

## What Makes This Radio D.J. Roll?



"You have to be just as eager to work as a younger person in today's society, no resting on your laurels," says the disc jockey Carol Miller of a career that is four decades and counting. Above, Ms. Miller at Q104.3 FM in 2009. James Estrin/The New York Times

**By Jo Maeder**

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Carol Miller, who is 62, began her New York radio career as a disc jockey at WNEW-FM in 1973. These days she can be heard weeknights on Q104.3 FM and on Sirius/XM's Classic

Rewind channel. *Get the Led Out*, her widely syndicated show chronicling the history of Led Zeppelin, began in 1984. (That's not a misprint; it's Ms. Miller's commitment to rock 'n' roll forever) In her recently published memoir titled "Up All Night: My Life and Times in Rock Radio" (Ecco/Harper Collins), she describes her relationships with some of the greatest rock stars of the time. Paul McCartney and Robert Plant dropped by the studio to chat; she dated Aerosmith's Steven Tyler and Paul Stanley of Kiss. And through it all, she has battled cancer — for 40 years now. This interview has been condensed and edited.

**Q. How have you adapted to working with managers and co-workers who are much younger?**

A. I treat everyone in a similar fashion, relate to them personally, and avoid constant age disparity references, which people seem to like to do these days. You have to get it out of your head. You have to be just as eager to work as a younger person in today's society, no resting on your laurels. You don't get your gold watch anymore. Maintain your appearance. Sorry, no matter what the magazines want you to think, gray hair equals old. I should know, I turned prematurely gray in my 20's. Watch your weight.

**Q. If someone wanted to follow in your footsteps and be a radio D.J., what would you say?**

A. I would say that's not a very good idea because the whole industry is changing. We're fighting to keep our job as a viable way of making a living. Listening to an automated system or preprogrammed music that's already been picked out for you by a computer is not the same as somebody playing something and telling you what's going on in sports, news, etcetera, as it's happening.

**Q. Since the early 1970s, you've seen a tremendous change in rock radio. The songs you play now, classic rock, are nearly as old as the boomers heading toward retirement. How did it feel when your show began to be more about the past?**

A. O.K., the 12/12/12/ concer — who did we see? Bruce Springsteen, Paul McCartney, Roger Waters, Eric Clapton, the Rolling Stones, Bon Jovi. Classic rock is not an oldies format. It's a lifestyle format. I don't see it as part of the past at all. It's something that I've lived with all these years. Now because of the fragmentation of the media there are only a few people who are

considered superstars. Bruce, Led Zeppelin, they're still on the magazine covers.

**Q. When you look into the future, when Mick Jagger is 80, will you still be able to do what you're doing?**



Carol Miller and Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin, in 2007.

A. Ron Wood of the Rolling Stones just said, "You can rock till you drop." And I really don't see why not. Put on Led Zeppelin's "Celebration Day," their 2007 concert, and close your eyes. You can't tell what age they are. They're as bombastic as ever. Nobody touches them. Now he's singing about a situation that we can picture him in at the time. If I was playing Beethoven's Fifth, it would be irrelevant if I had been there when he composed it. I resent Madison Avenue, the media or whomever trying to foster a generation gap when in fact there isn't one.

**Q. Your husband, music producer/engineer Paul Logus, is 12 years your junior and you've been married 18 years. Does that make you a cougar?**

A. No, that's ridiculous.

**Q. Why?**

I think so many of our age things in society today are artificial constructs. I've had a very different perspective because of illness and mortality being presented to me at an early age. When I met Paul, I assumed he was a little younger than me. We were friends for a while and I said, "What birthday's coming?" and he said, "29." I was "EEEE!" I was 41. I still don't feel

older than him. Some of his friends seemed a little young for a while but they grew up.

**Q. Often, I see you in clothes a 20something might wear.**

I'm very into vintage and it's right out of my own closet. I watch my weight and I'm still the same size. I keep what I have and adapt it. I'll wear tights with shorts over them but I won't go without the tights. That would be really inappropriate. This will be my 40th anniversary of putting sun block on every day and not going out in the sun. I slap it on my hands too. You'll always see me with a scarf in the summer because I don't want to get that crepey neck thing and I don't have it! I think 99 percent is sun exposure. People our age in the workplace, you do have to fit in. You don't want to draw attention to yourself.

**Q. How has your battle with cancer affected your perspective?**

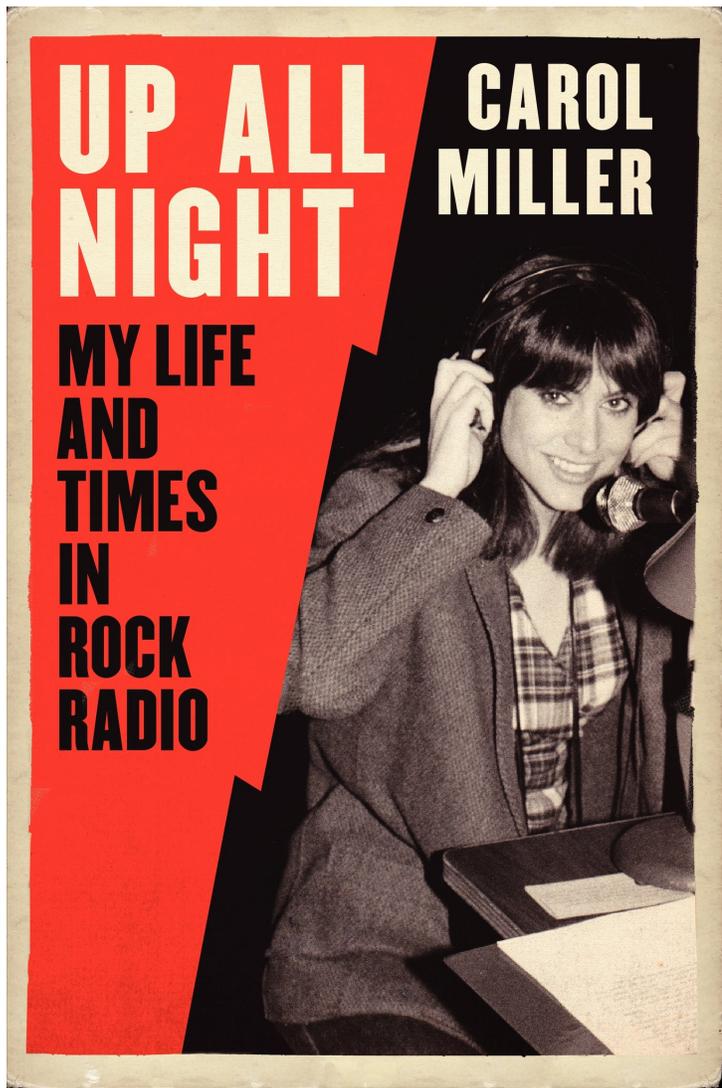
A. Because I was diagnosed with a bad type of cancer at a young age, I've always felt older than my peers. I'm actually grateful for the insight the illness has given me. When I turned 40 I was in the hospital and wasn't sure I was going to live. I wasn't worried about numbers.

**Q. In recent years, has your audience grown younger as a new generation discovers classic rock?**

A. I have high school, junior high school people sending me e-mails, who are just getting into the music. It's funny what they say, like "You're hot" from a 14-year-old.

**Q. What are the differences between a typical day in radio life in the 1970s and '80s versus today?**

A. Seeing the artists or gallivanting around is extraneous. A day has always been knowing the pulse of the city. What's going on, what's the mood, what are people talking about? The way I do it is the same way I've always done it. I go into a coffee shop or a store, some place where I can hear people talking.



Carol Miller's memoir, published last year.

**Q. What about social media or the Internet?**

A. I want to get the vibe from the real people. They can't put on a front. If all I did was read all day and then went into a studio, I'd feel very isolated. I like to think that in 50 years people will look back on this era as a very silly time.

**Q. How do you know so much about rock artists, especially Led Zeppelin?**

A. I can keep spitting stuff out because I was there or heard about it. As far as what's going on now, I have to keep up. There are services from Premiere Radio Networks and United Stations Radio Networks that the radio station subscribes to that are sent out every day.

**Q. For your “Get the Led Out” show you have everything in folders. Real folders.**

A. Sometimes when I’m giving sports scores, I put a sticky note right on the screen next to the team’s name so I can look right at it. Now they put everything on a computer. If it goes down, the whole shooting match goes down.

**Q. Most people don’t realize how few radio D.J. slots are left. How have you managed to keep working?**

I was never not on the air in some way. However, in my early 50s I was blackballed from a station because someone spread a rumor that I had sued an employer. I’ve never even filed a complaint. I hear that’s a common ploy when someone thinks you could take their job away. It lasted a couple of years. I did lots of part-time work. I was very angry. I didn’t want to think it was because I was old and in the way. I had to find out what I had done. Jim Kerr, Q104’s morning host, found out for me after he got a job there. I saw the market manager at a function, went right up to him and said, “I have to clear something up.” Two weeks later I had a job.

**Q. Did your repeated battle with cancer hurt your career?**

If you look at my record, you’ll find I have very few sick days. That’s because I take my sick time as vacation time. First of all, my job is to be on the air. If you’re not on the air a lot of time whatever it is that’s accrued to your ratings or your visibility at the station is going to be low. So we’re given three weeks a year as vacation. I’ve taken a lot of that vacation at Sloan Kettering. But I refuse to call that sick time.

**Q. When was the last time you had a real vacation?**

2006.

*The accompanying audio clip was engineered by Paul J. Logus Jr. and edited by Jo Maeder.*

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