What Radio’s All About

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groups and Moria and Stax and Ca-
deever and all the rest from the waist up and hearing “I Want To Hold Your Hand” for the very first time.

Stories about teenagers dedicating songs back and forth to each other. About children turning on the radio before they’re even awake, feverishly bringing in the very magic words: “No school, snow day!”

About loneliness and a solitary voice reaching out to you. About making a complete stranger laugh or reflect or remember. About baseball games from far away on car radios. About someone driving across town or across country with only you and your radio brethren for company.

Tell them stories about Larry Lujack, John Records Laidecker, Robert Weilmann Jack, Gary Owens, Dr. Don, Kenny Everett (ask someone from the UK about Kenny), and those crazy young jocks who brought American-style radio to Europe in the 1960s by taking to the streets in their God-awful radio ships (imagine broadcasting under the worst possible conditions, now imagine doing it while seasick.).

Stories about bad news and everyone immediately turning on the radio.

About sad news and where you were when you heard it. About practical jokes and misunderstandings and mild or wild revenge.

About getting away from your problems (imagine the U-Haul, and being scared all over again. Getting angry, getting older, and “the old good days.”) Static’s voices cross-coupling in the night. Fifteen-hour airaits, silky jocks, disappointing engineers.

Stories about legendary radio people you almost met in an elevator at a convention, the major-market PD who did you a favor: the request line caller you can’t forget. Practical jokes on the news guy, disappearing stationary, and a bedroom full of promo records that one day will be worth something. Staying up late talking radio, swapping tapes, “borrowing” ideas, “embellishing” your ratings, deepening your voice, losing your voice, losing your keys, losing your cool.

Wire service copy paper, 15-inch reels, pre-controlled automatic Caffeine additions, junk food, and whatever the station could trade for. Old friends, borrowed headphones, uncontrollable sleep-deprived laughter, Razor Blades, splicing tape, pencil erasers. Dropping the tape edit over your shoulders until it was safe to throw away. Cue tones, cue sheets, in cue, out of breath.


What am I doing with my life? seven-day workweeks, and “I can’t believe I get paid for this!” Slow-starting turntables, the needle on the vinyl, the card machine sticking. Tell them stories about boozes, hot showers, skimper phantom, cue time, check time, warping, ratings, feelings, winning, wronging off. Tubings, coffee mugs, and inedicable Friskies. Billboard and Claude Hall and Cashbox and Record World and R&R and Bill Gavin’s green pages. Floods, tornado warnings, power outages, and school lunch menus. Lost dogs, lost accounts, lost temper.

Jiving, shouting, rhymin’, and whistling. Huccey remudas, lemon ’n honey, a good old-fashioned adrenaline to save the day. Embarrassment, elation, and delight. Hi-Low, Name It And Claim It, and Dollar-A- Roller. Play-by-play and survey reports, and Good Guys. Q, Zoo, and Boss.


Newspaper wars, live reruns, and meter readings. Shouts, stingers, sweepers, stingers, stabs. Mack-goods, live tags, up ’n’ read, and backin’ to the news. Allen Freed, Dan Ingram, and Damn Bruice.

Beat the floods. Lucky Bucks, Battle Of The Bands. Pinning the needle, pegging the meter, riding gain.

Wrapping the capstan, and, “Hold on a sec. I gotta go on the air...” Sign on, sign off, warming up the fill-in and compression, compression, compression!

Gates board with rotary pots. Auto-tun and Vettermum. Imitations, overcos, parodies, talk-ups. False endings, records to max and Volumemax. Intros, outros, and instant moment. “Phrenological” differences and late-night resume photocopy sessions. Tight words, good prose, will relocate. The big break, bad luck, slap-whip, slap- town with the air staff’s paychecks.

Cueling past the splice, heavy phones, and cue tape. Solid Gold, Hot Nine At Nine, Hot 100. WABC, KEF, KLJF, WQOQ, WLS, and making it to the big markets.

Friday night countdowns, Saturday chart drops, Sunday drag racing commercials, twin spins, double plays, triple shots, and instant replays. Romantic entanglements, broken hearts, small wins, and “Garbage Mouth Leaves Cleveland.”

“NO ONE is to touch these cars!” and that means YOU!

“Were you listening when...?” “What’d ya think?” “You should have been there.”

That explains to that new kid. Now you are there... what are you gonna do with it?

Drawings by Bobby Ocean

The Listener-At-Work Rewards Program™

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