

THE JOB OF MY LIFE

By Tony Wilson

I have presented *Breakfasters* for six years, just less than a sixth of my life. It's been undoubtedly the job of my life - bashing into submission such other contenders as:

- unpaid boat cleaner for Bar-B-Boats (one hot unpaid summer cleaning up after booze cruises. Their cheque bounced);
- intimate apparel stock boy at Daimaru (never promoted to the satin finery of front of shop);
- insolvency and banking lawyer at Minter Ellison ('best ever' Santa Claus at two consecutive partners' picnics) and;
- failed professional footballer (parting quote to Hawthorn coach 'you'll regret this decision for the rest of your life').

I've been told by past *Breakfasters* that it will always be the job of my life - that for freedom, friendship and a sense of community, there is nothing to match it. And yet just as those wise old Gandalfs eventually left, I too am leaving. Sam and Fee would demand that the official reason be recorded as 'to spend more time with my family' even if in truth, Tam and Polly have not particularly missed me between the hours of six and nine in the morning.

The real reason has more to do with the rhythms of my work day. I would like to write more novels, and am currently struggling to write as much or as well as I would like. That last sentence, for example. That is a tired sentence, constructed at 3pm on a day when the undoubted highlight was finding out that our former segment presenter, Dr Cass, grew up with a public toilet urinal installed in his family home to cater for himself and his five brothers. The callers rallied to the topic - industrial appliances that appear in domestic situations. The callers *always* rally to the topic. So often, the day's biggest laughs come in those on-air hours. Is there a show on radio where the listeners are so consistently on-topic and funny? Of course occasionally a listener is off-topic and unfunny, and then the enjoyment is in watching Sam and Fee's faces as we sit trapped before the steamroller of awkward conversation. It's been so much fun.

I have many reasons to thank Kath Letch for offering me the job. Every day there is a raft of guests, which have ranged from international stars like Richard E. Grant, to a nine-year-old kid called Huon who was a 'definite maybe' to turn up to his own exhibition opening. I've loved meeting and getting to know segment presenters. And despite what I would regard as a dark era of federal politics, marked by a small man's no-holds-barred approach to power, I've enjoyed reading the news.

But the best part of all has been the time spent with my co-hosts. In 2002 it was John Safran. Who else could have given away album of the week to the person who rang in and proved that he hated us the most? Who else could have compiled a definitive list of all Adolfs who were not Adolf Hitler? Then, in 2003, it was Angus Murray Lincoln Sampson, named for four types of cattle, who could be asleep against the tiles in his own shower at ten to six, but have us in hysterics by quarter past.

But the sadness right now is relinquishing the daily catch ups with Sam and Fee. For four years, Sam has smiled his way through the show, needling Fee about whether she will play any Nelly, needling me about how the deciding factor in whether he has a third coffee is whether I make it. Pang has made almost every morning of those four years a joy, and with Burt and shit siblings and red beards and countless other on-air highlights, it is a joy he has so effectively shared with everyone.

As for Fee, she has piloted my entire journey through *Breakfasters*. From day one, we realised we had similar senses of humour, even if at that stage I didn't quite have her good taste in music. The great public service Fee has done me is the same one she has provided to so many listeners - she expanded my musical horizons, across genres and continents. For six years, Fee B-Squared has fed me goat's fetta where once I had Coon.

She's also a true comedy connoisseur. I remember the first time I ever visited her house she pulled out old *Saturday Night Live* video tapes, and played them to me for hours on end. Now I know that this was all preparation, that she is full to the brim with Sandler and Farley and Myers and Carvey and even a cheeky late caller called Toby who once called 3AW's Bruce and Phil to ask them to name the smelliest thing in the world. Slowly, I've navigated Fee's vast memorised back catalogue, and now when I hear the name 'Elliot', I only have to press PLAY. Indeed I can almost do the lines from 'The Sure Thing' myself.

'You're gonna name the kid Elliot? No, you can't name the kid Elliot. Elliot is a fat kid with glasses who eats paste. You're not gonna name the kid Elliot. You gotta give him a real name. Give him a name. Like Nick.'

The nicest thing of all is that the on-air rapport comes out of a genuine love and respect. Fee and Sam have not just been workmates. Outside family, they are the two people I would call in a personal catastrophe. Fee at any time of the day or night. Sam, if it was twenty one and still, or if Fee wasn't answering.

And so I go. To pursue my writing. To finish my second novel. To find where the snooze button is and to use it. I'll also be growing a beard and digging out the long white robes, because after six years, I become one of the Gandalfs. And like the others, I'll never stray far from this wonderful radio station - hanging around at barbecue days and OBs; apparating out of thin air whenever I need to plug something; telling the current day *Breakfasters* what a grand job they are doing, and *for heavens sake to enjoy it* - for this is the job of your life.

Breakfasters Live Broadcast

Friday 14 December

The *Breakfasters* final broadcast for 2007 live from the Blue Diamond, Level 15, 123 Queen St Melbourne from 6am-9am.



At Triple R's 30th Party at the Forum, Tony as the Chief from *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Fee as Major 'Hotlips' Hoolahan and Sam as Kottler

Picture: Shane Bell/City Weekly