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One from the Heart at WMNF

by Frederic Werner

It was Monday night, edging on toward midnight, the night time, the right time. The time when the entire staff of *Nightmoves* crawls from the closet and into the streetlights, seeking hot, young blood for the next issue. It was at midnight that WMNF drove its stake through my heart.



WHO WAS IT that said that a truly good radio show makes each listener feel that the whole show was produced specifically for him? Nikki Sandler, WMNF's Monday After Midnight DJ, is probably not responsible for the original quote, but she lives the words so thoroughly that I'll give them to her for sheer effort. Nikki uses the freedom of After Midnight with a purpose; she twists the air waves

into her own image and ends up with probably the most accessible, and yet unique, single show to grace the air waves of Tampa Bay. The show breathes...

"I like to do things that are a little different, be a little creative," Sandler told me during the following week's show. I had made the pilgrimage to WMNF's studio in search of my story, in search of that breath that I knew must lurk somewhere at WMNF, and I found the spark of creative life in a dimly lit room above an old church. In snatches of conversation pulled from the lulls in Sandler's tumultuous activity — cueing records, taking calls, setting up tapes, and chasing down every possible request back in WMNF's library of albums — there was a pulse.

"This week, for instance, since we moved the clocks ahead yesterday, I thought that I'd play some songs that dealt with time." Nikki pauses to smile, "I don't know though, I've been thinking about this all week, coming up with songs about time, and right now I seem to be drawing a blank."

The time segment started with the *Zombies' Time of the Season* and moved through a good selection of numbers that traveled easily through the years. Although she didn't find the Chambers

Brothers' Time Has Come Today, I suspect that Sandler successfully reminded those laggards with untuned clocks to get on the ball. Here is functional creativity, art for sensibilities' sake.

Monday night's After Midnight is, too, a program for the people — Sandler plays the requests, which may be Neal Young one moment and the Sex Pistols the next. "A lot of DJs wouldn't play some of this stuff, but I try to do everything that I can of the requests," says Sandler. "And the thing that I've found is that often I'll get a request for a song that I haven't heard before, and I'll throw it on and hey! it'll turn out to be very good, and I've learned something."

Nikki Sandler is not the only DJ in the Bay Area to have some sharp ideas, nor is she the only one willing to play requests, but she is one of the few who can accomplish all of this, inject a great deal of her own personality, and make the whole thing into a coherent and enjoyable three hours.

HER SUCCESS is no accident. At twenty-two years of age, Sandler holds a B.A. in Broadcast Programming and Production from the University of South Florida, and has spent the last three years working for both WMNF and for WUSF, the campus-affiliated station. She hosted a rock show on KABL in

Daytona Beach, and is presently technical director and acting production manager of WNSI in St. Petersburg.

How has she accomplished so much so soon?

"I HAVE FAITH IN MYSELF: I believe that I can do what I set out to do. I had a problem with television, in that I had to trust other people to do what I wanted them to do. That was pretty rough. But in radio you can come in and do it all, by yourself. You can create the entire picture."

If it was Nikki Sandler's show that spoke to me, that made me a believer, it could be any of thirty-eight others that crawl up and whisper in your ear... I swear to God, your little red pointer won't fall off the dial if you take it all the way down to 88.5. Someone at WMNF is probably creating a picture specifically for you.

Or, as Sandler puts it, "It's amazing how visual radio can be. People develop an idea of who you are, exactly what you look like. And you may not be that person, or look like what they imagine at all. You can create any picture."

And to an extent this is true, but I should let you in on a secret — you know how Nikki looks in your speakers? How she moves and the way she is? Well, it's true. Honestly. She's just like that.