



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

www.theBDR.net

... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

First Person My Dinner with Leonard



By Rich Wood

[June 2012] When we learned that Leonard Kahn had died we turned to Rich Wood, who had a relationship with Kahn going back over 40 years. We wanted to know a bit more about a man who did not make it easy to know him.

The curmudgeon community has lost one of its most highly regarded members. Leonard Kahn of Kahn Communications and father of AM Stereo died early in the month at 86 years of age.

I like curmudgeons - but especially this one.

And, as you will quickly guess, this is less an obituary than it is reminiscence.

CONNECTION

I have a very different view of this man than many.

I am not an engineer. My specialty is programming. That probably allowed me to tap dance through the minefield Leonard could be when he encountered skeptics and what he considered corporate bullies. Barry Mishkind, father of the Broadcasters' Desktop Resource, joked that “So

far as I know, he had no children aside from Rich Wood.”

After I stopped laughing I realized that this was substantially true. I was not the only one, of course. Leonard treated those he liked and respected as family.

INTRODUCTION

I met Leonard early in the 1970's when I was the Program Manager of XTRA, Tijuana/San Diego.

As a Mexican “Border Blaster” we were not restrained – as US stations were – from running AM Stereo 24/7 while other stations were still “experimenting” with it. At that time, the only option for stations was the Kahn system.

When I left XTRA and started my own business, Leonard was the first to call. He asked me to represent Kahn AM Stereo on the West Coast.

About that time a friend and I started the *AM Stereo Association*. Days after we announced it KSL, Salt Lake City, sent us a membership

check. They were the only one. It became obvious that only Leonard could sell his system directly to Engineers through his relationship with them. That should have been a clue that AM Stereo was not then ready for Prime Time among Managers and Programmers.

We returned KSL's check.

AN ONGOING RELATIONSHIP

However, we were not done. Leonard and I had a gentleman's agreement. To me that was far more iron-clad than any contract.

He knew that new businesses always struggle. So, he paid me full commissions even on leads I generated months before the stations signed contracts. Fortunately, they did sign up.



Photo courtesy: AES

When it was finally approved, Leonard had his system running on dozens of major market 50 kilowatt stations.

I would love to have so many terrible relationships.

KAHN VS MOTOROLA ... AND THE WORLD

I followed his endless disputes with Motorola and, eventually, various other companies.

He sent me copies of many of the legal documents he was submitting for my non-technical comments. I expected Motorola, with its political and financial clout, to squash him like a bug.

Wrong!

It is not nice to fool Father Kahn. Over the years, Kahn turned to the courts to give voice to his many complaints about big corporations and the way they operated against radio's interests.

As many did, I saw what unbridled passion can do. Other than his wonderful wife Ruth he loved little more than AM Radio. Since he named his web site *The Wrath of Kahn* it was clear he knew his reputation.

THE PRIVATE SIDE

I can only imagine the hellfire and brimstone that would have rained down on the world if Ruth had not been a moderating force in his life. She was the gentle voice that softened his edges.

When I moved to New York City to program Tribune's WPIX-FM, Leonard and Ruth were the first to welcome me to the city with a wonderful dinner at *The Water Club*.

I saw a dramatic change in Leonard when Ruth died in late 2005. She was his support structure. I vividly remember his sad phone call when it happened.

There has been much written about Leonard's cantankerous nature and I do not need to repeat all of it. My hope is to balance some of that with the side of Leonard that was warm and loyal. Our business does not often report that.

If it seems like I am fawning over a treasured friend, I can deal with that.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

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