

# The Boston Globe

## In its eighth year, public radio's 'The Infinite Mind' continues its exploration of the thought process

By Mark Feeney, Globe Staff  
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CAMBRIDGE -- There being nothing site-specific about thought, the human mind is highly portable.

That's also true of "The Infinite Mind," the public radio show on brain science, mental health, and human behavior, which last month celebrated its eighth anniversary. It airs on 240 stations nationally. WUMB-FM (91.9) is its local outlet.

For its first seven seasons, "The Infinite Mind" originated in New York. That's where the show's creator, Bill Lichtenstein, and its executive producer, June Peoples, lived. Lichtenstein and Peoples, who are married and both 48, had been considering a move from Manhattan.

"I think we woke up one day," Peoples says with a laugh, "and said, 'We own the company. We can work wherever we want.' And Boston just seemed alluring."

So now they and their 5-year-old daughter live in Lexington. Their production company, Lichtenstein Creative Media, is in a Kendall Square office building, and that's where "The Infinite Mind" originates.

A Newton native, Lichtenstein has local roots. "Radio is my first love in media," he says, and that love first manifested itself at WBCN. He started volunteering at the FM station when he was 14, answering phones for legendary announcer Charles Laquidara. Soon he was doing news reports and working as a weekend overnight announcer.

At Brown University, Lichtenstein didn't give up radio. He continued to work summers at 'BCN and was program director at Brown's student-run station, WBRU.

After graduating from Columbia Journalism School, Lichtenstein switched media. ABC was just starting its prime-time television news magazine "20/20," and Lichtenstein was hired to work on investigative stories -- "very mainstream, muckraking, follow-the-buck journalism," he says.

In 1986, Lichtenstein was diagnosed with manic depression and was unable to work for the next four years. The experience changed him personally -- and professionally. He realized, he says, "There were issues out there [concerning mental health] that somehow affect everybody that weren't being addressed. To a journalist, that's a very interesting thing."

Returning to radio, he produced three one-hour documentaries for public radio, "Voices of an Illness." The documentaries won awards, including a prestigious George Foster Peabody Award, and helped pave the way to "The Infinite Mind."

Peoples's involvement in mental health issues wasn't so hard won. A native of Bucks County, Pa., she worked as a reporter and editor for newspapers and the Associated Press in New York City and upstate. She remained a print journalist after she and Lichtenstein married. "I was one of these snooty reporters who thought 'broadcast news' was a contradiction in terms," she says with a laugh.

Yet when Lichtenstein was looking for a producer for one of the documentaries, Peoples surprised herself by volunteering. He agreed, and she's been in radio ever since.

Both Lichtenstein and Peoples say that one of the things that distinguishes "The Infinite Mind" is its broad approach. "Each week, 'The Infinite Mind' takes on an issue that in some way relates to human mind," Lichtenstein says. "It can be medical, it can be social. It can be metaphysical. We spend an hour examining it from as many perspectives as we can, so that at the end of the hour you understand that subject in a way you didn't before. It can range from a medical issue, like multiple sclerosis, to something like left-handedness or dopamine or writer's block."

This season "The Infinite Mind" has a new host, Peter Kramer. A psychiatrist who teaches at Brown, Kramer is the best-selling author of "Listening to Prozac." His latest book is "Against Depression."

"I feel lucky Bill and June have put this together and the show exists," Kramer says. "The Infinite Mind' has a public health function, and it's a broad one. Just talking about mental illness is useful. I also think it's useful not to talk about it exclusively but in the context of lots of aspect of mind and brain. There's real value in making mental illness ordinary."

Lichtenstein, who also makes documentary films, recently was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship for a film on at-risk juveniles in the social-welfare system. "The Infinite Mind" remains his priority, though, and he doesn't see the show slowing down any time soon.

"We have too many ideas," he says. "Unlike other parts of the body, where the more research they do the more they understand it -- like the heart -- with the brain every time they get a new insight it opens up 10 questions."

"The Infinite Mind" is broadcast locally on WUMB-FM (91.9) Sundays at 6 a.m. and 8 p.m.

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