



Brother Wease

A Life in the Limelight

No. 1 Rochester radio personality: Telling it like it is

By Amy Cavalier

No apologies. What you see is what you get when it comes to Brother Wease, one of Rochester's longest-running and most well known radio personalities.

Whether you love him or hate him, whether you listen or don't, the word "Wease" is synonymous with Rochester.

He's been voted the No. 1 radio personality in The Democrat and Chronicle Rochester's Choice Awards for the past 10 years and he ranks No. 1 among men 25-54 years of age, according to Arbitron, a consumer research company that collects listener data on radio audiences.

Wease's name is on bumper stickers. He's known for having a foul mouth and using made-up words like "shiznit" and "keester."

"He's got an over-the-top personality," says Joe Tantalio, co-owner of Physical Graffiti and a former producer of "Radio Free Wease."

"He wears his heart on his sleeve, tells it like it is, and what you get on the radio is what you get in person. There's no different personality. He's the same 24-7," he said.

His fame extends well beyond Rochester. Wease attended all three Woodstock concerts, serving as emcee in 1994 and 1999. Co-producer of the concerts, John Scher calls Wease "one of the greatest DJ's in the history of the modern music industry."

"He's is a rare breed because in America, especially terrestrial radio has taken an awful lot of the personality out of the industry," Scher says.

Scher compares Brother Wease to famous DJs such as the likes of Alan Freed, who is famous for introducing the term "rock 'n' roll" in the 1950s; Murray the K in the 1960s, who referred to himself as the 'fifth Beatle'; Cousin Brucie in New York City and Wolfman Jack in Los Angeles.

Wease loves to argue, he sports sunglasses indoors and has more than 45 tattoos. He's also as honest as he is loyal and notorious for speaking his mind. It's hard to typecast "The Wease Show," says Kevin LeGrett, vice president and marketing manager for Clear Channel's cluster of radio and television stations in Rochester.

"He, in many ways, invented the format he does," says LeGrett. "He is a pioneer and all you need to do is listen to Rochester radio to hear the imitators on a daily basis. There's only one Brother Wease and everybody aspires to be him."

Wease has met people and experienced things most people have only dreamed of, says Leslie Zinck, a long-time listener and owner of Lovin' Cup Bistro and Brews in Park Point at RIT. In spite of all his accomplishments, she says, he remains humble.

"Wease just is who he is, and he lets it all hang out for us to hear," says

Zinck. "He does all of these things while making us laugh. Not a giggle, or a chuckle, but a really good belly laugh. It's a beautifully refreshing thing."

In 2008, at the age of 63, when most people are retiring or already retired, Brother Wease was picked up by Clear Channel and had to rebuild his show from the ground up.

"That ain't as easy as I thought," he says. "That was pretty tough and scary, you know? I lost fans, and the guys I left behind do the show I created without me."

Now 65, Wease is working harder and waking up earlier than he ever has before, says his wife Doreen Levin.

"He's become an institution, but he doesn't take it for granted in any way," she says. "He still works real hard. Instead of backing off, expecting listeners, he always wants to be on top of his game. He's always worried about giving listeners the best show he can give them."

War, what is it good for?

Born on Park Avenue, Wease attended No. 1 School and Monroe High School. His dad Hyman owned a printing business and his mother Beverly was a housewife. He has two older sisters. After graduating from high school in 1965, he joined the Army as a paratrooper at the age of 19.

"It was kinda dumb decision," he says in hindsight.



Brother Wease with his wife Doreen, and four of his five kids: the older boy and girl are Satchel Jacob and Abbey Rose. The younger two are Lucille Ball and Sammy Davis Jr.

After advanced infantry training at Fort Gordon in Augusta, Ga., followed by paratrooper school at Fort Benning, Wease shipped off to Vietnam. He took three trips from 1966 to 1968, spending time in the jungles of the Northern Highlands and then the Long Binh Post in Saigon. After the war, he was promoted to drill sergeant.

"I didn't want to teach anybody to do that and send them to get killed," he says. "I was too pussy.

I used to go in and see my captain every week-and-a-half and ask for a different job."

Wease went AWOL, leaving the Army to manage a band. If he was lacking direction when he left for Vietnam, Wease says, he came home with even less. In a short period of time he was busted for drugs, served a year of jail time as a result of going AWOL, and got married to a "chick" in Philadelphia.

In 1975, he moved back to

Rochester to work for his father's business, Levin Printing, and he "hated it something terrible." Wease's heart was in music.

Glory days

Wease's radio career began as a "lucky accident," he said. While buying tickets for a show in Rochester, Wease met concert promoter Ted Boylan. The two hit it off and Wease began working for him. Together they brought acts like The Pretenders, Divo, Peter Tosh, Def Leppard and Judas Priest to town. Through his work as a promoter, Wease met Trip Reeb, program director at 96.5 WCMF at the time.

"One night he asked me, 'Did I ever want to be on the radio?'" Wease recalls. "I said 'Who doesn't want to be on the radio?'"

Eventually, Wease landed a 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. shift as a regular disc jockey five days a week at WCMF. When the station needed to fill a morning slot in December 1984, they approached Wease.

"I didn't want to do it," he says. "I didn't think I knew what I was doing. I was on at night, getting high, picking tunes, having a ball, meeting broads. It was a big raise, not that I even cared."

Despite his doubts, Wease took the gig. He gives much credit for his rise to success to famous comedian Sam Kinison.

Early in Wease's career, Kinison would frequent Wease's show when he was performing in Syracuse and Buffalo. He has also hosted Jay Leno, Adam Sandler and David Spade on his show, and Andrew Dice Clay visited the studio in January.

"I hate to brag, but I pretty much invented the way I did this," he says. "I've gone to morning show boot camp for the past 20 years and I've really spread the way to do this to tons of other shows that are now way bigger than me. They give me credit, and that feels good, but it also sort of hurts."

Back in the saddle again

In January 2008, Wease and Entercom failed to reach a contract. He says it was strictly a "dollars and

cents" decision for both parties.

"There was no betrayal," he says. "Those guys I left behind may have felt betrayed by me, but that's not the way it is. I have to worry about my family before I worry about anything else."

When he was picked up by Clear Channel a few months later, he had to build the show from the ground up. The show's line up has gone through some adjustments since restarting in 2008. Nationally known comedian Jamie Lissow is the only original cast member. Also on the show are head producer Pauly Guglielmo, and assistant producers Scott Brooks, also known as 'Brooksie', and Billy D'Ettorre.

A guest comedian on the Jay Leno show and Comedy Central, Lissow was living in New York City three years ago when he got the call about being on the "The Wease Show." With a son on the way, Lissow was looking to get back to Rochester and family.

"This is probably like one of the only opportunities I would have ever wanted to come home for," he says. "He's your guy; the LeBron James [of radio]. I knew I was joining what was the winning team and I just hoped I could do my job. I think it's gone pretty well."

The success behind the show is Wease's ability to tell it like it is, says Guglielmo.

"You fall in love with him as a friend and as a personality on the radio because you feel like you could have a beer with this guy and really talk to him," says Guglielmo.

Zinck says she admires the way Brother Wease speaks from the heart, whether he thinks people will like it or not.

"He loves people for who they are, and gives everyone a chance, but calls people out when they need to be called out," she says. "He'll admit when he is wrong, but not without a stubborn fight. Even though Wease is a strong force to be reckoned with, you can tell he has a sensitive side too."

The worst part of his job, Wease says, is negative feedback, especially when it's anonymous. He's the first

to admit that he doesn't have a "thick skin." Ratings stress him out.

"If I'm No. 1 by a mile, and I've got a 10-share, then that means 90 percent of people aren't listening to me," he says. "I know how good my radio show is. It's respected nationally, and called legendary by GQ [Magazine], but you know, to have to worry about these ratings is brutal."

It's a family affair

Wease is a self-proclaimed "lover of people."

"I always have to be with people," he says. "That's why I've been married three times. I've never lived alone."

He isn't shy about professing his love for his wife Doreen.

"The secret is she loves me, and you don't get that a lot," he says. "Here she is, 22 years younger than I am, way too hot for me, and she sincerely loves me. I can't tell you how much she does. We do everything together."

Originally from Long Island, Doreen moved to Rochester in 1990 to get her Master's degree at the University of Rochester. One of her former boyfriends was listening to the Wease show one day and called in. When Wease heard Doreen's thick Long Island accent in the background, he asked her to get on the phone. Before she knew it, she was being invited onto the show.

"It was exciting and fun," she says. "I was never anxious or nervous. I just went on to have fun and be myself."

Doreen would fill-in on the show in the early '90s. As the years progressed, so did a friendship between the two. In the fall of 1995, they started hanging out more seriously.

"Then one day he kissed me and that was it," she says. "He's got such a big heart and truly, that's what I loved the most. He's so caring and so giving."

Wease credits her with saving his life twice. Fifteen years ago, Doreen stopped Wease from getting an operation on his pancreas and got him into a specialist at John Hopkins for a second opinion. It wound up being a simple cyst. In 2005, Wease

was diagnosed with nasal pharyngeal carcinoma, a rare form of sinus cancer. Doreen got him into the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center for treatments. During his treatment, WCMF raised nearly \$100,000 for children with cancer with the "Kick Cancer's Ass," campaign. Wease has been cancer-free since.

Married for 14 years, Wease and Doreen have two children: Lucille Ball and Sammy Davis Jr. He also has children from his previous marriages: Satchel Jacob, Abbey Rose and Dianne. He spends his free time with family, traveling to Florida or the Caribbean, and at his summer home on Sodus Point.

Doreen, who works in education, says people often ask her how she tolerates having her life discussed on the radio.

"I've always been a very open person, even at work, so it didn't bother me and eventually, the people of Rochester, his listeners have become our big family," she says. "It's a blessing to me because we don't have any family here in town. Instead, it's like our family is replaced by all the people in Rochester who listen to him. It's amazing."

She says the listeners have been with them from the beginning of their relationship and sometimes they'll remind her about details of their lives she's even forgotten. Some even send cards for their children's birthdays.

"I know that there are other radio shows that try to do his kind of radio and at times they have issues because their family members don't want their lives to be an open book, and most of them don't even use their significant other's real name," says Doreen.

Doreen says she thinks listeners can appreciate that Wease has a wife at home that's going to nag him to empty the trash and the litter box and kids who want him to come home from poker and take them to a movie. At home, Doreen says, she gets the Wease show "uncensored."

"He will tend to bring home the same sentiment he has on the radio. I just get to hear the longer version of it with more dirty words," she says.

Satchel Jacob Levin, 24, is Wease's

son from his second marriage. He says his father is just as entertaining off the air as he is on.

"The basics behind a good argument are passion and facts and he has so much passion about what he's talking about it makes for a great argument to listen to," Satchel says. "I think he's just that way as a person. He's good at talking. All that pulled together, he's a radio personality and his personality brings out the best on radio."

There goes the last DJ

Wease said he is proud of the things he's accomplished on radio. During a recent 24-hour talk show to benefit Monroe Community Hospital that raised \$30,000, Wease agreed to have several sponsors' company names tattooed on his body. Wease is part owner of Physical Graffiti tattoos in Rochester.

"It sounds crazy to people, but I'm proud," he says. "Radio people do stupid, phony radio bits and you

might think mine is, but it's pretty bold, it's lasting forever, and it was for charity. Plus, nobody else has ever done it. If it wasn't hard, why doesn't everybody else do it?"

Wease is also big on endorsing services or causes that are near to his heart. For example, he has had an actual prostate exam performed live on the air to help Urology Associates of Rochester spread awareness of prostate cancer.

"I know guys that have prostate cancer, and it's really a simple cure,"

In the Words of Brother Wease

On war:

While serving in Vietnam, Wease collected audio recordings. Later in his career, he played excerpts on the air. The recordings garnered complaints so he pulled them. It's a decision he regrets.

"I'm the only one who doesn't glorify war," he says. "War is ugly, nasty. Why shouldn't people know the uglies instead of all this propaganda?"

On his nickname:

Weasel or Wease is a nickname he picked up in his youth because he was "always sneakin' around stealing stuff." The name stuck—in the Army, as a concert promoter, and then when he needed a name for radio.

"I was Wease, but I said 'Brother Wease' because I call everyone brother and sister," he says. "I said 'Brother Wease' never knowing it would be a career. I think if I'd had a chance to think about it, I would have picked something else."

On being compared to Howard Stern:

For lack of a better description for Brother Wease, people often times compare him to Howard Stern. Wease says that may have been a fair comparison 15 years ago, when Kinison and strippers were

regular occurrences on his show. Today, Stern's audience is men aged 18-34. Wease's demographic is men aged 25-54.

"I didn't need to keep having naked chicks to get the ratings," he says. "I still talk sex, no doubt about it, but I don't need naked chicks to come out and do stupid bits. My show is completely real."

On if he could have one person, alive or dead, on his show:

"This is easy. Jesus," he says. "Cause I want to prove to all the right-wing bastards that he's really a liberal. I guarantee it."

On profanity:

"On satellite [radio] you can say anything," he says. "I'm jealous of that, not just to swear to be dirty, but I'm a profane person. My right and wrong is different than Bob Lonsberry's. To me, to say the word f--- doesn't mean anything. It's ridiculous to think these words are right and wrong, at least to me."

On cancer and the fear of death:

In February 2005, Wease was diagnosed with a nasal paraneoplastic carcinoma, a rare form of sinus cancer. After being given a 60 percent survival rate in Rochester, Wease went to Memorial Sloan-Kettering

Cancer Center for treatments. He says cancer put a fear of death in him that Vietnam never did.

"It was way worse," he says. "When you're young, you're indestructible, and I wasn't indestructible anymore. That was the whole thing—I had little kids. Every day I went in for radiation, out the window from where I waited was a school with a playground. I would look at those kids on the playground and it was tearing my keester up."

On casinos and fast ferries:

Wease says he's all about funding for the arts or "anything that makes my place more fun or hipper."

"I want to live in a hip town," he says. "I shouldn't have to move to New York City. I want taxes to pay for all my stuff. We're already paying for all the stuff you've gotta have. I want to see some of the things people complain about—arts centers, ferries, skating rinks."

On retirement:

"I can never retire," says Wease. "They'd have to shoot me or fire me or something because I have kids and I have too big a lifestyle and they don't make enough money on this planet to keep me going."

he says. "Some guys are afraid to let a guy put their finger up their a--. That's fact. That's a hell of a gift to me that my stupid a--- h--- can save a guy."

At Woodstock, he remembers having to take charge and direct the crowds when a guy fell off a sound tower in 1994 and again as head emcee in 1999 when fires broke out on the concert grounds. Scher says Wease is a great communicator.

"He's someone I've come to be able to rely on to sort of get the temperature of what people are thinking, especially on concerts and entertainment in Upstate New York," says Scher. "He's a trusted friend and trusted business associate. His life story is such a great example to people. He's a veteran and pulled his life together to become as successful and charitable as he's been. I love the guy."

Wease started the Wease Cares Children's Fund in 1996 to raise money for children in need. Since 1998, the charity has raised and given away over \$270,000.

"I'm a bleeding heart liberal, and if the right wingers want to call it communism, so be it," he says. "I call it helping people who are hurt and I try to do as much as possible with a silly microphone and it's made a big difference over the years."

At 65, Wease says, he doesn't feel his age.

"I hang with mostly much younger people so their energy and attitudes get injected in me," he says. "That's just life, who you run with, so I don't feel that number at all."

Guglielmo says Wease has taught him that life experience is not just about currency.

"There's days you wish you were him and days you're glad you're not," he says. "Hearing his unique take on things and hearing the way he approaches life, you know, ultimately the major life lesson I've learned from him is that it's about the experiences and smiles in life, not money."

Wease says his only regret is that he "didn't figure this radio thing out way earlier."

"I never set out to accomplish anything except to stay alive and not hurt anybody, spread a little love," he says. "As corny as that sounds, I'm serious."