in which the Lord told her we could 'feed the 5,000'. We are now well on the way to doing so – see [Shine A Light On Life](#).



LATEST BOOKS are currently less than half price on my website, with all proceeds going to charity:
Time To Shine – first in the Evie Adams novels, in which Evie, a counsellor, helps to solve the mystery behind a female client's abusive marriage. The book became **No 1 in its category on Amazon**. This was followed by ***Chosen?*** in which Evie helps a male client, adopted at birth, to discover his biological family.

Picked for a Purpose – is a memoir with teaching that seeks to show that we *all* have a purpose in life. Excerpts from the book, and Bible Studies based on it, may be found here: [Roots In Rocky Places](#).

Reviews: *Mel Menzies has an impressive track record with her books. Look in the mirror of 'Picked for a Purpose' and it may prove life changing!* **David Coffey OBE, BMS Global Ambassador.** *Mel writes with honesty and openness, and her words are laced with hope. Read this book and find hope rather than clichés, substance rather than slogans. Highly recommended.* **Jeff Lucas, Author, Speaker, Broadcaster**