

*Born Lowen Lee Slagle to Lee Roy and Beulah (Catlett) Slagle on a farm in southeast Nebraska, Lee Shannon (radio name) spent 38 years as a disc jockey for Country Music Radio stations across the country. Lee had a talent that brought him nationwide recognition and honors throughout his career.*

## **My 38 Years Between the Country Music Turntables**

by Lee Shannon

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# MY 38 YEARS BETWEEN THE COUNTRY MUSIC TURNTABLES



FOREWORD BY  
Country Music Hall of Fame Member  
Whisperin' Bill Anderson

# LEE SHANNON

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## Chapter 10

Sometime after meeting Jim and Juanita Laughlin and after the start of racing season, I was introduced to a lady that Juanita, a nurse, worked with. Her name was Bonnie. We had a very casual relationship, usually seeing her in the pits when she and Juanita and other fans from the grandstand would visit drivers after the races. Occasionally the four of us would go out to eat after racing or she would be at Jim and Juanita's house when I would come over to work on the race car. As time went on we got to know each other better.

Bonnie's mother did not live in the area. Her mother and step-father lived near Fort Wayne, Indiana. Bonnie had been living with her aunt Irene, a nurse at St Luke's hospital. Her grandmother resided in Maquoketa, about 40 miles north of Davenport.

After much thought, I talked to her aunt Irene about marrying Bonnie. She encouraged us to wait since we were both young and working on our careers. We didn't wait long before tying the knot. Justin Wayne Slagle was born January 28, 1965 in Youngstown, Ohio. The marriage lasted only five years.

Being a married man now with a baby on the way, I realized I needed to say goodbye to my beloved white '62 Corvette convertible and get more of a family type vehicle, so I traded it in for a 1964 Ford convertible, white with a white top and red interior. We then prepared for another move.

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We moved to Youngstown, Ohio where I had a job waiting for me, a job at a CBS 'Good Music' radio station. I would be the host of a new country music overnight (midnight to six AM) show. The station had decided that was the music format needed for this blue-collar city and were willing to make the overnight slot the test area. Grand Ole Opry member, Bill Anderson, had recommended me as the person to host those six hours. I am sure his recommendation weighed heavily in their decision to hire me.

The test paid off with ratings for that time slot which were absolutely through the roof with a share of around sixty-five percent showing a huge majority of the radio audience in the Youngstown area was listening to my all-night show. WKBN-AM's frequency, on the bottom end of the radio dial at 570khz, would go directional with its six towers at night, sending its signal mainly in a south-southwesterly direction. I would get cards from listeners as far away as the Caribbean Islands. Many nights I would also receive phone calls during the broadcast from some of the country recording artists, on the road in Texas, New Mexico and Louisiana.

When Justin was just a few weeks old, I was hired to emcee a country music show across the line into Pennsylvania. One of the artists on the show was a young Hank Williams, Jr. He was a clean-shaven singer in those early stages of his career, and still under the guidance of his mother, Audrey. Justin was a very well behaved little boy that night, until Miss Audrey came to the mic to sing a couple of

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songs. He cried until she left the stage, then went back to sleep.

While in Youngstown, I met a lady named Kathy Dee, a singer who was from the area and a former member of the Wheeling Jamboree in Wheeling, West Virginia. This country music venue, which began in 1933, was known as the 'Worlds Original Jamboree', the second oldest country music broadcast in the U.S., after the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee, which had gotten its start in 1925. Kathy had been invited back as a guest performer in the early spring of 1965. She invited me to come to Wheeling as her guest, to be introduced on stage as the new all-night host of the all-country radio program on AM 570, WKBN.



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Although Kathy Dee developed diabetes at an early age, she lived her dream of becoming a country music recording artist with several hits and even made it to the stage of the Grand Ole Opry for a guest performance. By the mid 1960's, only a few months after we appeared on stage together at the Wheeling Jamboree, I learned she had lost her sight. This lovely and talented lady passed away in November of 1968, some five months shy of her thirty seventh birthday. If you google "Kathy Dee, country singer", you will see a photo of Kathy and a young thirty-one -year old, Lee Shannon, taken that night in 1965.



By early 1966, I got word that KFDI, Wichita, Kansas was looking for a Program Director. With a new son and an all-night job, trying to sleep during the day was beginning to wear on me and Bonnie. This was a full-time country music radio station, under the new ownership of Mike Lynch and Mike Oatman. An all-country station was what I had been working for and this would get us back to the Midwest, closer to family.

The day I began work as the new Program Director at KFDI was the morning the station received the latest Arbitron ratings (survey to measure the number of listeners a radio station has), which were very good. Understandably, the announcing staff could not see beyond these current good numbers and see there was an opportunity to move from “very good” to “excellent. After about six months, I could see they did not really need my services.

Shortly I was contacted by KSTT in Davenport as the station needed a new morning host, so I returned to where I had worked previously with Bill Vancil and his team of KSTT 'Good Guys'. I had enjoyed my time there even though this station was not one with a country format.

In late 1967, I was working my regular Saturday morning shift when I received a phone call from G. Laverne at WQUA, across the river in Moline, Illinois. The same Mr. Flambo I had worked for several years earlier. He asked how I'd like to work in Indianapolis, Indiana at a new full-time country music station. He told me Don Nelson had taken over as the station manager and was putting a staff together. Mr.



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Flambo told me if I was interested he would have a plane ticket waiting for me to pick up at the airport at one p.m. and Don Nelson would pick me up at the Indianapolis airport.

Upon my arrival, I got a brief tour of the 'Circle City' and the radio station downtown and flew home to tell Bonnie about the new job. She was not in favor of it, explaining she had made the move from Davenport to Youngstown to Wichita back to the Quad Cities, and now I wanted to go to Indianapolis. *Deja vu*. Zoe, all over again. So, I called Don Nelson to inform him of the decision I was forced to make.

For some reason, Bonnie changed her mind three months later. I never asked for a reason. This was one of those jobs of a lifetime. Perhaps it was from a discussion she had with her aunt Irene, who was "old school". She believed it was a wife's duty to go where her husband's employment took him. Fortunately, Don Nelson had not filled the position and I went on the air February of 1968 at WIRE Radio in Indianapolis.

Once we got there, I settled into my afternoon drive air shift (three to seven p.m.). My last two hours would be a remote broadcast from Smart and Perry Ford in Greenwood, a suburb just a twenty-minute drive south of downtown Indy. Before going on air at three, I would tape the third half-hour of my show. That was aired while I drove to Greenwood for the final two hours of my show. On the showroom floor of the Ford store was a small broadcast facility the WIRE engineers had set up for me. It consisted of two turntables for playing

the records and a microphone attached by a flexible gooseneck.

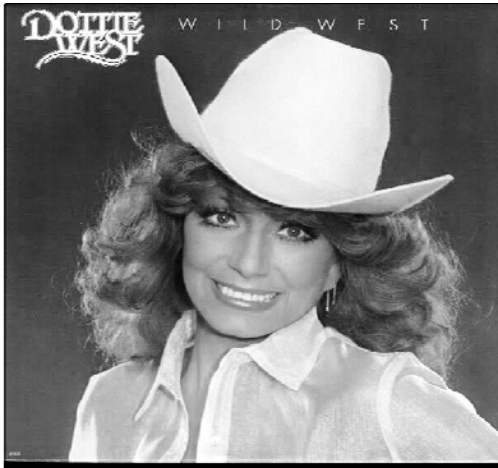
Herb Combs was the General Manager at Smart and Perry Ford and, a huge country music fan. He had booked Grand Ole Opry member Dottie West for a personal appearance. WIRE station manager, Don Nelson, insisted on his deejays, known as the Country Gentlemen, to be dressed accordingly. On remotes, we were expected to wear coat and tie. I had taken the mic off the gooseneck to interview Dottie on the showroom floor and when finished, placed that mic in my inside sport coat pocket while we continued chatting after sending it back to the WIRE studio for a commercial break. When the studio sent it back to me, I was seated at the control board in front of that goose neck minus the mic which was still inside my sport coat pocket. For those first few seconds the listeners must have thought I was speaking from another room. One of those embarrassing moments one can experience in public. I remember later seeing NASCAR driver Joey Logano one time after a TV interview, tip up his Coca Cola bottle to take a drink and he had forgotten to remove the bottle cap.

Dottie West and I would cross paths several more times over the years. This beautiful redhead, the oldest of ten children, was born in McMinnville, Tennessee. Following graduation from Tennessee Technical University in Cookeville, Dottie began appearing on a local TV Jamboree show as one half of a country-pop vocal duo called the “Kay-Dots” alongside partner Kathy Dee.

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Dottie West wrote a commercial called “Country Sunshine” which also became a hit record for her, reaching number two on Billboard's Hot Country Singles in 1973. “Here Comes My Baby” won her a Grammy for Best Country and Western Vocal Performance in 1964, the first woman to win that award. She also recorded hits with other country music performers. In the late sixties, she teamed with Don Gibson for “Rings of Gold”, also reaching number two on the country charts. They were nominated in 1969 and 1970 by the Country Music Association (CMA) for Vocal Duo of the Year. She also recorded a series of duets with Kenny Rogers; “Every Time Two Worlds Collide”, “All I Ever Need Is You” and “What Are We Doin' In Love”, all becoming country standards after earning Platinum and number one status, as did her single “A Lesson in Leavin”.

*Lee Shannon*



Dottie West died September 4, 1991 in Nashville from injuries suffered from a car accident on her way to perform on the Grand Ole Opry. It was just five weeks before her fifty ninth birthday.