



TAKING THE TIME

JAN BARTLETT

Jan Bartlett had no particular love of the microphone when she first got behind one in 1986. In a sense that hasn't changed over the course of a thirty-year career as a current affairs interviewer.

'I know some people like to hear their own voice all the time but I don't put my voice in much,' she says. 'I just ask questions and follow them up, and I think most people are quite happy not to be interrupted and hear my point of view all the time.'

Needless to say, there are other differences between Jan and your average current affairs presenter. For one thing, not many are known to have signed up for the task of balancing their station's books. For another, few broadcasters the world over would be capable of producing Christmas cakes, tarts and jam at such scale. Jan's one-woman cottage industry, at its height, saw her baking 600 cakes in one year, which raised \$20 000 for 3CR.

It was 1983 when Jan first 'toddled in' to the Cromwell Street building. Married, in her mid-thirties and with two teenage sons, she'd returned to study and been told by her public media lecturer to go and find out what 'public media' was.

'I had no intention of doing anything but answering phones,' the *Tuesday Hometime* presenter says. 'I sat on an outdated, horrible switchboard on a Friday afternoon.'

But a bit over six months later the mayor of Fitzroy was cutting the ribbon on the newly renovated Smith Street HQ, which was fitted with a 'lovely new, old switchboard', and before long Jan had been drawn into the life of the station and was taking on responsibility for its financial survival.

First she took over the administration of listener sponsors. Then, with the help of her brother, accountant Graeme Boscoe, she taught herself to do the books. Two-thirds of the way through an arts degree she ditched it to go full time in the office.

Humphrey McQueen's *Australia's Media Monopolies* was partly to blame. 'It explained to me so clearly the role of the mass media, advertising, and capitalism,' Jan says of the book, which had been on one of her reading lists.

Jan Bartlett in Studio 1, early 1990s.

The main pull factor for Jan, though, was the people, whose backgrounds and stories rapidly broadened the former 'housewife's' horizons, providing an education that hadn't been on offer at Melbourne Uni.

At the same time as tuning in to the 3CR community, Jan was becoming a broadcaster. Encouraged into the studio by station manager Geoff Swanton, she'd started out playing folk music. As her political awareness grew, she began interviewing the people around her.

'It started off with Latin America, because it was the time of El Salvador and Nicaragua and Guatemala and Honduras, where dreadful things were happening.'

With the departure of her co-presenter and a developing set of contacts, Jan hit her stride as a programmer, turning her attention to a wide range of events and issues, including the war in Bougainville, the occupation of East Timor, Burma's brutal military junta, the plight of the Palestinians and animal rights.

'She's a fabulous broadcaster,' says Geoff Swanton's successor, Bruce Francis, who presented the Wednesday version of Jan's show in the late 1980s. 'She is so amazingly prepared—unlike some of us, who would just roll up and run off the seat of our pants with what knowledge we had.'

'She has a range of issues she's particularly interested in and a particular style of in-depth broadcasting. She'll pursue an issue over years, find someone who's a real expert on it and go back to them on a regular basis, so you get this whole informed perspective on how something is actually unfolding.'

Activists Max Watts and Rosemarie Gillespie, MP Joan Coxsedg, journalist Nic Maclellan, anarchist Joe Toscano, East Timor 'separatist' (now ambassador) Abel Guterres and Indonesia and Timor rights campaigner Pat Walsh were among the large cast of characters who talked regularly to Jan on the show through the 1990s. Their expansive, leftist commentary, guided by her sparse but probing questions, charted the fluctuations and flashpoints of political and rights issues around the world.

Nic Maclellan, a long-time campaigner in the Pacific islands, is still doing regular interviews on Jan's show. 'It's worth getting up early once a month to record my chat with Jan,' he says. 'Tuesday *Hometime* is one of the few radio programs that consistently reports on the islands region that is so important to Australia, and provides information about the Pacific trade unions, women's organisations and indigenous communities that are the counterparts of 3CR's audience.'

People still call the station asking for her jams, but since resigning from the office in 2005 Jan feels she's earned the freedom to focus on what she wants to do at 3CR, which is work on her show and record oral histories for it.

'I like getting people in for a few hours, then editing the recording well. I've done a lot of people's life stories and I take the time to sit and talk to them properly,' she says.

Given the time she's taken at 3CR over the years to talk to people properly, to support other programmers and to help run the station, the amazing thing is that only one part of the premises has been dedicated to Jan.

'It was truly extraordinary,' Bruce Francis says, of her decades of full-time, full-on volunteer commitment. 'I've never known anyone else to do it.'

But Jan carries her contribution quietly, describing her involvement at 3CR as an opportunity she would never otherwise have had, to meet, interview and make friends with such a rich range of people.

'It's that confidence and knowledge that you're sort of making a contribution to a better world,' she says—confident now, after three decades behind the mic, but still understated.



Jan Barlett (front left) and others rallying to save 3CR on the steps of Dallas Brooks Hall, East Melbourne, after Minister Steve Crabb made a submission against the station's licence being renewed because of its defence of the Builders Labourers' Federation, 1987.