

Nan Rubin - “Beyond the Pale” Case Study: Joann Sfar and Carol Delton Radio Shows

1. Biography

[Nan Rubin](#) has been a radio producer for thirty years. Her expertise is in operations and station planning for public radio and T.V. stations. During college, she became interested in “guerilla” radio and later developed community and minority owned radio stations. She likes the ‘quick and dirty’ aspect of radio broadcasting – the relatively low cost of radio equipment enables broad public access to both listening to and producing for the medium.

Nan started community radio stations in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Denver, Colorado (bilingual). She worked for the [National Federation of Community Broadcasters](#), an organization involved with grassroots radio stations. She currently works at Channel 13 in New York as the Project Director of [Preserving Digital Public Television](#), a project to design a long-term preservation repository for digital television, funded by the Library of Congress.

2. Background of the Program

Nan is co-founder, co-producer, and occasional host of “Beyond the Pale,” a weekly one-hour radio show broadcast on [WBAI 99.5 FM](#) in New York City. “Beyond the Pale” refers to the Pale of Settlement to which Jews were traditionally confined to settle in Eastern Europe, and to the radical notion of going “beyond the pale” of settlement. The program started in 1995 in conjunction with Jews for Racial and Economic Justice as a forum for presenting progressive Jewish issues, new Jewish ritual, politics, food, and social justice. Nan co-produces the show with Marilyn Neimark and Esther Kaplan. The show is broadcast live Sundays from noon to one with pre-recorded segments and interviews. Marilyn, Esther, and Nan take turns producing segments for each weekly program in the series.

The show’s audience consists of thousands of listeners, both Jewish and non-Jewish. The show receives a great deal of support and encouragement from listeners who appreciate hearing an alternative to news on Jewish issues in mainstream and Jewish media.

3. Production

The Carol Delton segment, which aired recently, began as a suggestion during a brainstorming session among the producers of “Beyond the Pale.” The producers were discussing alternative ritual, when Nan mentioned that a friend of hers serves as a consultant in California for alternative bar and bat mitzvahs for young people with mobility issues and other special needs. The producers decided to dedicate a segment of the show to an interview with Carol about her experiences. Nan created a series of interview questions and interviewed Carol live on the show by telephone.

The Joann Sfar show (not yet broadcast) began when Nan found out that the French-Jewish author of the graphic novel The Rabbi's Cat would be doing a series of interviews in New York. She was able to get in touch with his agent and arrange an interview with him to discuss his unusual medium for writing about Judaism.

Nan usually spends up to five hours preparing, making notes, and reading press releases before an interview, and often, such as in this case interviewing an author and reading the book. In interviewing Joann, Nan accumulated fifty minutes of audio recording on minidisc recorder, part of which developed as a side conversation after the interview itself. Soon, she will edit the piece down to about twenty minutes for broadcast, using *Audacity*, an open-source digital audio editing software. Editing typically takes about five hours. The Joann Sfar segment is scheduled to air in November.

4. Media Formats and Ancillary Materials

Nan currently uses a digital minidisc recorder/player and an external microphone and cable. She likes the convenience of this portable apparatus – she can carry her mini tripod, her battery (one AA cell battery), her mic and recorder easily and form a one-woman crew. She has used many recording media during her career, and feels that the most important factor in producing broadcast-quality recordings is the use of a good quality external microphone. Having used a range of media from quarter inch reels to DAT cassettes, CDs and digital formats, Nan now prefers the minidisc format because of its accessibility and convenience rather than its superiority in reproducing broadcast-quality recordings. Nan envisions that in the future, there will be a move towards flash drive recording.

Nan's recent work has made use of digital editing, although her early training honed her skills at making rapid splices and physically editing the older quarter inch audiotape, which had to be run over tape heads and cut with a straight razor in special trays. Digital editing allows her to conveniently keep multiple versions of an edited recording, unlike manual editing, which often resulted in strips of cut tape being discarded or lost.

Nan takes notes and develops written questions as she prepares for interviews, however she has no formal system of retaining or organizing her notebooks. Nan and the other producers each have their own system of retaining materials from their respective productions in this series, as well as collective idea journals.

5. Preservation Issues

The producers of "Beyond the Pale" make airchecks and record shows. Incomplete collections of their broadcast history exist in the Jewish Collection at Yale and at the Jewish Museum in New York City. The recordings exist on cassettes, DATs and CDs. There has been a general move away from DATs as a recording medium as a result of their instability. The collection of airchecks also exists in part in a closet storage location at the office of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (a sponsoring organization of the show).

Nan keeps some DATs at home in a box and saves minidisks (source material), but only the ones she considers important; she records over other minidisks. Nan recognizes that the DAT tapes should be transferred to another format, but the time-consuming nature of the work has prevented it from happening, thus far. Although the show lacks a policy for saving written materials (program ideas, notes, letters and e-mails and listeners, scripts), the producers maintain an up-to-date program list of every show.

6. Recommendations

The first step would be to create an inventory of all of the program recordings that exist and to check it against the master program list. This would include documenting location, format, duplicates, and condition. Another suggestion would be to distinguish master copies and access copies. Ideally, the former would be kept in cold storage, once access copies are designated. In addition, the DAT tapes should be transferred over to a more stable medium, such as CD or digital format. Lastly, the producers may want to consider saving all original source recordings, as well as creating a policy to archive related paperwork.