



Troubled 3ABN Fires Linda Shelton

By Edwin A. Schwisow

In a move that consolidates Danny Shelton, president, ever more firmly at the helm of the troubled Three Angels Broadcasting (3ABN) satellite network, the 3ABN board in June voted to dismiss Shelton's now-ex-wife, Linda, from her position as vice president and on-air hostess.

The dismissal came just days before the couple's divorce became final in late June; an uncontested divorce filed in Guam by Danny Shelton, naming Linda as respondent, according to divorce papers obtained by Adventist Today, Linda's dismissal in June was followed immediately by an official release by 3ABN's board chairman, Walter Thompson, to the effect that Linda Shelton had chosen to go a 'different direction' from her husband and 3ABN. The release also said that the decision to terminate had come after considerable study and with the assistance of counselors and face-to-face dialog among the parties.

Concurrent with the announcement, staff removed all photographs and references to Linda Shelton from 3ABN's Web site and struck all programs on which she appears from the station's play lists.

Meanwhile, sources close to Linda Shelton characterize her removal as a coup-in-the-works for several months leading up to the June announcement. They acknowledge that in months leading up to her dismissal, she had been heavily involved in the rehabilitation of her adult son, Nathan (by a previous marriage), who reportedly had developed serious drug- and alcohol-dependency problems.

The therapy routine, administered by a Norwegian Seventh-day Adventist physician and financial supporter of 3ABN, reportedly achieved outstanding early results. According to Linda Shelton, in a release posted July 11 on her Web site, rumors that she had engaged in inappropriately intimate activities with her son's therapist began to circulate at 3ABN, leading in large part to her ouster. She vigorously and consistently denies any improper behavior or relationship with the doctor.

At approximately the same time, Johann Thorvaldson, director of 3ABN development in Europe, was removed from his post and has become an advocate for Linda Shelton. Citing provisions of her agreement with 3ABN, Shelton herself so far has refused to speak with reporters regarding her dismissal or future plans. However, at least two releases written in her name (one on e-mail, the other on her Web site) specifically deny that she committed adultery and attribute her fall to the proliferation of false information about her.

Sources close to Linda Shelton cite the 3ABN allegation of 'spiritual adultery' as a factor in her dismissal, a phrase invoked among conservative Christians but not readily definable elsewhere. It appears to mean that the person so accused became overly friendly with, or bonded to, a person other than a spouse. Meanwhile, Danny Shelton's daughter by a previous marriage, Melody, has begun to appear regularly on the air as a co-host with her father.

Linda Shelton's dismissal took viewers across the nation by complete surprise, though careful observers had begun to pick up on-the-air cues more than a year ago that all was not well between Danny and Linda. Danny Shelton has acknowledged to viewers that the couple was undergoing marriage counseling in months leading up to their sudden divorce.

The Linda-and-Danny team had appeared together for nearly 20 years on 3ABN programs, portraying the kind of down-home, simple, Bible-based, devout Christian living they urged their viewers to adopt. That such an apparently devoted Christian couple could divorce so precipitously, amid such allegations of scandal, shocked the 3ABN world.

At least one affiliate manager interviewed by Adventist Today off the record believes that Linda Shelton's removal could benefit 3ABN ministry long-term. This source indicates that 3ABN has been undergoing troubled times, including a historic loss of revenue income in 2003, and that a shake-up at this time could be a new beginning for the maturing ministry. In a mass mailing to all financial supporters, 3ABN has also reflected the view that Linda Shelton's termination represents a time of opportunity.

Meanwhile, the emergence of a brand new 'Hope' satellite network, sponsored by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, is attracting a great deal of interest across the nation, leading at least one influential Northwestern broadcaster, Blue Mountain Television, to sever ties with 3ABN as of Sept. 30. Other non-3ABN-owned stations may follow that lead in months to come, with unwelcome implications for 3ABN's

bottom line.

All told, it appears likely that the internal disruption caused by the couple's breakup and the loss of 3ABN's monopoly as the sole source of satellite-driven programming for Adventist-oriented stations will combine to produce a less-than-banner year for 3ABN in 2004.

Oddly enough, Shelton herself sees a beneficial outcome, personally, from her termination. Noting on her new Web site that she had become institutionally sheltered by her many years of work at 3ABN, she says she welcomes the opportunity to get out on her own once again, mixing it up in the real world. She continues to portray herself as supportive of 3ABN's grand vision but conveys a sense of relief at severing ties.

Sources close to Linda Shelton indicate that she is now living near 3ABN headquarters in Illinois, in a modest dwelling, and that income sources include royalties from the sale of music she has written and performed and monthly termination payments. They also say that she has agreed not to comment publicly in ways that could be construed as attacks on her former husband and ministry.

She has also reportedly asked her friends to forswear any such attacks or attempts to vindicate her, though some are now speaking out.

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