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MPBN’s Patty Wight *Radio News Reporter*

Experience tracked down MPBN radio’s Patty Wight and discovered a passion for reporting people-centric stories across Maine. Here’s how it went...

Patty, thanks for taking a few moments with us! What sparked your interest in radio?

I graduated from college with a degree in Wildlife Biology, which I loved to study, but realized in the end that it wasn’t quite right for me. I always was a listener of public radio and was intrigued by the idea of doing reporting. It sounded like a fun and challenging career. I got my ears wet at the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies and was hooked immediately.

How did you come to MPBN?

After I graduated from Salt, I had an internship at MPBN. I then pursued freelance reporting as well as a few other interests, but I knew I wanted to land back here someday. I was so happy to join the team in 2012.

What are your favorite types of stories to report on? What do you find most fascinating?

I really enjoy telling stories related to health issues, though I become deeply interested in almost any story I dig into. My favorites are when I meet and interview people you don’t typically hear in the news. People who are doing something interesting, surprising or are affected by an issue.

Reporters are known for going to great lengths to get a story. Have you had any crazy experiences hunting down the news?

You never know where you will find exactly what you are looking for. The greatest literal length I’ve gone to for a story is up in a helicopter. I reported on a story last spring about LifeFlight, a medical helicopter organization born out of a tragedy 20 years ago. I was able to spend a day with them and go on a call. They’re amazing folks.

What goes into choosing your stories?

I look for stories that are surprising, new or indicative of an issue or situation. Some stories are great if you can transport people to a place or experience where they couldn’t or wouldn’t normally go. Stories are best if they fulfill at least a couple of these criteria.

What are some of the most memorable stories you have covered at MPBN?

One of the most memorable was a story about the Maine State Police Computer Crimes Unit. Their focus tends to be on child exploitation, and while they have mountains of evidence to sift through, they’re typically only funded enough to pursue a small portion of cases. I went to their office, saw all the evidence stored in closets, and followed them on a visit to a suspect’s house. It was an eye-opening experience on a subject you don’t typically hear much about, and I’ll never forget it. I also remember spending a night catching elvers... that was quite memorable!

What issues out there today do you see having a real impact down the road on Maine?

Health care is a huge issue – how it’s delivered and received, who pays for it, and how much it costs. I’m very curious to see how the Affordable Care Act evolves and what impact it will have. I’m also curious to see how big a foothold the movement for universal health care will have in Maine. How we handle access to mental health treatment is an important issue as well as how to promote and encourage basic daily health.

If you could interview ONE person in the world, who would it be and why (and it can’t be Susan Sharon or Keith Shortall!)?

Periodically, I think of a famous person that I’d love to interview. But really, on a day-to-day basis, the person I most want to interview is whoever is experiencing or doing something that can bring me to the core of a story to give it a better understanding. Depending on the subject, finding this kind of person can be very challenging. Most likely, it’s someone you or I have never heard of...yet.

You’ve produced documentaries in the past. Can we expect more documentary work from you down the line?

Maine Things Considered is a daily news program, so I’m focused on stories with a faster turn-around. But I have an ever-growing list of series and/or documentaries I’d like to do, and some are in the works. Stay tuned!

Thanks Patty! ■