

# Sometimes he's funny, sometimes he just doesn't wake up

*(Editor's note: Here's a new Diversions column, from John Howell, one of the top-rated disc jockeys on the morning radio scene in Grand Rapids.*

I remember the day I told my father about my new job: disc jockey!! I also remember how he turned white and started shaking.

Of course, this was only a few months after I had dedicated my life to big-time wrestling, and only a couple of years after Dad had spent \$25,000 on me at the Berklee College of Music, in Boston.

He kept his composure and wished me luck once again. But he did mumble something about he and Mom having a little too much to drink on New Year's Eve 1959.

After working at, and being fired from, several stations in the Grand Rapids area, I now host the morning show at WGRD-FM (97.9). What a great job! Paid for reading the newspapers, talking on the phone, making mundane comments, and listening to the same mind-numbing songs over and over.

Most of my work days begin at 3:30 a.m., with the first of four alarms, not including my internal one, which ranges from gentle to violent . . . depending on the previous night's menu.

First every morning, check the radio news and hope for another incident on Jimmy & Tammy, or perhaps a



## Sometimes He's Funny

'Big John' Howell

fist fight at the city commission. I lay in bed trying to remember what it was like to get up at a late hour — like 6 or 7 a.m.

My mind will wander to important topics like: If medical science succeeds in wiping out all disease, will we lose our sick days? Why isn't motel soap bigger? Wouldn't the Amway make a dandy parking garage?

My broken toe has never really healed because each morning (in the darkness that is 3:40 a.m.) I stub it, I swear, the neighbor knocks, I swear again — louder. Hot water? Great. I stand under the water doing nothing but thinking of the important issues of the day: Someplace in the world, is there a hotel named "Look What The Cat Dragged In"?

I don't eat breakfast at 4 a.m., it just makes me sick. Oh, I might have the urge. After all, man has created life, mastered space, and controlled nature . . . So why can't I cook good eggs?

The process of transforming "stay-pressed" clothes into the "lived-in look" is a quick one, every morning, and as I head out the door I check my answering machine to see who I was supposed to call back the day before.

I get the same cab driver every morning, and the trip down Heritage Hill only takes a couple minutes, even when we stop at the newspaper stands. The cabbie tells me about his job; I talk about mine.

After catching my breath from the long walk up the stairs at the WGRD studios, I scan the four morning newspapers and prepare for the show. The routine between 4:15 a.m. and showtime can include any number of duties. Maybe I'll pour through a dozen cheap joke books for some more "original" comedy, or record a parody song or commercial. My mailbox is always interesting. After tossing out all inter-office memos, I'll read my mail and set aside any nasty hate mail to be read on the air.

Five-thirty a.m. It's showtime! The producer has arranged all the songs and commercials in order, the day's computer sheets are laid out.

Then the panic button once again goes off, and I wonder if I really have any business invading people's

personal lives. Do I have anything of importance to say, today?

But the thought of having to get a "real" job quickly outweighs the hesitation of forging ahead. The "on air" light flashes, and I begin another 4½ hours of talking on the phone, mundane comments, and listening to the same mind-numbing songs over and over.

*"Big John" Howell is on WGRD-FM, mornings. But he's not really big; look at his picture — he's only 3 inches tall.*

## GR Junior League presents Xmas shop

The Junior League of Grand Rapids is presenting the "Beneath the Wreath" specialized shopping for discriminating gift giving in Aquinas College this week.

Beneath the Wreath is a collection of specialty shops gathered from across the country to present their goods in one convenient location; the Wege Student Center, located in Aquinas College, 1620 Fulton St. SE. The event will be held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Thursday; from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Friday; and from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. Saturday. The cost is \$2.50 per person, or \$2 each for groups of six or more. Authorized parking is available at the college. Lunch and snacks can be found at Cafe Noel.

Some of the exhibitors include: Alpha-pets, from Charleston, SC, with handpainted personal items, key chains, and children's clothing; The Attic, from Franklin, Tenn., with handmade Christmas ornaments; Cherriches, from Malvern, Pa., with champagne, mustards, gourmet sauces, and salad dressings; East of the Sun, from Saugatuck, with woodies, carolers, gifts, and ornaments; and many others from all over Michigan and 10 other states.

For additional information, call the Junior League Office at 451-0452.

**FREE DELIVERY**

11:00 A.M. TO 12:00 MIDNIGHT

**JJ's #1**

890 Fuller, N.E.



**JJ's #2**

1634 - 4 Mile Rd., N.E.