

The General Manager of WBZ argues with Jerry live on the air, originally in Chapter 7:

One night Jerry got a surprising phone call.

It was one of those shows he hated – not even a show, really. It was an eight-minute fill-in following a late-running hockey game, and he had to shoehorn four minutes of commercials into it. He knew he was just there to occupy the air until the midnight news and Larry Glick, who was now doing the overnights on WBZ.

There was no point in making the time boring, so he launched into a diatribe about parking in Boston. The costs charged by the garages (“the hawkers downtown who own the lots”) were outrageous. He’d been complaining about it for years. The city should regulate the rates. He had to leave a **four**-dollar deposit to park his car!

After his set-up of the issue, he took a few minutes for the necessary ads. While they were on the air, Jim Lightfoot called on the inside line. Even though they were almost on top of the midnight news, he told the producer to put him on the air with Jerry.

“Two minutes to midnight on WBZ. Hello.”

“Where did you get the information about the parking downtown?”

Jerry was combative, authoritative. Who was this guy on the phone? He’d shelled out for the parking himself. He knew how much he’d paid. “I was **involved**.”

“Well, I was involved, also. This is Jim Lightfoot.”

Jerry suddenly became chummy. “Hi, Jim!”

“Hi, Jer.”

“How are ya?”

“I was only charged two bucks.”

“Two **dollars**?!” Jerry was incredulous.

“Tonight.”

“Downtown tonight. How ’bout daytime rates?”

“I don’t know about daytime rates, but – ”

Jerry cut him off quickly, vindicated. “It’s the **daytime** rates – ”

But Lightfoot kept right on going, keeping his tone cordial but revealing some annoyance: “ – you’re absolutely full of wind, if you’ll pardon the expression.”

“After six o’clock at night, after the town clears out, the rates go down, but during the daytime hours, when most shoppers come in – ”

“Well, I don’t believe that.”

“It’s **true**.” Jerry was amazed. Here was the General Manager of the station, the guy who’d hired him, contradicting his top nighttime talent. On the **air**.

“Well, I don’t believe it.”

“Well, you take my word.”

“I’m not gonna take your word. I know you too well.”

Jerry realized he was going to have to joust with his boss on the air. So be it. “I’ll take you to the place that charges these kinda rates.”

“Well, why do you **go** there?”

“Well, there’s no choice. People have no **choice** in town.”

Lightfoot gave it back. “Whaddya mean, there’s no choice?”

Jerry laughed with a mixture of frustration and concern. Here they were, less than a minute away from the news at midnight, his boss was arguing with him on the air about

parking rates, and he was only in this situation because he had to fill time after a hockey game. This was nuts.

Lightfoot continued testily, “There’s one place that overcharged you, and you are saying that the entire city is overcharging.”

Jerry smoothed out his tone, became more diplomatic. He had to find a way to wrap this up. “Well, most of the guys downtown **are** overcharging, and I’d be happy to show – ”

“I don’t **believe** that. What kinda facts do you have to say that everybody downtown is overcharging?” Lightfoot was serious now. He was calling Jerry on the carpet publicly for shooting from the hip.

“I’ll take you on a guided tour.”

“Don’t tell me what you’re gonna do tomorrow. Give me some reason to believe you tonight.”

“How can I prove it to ya?” Jerry was trying to smile through his words. This was ludicrous. There were **eight seconds** to go before midnight.

“Well, I don’t know. I think you’re wrong.”

“Well, **I** think I’m **right**.” He couldn’t believe what was happening. He was going to miss the cue for the midnight news because he was arguing on the air with the station’s General Manager.

Lightfoot barreled on. “As a matter of fact, **I know** you’re wrong.”

“Well, we’ll, we, you, you,” Jerry stammered as he watched the second hand on the studio clock sweep past midnight. There was a beep tone on the air marking the end of the hour. There was nothing to do now but make this into a joke. “I’ll tell you what. You’re fired. Oh, no. **I’m** fired.”

Lightfoot laughed. “No, no, wait a minute.” They both started laughing together. Jerry had broken the tension, and Lightfoot let a smile come into his voice again. “You just scared me to death.” But then Lightfoot got serious again. “I just don’t know why you can that all of the parking lots downtown are overcharging. I think you’re wrong.”

Jerry was determined to keep the tone diplomatic, light. “Well, I’ll tell ya. I’ll take the ten biggest ones downtown, and I’ll bring you the daytime rates so you can see.”

“How’re ya gonna do that?”

“I’ll make a list of the rates for ya.”

An edge crept back into Lightfoot’s voice. “Are you gonna make ’em up?”

“Oh, no, no, I’ll go downtown and pick ’em out. Tomorrow.”

Lightfoot scoffed at the idea. “You’re not gonna go downtown, Jerry.”

“Sure I am. We’re gonna shop tomorrow – ”

“Jerry, come on.” Lightfoot was scornful. “Be real. You **know** you’re not gonna **do** that.” Lightfoot was sounding like Jerry’s father now.

“I promise you.”

Lightfoot laughed. “I can’t even get you to come in and read a magazine. Don’t fool the **people**, Jerry.”

Jerry knew he had to change the subject somehow. “Are you in your car?”

“Yes.”

“Your other phone is ringing.” He laughed. Maybe an old joke would break the mood.

Lightfoot kept going, unamused. “Yes. I’m in my car, and I’m telling ya that I just went downtown and I got a very reasonable parking rate.”

“Well you **would**, during the evening hours.” My God, Jerry thought, we’re back to square one. It’s the same point we started with. If this were a normal call, we would have cut the guy off by now.

“Well, what is **this**, if it’s not evening?”

Jerry began to suspect that Lightfoot was putting all of this on. Now he wasn't even making sense. It was just argument for argument’s sake. “Well, that’s what I’m saying. During the evening hours, you would. At night. During the daytime hours, you come with me and I’ll be happy to show ya.”

Lightfoot laughed. “I wouldn’t go anywhere with ya.”

They both laughed. Jerry thought: Has this guy been drinking? He isn’t slurring his words. Why is this happening? He said, “Listen, have you been to any – where have you been?”

“I’ve been – that’s none of your business.”

“Well, awright, if that’s the way you feel about it.”

It was two minutes after midnight. Even Lightfoot now seemed to sense that it was time to stop, but he couldn’t resist a parting shot. “I think you’re full of wind, if you’ll pardon the expression.”

Jerry spoke deliberately. “I will be happy to set on your desk, on Monday morning, the list of the parking lots, and their rates, during the daytime hours, for your edification.”

“I’m not gonna believe it.”

“Well, I have to make a station break, Jim.”

“Well, why not?”

“WBZ and WBZ-FM, Group W, Westinghouse –” – and then Lightfoot joined in, reciting the station ID with Jerry. They finished it together. “– Broadcasting in Boston. The shortest show on record,” Jerry said.

“You make more money than anybody in broadcasting.”

“Do you wanna do anything about these long hockey games?”

“No. I’d like to do something about your salary.”

Jerry laughed, but he was stunned. This was uncalled for, unprofessional. When an ordinary caller brought up how much money he made, he felt it as an assault on him personally, and he usually dismissed the person with the finger-across-the-throat sign to the engineer. Besides, he wasn’t making that much money, and Jim Lightfoot knew it.

Lightfoot said, “Fifty thousand dollars a minute is not my idea of a good deal.”

Jerry kept laughing, but he was furious. “Well, that’s your problem.”

“Goodnight, Jerry.”

“You’ve got your options.”

“You’re wrong about the parking lots.”

“You ever get cut off on a talk show?”

“No, I haven’t.” They both laughed. “Let me experience it. Let me see what it feels like to be cut off.”

“How would you like it, subtle or otherwise?”

“Jerry? Cut me off.”

“Okay, here we go.” Jerry waved his arm at the engineer.

“You are a –” and then Lightfoot’s voice stopped. There was silence for a second.

“One of these days. That was Jim Lightfoot, our General Manager at WBZ. And I, after all, when else can I run three minutes overtime? Only when I’m talkin’ to him. It’s **true** about the parking lots, and he may say otherwise, but I’d be delighted to take him on the guided tour. For those people who don’t believe me, during the daytime hours – I wish I had more time. Call Larry Glick about the parking lots, OK? That’s it. One of the great shows I’ve done in my time. I’m so delighted to have been with you. And I’ll be back – when will I be back? Tomorrow night –” He caught himself as he realized he’d be doing another fill-in show the next day – “After the **game!**” He laughed. “Tomorrow night’s game is at 8 o’clock, so I’ll be here about 10:15 or 10:30. Jerry Williams. I quit. Good night, good luck, good morning, good night, T.”

It was 12:04:21. He walked out of the studio shaking his head.

This story is re-created from a tape of a January 1970 show, provided to us by Jerry Wishnow.