

**SHEPHERD EXPRESS**  
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**Listening, Not Just Talking!**  
**Anne Strainchamps on Wisconsin Public Radio**



A new program, 45 North, is airing on Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR) Ideas Network. Hosted by veteran producer Anne Strainchamps, it features live interviews with Wisconsin writers, scientists and performers. It airs Friday mornings from 9-11 a.m. I recently attended two broadcasting sessions at WPR's Madison studios and witnessed Strainchamps guiding guests through conversations with intelligence and grace.

**“45 North” refers to the parallel running through Wisconsin. What's the significance for your radio show?**

People love it when radio stations really convey a sense of place—the history and unique culture of where they live. Being a public radio station, WPR has that as a deep part of its mission. I'd fallen in love with Wisconsin and its astonishing cultural riches—major writers, musicians living everywhere. I wanted to create a cultural magazine with live interviews of those creative people.

**Tell me your history with public radio.**

A year out of college, I stumbled into a very part-time NPR job in D.C.—the weekend reference librarian! This was pre-internet, so I literally ripped out articles and kept the newspaper files up. It was great: Scott Simon, Cokie Roberts, Nina Totenberg would be running in saying “there’s an article in the LA Times!” and I would walk to the LA Times bureau and ask for a Xerox copy. I completely fell in love with public radio. I started volunteering with Diane Rehm and she hired me for a year. Then I followed a boyfriend to Madison, got a job at WPR in the news department and worked my way up.

**In 1990 you co-founded *To the Best of Our Knowledge* (a Peabody Award-winner) with Jim Fleming and your husband, Steve Paulson. What’s it been like to work with your spouse on that show?**

Those early years starting a program were just consuming. We were in love with each other and what we were doing—sharing audio tapes saying, “Listen to this!” It was a really fun time of my life. And we’re still creative partners and work on the same show. Those partnerships morph over time...we’ve learned to give each other a little more space. But it’s been really fun to grow up together in public radio. And then to have two children!

**How is it different interviewing on live radio?**

The art of interviewing is in listening carefully and closely. In live formats there are more voices to listen to: the guest, the people calling or emailing, the board op. It’s like hosting a dinner party—you want the conversation to flow, leaving spaces for different people to join in. You may want the interview to go to a deeper place, but afterwards you have to go in, reclaim the energy and pull it back up again. It’s like improv. Or jazz. My job is to listen.

*Photograph courtesy of Shepherd Express*

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