



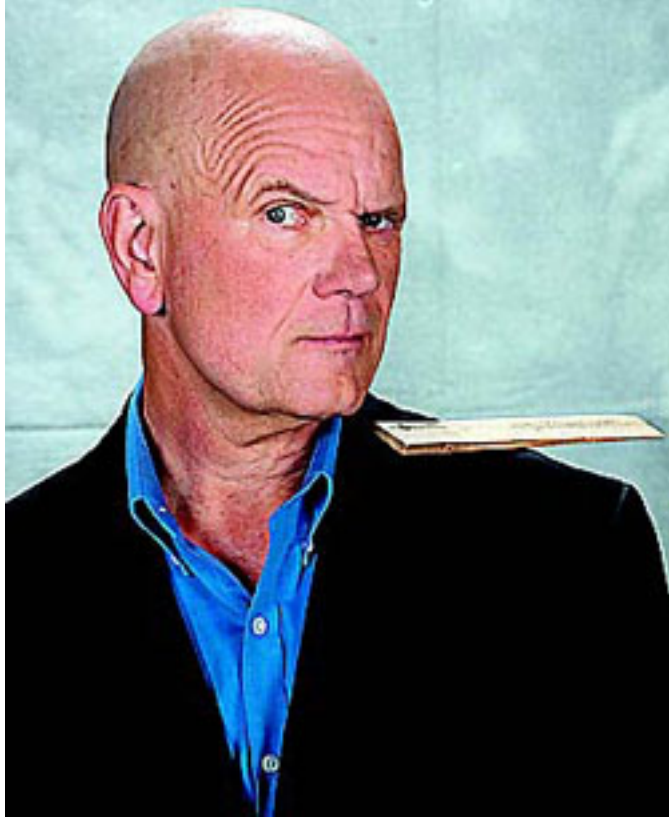
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Published March 25th, 2015

KGO Radio's Chip Franklin: Unplugged

By Nick Marnell



Chip Franklin Photo provided

Chip Franklin burst into the restaurant, flustered and apologetic for running late. He plopped into the chair, adjusted his eyesight to the dimly lit room and within seconds, he started talking.

"I've always had a job with a microphone since I was 13," said the KGO Radio talk show host. Franklin broke into show business playing piano and doing bits between acts at comedy clubs, eventually purchasing a string of those comedy clubs. "I literally put a million miles on my car in the '80s, driving all over the country, playing music and doing comedy and managing the business," he said. Franklin often showcased his comedians through promotional appearances at radio stations. One such appearance at WMAL in Washington, D. C., changed his life. "The program director was walking down the hall," said Franklin, who had done occasional fill-in shifts at the station. "He saw me and he said, 'Can you do the show tonight?'" The evening host had done something to upset the program director, the host was fired on the spot and thus in 1993, Franklin's radio career began.

A radio personality may have a Mensa IQ, or present a unique point of view, but without the ability to connect to an audience, that person will fail. Franklin's comedy background helped him

quickly connect with his listeners. "Authenticity," he said. "And be honest. People can smell a bunch of crap. The best thing anybody ever taught me - it was an operations manager in Baltimore - was to, number one, know what you're talking about, and number two, don't back down." Confidence, the man does not lack.

Franklin features a powerful tool in his repertoire, a tool used by many top comedians. "Misdirection," he said. "You think I'm going to say this, and I say that." As in, "When I was a kid, my dad came into my room and caught me looking at a Playboy. 'You better cut that out or you're going to go blind.' 'Sure, Dad. By the way, I'm over here.'"

"My mom raised five of us in a three-bedroom house," said Franklin, who was born in Alexandria, Va. "My dad was a cop. My family was full of government employees. So I always err on the side of liberal. Most people get more conservative as they get older. I probably go the other way." He describes himself as a free-market liberal, with a caveat. "I believe in business, but business should not pay money to the people who write the laws that govern business."

While on his comedy club circuit, Franklin met his wife, Wendy, through a mutual friend, Mary Chapin Carpenter. "We've been together for 33 years, married for 28," he said. "Everyone who meets me, and then meets her, quickly forgets about me," he said.

After five years in Washington, Franklin hosted radio shows in Baltimore and San Diego. Cumulus Media Inc. brought Franklin to San Francisco to help shore up the ratings of KGO, a radio station that has fallen on hard times. Ranked number one for decades, the station now barely sits in the top 20 in the Bay Area, according to recent Nielsen Audio ratings. "But let me tell you," said Franklin. "We still do a better job selling product than any of our competitors. It's something that I take pride in. At the end of the day, we're working for the people who advertise."

He moved to the Bay Area in December. "I thought for sure I'd live in the South Bay," said Franklin. "I loved the hills there, but there was nobody near you. A friend of mine asked, 'Have you checked out Walnut Creek?' When I drove through the tunnel and stopped in Orinda, it was like I went back in time. Right away, the place knocked me out. It's like Pleasantville, in black and white.

"Orinda reminds me of the '50s," he continued. "We've been conditioned that we can't have this anymore. But you can! You can have towns like this. Nothing against Berkeley, but if I want to smell urine, I know where to find it. I'm not going to feel guilty about living in Orinda. It's timeless, and I don't see it changing."

Franklin's trophy case must be in danger of collapsing. Listed on his website are his many acclamations, such as numerous Associated Press and Achievement in Radio awards, including Best Talk Show Host, Best Documentary, and Best Political Convention Coverage at the 2000 and 2004 Republican and Democratic conventions. He has made hundreds of TV appearances, from Comedy Central to The O'Reilly Factor, from ABC to HBO.

Golf and baseball highlight Franklin's off-the-job passions. And he runs. "Four miles a day," he said. "I used to run up the hill from the Village toward Orindawoods, but that's a killer. Now I stick to the Lafayette Reservoir."

Franklin signed off with a request to his Lamorinda listeners. "Call me up on the air, share your opinions, send me emails," he said. "I'd love to hear from you."

Just be alert for misdirection.

The Chip Franklin Show airs on KGO Radio 810 from noon to 3 p.m., weekdays. Call the Talk Line at 808-0810 from any area code in the Bay Area.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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