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Limelight America

by Michael Drew Shaw

The late Billy Joe Smith was born and raised in Toledo. He attended UT and Marquette University majoring in broadcasting. After graduating he started Hobbs and Smith, an advertising and PR firm. Then came an opportunity to help start a paving business. There was only one minority-owned paving company in northwest Ohio at the time.

Smith partnered with Brent Gerkin and started Ebony Construction in 1986. Seventeen years later he won a coveted Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award. That was in June, 2003. Billy Joe died a month later. His daughter Amy has followed in her father's footsteps.

Billy Joe was a friend of mine. He was soft spoken with a gentle manner. We had adjoining offices for a few years in a building at 29 South Erie Street ... that orange brick place where the Trail ends at Erie. It overflowed with creativity, inhabited by people chasing their dreams.

Before he left to co-found Ebony, Billy Joe encouraged me to write a song for a local youth group. I called it "*WE ARE THE FUTURE*". Ten years later the song inspired me to start NTR, National Teen Radio.

The idea was a show where teenagers could call in anonymously and share what was on their mind and then exchange ideas with other teens who would be invited to call in from around the country. The only ground rules were no bad language and no screaming. Talk intelligently, take turns, be polite, exchange ideas, disagree but don't lose control.

Potential advertisers told me NTR was an admirable idea, but nobody was willing to sponsor it. Everybody wanted to be the first to buy the second one so to speak - after the show was established and there was no risk involved.

NTR was never meant to be a generation *bridge*. It was meant to be sovereign territory for young adults with older adults being able only to listen in ... and in the process do some learning of our own.

This concept still has never been done on a large scale. Our children don't have a platform to speak out in this way, yet we adults have endless opportunities to speak our minds ... and too often we do it by screaming.

Limelight America is going to give the NTR concept a second change when we introduce a new segment devoted to what kids have to say.

I was concerned the word “teen” might not be politically correct, but when I asked our first guest Ben - you’re gonna love Ben - he said just the opposite. Teenagehood is a new plateau, a benchmark that leaves all that child’s play behind.

Sooner or later though we all miss the kid stuff, which brings to mind another song I wrote a long time ago called *”TEN AGAIN” - ‘I’m not sure where I’m going, but I sure know where I’ve been, what I wouldn’t give to be ten again.’*

Listen to **Limelight America** on Fox Sports Radio 1230 WCWA, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday 5-6 pm and online at **www.limelightamerica.com**

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