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A birdbrained Thanksgiving promo by the *WKRP in Cincinnati* crew



Show creator **Hugh Wilson** recalls how a true tale inspired a classic episode

YOU CAN STILL TUNE IN TO WKRP!

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“I had been in advertising in Atlanta, so when I had the idea to do the pilot for *WKRP in Cincinnati*, I went to observe friends there in the radio business. At the time, the No. 1 rock station in Atlanta, WQXI, was run by a wonderful guy named Jerry Blum, who had bounced from one station to the next and who told me how he’d gotten fired from a Dallas station for throwing live turkeys out of a helicopter. And I said, ‘Jerry, tell me more. I think I just won an Emmy.’

Then, in five minutes, the story we used in our episode ‘Turkeys Away!’ pretty much all came from this fellow’s lips. It’s been my experience that the real stories are the ones that lead you in great directions. Jerry was from New York City originally, and didn’t know that turkeys can’t fly very well. I’m sure most people don’t know that. So when they started their promotional stunt, the turkeys just went down like bombs. What’s worse is, when they

saw their error, they landed the helicopter to release the rest of the turkeys—and the turkeys fought back, chasing people and running into traffic. It was the perfect nightmare a comedy writer would want to hear about.

In our episode, our reporter Les Nessman reports that one turkey went through the windshield of a car—well, I took a liberty with that. Bill Dial wrote the first draft of the episode, and I did the rewrite. We had the idea to make Les’ whole report sound like the famous radio broadcast of the Hindenburg tragedy, with the line ‘O, the humanity!’ But the rest of it had all come from Jerry.

Even now, it’s amazing. When people find out who I am, they come right up to me and the first thing out of their mouths is, ‘As God is my witness, I thought turkeys could fly!’ I have to take credit as the author of that line, because I’m really proud of it.”

— *Hugh Wilson, creator of WKRP in Cincinnati*