



A Sound Life

A life in music and sound by the
founder of Isle of Wight Radio

Jean-Paul Hansford

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Prologue

Some friends and colleagues advised against me publishing this book. They warned it would only stir-up a painful experience I went through in 1997, which affected not only me, but my family, friends, and many other people who only know me as a voice on the radio.

We all make choices in life and I think most of mine have been good ones, but I am still unsure about publishing this. I do have one inescapable regret. After I have gone, my family name, one of the oldest on the Isle of Wight, will disappear. It upset me when I realised when my brother and I die, there will be no male children to continue the Hansford surname.

I have no children and my brother has four daughters. Technically I could still have a son but at 65 as I write, it is unlikely. (Although it didn't stop Mick Jagger, bless him.)

I've decided to publish this book as a kind of legacy, a small bit of history. I hope it may motivate or even inspire anyone who has a dream, an ambition to do something important; to leave something that might live on.

'Sound' has played an important part of my life and career, from the sound of the sea to the sound of a song.

The names of each chapter are the titles of songs and you will find links to them at the end.

I hope you enjoy the ride.

Jean-Paul

'Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.'

Winston Churchill

A Sound Life

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A Sound Life

By Jean-Paul Hansford

My true story of dreams,
disasters and determination.
And why, whatever happens,
never, ever give up.

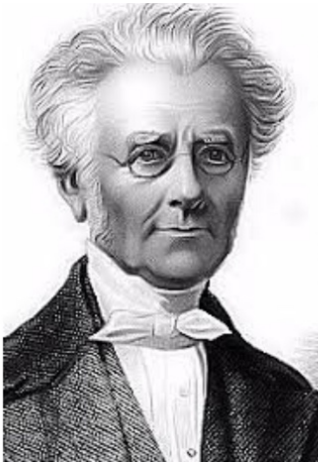
Chapter One - Start me up

"The boys were lying on the fresh green grass, under the shade of the old oak on the lawn, while their great-uncle Owen, sitting with little Mary on the garden-seat near them, was about to tell them of his wanderings in the Isle of Wight."

In 1846, the writer and keen traveller George Mogridge, Old Humphrey, wrote a book called 'Wanderings in the Isle of Wight.'

"He that would boyhood see alright, with eyes of pleasure sparkling bright, in all its joy and glory. While blows around the evening gale, must tell some sweet and pleasant tale, or wild and wondrous story."

I would like to have met George, but he died in 1854, on the same day I was born exactly 104 years later. It is the first of many coincidences to come. George was a prolific writer and traveller with strong religious convictions and a passionate, romantic nature to all his writing.



At 9 years old, I remember frantically running up the High Street with my brother, knowing we had to get to the church on time. We were two young schoolboys with only minutes to spare to transform ourselves into two sweet altar-boys.

I am no good at running, and my younger brother, Anthony, was always a little ahead of me, but I kept up the pace. It was a typically rainy winter's day on an early Sunday morning in Ryde on the Isle of Wight.

Running towards our destination, St. Mary's Catholic Church, I splashed my foot in a dirty puddle of something but carried on. My brother was still in front of me as we raced to arrive in time to change and prepare for the regular 10.00 am Sunday High Mass.



St. Mary's Church holds a special place in the hearts of our family. My mother, Anne-Marie, and father, David, were married there in an extraordinary double-wedding, with my Mum's brother Jimmy, and Auntie Siobhan from Ireland, jointly making their vows.



Mum's brother Jimmy and Auntie Siobhan from Ireland, jointly making their vows.

In the years to follow, St. Mary's Church would host many of our families' most momentous occasions, both joyful and sad. From funerals and anniversaries to celebrations and many more weddings, including my own.

Puffing and panting, we finally arrived with just minutes to spare. We quickly changed into our angelic white robes, and I remember the St. George's Medal hanging over my head, the Catholic award for long-serving altar-boys and girls.

The sacristy bell rang and the packed congregation rose, as the priest, in his beautifully crafted, colourful vestments, entered the altar chancel. Anthony was behind him, swinging the thurible, creating thick, satisfying clouds of sweet-smelling incense. I walked behind them, my hands clasped in boyful prayer.

There is something very special about incense. It creates an almost hypnotic feeling, perfect for thoughtful prayer and reflection. You can still smell its richness on your clothes days later.

As the first hymn began, the priest blessed the altar, with Anthony and I holding the hem of his robes, gently walking him around, clouds of incense filling the air.

It was then I noticed an unpleasant smell.

Despite the sweet incense, there was another definite odour of what can only be described as 'pooh.' Anthony must have smelt it too, because I saw his nose wrinkle, and he gave me a strange, quizzical look. Where could this faint, 'hint of shit,' be coming from?

Then I remembered the dirty puddle. My foot splashing in it as we ran up Ryde High Street. I nervously looked at the priest, but if he smelt it, he showed no sign. I don't imagine the congregation could smell it either. I do hope not.

Pooh on my shoe was my earliest embarrassing moment. But as you may imagine, many more would follow.





Chapter Two - Born To Be Wild



Baby J-P

I was born in Ryde Nursing Home on the 2nd November 1958, which makes me a Sunday child. I am the eldest of five siblings, my one-year younger brother Anthony, and three little sisters, Marie-Claire, Jacqui, and Marie-Anne. We all grew up in an impressively large house in Appley Rise in Ryde.

The 3-storey property (plus basement) would later be bought by Mark King, the legendary founder and bass-player from the pop band Level 42. Their wonderfully crafted music is still played on radio stations all over the world.

Up the road, two hundred yards on the left is St. Cecilia's Abbey, a permanent home of worship and prayer for an order of Benedictine nuns, devoting themselves to a lifetime of Christian fellowship.

The gentle ringing of the Abbey bells would always be heard from our beautiful back garden, with their comforting sound of tranquillity and peace.

Sunday services at St. Cecilia's are special. The haunting Benedictine chant from the choir of nuns is spiritually uplifting.



As teenagers, Anthony and I also served at St. Cecilia's as altar-boys. We were very privileged to be able to see the nuns in front of us, their pews hidden from the main church congregation. A monk from Quarr Abbey, another Benedictine Monastery just outside Ryde, would lead each Sunday worship.

Before each service, my brother and I went into a special room to practice the morning 'readings.' Sister Louis-Marie and Sister Mildred would listen to us, giving advice as

we read out loud the words we would later speak from the church lectern. It taught me to open my mouth, not to mumble, and gave me the diction and wide vowels I still have today.

Particularly when I have a microphone in front of me.

Quarr Abbey holds a unique place in my heart with a Benedictine history well worth researching.

If you like deep peaceful chant and the smell of incense, you will love Quarr Abbey. It is on the right, up a long tree-lined lane, as you drive along the main road from Ryde to Newport.



Benedictine Monastery 'Quarr Abbey,' near Ryde

Our family's impressive house overlooks Ryde Esplanade and the Canoe Lake, with breathtaking views of the Solent. The Solent is a stretch of sea which will play a big part of my future in years to come. Waking up to that view, gazing out of my bedroom window is etched into my mind forever.

The house has sweeping front gardens, with a wide gravel drive running through the middle of flower bordered lawns, leading up concrete steps to the front door.

The delightfully large back garden would eventually become spectacular, but back then, was so desperately overgrown it was tough to try and walk around. Tall, rampant grass and weeds would sweep and tangle around your waist. Ancient concrete paths were invisible, hiding beneath creeping, overgrown nettles and debris.

The large centre-piece lawn was simply an untended field of dying or dead straw. Mum and Dad spent decades transforming it into a magical haven, a remarkable heaven on

earth for all our family, friends and visitors to enjoy.

Next door to us lived my Mum's parents. In my baby-speak I called them Nan-Nan and Gog-Gog, which became the names all our growing family gave them. Nan Nan was a French lady, who met and married Gog Gog in America. That is where the quarter-french blood in me comes from.

Parts of my grandparent's house was run as a comfy boutique hotel, a 'word-of-mouth' kind of place. Most guests would keep it secret, just for themselves and close friends.

It was called 'Avalon,' a relaxing retreat for everyone who stayed there. As a young girl, my Mum helped with the cleaning and cooking. There was even a special lift, a tiny elevator, bringing trays of freshly cooked food up and down between floors.

Most days Gog-Gog would blow a chirpy whistle over Avalon's garden wall. That whistle was so sweet, inviting us to come for a chat. Gog-Gog would often have an 'Old Holborn' tobacco roll-up between his

fingers, or sometimes in the corner of his mouth. He was a kind Grandfather, fairly strict, teaching us young brothers some basic rules of life.

Number one, was never be late.

One morning, while chatting over the garden wall, Gog-Gog invited me and Anthony to lunch at 1.00 p.m. the next day. For a reason I don't remember we turned up 10 minutes late.

Nan-Nan was fine, slaving over her AGA stove in the kitchen. But I'll never forget the look in my Gog-Gog's eyes.

With a deep stare, and his eyes almost black, he said, *"When you're invited to something, never, ever be late."*



Dad, my little brother Anthony, Mum, Gog-Gog, and me, picking my nose



Me and Mum's mother, Nan-

Nan

As toddlers we would enjoy regular family walks, and I would thrill at the iconic sights and sounds of 1960's Ryde. Swans swooping and skimming Ryde Canoe Lake as they splash-landed. I loved the fire-spurting, screaming engines, of the SR-N6 Isle of Wight hovercrafts, with their kerosene aviation fuel, belching a powerful, almost addictive smell.

But my favourite thing was grabbing the iron railings above Ryde's railway tunnel, waiting for one of the original Isle of Wight Steam trains to blast smoke and steam in my face, as they thundered below.



Ryde to Southsea SR-N6 Hovercraft

Walking back home we would occasionally spot a beloved Ryde character, slowly shuffling along the road. He was always dressed (if you could call it that), in dirty brown clothing stuffed with rags and screwed up newspapers. You never knew when or where you might see him. Back then, few people knew his story. His name was Theodore Searle, and years later I interviewed him for Ocean Sound's Isle of Wight Programme.

Born the son of a clergyman and educated at a public school, 'Theo' spent more than 30 years living rough on the Island. Despite

appearances, he was a cultured gentleman, liked by everyone who met him. On rare occasions, if invited, he would enter a local Ryde pub and showcase his expertise on a piano.



Ryde's 'Gentleman of the road,' Theodore Searle



Where I first heard and played records, on a radiogram like this at 'Redworth'

Chapter Three - Wonderful World

Every weekday morning, Dad drove us to St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, annexed to the church. My brother and I would usually walk the couple of miles back home. Dad always had the latest cars and models, from an impressively sleek Jaguar Mark 10, to the first Range Rover ever seen on the Island. Dad always liked to have the latest and best of everything.

My first day at St. Mary's Primary School was traumatic. I remember bursting into tears, refusing to let go of Mum's hand, until one of the Benedictine Nuns gently coaxed me towards my first class. My best friend was the school's only black boy, Anthony Trafford, and we were inseparable.

Sadly, as so often happens, we later lost touch when I started 'big school' at St. John's College, across the Solent in Southsea. But I often think of him and wonder what he is doing now.

The playground at the mixed St. Mary's Primary School was split into two distinct halves. The top half was where younger boys and girls played. But occasionally we were nudged and shoved, forced to stand against the bottom half wall, as older boys flicked fat, stinging elastic bands against our bare legs.

Most days, '*Off Ground He,*' was a popular game with anyone caught with their feet on the ground shouted out. '*Cowboys and Indians,*' was another favourite, with everyone linking arms singing, "*Who wants to play, 'Cowboys and Indians,'*" as we playfully skipped around.

It was in this playground a girl first chased me. She was a sweet Italian, Edana Minghella, whose family manufactured some of the finest ice-cream you will ever taste, famously even sold at Harrod's in London.

Any children playing too loudly or over-enthusiastically, would be caught in a heart-stopping, penetrating stare of disapproval, from the wonderfully enigmatic, slightly

intimidating figure of Sister Joan, who missed absolutely nothing.

Leaving St. Mary's Primary School at eleven, I thoroughly enjoyed my high-school days. Especially the daily sailings back and forth across the Solent, from Ryde Pier Head to Portsmouth. We would catch the 147 bus, taking us to St. John's College in Grove Road, Southsea.

The 35-minute ferry trips should have been used to catch up with any homework, but usually became excuses for gambling, playing pontoon with the other Isle of Wight schoolboys. I feel sure the older boys were adept at cheating, because I never won a penny, usually losing all my weekly lunch-money allowance.

St. John's College was operated by the De La Salle Brothers, a Roman Catholic religious teaching congregation founded in Rheims, France in 1660, by Jean-Baptiste De La Salle.

Today, the order consists of more than 3,000 De La Salle brothers, operating schools in eighty countries, with 90,000 lay-teachers

and over a million students. The De La Salle brothers are instantly recognisable in their long jet-black robes and white double 'neck bibs,' called the Rabat.



Chapter Four - See me, Feel me

The many escapades my brother and I got up to, both in and out of school, could easily fill a separate book. Thinking about it, Anthony was certainly the naughtiest. Or perhaps I am choosing to rewrite history.

We set off fire-extinguishers on the lower deck of the Isle of Wight Ferry. Anthony almost set a classroom on fire, with a failed firework rocket-launch across the room. But what sticks most firmly in my mind is when he chucked one of his famous 'bolt-bombs,' over the wall of the Torpedo Training School at HMS Vernon in Portsmouth. I know that incident had the Navy Bomb Squad called out.

On full alert.

My own naughty episodes seem to pale into comparison. Although sneaking out of school at lunchtimes, leering at 'dirty magazines' in a local greasy-spoon café, was

frowned upon very seriously indeed. Most of my other risqué episodes took place out of school, usually at weekends or during school holidays.



The Who's brilliant and crazy Keith Moon

I only skived off school once and delighted I did. It led to me meeting the legendary, slightly crazy and totally brilliant drummer with The Who, the irrepressible Keith Moon.

During the summer of 1974, many scenes from the film 'Tommy,' based on The Who's album of the same name, was filmed in and around the Portsmouth area. Many local people, including me, appeared in the film as extras.

Walking down the road in my school uniform towards Southsea's Kings Theatre, I spotted Keith Moon outside a café opposite. He was chatting with a group of fans. I stood on the pavement staring at one of my hero's.

When the fans wandered away, Keith Moon saw me and smiled. He waved me across the road and invited me into the café. For 20 minutes, we enjoyed a cup of coffee and hilarious, warm, sparkling conversation. It was the first time I had met anyone famous and will never forget his almost shy, infectious personality.

With advanced apologies to my radio colleagues today, while lying in bed at night, I would take much little boy pleasure phoning up my local commercial radio station, the Radio Victory Late-Show, and blow enormous, farting 'raspberries' down the phone to the presenter, usually Nick Jackson, when I was eventually put through.

I was on the air for the first time, but it was hardly the most glorious of radio debuts. But Radio Victory would later become instrumental in my early broadcast career.

During those early mischievous teenage days, I met a young man whose passion for ariels and transmitters would stoke a passion in me I had never felt before.

One of my Mum's best friends was Patricia Johnson who had two sons, Michael the eldest and Derek. We would often spend pleasant afternoons together in their home in Sandown. I did not often see Michael who had just started his first job. But one afternoon he invited me to see his latest 'invention.' It was a pair of home-made

walkie-talkie transmitters, and I marvelled how we could hear and talk to each other wherever we were around the house or garden.

But there was more to come. One afternoon Mike invited me into his bedroom, and I was impressed. Inside were racks of fascinating equipment all with flashing lights and emitting strange squeaking sounds. Mike was a ham-radio enthusiast, communicating with similar fans all over the world, using home-made ariels on the roof.

Mike was also a big music fan and while we chatted, he slipped a music cassette into one of his playback machines.

My life was about to change.

For the first time I marvelled at the brilliance, passion and sheer energy of the pirate radio stations, their boats and DJ's bobbing about in international waters, pumping pop-music

into homes all over the UK. There and then I knew what I wanted to do.



Chapter Five - So Beautiful

At nine years old, I was still being chased around St. Mary's School playground, occasionally becoming aware of pretty schoolgirls for the first time. One girl walked down the playground steps wearing a shortish skirt with beautiful legs utterly captivating me. That innocent early feeling would cause me big trouble a few decades later.

I don't know when we become particularly attracted to certain parts of the body, but I was nine years old when legs became my number one. Five years later I remember a disgusted glare I received from a mother on the 147 bus to St. John's College, as I dared a furtive glance at her 14-year-old daughter's legs.

She was dressed in a very short skirt. I was not being disrespectful or anything 'rude.' I just liked what I saw. It was a natural admiration and a funny feeling in my schoolboy shorts.

Maybe now would be a good time to mention another pair of legs which stopped me in my tracks on the St. John's playground.

Except this time, it was a schoolboy.

At the time, St. John's College was a very competitive all-boys school, with regular visits from various sports teams from all over the UK. I was doing nothing in particular, when the playground gates opened, and a stream of keen looking boys entered. As usual, we all stopped to check them out, and that is when I spotted him.

He must have been younger than me, because I was about fourteen, now wearing long trousers. He was wearing shorts, and I could not stop looking at his legs. I had never seen a boy with such lovely legs before, and it made me feel very strange.

I could not really see his face, but his hair was blonde, and slightly long. Not allowed at St. John's College.

The first thing that happened with sporting visitors was the school photograph, and I made sure to be next to him as the photo was taken. We all had to hold hands in friendly competitiveness, and I held his. We briefly looked at each other and smiled. And that was it.

We never saw each other again.

Chapter Six - Blowing in the wind

At 11 years old, in August 1969, my dad and I looked out of his bedroom window, watching long queues of hairy 'hippies' streaming along Ryde Esplanade. It was the first Isle of Wight Pop Festival, with posters suggesting Bob Dylan could help 'Sink the Isle of Wight.'

A year later, estimates suggest more than six hundred thousand people came to the Isle of Wight, witnessing the biggest rock and pop event of its time. Jimi Hendrix headlined the 1970 festival, setting fire to his guitar,



while tens of thousands broke down barriers,
watching for free on Afton Down.





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EXPERIENCE
JOAN BAEZ
DONOVAN
& OPEN ROAD
LEONARD COHEN
& THE ARMY
RICHELIE HAVENS
MOODY BLUES
PENTANGLE
GOOD NEWS**

Chapter Seven - Opportunities

Our Dad was a strong believer in working hard for your money. If you wanted to buy the latest T Rex single, (50 pence), or the first album by the Electric Light Orchestra, (£2.50), you had to work for it. Ryde's 'Studio 4' record shop sold albums on the ground floor and singles in the basement. Those were the days you could go into a little booth, put on a pair of headphones, and listen to a record before deciding if you wanted to buy it.

There are many 'Universities of Life,' and in my experience, working in shops and supervising customers is one of them. On leaving St. John's College at 16 and throwing my old school-cap in the waters of the Solent, I returned to my comfortable home-life with my parents and siblings.

Eight glorious years would pass earning money working in Dad's growing number of retail shops. As the eldest Hansford son, I felt

a powerful duty to eventually run the family business.

As a youngster I loved working in Dad's Ryde Union Street 'Gift Shop', selling everything from Bob Dylan and The Who T-Shirts, to the finest Swiss Army knives, innovative gifts and kitchen accessories.



Dad had an enviable knack of employing excellent management and staff and I learned a great deal watching and listening to him. He once told me he suspected a long-serving member of staff was stealing

money from the safe. Double-checking and in disbelief, Dad brushed all the cash in ultra-violet powder. The powder was a new innovation, and he caught the culprit, her hands covered in it. To his credit, Dad gave the lady a second chance and it never happened again. His words to me were, *"Better the devil you know, than the devil you don't."*

Chapter Eight - Teenage Rampage

Growing up I usually tried to be good and please everyone. I did not know why but there was something inside wanting to make everyone happy.

I met my first girlfriend at the famous Osborn-Smith's Wax Museum in a small town called Brading, just a few miles from Ryde.

Anthony and I were sitting together at a party, when two pretty girls came over and sat in-between us.

One girl had long black hair and I was chatting with her, while Anthony spent his time with the other one. After about half an hour, the girls said they needed to 'powder their noses,' or whatever girls do when they go to the loo together. Arriving back, they positioned themselves differently. Anthony was now talking to the black-haired girl, and I sat next to the other one, with beautifully long and flowing gypsy-like braided hair.

Her name was Judy and became my first proper girlfriend. We never had 'real sex' together, just a few funny fumbles. It was her brilliant personality, unconforming character, and intriguing take on life that appealed to my own cheekiness.

One evening, Judy and I crept out the back door of a house party somewhere and we began properly kissing. What an experience! It was my first real kiss, and you never forget it.

Being a good Catholic boy, this was simply incredible. Her hands roamed down my jeans and she unbuckled my belt and zipper.

I could not believe it as my jeans and underpants were pulled down to my knees.

Wow!

As her hand just began touching me, the back door started to open. I quickly yanked up my jeans, with my underpants still caught at the knees. We stood there wriggling as Judy's father came out to ask what we were doing.

What do you think we said!

It is uncomfortable with your jeans pulled up, and underpants still stuck at your knees. You certainly cannot walk properly unless you want to waddle like a duck. Judy said, "*Only talking Dad.*" I am sure he did not believe us, but he went back inside as we giggled away like crazy.

Chapter Nine – Something in the air

As young teenagers, my brother would spend hours patiently grinding and blending chemicals together at his bedroom desk, making home-made fireworks, while I recorded home-made radio programmes in the Redworth basement. Anthony would sometimes blow my eyebrows off with his latest explosion. Meanwhile, I was also working with a friend who had bought a radio transmitter on 'Exchange & Mart', the eBay of its time.

It was not a particularly powerful transmitter, but strong enough to be heard a couple of miles radius away, providing the aerial was the correct length and high enough.

Brading Downs are rolling hills overlooking Sandown Bay, and where I set-up an illegal pirate radio station called 'Highlight Radio.' I printed A4 posters sticking them all over St. John's College. Every time they were pulled down, I stuck new ones up in their place.

Listen this Saturday

2.00 p.m. (242 metres AM)

HIGHLIGHT RADIO

I had no idea how transmitters worked but learned if you wanted to transmit on 242 metres, the aerial had to be an equal fraction of the length.

We worked it out and strung up a piece of steel wire between two trees, just over 20 metres long. We had to connect the transmitter and make a good wet 'earth,' so we all undid our pants and urinated into the soil making it nice and damp.

Our cassette recordings from the day before were ready. We had a friend in a phone-box down the road to take requests for the following week. It seemed so simple, lazing on the grass and nervously pressing, 'PLAY.'



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Wills & Wills

With a small radio tuned to 242 metres medium wave, a kind of magic happened. For the first time we heard our own voices on the radio, presenting our own programmes. It was amazing to listen to ourselves as we laid back on the grass sharing a couple of naughty cigarettes.

Now here comes the next coincidence. Put the number 1 in front of 242 metres and you have the original medium wave frequency of Isle of Wight Radio.

Chapter Ten - Take it to the limit

My first car was a black Morris Minor passed on by my grandfather, Gog-Gog. At 15, I practiced driving off-road at Puckpool Park. In the UK you are not allowed to legally drive until you are 17. Puckpool was the perfect legal place, to learn mirror, clutch, and manoeuvre. Warners Holiday Camp at Puckpool, would later become one of my favourite venues to perform with my disco roadshow.

While I was fumbling with girls and generally enjoying my freedom from school, I would also love house parties, arranged by my friends in their parents' homes. Aside the fun and games, I noticed there was no focus from where the music came from. It would usually be in the background, playing from cheap, tinny sounding speakers. One night, I had a thought.

Why not put my own 'hi-fi' system in the back of my car, along with my records and cassettes, and become a mobile DJ?

My car was now a silver Volkswagen Beetle (VDL 504K) and the idea seemed to work. The 'hi-fi' was a simple record player and cassette-deck, attached to a pair of Woodman's speakers, originally bought to sit on the back seat parcel-shelf of my car. It guaranteed everyone could hear me as I drove around the Isle of Wight, my favourite music making the car literally shake, with a very decent beat of bass, drums, guitars and vocals.

The first time I used my make-shift disco was at the party I mentioned before, at Osborn-Smiths Wax Museum. This was different to any 'house-parties' we had attended previously. Special because the Wax Museum holds a unique atmosphere and memories for anyone who has been lucky enough to visit.

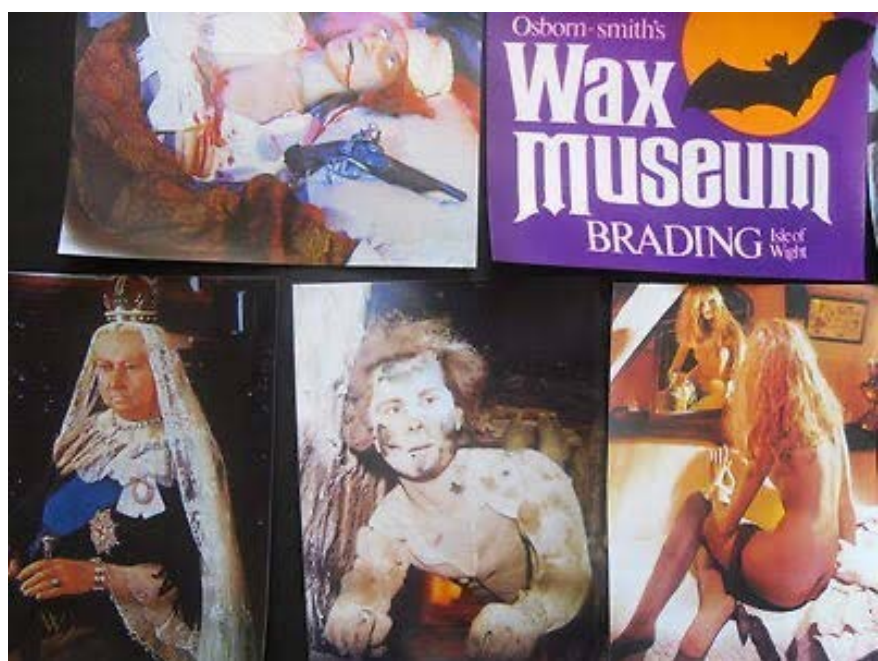
The evening was a party for family, friends and colleagues, who had got to know each other as we all grew up. I remember the responsibility I felt, setting up my little music system in the corner. I had even bought my

first microphone, secretly practicing what I might dare to say, if anything.

The evening was amazing. I nervously spoke a few quick musical introductions into the microphone, and was thrilled when people listened and began dancing, laughing and enjoying themselves.

Most of the younger partygoers were teenagers who I did not actually know. Most had attended schools on the Isle of Wight, while Anthony and I were miles away, across the Solent on the mainland. I knew our school was a very good one, but at 16, hardly knew anyone of my own age back on the Island.

Here were all these people having fun, while I played music for them. Apart from meeting my first girlfriend at the party, I also met Cameron Osborn-Smith, the eldest son of Graham, the founder of the Wax Museum. Despite not seeing Cameron for many years, he is still one of my best friends and often in my thoughts.



Chapter Eleven - When I was a boy

Growing up a good Catholic boy, I always felt guilty about anything slightly sexy or naughty. Any of my own romantic feelings were buried, and even now I sometimes have a sense sex is somehow bad.

Now will be a good time to mention the Swedish girls. Every summer thousands of Swedish girls would arrive on the Island for 2 weeks, mainly to improve their English.

The Isle of Wight girls would become angry, as the local boys gravitated towards these young, pretty and colourful girls, usually dressed in bright blue, red, green, and yellow outfits. It was in stark contrast to most

local girls in their drab, dull English greyness.

Several of my early girlfriends were Swedish, and we would hold regular parties at our house, now boasting an impressive, heated, and brightly lit sunken swimming pool in the large back garden. The Swedes would invite all their friends to these parties and wow, what fun we had. Swimming, dancing and splashing around, while Dad would check on our antics through a pair of binoculars from his bedroom window. The carefully tended vegetable patch at the end of the garden was often rather roughed up when the gardener arrived the next day.





**The view from my childhood 'Redworth'
bedroom window**

Chapter Twelve - Brothers in Arms

Hansford's of Ryde was the Isle of Wight's oldest family business, founded in the realm of King William IV, 1830.

At the time King William was the oldest person to be elevated to the British monarchy, until the succession of King Charles when he was 73.

The founding 'Hansford Brothers' were originally cabinet makers, creating sturdy oak coffins; then graduating to the manufacture of hand-made furniture and soft-furnishings, stitched together on the top floor of a 5-storey building on the corner of Cross Street in Ryde.

Future generations continued the family tradition, expanding the business with craftsmanship, innovation and quality at its heart.



Standing on the Cross Street shop roof one afternoon, I remember watching Concorde, surely the most beautiful aircraft ever made, majestically soaring over the Solent.

Ryde Carnival remains an annual treat. It is the oldest carnival in the UK, celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887.

I love the fact my brother and his family still live in East Cowes, just a few yards away from

Osborne House, the famous stately home and gardens designed by Queen Victoria's beloved husband, Prince Albert.

While working at our Cross Street shop, I began to develop a mobile disco business. When it started, I would pile the gear into the back of my silver Volkswagen Beetle.

I soon upgraded to a big blue Bedford van, with powerful amplifiers and lighting, a pair of thumping Altec speakers, plus an amazing wooden stage-set, with 'Vectis Sound Systems,' proudly displayed on a huge sign above me.

From the moment I had the idea, I was determined the show would not be your typical little 'disco-in-the-corner.' It almost became a compulsion.

I wanted my shows to be memorable events, with sound, lighting and effects, never seen or heard before on the Island. I set-up an office with its own dedicated telephone number, and within a couple of years my disco diary was full.



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I give a heartfelt nod of thanks to my brilliant road-crew, who night after night, year after year, worked exceptionally hard.



Chapter Thirteen - Puppy Love

By now during the day, I was working at Dad's 'Ercol' Furniture' shop. It was on the right towards the bottom of Ryde Union Street. I loved it there, helping sell this world-famous, hand-crafted, solid-wood furniture. Norman Butler was my manager, a strict, loyal, and traditional man, who taught me a great deal, and was forever patient, even when I inevitably turned up a few minutes late after a disco show the night before.

The Ercol shop was previously a main branch of Lloyd's Bank, and hidden at the back was an enormous walk-in safe, with shockingly heavy, 8-inch-thick steel doors.

Another of Dad's retail businesses was the Hansford's Gift Shop, also previously a bank, the National Westminster, with a similarly impressive room-size safe. It held all the legal, licenced firearms on the Island.

They included dozens of World War 2 German Lugers, racks of powerful rifles,

handguns, and several of the infamous 44 Magnum, the most powerful handgun in the world.

Clint Eastwood famously demonstrated it in his movies Dirty Harry and Magnum Force. *"Do you feel lucky? Punk...!"* I got to fire one a few times, and it packs a punch and recoil which can literally make your hand bleed.

The The Hansford's' Gift Shop had an inside office, with security glass which staff could see through, but looked like a mirror to the customers outside. There was a cassette player in the office, playing gentle background music, while customers looked around.

Most weekends, I would put on music like Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison, or Neil Diamond's 'Hot August Night.' I liked to turn up the volume and watch the reaction. It made me feel good when customers stopped what they were looking at, and began listening to the music I was playing.

Working in the Ercol shop one afternoon, a lady and her daughter walked in to look around. I immediately liked the look of the girl, dressed in a very fetching, flowery blue summer dress. I seemed to recognise her from somewhere, and then remembered she had been at one of our parties in my parents' house. We had only spoken briefly towards the end of the evening, sitting on beanbags in the newly renovated house basement.

It was the basement I eventually built my first studio, recording my earliest radio 'demo-tapes,' which my brother described as me sounding "rather homo." He still says that today, but I think he is joking. A few years later, that same room became the home of a weekly 'Isle of Wight Programme,' on a radio station called Ocean Sound.

I learned the name of the pretty girl in the flowery blue dress was Philippa and we spent more than a decade together, growing up, loving, learning and marrying each other, but eventually, breaking each other's hearts.

I was 19, with a red Renault 19 car. A boy with a car is still an attractive feature to many girls. I would often sit outside Cowes High School, waiting to spend a couple of hours with Philly, chatting, learning more proper kisses, and watching the yachts and ships from Cowes Esplanade.

Philly lived on a 180-acre farm, more than an hour's drive from my Mum and Dad's house, in the deep Isle of Wight countryside. From the first time Philly introduced me to her parents, younger brother and sister, I immediately liked them all. But I disliked the long drive back home, trying to avoid rabbits in my headlights, as they stupidly sat in the middle of the country roads. But the farm and lifestyle was idyllic.



Philly became the first and fundamental member of my growing disco road-crew. She understood all my ambitions and would help me achieve many of them. To my shame, I sometimes let those ambitions overtake me, and I became far too selfish.

My selfishness was born out of pure frustration, a burning desire to get a job on the radio.

As much as I loved performing with my now massive disco roadshow, I had spent 10 years recording demo-tapes, writing letters and turning up unannounced on radio station doorsteps.

With no success.

Chapter Fourteen - Us and Them



Rather perversely, it would take the Falklands War to get my first break into real radio broadcasting. My local commercial station was Radio Victory, the same station I had blown farting noises at, down the telephone while a young boy.

Based in Portsmouth, Radio Victory was not far from St. John's College. Getting off the ferry, I would sometimes see Radio Victory's young Breakfast Show presenter, Bill Padley, wearing an impressively embroidered leather jacket catching a train to somewhere. I was envious as I watched him in my school uniform, knowing I had been listening to his radio programme just a couple of hours before.



Radio Victory, St. Mary's Institute, Fratton Road,

It was a similar feeling I had in the summertime, when the UK's number one pop music station Radio One would arrive in

Sandown, with its famous DJ's and screaming fans. It confirmed something I already knew. *"This is what I have to do!"*

When Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands in April 1982, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was in political difficulties. For many years I had been sending demo-tapes to Radio Victory. One afternoon, totally out of the blue, I received a phone-call from its Programme Director, Paul Brown.

With tens of thousands of Navy and military personnel on their way to the South Atlantic, Paul wanted Radio Victory to become fully live for 24 hours, crucially overnight, for the nervous families waiting at home for the latest news.



At 2 a.m., on the morning of Thursday 15th April 1982, I opened and spoke into a live radio microphone for the first time. And here comes the next coincidence. On exactly the same date 8 years later I would be doing the same, launching Isle of Wight Radio.



Radio Victory's main on-air studio

I felt a mixture of confidence and exhilaration, not particularly nervous, just relief. I was talking to people on a proper radio station. My first four-hour programme

flew by, and the next night I was asked to do it again.

Those two overnight programmes on Radio Victory reignited in me a feeling of inner belief and determination to carry on. But it would be another 4 years before anything similar happened again.

I became incredibly frustrated and almost gave up pursuing my dream. But a young man I had briefly met at Radio Victory, told me something for which I am forever grateful.

Matt Hopper knew I wanted to be a radio presenter, but he recommended I also learn radio journalism. *"Everyone wants to be a radio DJ, but the job is very precarious."*

I understood that but had never considered radio journalism before. Matt gently insisted. *"Radio journalists are always in demand, and it is a far more secure career."*

I took him at his word which would take me away from my safe and comfortable young

life on the Island, to the 'Big Smoke,' and
bright lights of London.

Chapter Fifteen - Thank you for the music

It would be amiss if I forget to mention some of the music I discovered back then, and still makes me jump up and down today.

Number One is Queen, the first major rock band I had ever watched live in 1975, at the Gaumont Theatre in Southampton. When I bought Queen's first album, I was well and truly hooked. Two albums later, 'A Night at the Opera' had just been released, and Bohemian Rhapsody began its remarkable nine week run at Number One in the British charts.

The power of that first concert astonished me. It was the raw quality and pulsating exuberance of sound, lights, smoke, and of course dear Freddie Mercury's unique stage presence. It opened my eyes to what is possible with lots of practice and sheer determination.



I changed the name of my mobile disco from Vectis Sound Systems to the 'Jean-Paul Music Show.'

I was now driving an impressive Ford Transit 'Luton' van, with huge Court Acoustic speakers, massive bass bins, each weighing eighteen stone, (114 kg) with the finest amplifiers, turntables and lighting money could buy. My brother helped me bring much of this equipment back from London, and he still wonders why I spent so much

money. It seemed simple to me. I wanted everything to look and sound exceptional.

With Philly and the crew my roadshow would now take around 2 hours to set-up, and on a good night, another hour to pack down and load back in the van. After the shows we often enjoyed a fresh donor or shish kebab, and you could still smell it on your breath the next morning.

I marvel at the resilience of bands like the Rolling Stones, The Who, E.L.O., and of course Queen. The first couple of albums by the Electric Light Orchestra flabbergasted me, and I regularly received school detentions for using a penknife to carefully carve **E.L.O** into every wooden desk I sat at.



The Electric Light Orchestra

The first time my parents took Anthony and I to London was in 1971. Highlights included watching the 'Changing of the Guard,' outside Buckingham Palace.

We watched original productions of the musicals 'Hair,' with its infamous anti-Vietnam profanity and West End nakedness. The next night it was 'Godspell,' and we were invited to meet David Essex on stage during the interval. Mum and Dad were clearly progressive and open-minded, but we were too young to appreciate it at the time.

Four years later in 1975, Dad took me to London again staying at Claridge's Hotel, easily the poshest place I had ever experienced. I was even more intrigued to see posters plastered everywhere for a band called the 'Sex Pistols.'

I bought their album 'Never mind the Bollocks,' plus an original, black-sleeved EMI version of their debut single, 'Anarchy in the UK. Annoyingly, it was later stolen from one of my record-cases while my back was turned during a disco-show. Someone obviously knew how much it would eventually become worth.

My music-show was now bringing in fairly decent money, and I continued recording and sending out dozens of radio demo-tapes. If anyone ever bothered to reply, they were usually pre-written, standard rejection letters. I made a pledge; if I ever achieved my ambition, I would listen to every demo I received and give it a personal reply.

Chapter Sixteen - Don't Stop Believing

During these years of frustration and increasing feelings of dejection, two incredible letters arrived which kept me going. I later had them framed, reminding me of the encouragement and self-belief they reinforced inside me.

The first letter was from the 'Royal Ruler,' Tony Prince, the legendary pirate radio DJ, and later Programme Director of the equally legendary, '208' Radio Luxembourg.

I had sent Tony a demo tape which included a live commentary I'd recorded while hurtling around 'Space Mountain,' the breathtaking roller-coaster at Walt Disney World in Florida.

The encouragement, detail, and care Tony took writing that letter, still inspires me today. It taught me many things, including what you say, words, and how you write them, really do matter, and can change lives.

Thank you, Tony. That letter is a gleam of inspirational sunshine.

A few months later, another letter dropped through the letterbox of my own first home. I had secured a mortgage on a small apartment, just a few metres away from Dad's Cross Street furniture shop.

When I heard the letter drop through the door, I hoped it was not just another brown envelope, reminders of more bills to pay. It wasn't. In the top left-hand corner was one of the most famous radio logos in the world.

It was from BBC Radio One.

I felt a slightly sick feeling in my stomach, an unpleasant mix of nervousness about what the letter might say. I picked the white envelope up, placed it on the kitchen table and made a cup of tea.

I looked at that envelope for a long time and even phoned Philippa, before finally finding the courage to open it.

The letter was a tightly typed page of A4, signed by Radio One's Executive Producer, Doreen Davies. She was number two, to Radio One's Programme boss Johnny Beerling, both hugely influential and revered managers and talent-spotters. Not only did her letter give me masses of encouragement and advice, but Doreen even invited me to London to meet her.

Another WOW!



I arrived at Radio One's Egton House in Langham Street, just across the road from BBC Broadcasting House. Doreen was sensational. Warm and charming, with an obviously deep love and passion for radio

and radio people. I told her the advice I had been given, to try and add radio journalism as another 'string to my bow.'

Doreen agreed and said the best radio journalism training in the U.K was at the London College of Communication, then called the London College of Printing, but notoriously difficult to get in to.

I immediately sent for a prospectus, but was dismayed to discover you needed a good degree to stand a chance of getting on this post-graduate course.

I didn't even have an A-Level, let alone a degree. But I vowed not to let anything stop me trying. My first application was turned down flat. I tried again the following year and decided to go up to London myself to hand-in the application in person. I refused to leave reception until a course tutor finally met me.

He went through my application, pointing out my lack of suitable qualifications. I gently but firmly asked him to give me a chance. He promised to get back to me.

True to his word, a couple of weeks later, I received a letter saying although my lack of qualifications was an 'issue,' the college board wanted me to get two weeks work experience at my local BBC radio station, and write a 2,000-word report on my experiences.



This I duly did, spending a fortnight at BBC Radio Solent, working with a brilliant team of radio professionals. They included a young man who confidently strode around the newsroom with a strange looking typewriter, strapped around his neck. The man was Peter White, who was born blind. He was using an early braille typewriter, and Peter went on to national UK prominence, as a champion broadcaster for the blind and partially sighted.



The second year of applying, I was thrilled to be offered a place on the acclaimed post-graduate radio journalism course at the London College of Communication.

While I had been researching various radio training courses I discovered the National Broadcasting School, (NBS), based in London's Soho Square.

The NBS offered thirteen weeks of highly intensive, very practical radio training in radio production, presenting and journalism, from some of the U.K.'s biggest names in commercial radio. I adored the sound of it. Very conveniently, it started just before the Post Graduate course. I wondered if I could do both training courses?

I secured an Isle of Wight Council grant for the London College of Communication, but the NBS course would cost almost £1,000 on its own. And I had hardly even thought about living in London.

Thankfully my parents agreed to pay for the NBS course, and found a large Christian 'Hostel' near Earl's Court in London, where I could safely live and sleep.

Bless you Mum and Dad for that.

Chapter Seventeen - Without You

Earlier on I mentioned my selfishness, born from ambition and frustration. Philippa and I were still together, both working during the day, running the huge mobile music show most nights. But cracks had been opening for some time. Before I headed for London, she left me. I was devastated. Philly and I had grown-up together for seven years, and suddenly she wasn't there.

I coped rather badly for a while, occasionally driving to her new place, waiting and watching from my car, wondering if I might spot a new boyfriend. Daft thing to do, and I never spotted anything.

Finally coming to my senses, I focussed on the training opportunities ahead. To be born and grow up on the Isle of Wight, with a loving and supportive family is a remarkably fortunate thing. The trouble is, as you are growing up, you do not always appreciate it.



The Isle of Wight

As a youngster, I often questioned anything and everything, particularly if the subject was controversial or uncomfortable. I can still shoot from the lip if I get really angry!

Sitting at the breakfast or dinner table, I would often say something questionable, just to get a reaction. My brother and three little sisters would bow their heads, staring into their plates of food, as I would listen to the reactions, debating whatever was on my

mind. I still do that today and enjoy other peoples' thoughts and opinions.

Mum and Dad were usually patient, often breaking off to speak in French, so none of us understood what they were saying. That would really annoy me. I wish they had spoken French more openly. I would have learned the language my name Jean-Paul, suggests I should speak fluently. I know most people and families have 'secrets,' but I do not like them. Secrets are destructive, and usually found out in the end.

When I bought my second home, a pleasant 3-storey renovated 'townhouse,' I had been going out steadily with Philippa for more than 5 years. The new house was a few yards from where I grew-up, in Appley Rise. My parents, brother, three sisters, Uncle Adrien and Auntie Heather and Nan Nan and Gog Gog, were just down the road. And the bells of St. Cecilia's Abbey were even closer.

I would occasionally stay overnight at my new house with Philippa, to receive a look of disapproval from Mum the next day. It was

never more than a strong stare, but only compounded my Catholic feeling of guilt.



My second house, Wilmington Mews, Appley Rise, Ryde.



Me, Mum, and Dad, Bembridge, 2014 (Photo by my sister Marie-Claire)

Philippa's family are an inspiration. We ran through acres of farmland, hiding, watching the cows, playing together in swaying fields of gold. Her Mum, Jane, made fabulous varieties of home-made cheese.

With Philly's Dad, Richard, and their children Tim and Kate, we always enjoyed thick, lavishly poured jugs of fresh cream over every pudding we ate. They were joyful and fun family occasions.

Despite my own frustrated selfishness, Philly and I stuck it out together. We enjoyed many years of summer seasons. Christmas and New Year Extravaganza's at Warners Puckpool, Whitecliffe Bay in Bembridge, and dozens of pubs, hotels, and venues large and small. From supporting famous music stars like Billy J. Kramer, Tony Christie, and Gerry & the Pacemakers, to exciting private parties, weddings and celebrations, Philippa was with me every step of the way.

When she left me, it felt like I had lost a limb and I was totally lost, until my brother and sisters came to my rescue.

Step by step they brought me back together and reminded me what family is all about. I had so much to look forward to, a future few people would have the same opportunities to pursue.

Chapter Eighteen - London Calling

In 1984, I was twenty-six, and headed to London for two years of intensive practical radio experience, and academic journalism training. I expected to be back home in a couple of years, but it became six years of some of the most exciting and life changing periods of my life. After more than a decade of frustration and rejection, for the first time I was moving forward.

Arriving on my own in London was slightly scary, but exhilarating. Navigating the underground 'metro' that evening, trying to find Earl's Court and my residential hostel, was a complicated mess of missed stops, crazy crowds, and dark, possibly dangerous streets.

Finally arriving at my destination, I imagine it might be like a first night at any university halls of residence. The hostel was packed, with hundreds of young people, all with

looks of slight nervousness and expectation in their eyes.

Finding my room, I crashed on the single bed nearest the door, wondering when my roommate might arrive. I knew I would be sharing and fell asleep.

Around an hour later, I woke-up hearing the door open, and met Seth, James Smith. We got along instantly. Together, we prepared for our first day at the National Broadcasting School.

I do not know where 'confidence' comes from. I suspect it is an intriguing mixture of what you are born with, healthy splashes of good family upbringing, sprinkles of your own ego and self-belief, plus vitally, a few drops of your own life experiences. I am fairly confident, and a little shy.

When I walked into the NBS 'classroom' on my first day, and confidently said "*Good morning all,*" I was surprised when my colleagues later said they thought I was their teacher.

The next 3 months were an intoxicating whirlwind of intense, practical learning, and the building of wonderfully close friendships.

Early lessons included how to cut and edit a quarter inch recording tape, using razor blades and a greasy chinagraph 'pencil.' It was literally hand made radio.

Technical equipment included a 'UHER', a bulky, so-called 'portable' recording machine, to record 'vox-pops', documentaries, and celebrity interviews. You had to find the 'celebrity' yourself. After weeks of research, I arrived at London's Hammersmith Odeon, sitting backstage for an interview with Cliff Richard.

'Shaking like a leaf,' is an often-used phrase, and waiting to interview one of my music heroes, I was nervous. Double checking my 'UHER' was turned on, and the spool of tape not tangled, Cliff Richard walked in.

He was cool, collected, and even before we sat down together, showed a natural warmth and kindness I really appreciated. Cliff must have noticed my microphone hand shaking,

but his calmness helped me relax. I still use 'clips' from that interview today. He was open, honest, and despite a few tough questions, answered them all with braveness and passion.

Through his agent, like many of his most dedicated fans, I received Cliff Richard Christmas Cards every year, until I moved from London, and we sadly lost touch.

The National Broadcasting School was based at 14, Greek Street in Soho, formerly the home of the St. James's and Soho Club, a so-called 'Gentlemen's Club', once described in 'The Times' newspaper as a thriving Victorian brothel.

By the mid-1980's, Soho's red-light district was slowly being 'cleaned-up,' but still a hugely vibrant place, packed with pubs, nightclubs, and some of London's finest restaurants.



One of my final assignments at the NBS was to record a 30-minute documentary on a topical news subject. Returning to my hostel each night, I often spotted furtive drug-dealing and the victims of drug-abuse, strewn around Earl's Court. I produced my first documentary, 'Taming the Heroin Dragon.' It was a hard-hitting investigation into attempts being made to reduce a problem fast spiralling out of control. It was awarded the Best Course Documentary, and the subject matter is just as relevant today.

A few weeks after completing the NBS course, I began studying for my Post-Graduate Degree at the London College of Communication, based in Elephant & Castle.



It was academically rigorous, with 75 per cent of the time learning media law, news values and writing for radio. I found it tough but studied long and hard to ensure I made the grades. Similarly to the NBS, one of our final assignments was to record a radio documentary on a topical news subject.

In 1985, The National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children, (NSPCC,) released new figures showing most child sexual abuse occurred within the family, or by someone the child knew. I recorded and produced, 'Incest - The Big Cover-Up,' which won the BBC Radio 4, Student Documentary of the Year.

Amazingly, despite being turned down the first year I applied and not having an A-Level, yet alone a degree, I was named 'Student of the Year.' I was awarded my own UHER portable tape recorder, worth a hefty £800 at the time, and it served me extremely well in the years to follow.

Chapter Nineteen - Do They Know It's Christmas?

It was difficult to watch Michael Buerk's TV broadcasts from Ethiopia. You could feel Britain crying together, watching in horror at starving children and babies, dying in the arms of their desperate families.

Michael's broadcast of a "biblical famine," was filmed in a remote part of northern Ethiopia, by Kenyan cameraman Mohammed Amin. Together with Buerk's powerful words, they produced one of the most famous television reports of the late 20th century.

Band Aid's record 'Do they know it's Christmas?' became the fastest selling single in history leading to Live Aid, the biggest rock and pop concerts ever seen.

Organiser Bob Geldof described the two concerts as the 'Global Jukebox.' They took place on Saturday July 13th, 1985, at

Wembley Stadium in London, and the John F. Kennedy Stadium in Philadelphia, USA.

I was proud to be on the pitch at Wembley. The 16-hour “super concert” was officially opened by His Royal Highness Prince Charles and Princess Diana, and globally linked by satellite to more than a billion TV viewers in 110 nations. It was a triumph of technology and good will, raising 125 million pounds on the day, for famine relief in Africa.



The Saturday before, I watched Bruce Springsteen with his E-Street Band, rocking Wembley with a stunning 4-hour concert of pure genius musicianship. He left his stage-set, sound and lighting at Wembley, for 'Live Aid' the following week.

I often ask people the best concerts they have ever been to. Living and training in London gave me the opportunity to witness many memorable shows. Live Aid, Queen, and Michael Jackson, exploding onto the stage, just standing stock still, 2 minutes, then removing his sunglasses, and making his moves.

And then there was the Rolling Stones. I had been given a VIP pass to be backstage in the 'Voodoo Lounge' with the Stones, as they prepared to wow their 80,000 expectant fans. The 'Voodoo' marquee was enormous, brimming with A-Class celebrities and sensational first-class free service.

I vividly remember being gently chatted-up by a beautiful girl who introduced herself as Sabrina. At the end of the evening, she gave me her card. I didn't read it until the next day, with a flicker of recognition at her full name.

Sabrina Guinness.

Why did it sound so familiar?

I found out Sabrina was a very high class girl, with a few high-profile romantic liaisons. Famously they included romantic liaisons with Paul McCartney, and in 1979, a relationship with the future King of England, then Prince Charles.

She is now Lady Stoppard, after marrying playwright Sir Tom Stoppard in 2014.

I wonder what might have happened if I had called her? Probably nothing, but you never know!



HRH Prince Charles with Sabrina Guinness

A few years later, I asked my girlfriend at the time to watch Pink Floyd performing their 'Division Bell' tour in London's Earl's Court. She was rather reluctant, saying she did not like them.

People often make opinions and judgements too quickly. Driving back home, she said it was the best musical experience of her life.

There were two more extraordinary events in my final few weeks at the London College of Communication. Firstly, one evening I

received a phone-call from my long-time ex-girlfriend Philippa. She was almost in tears, and so was I, when she said she wanted us to get back together,

Around the same time, one of my tutors took me into his office one morning, to tell me BBC Radio York had heard some of my work and wanted to offer me a job. It was my first radio job offer, from one of the country's most popular and respected local radio stations, serving England's largest county, North Yorkshire.

Chapter Twenty - Radio Ga Ga

In late 1985 before heading for York, I briefly returned to the Isle of Wight to see my family. My Mum gave me her car to use, giving me my first experiences of driving on the 'big' roads and motorways on the mainland.

I became fairly good, driving the 270 miles, almost 5-hour journey to the City of York. Philippa, typically industrious, had secured a job in London, working with Jim Henson Productions, creators of the iconic Muppets. With two salaries coming in, we decided to buy a house in London, and found a pleasant 2-bedroom property in Honor Oak Park, SE23.

In 1985 the house mortgage was £24,000. That same property is now valued at just under £500,000. Wow. I wish we had kept it, but looking back is rarely helpful.

I arrived in the historic North Yorkshire city of York one year after the devastating York Minster fire which remains one of the worst cathedral fires of modern times.

I strolled over Lendal Bridge with the River Ouse flowing below. I marvelled, walking into a sensitive blend of ancient, defensive city walls and stone arches known as 'gates.' The spectacular castle is surrounded by dozens of historic structures, thriving contemporary businesses, all nestling along pretty cobblestone streets called 'The Shambles.'

With York Minster Cathedral and BBC Radio York just a few steps away from my rented home, I was dizzy with excitement. Turning up on my first morning at Radio York reminded me of my earliest days at the NBS and LCC. I was nervous, but some kind of ego and inner confidence helped me through. I began working as Programme Assistant to the mid-morning presenter, Chris Choi. He was becoming well-known for his 'personality' way of mixing the day's top

local news stories, with powerful, polarising listener reaction.



My main job was to drive the radio-car all over North Yorkshire, reporting from wherever the story came from, sending live reactions and opinions back into his programme.

Please. Give me a break!

Back then, I had trouble finding my way around the Isle of Wight, let alone being asked to find towns and villages all over North Yorkshire I had never heard of. One

afternoon I spent several futile hours trying to find my way back to the centre of York, becoming utterly lost. Embarrassingly, I was driving the highly distinctive, logo emblazoned, BBC York radio- car. I eventually resorted to hailing down a police car and followed it back to the radio station.

I adored everything about North Yorkshire, from its breath-taking scenery and countryside to the friendly, plain-spoken people. I must have driven thousands of miles all over this delightful county. One afternoon I experienced the first major shock of my life. It also made the front page of the Yorkshire Evening Post.

Early one afternoon, I was returning to base from Scarborough, driving fast down the A64. Suddenly, the steering wheel came off in my hands. Travelling at seventy miles an hour, with no steering wheel is not recommended.

I braked hard, desperately trying to push the steering wheel back into its socket. But it wouldn't go. With rising panic, I continued to

brake but felt the car drifting into the right-hand lane. I braked harder but was now in the wrong lane with my car out of control. By some miracle there were no vehicles coming the other way, and I eventually came to a skidding stop on the right-hand verge.

Seconds later, a black Audi sped past me, and I realised how close I had come to seeing my life flash before my eyes.

The AA came to my rescue, and predictably the bold newspaper front page headline was, 'Radio York D.J. in a Spin,' with a picture of me looking very white-faced. I may have come close to my own demise, but it was great publicity for the programme.

A few weeks after joining Radio York, I was offered my first regular radio programme every Friday evening. It was a mixture of music, and forthcoming local events.



I was looking forward to seeing my name in the 'Radio Times' for the first time, but disappointed when they printed 'John Paul.'

I was told the French spelling, 'Jean-Paul,' would not 'sit right,' with the North Yorkshire audience.

I cherished my time at Radio York, but a special phone-call was on the horizon. A call inviting me to an even more exhilarating life ahead.

Riding on the wave of an ocean.



Most memorable opportunities knock gently. One evening, I received a phone-call from Michael Betton. He told me about a new independent radio-station launching soon, serving Hampshire, West Sussex, and the Isle of Wight.

I had sent Michael a demo-tape. His call was the first time a Programme Controller had called me, with an invitation for an interview. I explained I was quite happy at the BBC, and did not see any point wasting our time. He asked me to think about it, phoning again

the following evening. Michael can be extremely persuasive.

He emphasised the huge opportunity this would be, broadcasting daily programmes to the south of England, including the Isle of Wight. I was very tempted, but still felt reluctant to leave the BBC.

The next day I phoned my parents asking their advice. I had never been in two-minds like this before. Mum and Dad both said I should remain at the BBC. But in the end, the idea of presenting my own programmes on such a prestigious new radio station, broadcasting to people and places I knew and loved, tipped the balance. On Michael's third time of asking, I agreed to meet up.

I liked Michael the moment I met him. Son of a Methodist minister, he was the youngest independent radio Programme Controller in UK history. After the interview, I met Ocean Sound's Managing Director, the highly respected and personable David Lucas. They are two of the finest people I have ever worked with.



Ocean Sound's Michael Betton and David Lucas

Chapter Twenty-One - The Wedding Song

Philippa and I sold our London house and moved to a new home in Titchfield, Hampshire, a strawberry growing village by the River Meon. Most impressive to me was the lawned 140 metre back garden.

When not working, I spent happy days digging flower beds, chopping wood for the wood-burning fireplace, and looking after a cute bunny rabbit. I had pedalled the fluffy bundle home in a cardboard box, strapped to the back of my bicycle.

A couple of months before Ocean Sound launched, Philly and I were married at St. Mary's Catholic Church, back in Ryde on the Isle of Wight.

I felt tears in my eyes and a happy 'lump in my throat,' as I watched Philippa walking up the aisle, her father Richard by her side, and my best-man, Alex Dyke next to me.

After a beautiful church service, we enjoyed an afternoon lunch reception, followed by a big party in the evening.

Both were held at 'Cliff Tops Hotel' in Shanklin, a venue we both knew well from many disco shows we had performed there. Cliff Tops was designed by my late Uncle Michael, the charming husband of my dad's sister, Gillian.

Unsurprisingly, Alex's best-man speech was cheeky and funny. Mine was apparently '*touching*,' and made a few people cry.

Our wedding night was at the Hotel Ryde Castle, and my youngest sister, Marie-Anne, had hidden a card, with a small bottle of champagne, under the bed sheets. We had kept the hotel secret, but Marie-Anne found out.

The next morning, a Rolls Royce was waiting for our journey from Portsmouth to Gatwick Airport, another special surprise from my parents. We spent a wonderful two weeks together in St. Raphael, on the Côte d'Azur in the south of France.

Chapter Twenty-Two - Ocean Deep



I understand there are many things in life outside our control. I also believe if you want good things in your own life, you should not just sit back and hope for the best. As my friend Cameron Osborn-Smith's father once

told me, *"Don't wait until the iron gets hot, strike it until it does."*

Sitting in reception at Ocean Sound on my first morning, I met many future friends and colleagues who had done just that.

At Ocean Sound we were all facing huge new challenges together. Together is the correct word, and in the weeks, months and years to come, we achieved everything together.

Prior to Ocean's launch we spent several days on a coach, touring and getting to know our transmission area. We visited dozens of towns and villages in Southampton, Portsmouth, and the Isle of Wight, where I fell asleep on the coach after lunch at the famous White Mouse Inn, in Chale.

During one of these coach trips, with all the presenters and news-team on board, Michael Betton famously said, *"Let's hope this coach doesn't crash, or there will be real problems getting on the air."*

In 1986, with my new wife Philly, our new home and garden, new jobs, and a rabbit, the world was our oyster. Philly bought a BMW, and I cycled the 2-kilometre hill to Segensworth West, in Locks Heath.

Philly and I both did our best in work, love and play. When Ocean Sound asked me to work out a specialist programme, uniquely for the Isle of Wight, it aroused a long dormant feeling inside of me.

The potential programme invited anyone from the Island to get in touch, if they thought they had something to offer. Hundreds did, and the 'Isle of Wight Programme' was born.

We broadcast every Saturday evening. Firstly, from Northwood House in Cowes, and a few weeks later from the basement of my original family home in Ryde, where I had recorded my earliest radio demo tapes. My three years at Ocean Sound were some of the happiest of my life.

Every day was sheer wonderment, presenting programmes, recording special

features, documentaries, and being part of extraordinary outside broadcasts. Most memorably, I was the only radio reporter on-board a tugboat, gently pushing HMS Warrior, the world's first iron-hulled, steam powered warship, into Portsmouth Harbour, where she rests magnificently today.



HMS Warrior. I am in the tugboat on the right, near the front of this photograph.

Another unforgettable moment was shaking hands and chatting with His Royal Highness, Prince Charles. He officially opened Ocean Sound on 1st December 1986, and I will



always remember his natural friendliness,
and real interest in everyone he met.

Chapter Twenty-Three - Time of my Life

I was becoming a little bit 'famous,' doing my daily Ocean Sound programmes and occasional nightclub appearances. One night I was tricked onto a famous Southampton dancefloor, asked to lay down, stripped naked to my underpants, then licked all over with mayonnaise, by two very enthusiastic young ladies.

Weekends, I whizzed back and forth in the Ocean Sound radio-car on the Wightlink Portsmouth - Fishbourne car-ferry, presenting the Saturday evening 'Isle of Wight Programme.'

I loved working with the programme volunteers, including Steve Oates, Marie Allen, David Kermode, Andy Shier, Stuart McGuinley, and not forgetting Mike Spice, the technical operator in the mainland studio.



Presenting Ocean Sound's 'Isle of Wight Programme' from 'Redworth' basement

The mayonnaise licking incident was one of many tricks we played on each other. The usual strict professionalism inevitably led to cheeky temptations. One afternoon I was chatting live on-air, and the evening presenter, Pete Wardman, had hidden under the studio mixing desk. He suddenly grabbed my leg, and I screamed out in shock, thinking it was some kind of animal. Listeners must have wondered what was wrong.

Even naughtier was when a group of us replaced Mark Flanagan's usual 'Mystery Voice' audio, with a clip from the wickedly

brilliant DJ, Kenny Everett, welcoming listeners to, *"the radio station with the biggest tits in Britain."*



**On board a new Hovercraft with Michael Betton
& Head of News Chris Rider**

Chapter Twenty-Four - Nothing's gonna stop us now

Several years before joining Ocean Sound, I was aware of a group of people on the Isle of Wight, lobbying the commercial radio regulators, the Independent Broadcasting Authority, to allow the Isle of Wight to have its own dedicated radio station.

The most enthusiastic and zealous of this group was Pat Norris. He had dedicated many years, cajoling the authority have to recognise the unique qualities and community spirit of the Isle of Wight, and why it deserved its own radio station.

His groundwork began to pay off when the authority invited official 'letters of intent,' from all over the UK, demonstrating and providing evidence why any region deserved its own 'incremental' radio station. I secretly went to work, gathering support, proof, and corroboration, and sending off my own 'letter of intent.'

A month later the Isle of Wight was officially named as a region which could apply for its own a radio station. Final applications had to arrive by 10th April 1989, with the winner announced a month later.

Bear in mind, I was still working at Ocean Sound, an area any new Isle of Wight radio station would be competing with.

I immediately told my bosses the plans I was working on. Magnanimously, they allowed me to continue preparing my application, while still working for them. Ocean Sound and five other groups, including one headed by Pat Norris, also applied.

On the weekend of Saturday, 20th May 1989, I was scooping rabbit droppings from the hutch in my garden, when Philippa called me inside saying Steve Oates was on the phone.

Steve and I first met as teenagers on the Island, and he became an important part of Ocean Sound's 'Isle of Wight Programme'. I knew why Steve was phoning, and he asked me to sit down. With heart in my mouth, I waited for Steve's next words.

'We've won,' he said. Two simple words, which would lead to many magical moments in the months and years to come. I was more relieved than surprised and knew there was a steep climb ahead.

"Now look what you've done," was one of the first comments I received, back at work at Ocean Sound on Monday morning. It was a surreal few days, coming to terms with what had happened. Winning the licence to broadcast is one thing. Delivering on your promises and creating radio magic is quite another story.

It seemed an impossible dream was becoming a reality. After more than a decade recording demo-tapes, and only a couple of years in full-time radio, my team had won the licence to create our own legal radio station.

Serving our community on the Isle of Wight.

It sounds rather romantic now, but there was nothing remotely romantic about raising the £500,000 (half a million pounds), our

accountants advised it would need to achieve.

Broadcasting rules were far stricter back then, and despite our youthful naïveté, Steve Oates and I scoured the Island, meeting all the great and good. We raised the money in a matter of months. Sitting in a tiny room above a newsagents in Newport, Steve and I started work, bit by bit, step by step, to create something special.

From the ground up.

It began in a field of thick, wet, and horribly sticky mud. A field at Briddlesford Farm, just outside Wootton, would become the home of Isle of Wight Radio's original transmission system. When the persistent rainfall finally stopped, half a dozen extremely brave men began erecting, then climbing a towering steel arial-mast. Heavy, circular underground cables, connected the towering arial system to the transmitter, housed in a secure concrete blockhouse.



Briddlesford Lodge Farm, Wootton



Erecting the aerial and transmission system





Several evenings prior to launch, I drove down the lane staring at this amazing new mast, with its red, flashing aircraft safety lights shining brightly on top. I always said a few prayers, thanking Neil Friday, our Chief Engineer, who connected everything together.

Meanwhile, in unexceptional empty steel garages on a new industrial estate in Newport, more remarkable things were beginning to happen.

Steve Oates, our Chairman Kenneth Boardman-Weston and I, went to consider these empty metal sheds as a potential birthplace for Isle of Wight Radio.

Chapter Twenty-Five - Bridge Over Troubled Water

It feels like seeing a swimming pool,
wondering if the water is cold. Or sitting on a
beach, gazing at the power of the sea.

Emotions and memories flow through you.

April 15th is a memorable date for many
reasons. It was the same date in 1912, the
infamous, so-called unsinkable passenger
ship, 'Titanic' sank, just after midnight, with
1,500 people drowning in the Atlantic
Ocean, on its way from Southampton to New
York.

And in 1989, exactly one year before Isle of
Wight Radio launched, tragedy played out at
a game of football, between Liverpool and
Nottingham Forrest. 96 fans were crushed to
death, at the now infamous stadium in
Hillsborough.

It is an historically important date, and any
'countdown' should always be memorable.

As I sat in front of the microphone, counting down to 10.00 a.m., on Easter Sunday, April 15th, 1990, I was tingling with memories and emotions.

I was particularly happy to have Pat Norris sitting opposite me, presenting the final launch countdown. Pat was instrumental in the Isle of Wight being designated one of the first areas in the U.K. to be offered its own radio station. Although Steve and I ultimately won the licence, it was very appropriate Pat should be Isle of Wight Radio's first live voice.



"This service will begin broadcasting in 15 minutes," Pat said, giving a reassuring smile, and leaving the studio for me to prepare for the final few minutes.

I tried to ignore the many cameras recording the event, but could not miss a couple of horses, enthusiastically 'making out,' in the field outside the studio window. As the clock ticked towards ten, I closed my eyes, leaned back in my chair, and said a few silent prayers.



I thought of my family, friends, and for everyone who had worked to make this moment happen. I prayed for all the people, listening with anticipation to 1242 metres.

I thought of all my radio colleagues who might be tuned in. Including my friend Chris Carnegy. He drove a special journey to the top of Portsdown Hill on the mainland, to get the best reception.

Second by second, the clock ticked closer to 10.00 a.m. With a deep breath, and another silent prayer, I pressed 'PLAY,' and the famous launch sequence began.

"The silence retreated,

The air crackled,

And the Master whispered,

Follow the Magic...."

As the legendary actor and former Bembridge School alumnus, Jeremy Irons, delivered the specially adapted poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson, Steve Oates walked into the studio with a glint in his eyes.

He said a listener had phoned-in, saying at precisely 10.00 a.m., as 'the silence retreated,' a magnificent rainbow appeared over Alum Bay.



Pensive J-P, a few seconds before IOW Radio's first 'link'

The father of modern radio, Marconi himself, must have been smiling down on us from his monument at The Needles, Alum Bay.



A couple of weeks after the launch, at around four thirty in the morning, I was driving from my new cottage in Whitwell, to present the IOW Radio Breakfast Show. Whitwell, (pronounced Whittle, to the locals), is a rural village in the south of the Island, with Niton up the road, and Ventnor its closest town.

As I drove towards the studios in Newport, I was hailed down by a milk-van, and the driver leaned over and wound down his window. I was a little concerned, especially when he asked '*.... are you Jean-Paul?*'

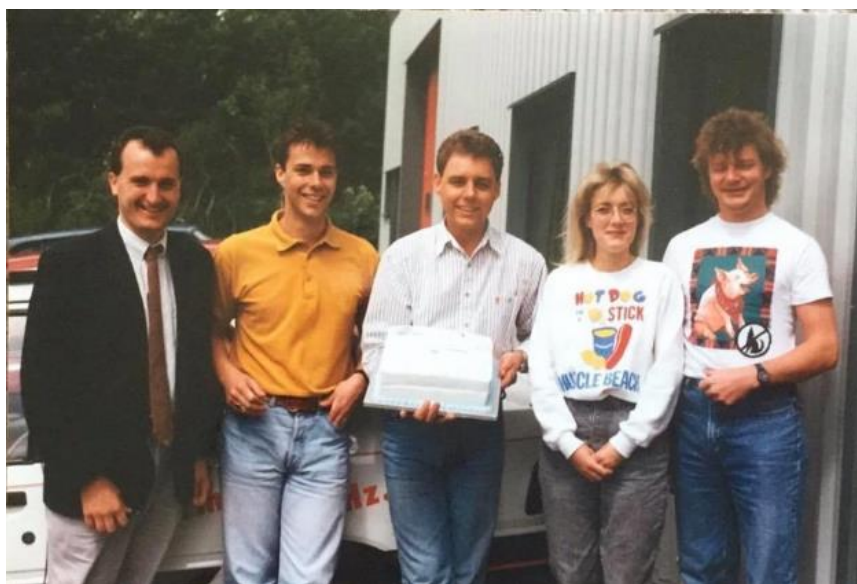
I nodded, and he smiled. "*I'm a huge radio fan,*" he said, "*...and that launch of Isle Wight Radio you did the other day, reminded me of the best days of Radio London, Radio Caroline, and all the other great pirate radio stations. Great job mate.*"

With my eyes welling-up and a beaming grin, I thanked him very much, as he quietly drove away, continuing his early morning deliveries.

The compliments of strangers are never forgotten.

As the launch sequence ended and I spoke my first words, the thrill, pride, and responsibilities laying ahead surged through me. I recalled a comment made by one of the tutors at the National Broadcasting School in London, when he said, radio is like tap-water. *"You never really think about it, until it's not there."*

My team at Isle of Wight Radio were a carefully appointed mixture of people who understood our common purpose. They all had the passion and professionalism I wanted; a hardworking, exciting blend of experience and exuberance.



**Isle of Wight Radio's First Birthday. Steve Oates,
Paul Seed, Me, Flo Rogers and Bill Padley**



Some of the original Isle of Wight Radio team and friends in relaxing mode

A good example of the team spirit was in our first year, when we raised almost £60,000 towards the St. Mary's Hospital Body Scanner Appeal, in one breathtaking weekend.

It was one of the UK's first radio charity auctions, bringing together the expertise, technical ingenuity, and generosity of all the Island community.

Depending on your discipline, and how you manage getting up at 4 a.m. in the morning, a daily Breakfast Show disrupts any kind of normal living or social life. I adored presenting my Breakfast Show, arriving at 4 in the morning to check everything was ready for our 6.00 a.m. start.

Every morning was a total thrill. No matter how tired we felt, the adrenaline and sheer love for what we were doing, pushed us through.

Chapter Twenty-Six - Embarrassment

Waking up my listeners with good music, important local news, and a bit of me, was a pure joy. It is seriously exhilarating and exhausting, but I was young and thoroughly enjoyed it.

Regrettably, my determination brought out more selfishness, and I didn't look after Philippa, my long-time friend and wife, anything like enough. Soon after the launch of Isle of Wight Radio, she left me for another guy. I fell into a period of silent depression, which I tried to hide by throwing myself even harder into my radio work.

Some mornings were particularly memorable, and the Christmas of 1991 springs to mind. I had produced an 'Audio Advent Calendar,' where instead of opening a card revealing a festive picture, I would

unwrap the mornings 'Advent Present,' giving clues to what it was.

Try to imagine what you would say, if you were opening the present one morning to discover the present inside had been secretly replaced, with a disgusting sticky condom, filled with sour cream.

I had to postpone the next programme item, 'Baby Talk,' when I would usually announce the new babies born on the Island in the previous 24 hours.

But that story fades in comparison to the time I was taken hostage. Kidnapped, live on-air, blind-folded, and taken in handcuffs to the mainland. It was a quarter to nine on a Friday morning, and I was looking forward to a date with a new girlfriend. I was introducing a record when the studio-door suddenly burst open, and 5 burly blokes rushed in.

They were shouting and screaming at me, and for just a second, I was truly terrified. Until I realised, they were all dressed aso

characters from the classic movie, 'The Blues Brothers.'

"We're here to take you away J-P," they yelled, each of them looking fantastic, wearing black suits and white, long-sleeved button-down shirts with skinny black ties. They sported black fedoras, and signature Ray-Ban sunglasses, right down to the white socks, and shiny black shoes.

It was an elaborate set-up, and the beginning of one of the most unforgettable weekends of my life.

Crossing the waters of the Solent was nothing new. Being hand-cuffed to a pole in the passenger cabin of the Fishbourne to Portsmouth Car Ferry, certainly was.

After the 'Blues Brothers' dragged me out of the Breakfast Show studio into a car, I knew I could either fight this like a babbling baby, or trust these crazy people for whatever they had planned. Still blindfolded, sitting in the backseat between two 'Blues Brothers,' I tried to work out from the sounds, curves, and stops in the road, where we were going.

Finally, the journey ended, my seatbelt and blindfold were removed, and in front of me I saw the sign to my first destination.

"Welcome to Sandown & Shanklin Rugby Club."

I felt an odd feeling of relief, finally knowing who these 'Blues Brothers' were.



I was walked into the rugby clubhouse, greeted by a crowd of around fifty grinning men and women, who obviously knew what was going on.

Invited to stand in front of the clubhouse bar, I was offered a beer. It was early, but by now could really enjoy one. I just stood there, waiting for the beer to be pulled, but someone said I needed to change into one of their rugby outfits first. *"To prove you're one of the team,"* he said. *"No problem,"* I replied, with cheeky giggles from the women in front of me.

It was the first and only time I had taken my clothes off and changed in public. I really enjoyed the beer, but still had no idea what was going to happen next. I explained I had a date with a new girlfriend that night but was given a phone to say I wouldn't be able to make it.

I was driven to the car-ferry at Fishbourne, and hand-cuffed once again, to a pole in the passenger cabin. There were many amused

looks from fellow passengers, but nobody helped me or asked if this was a joke.

I had already stripped and changed in public and was now strapped to a pole in a rugby outfit, on an Isle of Wight Car Ferry to goodness knows where.

An impressive coach was awaiting our arrival at the Portsmouth terminal, and we all piled in. It was quickly filled with an extremely cheerful bunch of rugby players, all on their annual adventure. This always included someone in the Isle of Wight's 'public eye,' to experience what an off-season rugby tour is all about. I was sat down next to my 'tour sponsor,' and handcuffed to him.

Feeling unsettled is always uncomfortable, not knowing what might lie ahead. Being kidnapped by a bunch of friendly, but unknown strangers was a unique experience. A little like life itself, I suppose. If you knew the future, it might seem too much to cope with.

Like most long journeys, this one began the same. You are sitting next to someone you

do not know; maybe you start a conversation. After half an hour, the first case of beer appeared, and cans cracked open everywhere. I began to feel safer as the beer flowed, and I was asked many questions about myself and Isle of Wight Radio. I love finding out about other people, but it is a special pleasure when they are just as interested in you.

After an hour or so, the singing began. An uplifting and wonderfully naughty selection of songs, which I quickly learned and sang along with. I do not know why some guys, usually empowered by alcohol, feel the need to get their dicks out, but several found it amusing to ignore the coach toilet, and piss in an empty beer can. I did not, and was very careful to check the next can of beer passed to me. My natural caution would serve me very well over the next couple of days. I still had no idea where we were going, or what was planned. It was rather a relief when I saw the sign to our destination.

"Welcome to Weymouth"

Chapter Twenty-Seven - The Boys are back in town



What happens in Weymouth, stays in Weymouth. Especially when you are a reluctant participant in a visiting rugby tour. Still handcuffed, I began to feel rather frustrated. I had played along so far but was now thinking enough is enough.

I was led to a crowd of Weymouth families, men, women and children, standing in front of their own rugby clubhouse. That was it. I

made it very clear. If you want me to play along with this crazy experience, you must release me. Eventually they did, and the so-called 'fun' began.

I had never played rugby before, and after a quick explanation of the rules, was put on the right-wing to play our first match against the Weymouth side. Playing on the wing you must be fast. If you manage to catch the ball, you have to run and dodge like crazy, as far as you can, before inevitably you are brought crashing down. I was fairly useless but had a great time.

As in Las Vegas, what happens in Weymouth, stays in Weymouth. Later that first evening, we all hit the town and made our presence felt. We enjoyed the hospitality of several fine hostelries, then packed into a nightclub. I was beginning to feel safe with my new colleagues, even when a slightly drunk Shanklin player grabbed me around the waist, leaned forward to try and kiss me, and shoved a whole pickled egg in my mouth.

I was very much the centre of playful fun, but only truly embarrassed at lunchtime the next day.

After a slightly hungover breakfast, we wandered around Weymouth until the pubs opened again. I honestly had to force a pint down me, then headed back to Weymouth Rugby Club. The clubhouse was loud and overflowing with anticipation. I could feel it in the air but had no idea why everyone seemed so excited. I joined our team in the visitors changing room and began preparing for my second game of rugby.

As I got down to my underpants, a couple of my new colleagues pulled them down. They led me, totally naked, into the corridor outside.

Standing in line were a dozen other guys, also butt naked, waiting to be led onto the rugby pitch outside.

There are moments in your life you cannot control. I just stood there, looking behind me, looking in front, and wondering why I

was in a queue of other young men, all looking as nervous and naked as me.

A whistle blew, and we were led into the open-air, with a cheering crowd of spectators, whooping and laughing in delight at our embarrassment.

Naively, I thought we might just run around the rugby pitch, but I was very wrong. An elaborate obstacle course had been set-up. One by one, we ran and raced, climbing ladders, swinging on ropes, while the spectators took photographs. It was easily the most embarrassing moment of my life, but I just went for it, flopping willies everywhere.

A few weeks later, I would see some of these cheeky photographs posted at the top of the stairs at a famous Shanklin nightclub. But my embarrassment did at least earn me free, VIP access whenever I wanted.

What happened in Weymouth stays in Weymouth.

Arriving back on the Isle of Wight late on Sunday night, I went to sleep with nothing but sweet dreams, and knowing I had a 4.00 a.m. start.

And an explanation for missing my date with a potential new girlfriend.

Chapter Twenty-Eight - The First Time, Ever I Saw Your Face

With a very serious headache, I got to the radio studio on-time and began preparing for the Breakfast Show. Sitting in the studio, the last thing I needed were a couple of uniformed police constables, standing outside the studio glass. I had accidentally set off an automatic alarm to Newport police station, after incorrectly pressing the entry code.

While they checked all was OK, I made us coffee and invited the two policemen into the studio. I was nervous as they watched me and dedicated the mornings first song to the people who care for us, behind the scenes.

The people you rarely hear from or see.

1991 was a rather turbulent year for me. I was living on my own, in a pretty village called Whitwell.

I had a car to drive to the radio station every day, but enjoyed cycling up the road, to the village shop in Niton, to buy the basics. Fresh bread, milk, and maybe a bottle of wine for the weekend.



Dolphin Cottage, Kemming Road, Whitwell

One evening as I did my shopping, I noticed a stunning girl, and my heart skipped a beat. I gave her a quick, slightly nervous smile, paid for my two plastic bags of shopping, and got back on my bike.

Head over heels.

Over the next few weeks, I could not work out why Alison, (Ali), was always in the village shop, at the same time as me. Later I learned she lived across the road, opposite the shop. Ali would look out of her window, making sure I was there. I am rather shy and rarely make a first move. But the first time I saw Ali, she took my breath away.

I was pleasantly surprised one evening when Ali was waiting outside the shop and said hello. She was sweetly alluring. I was utterly captivated. She already knew my name, where I worked, and impending divorce. As we chatted on the corner, I knew I was falling for this intriguing, smart, and beautiful girl.

The next few weeks I peddled up the road, often unnecessarily, hoping I would bump into Ali again. It happened once, when I saw her with a bottle of Mateus Rose wine, and I gave her another nervous smile. We chatted, and Ali asked if I had seen the note she'd dropped through my letterbox, three weeks earlier.

No, I had not.

It was a yellow 'post-it' note, with the words, *"If you'd like to talk,"* and a phone-number.

The note had disappeared, dropping inside a flowerpot. When I spotted the small note, lying in the bottom of the pot, I was amazed, but felt stupid I had missed it. I phoned her at once.

Early dates and first kisses were back. I never thought I would feel this way again. Our first evening was relaxed and simple, sitting in my new cottage in Whitwell, with Ali and her young daughter Natalie in her arms. I had my lovely wood fire burning, and as night drew in, I gave Ali my first kiss.

Around 4 am the next morning, I drove up the road, dropping my own note through Ali's letterbox. *"My first record at 6 am, will be for you."* I did the same most mornings enjoying the feeling she might be awake and listening. I was on Cloud Number 9, especially when Ali and Natalie moved in with me. For the first time I was responsible for both a girlfriend and her 3-year-old daughter. I adored them both and loved my

new family life. I still love and think about them every day.

It would be nice if our work, social and love life could always be in harmony, but it rarely is. Just when you think everything is perfect, something will bite you on the bum. By the middle of 1991, Isle of Wight Radio was facing some cash-flow and other business issues. I tried hard not to let them interfere too much with my newfound personal life.

Ali and I discussed everything together. When I was invited to an interview at Two Counties Radio, (2CR FM), the famous heritage radio station serving Bournemouth, and much of Dorset, I grabbed the opportunity.

In mid-1992, with a very heavy heart, I left Isle of Wight Radio, and with great excitement became Programme Controller of the largest commercial radio station in my career so far. Ali had found a very decent 2-bedroom house in one of Bournemouth's most exclusive tree-lined avenues.

Paradoxically, my new radio station, 2CR FM

was based in the most famous 'red-light' district in Bournemouth. As you might imagine, driving back home every evening was always interesting.

I was reminded of my days in London's Soho, except this was a street level prostitution I had not witnessed before. They were either young, or very mature. All were unashamedly cheeky.

Arriving home, Ali, Natalie and I spent beautiful evenings together, laughing, cooking, chatting, watching movies and I would occasionally smoke a sneaky Marlboro Light cigarette out of the kitchen window.

One evening, Ali asked me to listen to a song she wanted to dedicate to me. I still start crying when Oletta Adams sings, 'Get Here'

"You can reach me by railway, you can reach me by trailway.

You can reach me on an airplane, you can reach me with your mind.

You can reach me by caravan, cross the desert like an Arab man.

I don't care how you get here, just get here if you can"

I still pinch myself remembering how in just 6 years, I had gone from a frustrated disco DJ, to joining the BBC, Ocean Sound, launching Isle of Wight Radio, and now working at 2CR, this proud radio station in Bournemouth.

We achieved wonderful things together, including reaching Number One in the marketplace, and winning our licence to broadcast for another 5 years.

Bringing a very youthful pop sensation called 'Take That' to Bournemouth was an exciting highlight.

Thousands of screaming fans greeted them, and I was delighted to spend the following afternoon with the five boys, swimming, joking, and laughing together in my local gym.



2CR FM and Classic Gold joined GWR, a fast-growing radio group in the UK. For the first-time, regular radio audience testing was used, to find out the songs listeners really liked.

Without fail, presenters and managers like me were often surprised at the results. But just like polling numbers in politics, the weekly figures dictated our policy. And it worked.

Top GWR management asked me to travel all over the UK, to sell its new 'Better Music Mix' radio format, to dozens of nervous and suspicious presenters, journalists, and management. I do not like formats, but understand them. Most radio people like to be themselves, choose their own music, set news agendas, and generally have their own personalities.

The new 'Better Music Mix' format was essentially playing more music your listener loves and talk less. When you do talk, make it count. It was disliked and uncomfortable for many and made me rather unpopular.

But the format worked, with impressive increases in audience numbers and market share across the GWR Network.

One of the new, simple, and most enjoyable experiences of growing up with my new stepfamily in Bournemouth, was reading Natalie to sleep. Ali and I would be either side of her, and when she was gently snoring, we would have a few hours to ourselves. We loved to talk together about anything, mess about, listen to music, and look forward to coffee and shopping in Bournemouth Town Centre at weekends.

One Saturday, after window shopping and wandering around, we popped into a popular town-centre pub for a quick drink. While we were chatting, a man suddenly knelt in front of our table. He looked at me, and began singing, 'Love me for a Reason,' which was playing in the background.

Assuming he was drunk, I looked at Ali who was smiling. We thought he might forget the words at some point, but he remained on his knees, singing right to the end, then stood up, blew me a kiss, and strode away.

Writing that story reminds me of another time, back in my disco-days, when we had a heaving dance-floor, and a guy asked one of my road crew if he could have a look at all the equipment on stage. After showing him all the gear, he suddenly put his arm around me, and whispered in my ear, "Are you gay?" When I said I was not, his face dropped.

He looked me straight in the eyes, and said, "What a waste."

Chapter Twenty-Nine - Private Investigations

I have never thought of myself as a 'boss.' I don't like the word or being called one. Even more, I dislike bossy people who, in my experience are often rather weak, spineless characters.

Being responsible for people in any walk of life requires not only an inner resilience, but the ability to listen and empathise. They are essential foundations to any successful long-term relationship.

Everyone messes up sometimes. I messed up big-time at 2CR, when I became fed-up with playing 12 minutes of commercials

every hour, often the same one. My excellent Managing Director at 2CR was Sally Oldham, who for nearly 3 years nurtured and encouraged me.



When Sally left 2CR for even bigger things, I was caught manipulating the adverts, to fit more music into the hour. I was suspended, and eventually lost my job. A few months later, I was dismayed and totally distraught, when Ali left me, and moved on with little Natalie.

My life fell into a horrible hole.

After a period of drinking myself silly, I finally pulled myself together. I joined an evening

course in 'Conversational French' at Bournemouth University. With a name like mine, it was about time I learned to speak the language. But it never quite happened, with yet more surprises on the horizon.

It is fun to be flirted with. Driving back from Bournemouth University, I was smiling inside while thinking about the young lady who had started chatting me up. We agreed to a 'date' the following week. But as in politics, a week can be a long time.

Later that evening, I popped into my local pub, sitting at the bar for a quick pint. The pub was surprisingly empty, but I became aware of a guy, glancing at me, from the other end of the bar. His glances were not furtive or suspicious, and we were soon chatting. When he told me he was a Private Investigator (PI), I laughed and was not convinced two pints later. I noticed him a couple of days later, back in the same pub.

We opened very easily to each other, and with nothing else to do, a week later, I flew to

his home in Majorca, staying with him, his wife and two children.

It turned out he really was a Private Investigator. His first-floor office looked like a movie-set from a James Bond movie. The room was impressively big, but almost empty. A dominating desk sat one end, with a massive window opposite.

The window looked out to views of green valleys below, and mountains on the horizon. He was sitting at his desk, with a bank of telephones, around six landlines at least. And several brick-like, Motorola and Nokia mobiles scattered around.

My Private Investigator's name is Gavin. He was unlike anyone I had met before. He introduced me to many new things, both good and slightly naughty.

Gavin had a remarkable ability to hold many conversations at once, doing business with a mobile phone to his ear, and on speakerphone with other people all over the world. I admired his natural multi-skilling.

One evening after work, Gavin and his wife took me into the centre of this Majorca town, a pretty place in the genuine Spanish tradition.

Several large glasses of quality wine were consumed, and although not realising it at the time, he was still doing his job, undercover.

Halfway through the evening, we were joined by a journalist from the notorious British tabloid newspaper, 'News of the World.'

He looked like the stereotypical, dishevelled character you may imagine, getting his money writing salacious stories, and taking photographs of famous people in private, possibly compromising situations.

It was in this atmosphere Gavin offered me half a tablet. It was my first experience of the famous love and dance drug, 'Ecstasy.' So described because it makes you feel extremely loving, and if music starts playing, you cannot help but dance your head off.



Returning to Bournemouth a week later, a new adventure was about to begin. This time, taking me to the medieval 'City of 'Dreaming Spires,' Oxford, in central southern England.

Chapter Thirty - Everybody Hurts

Founded in the 12th century, it was the architecture of the thirty-eight colleges, making-up Oxford's world-famous university, which inspired the poet Mathew Arnold, to give the city its 'Dreaming Spires' nickname. I joined FOX FM as Programme Controller, proud to be heading the team at one of the UK's most widely respected radio stations. FOX had an enviable reputation for first-class programming, and brilliant marketing.

I was also very happy to be working again with Sally, my former M.D from 2CR in Bournemouth.

Despite FOX FM's excellent reputation, it was losing audience, number three in the marketplace when I joined. Six months later, we were back at Number One, but the changes we made were difficult for the FOX Board of Directors to understand. Sally and I regretfully resigned, upset to be leaving, but proud at what we had achieved.

Unfortunately, I was on my own again. Back in Bournemouth. No job, no partner. I lost myself in another haze of late-night alcohol, occasional amazing prostitutes, and swapping pictures of schoolgirls on the internet.

It was like collecting football cards of your favourite player. Who could collect the full set? I knew it was dangerous territory, but I continued looking and saving them.

Stupid? Absolutely.

Sinister? Absolutely not.

Several weeks passed in despondency and bored frustration, and I sometimes went to bed the worse for wear.

I still had money in the bank, so when Gavin, my private investigator friend turned up again, this time with another new girlfriend, we spent many lazy summer days on the beach, and enjoying the best night-life Bournemouth had to offer.

Music hooks me more than anything.

According to a future girlfriend, I live my life

like a series of songs, although I never found out which ones. I suspect there are many of them, depending on what is happening at the time. But however tough life might get, I never sit around sulking for long. Even when I feel completely lost, I always search for a way out.

Thankfully, the BBC in Southampton came to my rescue. Radio Solent began broadcasting on New Year's Eve, 1970. It was where I had my first 2 weeks work-experience as a frustrated disco DJ, writing my experiences to gain a place at the London College of Communication. It felt as though I had a completed a circle, but I was still a little lost inside.

Radio Solent's News Editor, David Dunning, had been following my career, through Ocean Sound, Isle of Wight Radio, 2CR, and FOX FM. He offered me a job as a Senior BBC Producer which I accepted with delight.

David and my superb Station Manager, Chris Van Sheick, made it clear they wanted me to help sweep away the dusty cobwebs from

this famous, but rather old fashioned, heritage BBC radio station. To focus less on lost cats, dogs, and poop on the pavements, and much more on gripping local news, telling genuine stories of life in the south of England. I understood that and threw everything into my new job.

Working with the BBC is the best possible privilege. Even the initials earn respect, anywhere in the world. I enjoyed producing news bulletins and programmes but missed the live connection of presenting my own radio show. My managers at Radio Solent quickly realised this, and gave me a regular late-night talk show, with listeners phoning up with their opinions and reactions, to the big news subjects of the day.

I love these programmes, especially the listeners. Their personalities usually steal the show.

Radio talk shows require a special team of programme assistants and producers. People who help with topical ideas,

answering the phone, and deciding which listeners get on the air.

One of my favourite producers was particularly good. She knew exactly what would work best with me on the radio. She was also very pretty, and a youthful twenty-two years old. I was almost twice her age, and she already had a boyfriend.

But we made a special connection. She even asked me to meet her Mum, Dad, and boyfriend, who also enjoyed my programmes.

Meeting her family, chatting, and eating together was a relaxed pleasure. After the meal, we all sat and talked together, then daughter and her boyfriend disappeared upstairs.

When I thought it was time to leave, her Mum asked me to stay. Her husband had gone to bed, and she told me some very surprising, open, and honest things. She said she loved my voice and personality on the radio and liked me even more in person. I

was not sure how to react, but we continued chatting.

That night I slept in a spare room. The following morning, her Mum and me were on our own. Her husband had left for work, while daughter and boyfriend had gone off somewhere. We went for a pleasant walk and although it wasn't Bobby Goldsboro's song, '*Summer, (The First Time)*,' it could have been.

Back on the Isle of Wight a few weeks later, I received a letter from her. It was a beautifully handwritten love letter, which I took to heart, then screwed up, throwing it in the dustbin. It would have been far too complicated.

The dustbin was in my brother's kitchen. I was back on the Island, living in the spare room. Anthony and his wife Angela, would put up with my early morning splashing around, making their bathroom soaking wet. I had rejoined Isle of Wight Radio working towards an even more ambitious ideal.

A new regional radio station had been advertised, serving much of the south of England, and I could not resist the challenge.

I loved being back on Isle of Wight Radio. But while preparing for the next big step, my worst nightmare began.

Chapter Thirty-One - I Got Stripes

It started like any other morning, presenting the Isle of Wight Breakfast Show. I had no idea at just after six, my house across the water in Bournemouth was having its door bashed open. My unlucky radio colleague and tenant, was rudely awoken as five detectives rushed through the door yelling, "POLICE!" They were looking for me but had out-dated information. My shocked friend explained where I was.

At just after 9 a.m., I had finished my Breakfast Show and was in the sales office. The Isle of Wight Radio receptionist walked in and whispered in my ear. *"There are five plain-clothed police officers in reception, asking for you."*

My blood had not yet run cold, but I had a bad feeling growing in my stomach. They asked if we could go somewhere private. I led them to Studio B, the studio I hoped would become the broadcast studio for

'Lighthouse Radio,' the new regional radio licence I was working on.

I opened the heavy studio door and invited them inside. Standing against the back wall, I looked at the detectives in front of me.

That was when my blood really did run cold. I had heard the 'miranda' many times, in films and TV shows, except this time it was me, being arrested on allegations of child pornography.

My innocent search for pretty legs had mutated into the most ghastly and devastating time of my life. I was speechless, but grateful handcuffs were not used, as I was led outside, walking past my worried, shocked colleagues.

I was sat in the backseat of an unmarked police car, between two burly detectives on the short drive to Newport Police Station. Rather naïvely, I asked how much trouble I was in.

No answer.

The police cells in Newport were nothing new to me. I had been there many times before, recording various radio interviews. But it felt very different when the cell-door slammed shut, with me locked inside.

I suppose it was shock, but it was the first time my mind began trying to comprehend what was going on. The very words, 'child pornography,' were the worst I could imagine. I knew whatever happened in the future, my life would be forever tainted.

Sitting in that cell, my swirling thoughts were of my family. I already felt ashamed, although unaware of what I would be facing. After a couple of hours, the cell door opened, and an officer asked if they could enter my brother's house, where I was currently living. No problem, I said. They already had my keys but required my permission.

Another couple of hours went by. I was eventually released on police bail. Back outside on Newport High Street, I was shaking. I phoned my brother to meet-up.

Thank goodness for Anthony, who remained calm and supportive. As radio runs through my blood, my family are in my bones. I explained the dreadful situation to Anthony and tried to hold myself together.

While we were growing up, naked breasts always featured on Page 3 of a famous UK newspaper, but they never really appealed to me. Then as now, I look at the face, the eyes, and legs. (If you want to know what someone's legs look like, look at their arms. The proportions are the same. I read that somewhere, and it's true.)

When I turned up to my next appointment at Newport Police Station, two detectives opened a thick file of pictures. Proceeding to flip them over, they questioned if I had seen each one. I recognised the first few and nodded at pictures of teenage schoolgirls.

As they continued flipping them over, some disgraceful pictures appeared. I frowned and glared rather angrily at the detectives in front of me. Slowly, they continued to show me pictures I had never seen before. Disgusting

pictures I later learned had been sent from America, in a 'zip' file. At the time, I had no idea how to open a zip file, but inside this one were many grossly indecent images.

The Federal Bureau of Investigations in America, (FBI), had been tracking this zip file, to gather information about who was sending it, receiving it, and where it came from. The innocent looking zip file landed on my computer, and I was screwed. Without asking, my computer now had thousands of images I had never seen before.

But the fact was, they were there.

I decided to plead guilty and received 12 months in prison. I had never searched for child pornography, but it arrived on my computer, and I had to pay the price.

There are times in life when everything seems to stink. Not just smelling a bit odd, I mean really stink. It is never nice, but what do you do? Sit in the shit or pull yourself up and move on.

Chapter Thirty-Two - Jailhouse Rock

Growing up, a powerful gong would strike, reverberating throughout our house. It was a wonderful instrument to guarantee the obedience of five children, including me, to stop whatever 'important' things we were doing, sit down at the dinner table, and eat together. I was usually the first to sit down, chatting with Mum and Dad, waiting for the others to arrive. The dinner table was where I learned manners, conversation, and how to listen, debate, and argue a point of view.

My first meal at Winchester Prison involved walking in file, down 2 flights of steel stairs, looking around, and taking a metal tray of slushy eggs, and watery looking beans, back upstairs to my cell. Across me sat my cellmate, a man who told me he was sixty-two, but looked much older.

He had been sleeping on the top bunk of the bed, apparently his privilege. We sat down across a small metal table, eating metal tasting eggs, from metal trays. First impressions are important in all aspects of

life, but they are magnified in prison. As we finished our soggy, totally tasteless prison breakfast, a loud bang hit the cell door and it slammed open. I carefully gathered up the metal trays, and politely stood, handing them to the prison officer in the doorway. He gave me a stern look and said, *"What do you think this is, a fucking hotel?"* I was ordered to put the trays on the floor. Despite my embarrassment, the amusing . endeared me to many prisoners as it got around.

There has been a jail in Winchester since the



13th Century, with an infamous and often inglorious history. The existing prison was built in the mid-19th century, high on a hill, hidden behind a dominating brick wall.

Sixteen men were executed by hanging from 1900, until the last one in 1963. More recently, in 1995, serial killer Rosemary West was held here on remand, in a specially built unit, while being driven to Winchester Crown Court each day of her trial.

In December 2001, a convicted murderer escaped by scaling the wall. The prisoner went on the run, using a home-made handsaw to cut through the bars of his ground floor cell window. He then used a rope and grappling hook to scale the 30-foot prison wall. He was recaptured a few days later.

I spent my first month in this nerve-racking place, walking past the now defunct concrete execution block, on my way to the gym. It was impossible not to feel a deep chill.

Spending 23 hours every day, stuck in a cell, was one of the hardest parts of my early sentence. The nights were noisy, with little decent sleep, and just another day of nothing. Boredom can soon become all

enveloping, and potentially dangerous. Thankfully, my cell mate was someone I enjoyed being with. As a young man, he had been in the Navy during World War 2. Before his incarceration he was a private Captain, sailing world famous celebrities in their spectacular yachts all over the world. His wealth of stories were always fascinating, and often very funny. They helped keep me sane.

We all know crazy things happen in our world, much of it hidden and inexplicable, and occasionally revealed by brave investigative journalists. I have never believed in human 'monsters,' but in prison, I met many men the media had described as just that. You would never think it when you meet them. They look just like you and me.

If you are ever sent to jail, there are 3 important rules to remember, when you first arrive.

Number One: Never look in anyone's eyes. I learned this very quickly, after my cellmate warned me, prison is like a jungle. He

explained most men inside were fine, but to be aware of the 'foxes and wolves,' and other sneaky creatures, always on the look-out for any kind of vulnerability to take advantage of.

Number Two: Be careful making friends. They usually won't be.

Number Three: Do not ask what anybody is inside for. You will always get a lie, until maybe, just maybe, they trust you enough to tell their story.

Boredom in prison can easily become crushing. You quickly learn what losing your liberty means. Your life is never your own. You simply sit in your cell, waiting for the next structured piece of the disciplined day.

They are few and far between, but 'Association' is the biggest one. For 45 minutes, you are let out of your cell, to mix with your fellow convicts. It is also when new prisoners like me, had to be very careful and remember the 3 important rules I mentioned earlier.

At the time of writing, Wikipedia says:

Quote:

"Many prisoners spend just 45 minutes a day out of their cells. There is weak support for prisoners at risk of self-harm, and there have been five suicides since the last inspection in 2014.

New prisoners are reasonably well treated, initiatives to prevent violence are good, and the prison is making progress in many areas. However, limits to time out of the cells, reduces the good the prison can do. After a prisoner took his own life in September 2016, there were complaints over lack of suicide prevention training among the staff. "

Four weeks into my incarceration, I was taken into the Governor's office, and told I would soon be leaving Winchester, to an 'Open' Category D Prison in Gloucestershire, called Leyhill. I was relieved to be going somewhere far less restrictive, but my first thought was my elderly cellmate. I asked the Governor if he could come with me. *"If he*

wants to, that will be fine, but I don't think he wants to move."

I did not understand why he was rather resistant to leaving this uncomfortable 'hellhole,' to a potentially better place. I encouraged him the best I could, and eventually he did .

Formerly a World War 2, US Military Hospital, Leyhill is now a mainly 'lifers' prison. It houses the most serious long-term offenders, who through 'good behaviour,' have spent at least 20 years serving their sentences in top security jails.

Slowly, very slowly, they might earn the trust to eventually arrive at this open Category D prison. You can easily abscond from a Cat D jail. You are not locked in. But if you do walk out, and are caught, you are shipped back. into places like Winchester, or worse.

Leyhill reminded me of a boarding school, with private rooms, and many opportunities to gain experiences with new things.

Leyhill prison is effectively a working farm with acres of land and livestock, supplying food and essentials to other prisons and communities all over the UK.

I was pleasantly surprised to be asked to manage and run the farm-shop café, about a mile outside the main prison gates.

I was given the keys and drove a big Bedford van to pick up my fellow trustees every morning, with special toots on the horn. We quickly had a fabulously successful café, attracting prison officers and civilians from towns and villages near and far away.

It still amuses me I was given the keys and a van, to drive in and out of prison every day.

My All-Day Breakfasts became legendary. Imagine, a large oval white plate, dressed with two seriously thick 9-inch, 90% pork sausages. Two juicy grilled tomatoes would be placed at either end, with mushrooms helping them out. Slices of fried bread lay in the middle, with 3 thick rashers of crispy, rindless bacon on top.

Two beautifully fried eggs winked at the sides, with small dollops of baked beans, and fresh black pudding in all four corners. Toast, coffee, and three times deep fried chips, were on the side. Not bad for £3.99.

I loved pulling all this together, especially when we were busy, with dozens of breakfasts to make, as the customers crowded in. It reminds me of the timing and teamwork required to create great radio. Preparation, content, teamwork, and ultimately great delivery.



Freshly baked bread rolls, salads, jacket potatoes, cold meats and pickles, ensured my team never had to endure the usual prison food.

We were allowed a small carrier bag of food each evening to bring back. Supposedly strictly regulated, you would be amazed at the kilos of meat rolls, sausages, eggs, tubs of salad, and other food contraband, smuggled out most evenings.

But it was the thick wedges of cake that made me very popular. I rarely ate them myself, and the windowsill in my room, quickly became a mini café of its own. Hidden behind the curtain.

Nothing stays secret in prison very long. Providing they politely waited at my door, I handed over whatever they wanted. But one evening, a young guy just ran in, grabbed a handful of grub, and ran back out. He wasn't welcomed again.

As much as I enjoyed my experiences running the prison café, one afternoon

something happened that easily remains the most frightening moment of my life.

It began when a phone-call came into the adjacent farm shop, saying I had a visitor back in the prison. This was a surprise, as prison visits are normally arranged weeks in advance, and something to look forward to. When I explained to my café team I would be leaving for a couple of hours for the visit, one young guy utterly lost it. I had worked with him for many weeks, and we had built a decent, trustworthy relationship.

Suddenly, he grabbed a 10-inch kitchen knife, grabbed me from behind, and held the blade, hard to my throat. I froze. He said I was getting special treatment with my unexpected visit.

I have never been so close to actual death before but remember becoming extremely calm and talking to him. I explained my prison visit was as much a surprise to me, as it was to him. I also warned him if he carried out his murderous threat, he would lose everything he had worked towards, be

shipped back to a nasty Category A top security jail, and probably never leave it again.

He was formerly a highly successful jockey, racing famous horses all over the world. He was short, but stocky, and extraordinarily strong. I gradually talked him down and he eventually removed the knife and let me go.

That was when I started to shake.

I do not know where he went, but I became slightly hysterical as I ran into the farm shop almost hyperventilating.

I never told any authorities what had happened, but two days later, driving to open the prison gates, I saw him on a verge digging plants. I wound down the van window and he gave me an embarrassed smile, thanking me for not snitching.

The following morning, I was taking my usual early morning shower, behind the privacy wall, when he walked in with a large glass tumbler, brim full of what he said was vodka and orange. It was his thank you present to

me, and even though it was only five in the morning, tasted fantastic.

From armed bank robbers, who dressed up as elderly women, to lorry drivers with refugees packed in crates, and even worse, tabloid shocking crimes, I met them all. But prison is an incredibly good leveller. You have done your crime, and if you have finally arrived at Leyhill, the authorities believe it may be time to consider you for release, back into society. Maybe.

This was a mix of mainly lifers, men serving 20 years plus, and a few new timers like me, living together in this unique community.

The Leyhill 'experiment' is still controversial, particularly among some living in nearby villages. They are naturally nervous at the thought of so many serious convicts close by. With the freedom to walk out, (abscond), if they decided to.

During my journalism law training in London, the question of retribution or rehabilitation, was one academic study. I remember writing a death sentence was certainly a final kind of

retribution, but while killing, raping, or abusing someone is wrong, judicial executions, whether by noose, needle or electric chair, is not an answer.

Drastic retribution by death is not something I believe works to solve crimes in any society.

But rehabilitation is often even more difficult, as the long-serving prisoner simply becomes an expensive institutional shell, with no understanding of the free new world, he or she may be released into decades later.

On New Year's Eve 1997, I was dozing in my room when there was a gentle knock on my door.

It was about 10.30 in the evening, and a kind looking black Rastafarian stood there, with a guitar and 2 fat cannabis joints in his hand. He looked like Bob Marley and invited me across the corridor to his room. We quietly played dominoes while slowly getting high. I had heard him strumming and singing before, and he was exceptionally good.

An advantage of 20+ years of practice behind bars.

In what must have been a Leyhill first, I managed to arrange its first Prison 'Pub' Quiz. I was confident about entertaining crowds from my disco-days but having almost 500 convicts in front of me was a unique and daunting experience.

I now know how Johnny Cash must have felt at Folsom and San Quentin jails.

The highlight of the evening was a pop segment, with music clips sent in on cassette by my dear friends Mo and Danny. Obviously, they had been carefully security checked before I got them.

It was quite a thing to turn a large, cold prison auditorium, into an intimate space for hundreds of men going through the worst experience of their lives. But it worked, and for a couple of hours, the suffocating, rigid disciplines and dullness of prison life were forgotten.

Thank you Mo. Thank you Danny.

Leaving Leyhill, I knew it was doubtful I would meet my convict colleagues again, but I look back with fondness at most of my time running the farm shop.

Freedom is fantastic, but it is easy to drift, just wallow around, and I did that for several weeks. Freedom is one thing; doing something with it is harder.

But friends will be friends, and best friends are even better. They believe in you, no matter what. Years can roll on, but it does not matter. When you need them most, they are still there. Back on the Island, my reliable friend Chris Carnegy came to visit me, with a job offer, leading to the next chapter of my life.

Chapter Thirty-Three - I Am, I Said

Unfortunately, it began as a bit of a nightmare. I arrived at Wellingborough railway station with suitcases and stuff, waiting to be picked up to stay at the News Editors house.

Wellingborough is a market town in Northamptonshire, with pretty rivers, and a railway line taking you to London in under an hour. Few railway stations are nice to be stuck at, but various communication problems left me stranded there for nearly four hours. Once again, I had no idea what my future might hold.

My new job involved helping launch Wellingborough's first local radio station, Connect FM, while also rebranding the heritage station KCBC, in the nearby town of Kettering. The next five years flew by, with flashes of exhilaration, and even more memorable moments.

Nobody likes change, and I wasn't always popular, but we ultimately achieved some truly great radio, and I made many good friends.

My Managing Director was the brilliant Bill Johnston, a true local radio stalwart. In July 2000, we went to watch Elton John performing at Castle Ashby, the stunningly beautiful stately home in rural Northamptonshire. Elton's performance was sensational, just him and his piano, taking our breaths away.

Awaiting our taxi home, Bill and I stopped off at the cute village pub. (Naturally!) We descended into the pub's basement, and gently squeezed ourselves between a friendly group of fellow revellers.

Thinking back, the Covid-19 virus pandemic, and resulting lockdowns, would not have allowed the next chapter to happen.



Bill Johnston

Chapter Thirty-Four - Can you feel the love tonight



The pretty pub basement was heaving with Elton John fans, still high after watching and listening to a genius at work. Amidst the excitement, my eyes spotted an attractive girl across the table. We had both been glancing at each other, but now our eyes were locked, and began searching in the way only eyes can. I could see a heady mixture of attraction and questions in

Angie's eyes, and she must have seen the same in mine.

If someone had told me I would one-day fall in love with a Yorkshire girl, with five boys aged 3 to 19, from three previous marriages, I would not have believed it, but that is what happened. Angie was a professional housekeeper and cleaning supervisor, with experience managing teams of staff, cleaning and maintaining everything from luxury homes to London's iconic Wembley Stadium.

We were remarkably close with no secrets. I dislike secrets, and always try to avoid listening or telling them. I am a 'Needle in the Haystack' type. But always the needle, not the haystack. I do tend to 'prod a wasp's nest,' just to see what happens, even though I might get stung.

While at Connect FM, I experienced my first taste of Class A drugs. I was still in touch with Gavin, the Private Investigator back in Bournemouth. He had first introduced me to

'Ecstasy,' and very pure cocaine a few months before.

When I made my occasional weekend trips home to the South Coast, I often drove back with a few pills, hidden in my bag.

Those few months were enormous fun, meeting and doing things vastly different, and often rather 'naughty.' I never 'lost' it completely, but thankfully when I felt close to it, I stopped.

As I get older, I find myself becoming even more intense, although I prefer the word thoughtful. I wonder if I will eventually become wiser with age. Maybe, but I do not think I will ever fully grow up. I don't really want to.

While working at Connect FM, I had taken out a mortgage on a pretty cottage, in the equally pretty rural village of Great Doddington, with its sweeping views of the Northamptonshire countryside. I also decided to resign from Connect FM, and work with Angie, setting up an exclusive home-cleaning company called 'Sparkles.'

We built up an excellent customer base, performing meticulous, deep house cleaning, with no corners missed. The idea seemed simple, and it took off fast.

My role was to get customers, marketing and administration, while Angie employed and managed the staff. That was the idea anyway.

It worked well, but Angie decided she did not like the intensity of a business partnership with me, and she began working at a posh hotel complex instead.



Our personal life continued, but I was suddenly left running a home cleaning business on my own.

I stuck it out successfully for almost five years, but when I began waking up feeling fearful of the day ahead, and the way some people would treat house cleaners, it was time to move on.

I gave up the Sparkles business, and with no money coming in, handed the cottage keys back to the mortgage company. Angie and I also went our separate ways.

It was around this time while laying back in a nice warm bath, I noticed something slightly odd happening. When I brought my knees together, a slight tremble would begin.

Nothing dramatic, just a very slight shake in my right leg. I tested the feeling several times over the weeks.

One afternoon, while packing up my belongings, I was standing on top of the steep cottage staircase, when something

made me stop. I just stood there, knowing I must not run down the stairs as usual.

Knowing I had to be careful, I put my belongings down, using the banister to keep me steadier. It was the weirdest of feelings, because I had not actually felt anything, just a 'knowing' something, somewhere in my body had changed.

Chapter Thirty-Five - The Way It Is

Driving back to the Isle of Wight, I felt totally deflated. It was an unusual, uncomfortable feeling, and I was more nervous about the future than ever before. All my important belongings were stuffed in bin bags in the boot and back seat of my Mitsubishi car.

Finally arriving in East Cowes, I sat outside my brother's house for a couple of hours, just contemplating the disruption I might, and probably would be causing.

My brother Anthony was now looking after his three youngest daughters, plus being a stepdad to two young lads, all growing up and living together in his house. I smiled in embarrassment and gratitude, as he and his family once again welcomed me into their home. Anthony lives a few steps from Osborne House, the favourite Royal Palace Prince Albert built for Queen Victoria, and streets all over the Island are proudly named after them both.

I had many thoughts running through me. Not least where to live more permanently, and what to do next. I thought my luck may have run out. I found a flat down the road, bought a fishing rod and often simply dreamed, thinking a great deal, while gazing at the horizon and expanse of the sea.

The ocean makes you think. Dreaming of beaches, lapping tides, and soft sand tickling your toes.

The best thing I caught while fishing off East Cowes, was an enormously fat and wriggly eel, a bottom feeder, almost one meter long!

Thankfully, a passing couple saw me battling with the slippery monster, and stood on its head, while I carefully took the hook out of its mouth. I do not know if eels are edible, but did not want to find out. I threw the fish back, watching it gratefully slide away.

My rented flat was close to the East Cowes Chain Ferry. The ferry drags cars and passengers across the River Medina to Cowes, the world-famous yachting town, hosting 'Cowes Week' each August.

Every year the normally quiet town, suddenly becomes a bustling mass of rich and famous celebrities, competing yachtsmen and women, and usually a healthy sprinkling of Royalty.

The most prestigious yacht-club in Cowes is the Royal Yacht Squadron. One year, I was outside the Squadron, leaning up against its much-photographed green wooden gate. Suddenly, the gate was sharply pulled open behind me, and I literally fell back into the arms of the Duke of Edinburgh. Prince Phillip laughed as I stumbled back up, and with a glint in his eye said, "Bloody daft place to stand young man," and sauntered off.



The Royal Yacht Squadron, Cowes, Isle of Wight

I love the genuine community spirit of East Cowes. Walking to the small Co-Op to buy essentials. I knew many locals understood my situation, and had listened to me on Ocean Sound, Isle of Wight Radio, 2CR, and BBC Solent.

Not once did I feel nervous or judged. I used to hit the bottle too much, more than ever before, but even the hangovers were never bad enough to stop me, somehow, anyhow, trying to get back into radio.

I was on the dole. No job, just the Job Centre in Newport. Always ensuring I was smart, spick and span, once inside, the routine was bureaucratic, and often seemed pointless.

But the Job Centre staff tried to be helpful and kind. What really got to me, was the seemingly endless form-filling, and box ticking exercises. Of all government departments, the Department of Work and Pensions must be one of the toughest, trying to balance genuine need, with people who have just given up.

Chapter Thirty-Six - On The Road Again

I love airports, and never get bored of watching aircraft take-off and land. I love the crazy, busy atmosphere inside airport terminals, watching people coming and going, from all over the world.

I had never flown from London's Heathrow airport before, and in 2008, my first flight to the Middle East began. Sitting in the departure lounge, my nerves were jangling.

Glancing around at my fellow Royal Jordanian passengers, it was obvious I would soon be experiencing another unique moment in my life. The departure lounge was packed, with a bustling mixture of cultures I had never seen in one place before.

Many women were dressed in traditional Arab clothing. The Burqa, Niqab, and other dress wear are often confused.

Niqabs cover the face and hair, showing only the eyes. Burqas cover the entire face and body, with just a small mesh screen, allowing the wearer to see. But there are other common dressing styles as well.



As we took off on route to Amman, the historic capital of Jordan, I closed my eyes, reminiscing on the remarkable turn of events bringing me to this point.

I had become increasingly despondent in my boring East Cowes apartment, when an email pinged, and flashed on my computer. It was a response to an application I had made to a slightly strange job advert. It

asked for a long and detailed list of qualities I knew I had, but ended saying speaking Arabic was essential. I almost didn't bother sending off my details.

But I did, and here I was, sitting on a plane heading for an interview 3,000 miles away, in the Middle East.

Halfway through the 5-hour flight, on the right-hand side, I noticed four Burqa dressed women, suddenly leaning forward with heads down and arms rising and falling in obvious prayer.

I had already spotted the compass, showing the direction of Mecca on a screen above us, and witnessed the dedication religion can inspire, and sometimes dictate.

Half an hour before we landed, I looked out of the aircraft window at desolate nothing. Just expanses of the Sinai desert, and inevitable thoughts of historic wars, and recent terrorism in my head.

Sitting next to me throughout the flight, was a well-suited businessman. As I was looking

out of the aircraft window, we slowly began to descend. It was then my aircraft neighbour leaned underneath his seat, pulling out a large bag which he placed in the aisle. I tried not to react nervously but wondered what might be inside.

The man stood up, stepped into the aisle, and unzipped the bag. He pulled out a thick, brilliantly white cotton robe, slipping it over his head, letting it gently flow to his feet. Next, he leaned into the bag again, bringing out a white head scarf, skilfully wrapping it around his face.

I was transfixed. Finally, he took out a thick, richly ornate roped band, placing it over his head. In a matter of minutes, my aircraft neighbour had turned from a three-piece-suited businessman, into an immaculate Saudi Arabian sheik. He sat back down, and I could not keep the smile off my face. He smiled back, and the aircraft gently came into land.

Welcome to Jordan.

Chapter Thirty-Seven - Ya Ana, Ya Ana (Oh Me, Oh My)

Waking up in the Middle East was special, and very different. I looked out of the hotel window, watching life in Jordan's capital city, Amman, below. The first 'call to prayer' at 5.00 a.m. began, the booming sound echoing everywhere. I was tired and nervous, but it was a Friday, and my interview was not until the following day.

My potential employers had kindly arranged for me to meet up with another English presenter, working on their 'sister' radio station, Beat FM. It is always nice to do things together, and Rob Stevens helped me enormously, and still does.

The next morning, I sat in the 'Seagulls' company reception for 3 hours, waiting to be interviewed. It was frustrating, but I sensed my patience was being tested. I enjoy being interviewed, and this process went on for the rest of the day, and well into the night. It

included the Chief Executive, Hussein, taking me out for lunch at a fabulous Italian restaurant.

We were joined by his brother and Operating Officer Nidal, and I quickly knew I could work with both my potential new bosses. They were passionate, firm and fair. Always the best way to be.

Early in the evening, after a quick change of clothes at my hotel, a car picked me up to take me to the radio station. The car was driven by another brother, Hisham, who would soon become my regular and excellent dentist.

We drove to Mood 92, then based on the 4th floor of the Crowne Plaza Hotel, in the centre of the bustling city. I was not expecting to visit the radio station that day, but even more surprised to find the entire working staff of both radio stations, Mood and Beat FM, awaiting my arrival.

And there was another surprise to come. While I walked around, chatting and shaking hands with the staff, Nidal showed me into a

cupboard-sized 'voice-booth,' with an old-fashioned, BBC type microphone, strapped on a wobbly, floor standing mic stand. It had been decades since my first radio audition.

This time I had no preparation, and all the staff were outside, getting ready to listen. I took the initiative, and asked Mood's station manager, Ahmad, to prepare a sheet of paper with half a dozen songs written on it.

With no headphones, no music, just a list of songs jotted down, and a rickety microphone wobbling in front of me, I imagined each of the songs playing in my head. It was the strangest radio audition of my life.

After chatting into the microphone for about 10 minutes, the studio door opened, and I was told I had passed with flying colours. They were recording and listening to me outside, and I blushed in embarrassment, with everyone smiling and clapping their hands.

I have always used my hands to express myself, whether it is just talking, or

drumming like a mad man listening to music, my hands and arms always seem to move.

Maybe it's the quarter French blood in me from my mother. I cannot really dance, but I do have rhythm, and love to move.

Often on my own, I will drum in my chair and sometimes, accidentally smack myself in the face. When my brother Anthony saw me recently, he commented on my expressive hand movements as we chatted.

I did not think I was any different than usual, or perhaps I was making up for the fact I could not walk or balance as usual.

Before I flew back to Jordan, I had two more MRI scans, one brain only, and the other full body. Both times no problems were found. While that was nice to hear, I still had the slight limp in my right leg.

Anthony had also noticed a balance issue, something I wasn't aware of at the time. The last thing I wanted was a medical issue stopping me getting back into radio, in this

historically important and fascinating country.

At 4.00 p.m. on Sunday February 3rd, 2008, I sat in the makeshift studio at Mood FM, and my new life in radio began.

Ironically, the date was also the 50th Anniversary of the tragic air crash, that killed pop stars Richie Valens, JP Richardson, ('The Big Bopper,') and Buddy Holly. I made my opening as special as possible, with a BBC pips countdown, then into my St. Elmo's Fire theme music. This was followed by Don McClean's iconic tribute to the 'day the music died,' American Pie.

My Mum, Dad, family and friends were in my mind as I played Elton John's 'Your Song,' my own tribute to Jordan, and the world.

"My gift is my song, and this one's for you"

Friends often tell me I seem to live my life through the lyrics of songs. The more I think about that, the more it seems true.

"I don't have much money, but boy if I did, I'd buy a big house where we both could live."

That has been true most of my life. Having my own house is a basic instinct. A home of my own, not renting, no landlords, a place of my own. I have always been like that, and still am, writing this from my small apartment in Egypt. It is mine.

I am very aware of the effect music has on people. Being on the radio gives you great power and responsibility. When you are sitting in a radio studio, with just a mixing desk and microphone in front of you, every tune you play, every word you say, every breath you take, is very important.

You don't know who is listening, where they are, or what they're doing. It is irrelevant how many people might be listening; you are only talking to one person. Just like you are the only person reading this now.

Every day and night in Jordan was an eye-opener. A whirl of constant colours, flashing lights, smells, crazy driving, and the wonderful warmth of the people.

Security in Jordan is everywhere, and intense. All hotels, supermarkets, and public buildings have airport style, walkthrough scanners, bags are opened, and you are usually patted down before being allowed inside. Vehicles are mirror checked underneath, the boot opened, and everything carefully studied, including you and any passengers. I quickly got used to it.

Every year blood tests are mandatory, and licences, ID cards, passports and other paperwork checked. During my first year in Jordan, I was amused when the policeman checking me said:

"You're OK, you are too old to be a terrorist."

The strict security soon becomes reassuring, knowing everything possible is being done to keep you safe.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on America, my favourite TV series, 'The West Wing,' produced a one-off episode titled 'Issac and Ishmael.'

In one memorable scene, a young student asks, "...*Why is everyone trying to kill us?*"

Another student replies, "*It's the Arabs, and it's Islamic.*" The White House Deputy Chief of Staff interrupts, saying no, that is not correct.

He then writes on a whiteboard:

***Islamic extremist is to Islam,
as the.....???....is to Christianity***

He then fills in the space, so it reads:

***Islamic extremist is to Islam,
as the KKK, (Ku Klux Klan) is
to Christianity***



An excellent analogy.

Chapter Thirty-Eight - Kindness of strangers

Driving in Amman was not something I was looking forward to, but my Chief Executive Hussein, insisted I took the plunge. I would practice on Fridays when most of the population were off the roads, observing the Muslim 'Holy Day.'

My sense of direction has always been dreadful, and one evening I found myself in the Mood FM car, totally lost in a local downtown marketplace. I was surrounded by dozens of animated Arabs, countless chickens squawking in their cages, and the air full of heady, spicy aromas.

I was stared at in my car, galabia dressed men, women and children, peering through the windows at me. I was the strange looking person here, and an early culture lesson.

Looking at their fascinated faces, I wound down my window and was immediately offered a cigarette. I had given up a few

years before but accepted it with a smile and nod of thanks.

It was obvious they all understood my predicament. Despite their rather shaky English, and my totally useless Arabic, we worked it out and I was eventually found, by my colleague Rob Stevens. After many warm hugs, and a belly full of food, we made it back to my apartment.



Downtown Amman, Jordan

Jordan was a revelation to me, every minute of every day. Driving was always a nerve-

wracking adventure, and I had to learn the Arab way of doing things on the road.

Forget indicators, driving lanes or mirror, signal, manoeuvre. It is simply manoeuvre, ignore other drivers, just go where you want to go, as fast as you can. It is a nightmare, but I never saw an accident or experienced one, while driving myself.

Sadly, that cannot be said when using some taxi drivers. I was nearly badly injured, when a taxi I was in was overtaken by an idiot driver, who swerved and crashed into the passenger side of the car where I was sitting.

Total twat.

Just as frightening, was the taxi driver who kept looking at me, and surreptitiously began playing with himself. You could not make it up. I immediately got him to stop the car, with a warning I had his taxi number, and would contact the police. I got out, shaking on the pavement, then walked the rest of the 5 km home.

While taxi drivers do have a notoriously bad reputation, most are OK. When you find a good one, get his phone number and you will be safe. But do not expect them to be on time.

Working at Mood 92 in Jordan allowed me to use my previous experience to help develop the radio station. It also taught me to listen harder and understand more. I had never seen a refugee camp before, or nomadic Bedouin hillside dwellers, tending to their families, sheep and goats.

Bedouin is a term usually applied to Arab nomadic tribes found throughout most of the desert belt, extending from the Atlantic coast of the Sahara to the Eastern coast of the Arabian desert.

I now better understand why the many different Arab tribes are often like families. Warm and loving, but not always agreeing with each other.

Chapter Thirty-Nine - Never Ending Story

I lived and worked in Jordan for 5 years, spending a couple of weeks' vacation each year, flying back to visit my family on the Isle of Wight.

I would occasionally vacation in the relaxing sunshine of Sharm el Sheikh in Egypt. Lazing by the hotel pool one morning, I got talking to a Palestinian couple, who told me about a place called Hurghada, a former small fishing village, now a fast-growing Egyptian city on the other side of the Red Sea. I liked the sound of it, a genuine Egyptian city.

After lots of research, I made an appointment to meet the Chief Executive of a large Real Estate company in Hurghada, and flew over to meet him. I liked him, his family and Hurghada itself, so decided to invest in an apartment. I imagined it would be quite a few years before I lived in it, but

liked the security of knowing I would once again have a place of my own.

I had no experience of living in Egypt and was amused to learn many mature women will fly here to have sex with very energetic young Egyptian men!

I always try to break down the stereotypes and misunderstandings many of us are guilty of. Most of the Arabs I meet are very friendly, caring and kind.

Bravery is a big word, but people who are, don't realise or think about it. It can be shown in many historic, public, or private ways. I only use the word because my dad once said he thought I was brave, travelling to far flung places, to keep my passion for radio alive.

Living and working in Jordan reenergised me, opening my mind to a bigger world. I gave it my everything, my experience, apparent confidence, and ambition. During this time, my right leg was no worse, but not getting any better. I have always enjoyed

keeping fit, and every morning went to a fantastic gym at Le Meridien Hotel.



Medical services in Jordan are famously excellent, and I had another MRI scan. The experts could see no problem, skeletal, brain, or anywhere else in my body. The positive results were a relief, but frustratingly didn't provide a diagnosis of what might be wrong.

At several social events in Jordan, I met other doctors and neurologists, who all recommended the same thing. Keep staying fit, eat well, and remain positive.

During one of my occasional visits back to my family on the Isle of Wight, I was told my Mum was showing early signs of dementia. I had heard the word, but did not really understand what it meant.

I imagine most people think of their Mum's as angels, and mine really was. She and my dad are with the angels now, smiling down on all the people their lives touched.

At the end of 2012, I returned to the Isle of Wight, to continue presenting on Mood 92 in Jordan, but this time using clever technology to broadcast from my parent's home in Bembridge, an attractive seaside village on the Island's East Coast.

As much as I enjoyed being back living with Mum and Dad, a couple of years went by, and we agreed I would find a place of my own. So yet again I was on my own, wondering what to do next.

I was still broadcasting on Mood 92, but continued searching for radio positions around the UK, and anywhere else in the world.

In 2013, for the first time, I flew on a 747 Jumbo Jet to Phuket in Thailand for an interview, which sadly didn't quite work out.

But I will never forget our Jumbo Jet coming in to land. We skimmed over the sea below, so close, you could see sunbathing children waving in delight, while their parents cowered in dread as our monster aircraft roared above them.

Chapter Forty - Desert Rose

The next time I landed in an aircraft was on board an 'EasyJet' Airbus, with my every possession packed in five giant bags in the cargo hold.

As I gazed out of the aeroplane window, I marvelled at the seemingly never-ending expanse of desolate, yellow desert below me.

And a majestic, beautiful streak of blue, slicing through. The story of Moses parting the waters of the Red Sea, so he and the Israelites could flee Egypt to the Promised Land, is one of the most famous stories from the Bible's Old Testament.

"And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided."



Living in Egypt is my latest adventure, and I mentioned bravery earlier. I did feel nervous, but a little bit brave, landing at Hurghada's new International Terminal 2.

And guess what? My brother was with me, and we eventually heaved my five over-large and lumpy cargo bags into a waiting truck, to take us to a hotel to sleep.

Hurghada is a former small fishing village, with fishermen and bustling fish-markets still

at its heart. I love listening to the tales fishermen tell.

They will always test you first, because as much as you are interested in them, they want to make up their own minds about you.

The other day I met a fisherman who at dead of night, dives down to catch calamari, just holding his breath, to grab one huge squid, bringing it up to the surface.

Great to sell, and very tasty, but a dangerous way to make a living.



Living in 'sunshine heaven,' can also be a bit of a nightmare. Basic things, like running water, electricity, drains, and unreliable internet are daily problems.

The Egyptian's are used to it, but it drives me nuts. Every day I do all I can, trying to change their lackadaisical attitudes.

As much as I love their genuine care and kindness, most lack the basic skills to keep the lights on, make the internet work, fit a plug, or keep the water flowing. It is immensely frustrating.

It amuses me how thousands of years ago, Egyptians could build the pyramids, but today, find difficulty building a house or apartment properly. And their relationship with timekeeping is famously flexible at best.

The year before I made my big move to Hurghada, to an apartment block called Tiba Resort, an idea struck me. During my first meeting with Tiba's Chief Executive, he showed me his plans and ambitions, to build a community of Tiba homes all over Hurghada.

The idea of this community appealed to me, and a radio station might be attractive.

I spent many useless months applying for an FM radio license, which was a total waste of time and effort. But it did force me to learn all about internet radio.

In 2015, TIBA Radio was born and built in my bedroom.

With Egypt's agonisingly slow internet service, TIBA Radio runs from a laptop in my brother's house on the Isle of Wight. I connect remotely, updating all the music and content. It is a painfully slow process but allows me to keep doing what I love.



Chapter Forty-One - Walk like an Egyptian

For the first couple of years in Egypt, I was literally broke, relying on £20 a week sent over by my brother. Extremely fortunately, the first morning I arrived in Hurghada, the British Pound doubled in value against the Egyptian LE. In just one day, the English Pound bought you 20 Egyptian Pounds, from 10 the day before. As I write, (September 2024) 1 GBP = 64 EGP.

I was determined to make a new living for myself in Hurghada. I set up CHERRY News Media, writing and distributing Press Releases to clients all over the world. Thank goodness I had taken the advice to learn journalism all those years before.

In December 2019, the Covid-19 virus was first identified in Wuhan, China, and all our lives changed forever.

My own world remained basically the same. My silly right leg and balance were not improving. To this day, the only person I regularly allow in my apartment, masked and 'socially distanced,' is my taxi-driver and deliveryman Hossam.

It took me many weeks to arrange my two Covid vaccinations, waiting more than 4 hours outside the local hospital to finally have the jabs administered. Nothing is remotely efficient here.

The Covid-19 lockdowns were something we were forced to live with. They also released a burst of creativity and new ways of doing business. Petty problems became less significant with increasing world tensions.

The Israel, Gaza and Lebanon crisis and the Russian invasion of Ukraine brings war closer to home with 24-hour news full of worrying stories. New generations are being born into an increasingly nervous world, and the technology revolution is moving at astonishing speed.

My own levels of frustration and patience to deal with my dodgy right leg and balance is unlike anything I have experienced before. Simple things in life become complications. I occasionally take a couple of drowsy making tablets to try and get to sleep. I still wake up at 4 a.m. most mornings and use the quiet time to get work done. I always keep busy and regularly exercise, while cleaning away the constant dust, mosquitoes and flies.

The suffocating heat from May to September is hard to live with. By February, I am pulling on thick layers of thermal underwear, layers of t-shirts, jumpers and a dressing gown during the day, with electric heaters carefully placed in my living room and bedroom at night.

I am lucky to have a balcony on the 4th floor of Tiba Resort, overlooking the pools and café below. It used to be a busy mix of tourists from all over world, but when coronavirus struck, everything stopped.

I stopped swimming, and the tourists stopped coming. One afternoon I heard a

quiet sobbing outside my apartment door. A young woman was sitting on the floor, with bags huddled around her. It was an early experience of how refugees must feel. I sat and chatted with her, until security and government officials eventually arrived to take her somewhere safe.



Tiba Resort, Anthony, and me



Just before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I met a couple, Max and Victoria, in the Tiba Resort elevator. Victoria lives in Kiev, and Max from Moscow. Like many Ukrainians, Victoria was attractive, and Max a former international champion bodybuilder. One evening, he proudly showed me his tournament pictures, with massive muscles, bulging in places you wouldn't believe muscles could be! Max kept telling me how much he was in love with Victoria.

Privately one evening, Victoria told me their love had long gone. We talked about that sad feeling for a long time, and she leaned forward, giving me a gentle kiss. Max and Victoria have gone their separate ways now, and I hope they are both safe.

I miss my birthplace on the Isle of Wight. The Island's always been a restful, tranquil microcosm of Britain. In many ways, if I see it again, it would be like stepping into an old photograph of when we were growing up.

One thing in life is always true; none of us can predict the future. But we can be certain of immense change ahead. The older we get

the faster time flies. Growing up in the digital age young people today have access to more information and opportunities than ever before, but the rapid pace of technology is raising social, ethical and privacy dilemmas requiring global cooperation. Most urgently in the areas of climate change, quantum computing and artificial intelligence.

But we must remain positive! Whatever your own dreams and ambitions, I would encourage you to be brave, believe in yourself and always put love and passion into everything you do.

We all have phenomenal capacity.

Thank you for reading this, and as the Irish comedian Dave Allen always said at the end of his shows: "May your God be with you." Take care and look after each other.

Ma'a salama. (*Farewell in Arabic*)

JP



Song Links

Chapter 1 Start me up – Rolling Stones

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=SGyOaCXr8Lw>

Chapter 2 Born to be wild – Steppenwolf

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=rMbATaj7II8>

Chapter 3 Wonderful World - Sam Cooke

[2qq](#)

Chapter 4 See Me, Feel Me - The Who

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=NzuNJod_o7g

Chapter 5 So Beautiful - Darren Hayes

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=HXsgkWbbENM>

Chapter 6 Blowin' in the Wind - Bob Dylan

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=YIJeNTZwaw>

Chapter 7 Opportunities - Pet Shop Boys

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=aNPq-GyfrXg>

Chapter 8 Teenage Rampage - The Sweet

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=hsVkxPO_x0

Chapter 9 Something in the air

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=qJae3Q2I-BY>

Chapter 10 Take it to the limit (Live) - The Eagles

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=tJkW0CIsvrk>

Chapter 11 When I was a boy – ELO

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=dfH8EJA-hg0>

Chapter 12 Brothers in arms - Dire Straits

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Wu4oy1IRTh8>

Chapter 13 Puppy Love - Donny Osmond

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=irs1nRvBss>

Chapter 14 Us and Them (Live) - Pink Floy

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=deU_uwINpO0

Chapter 15 Thank you for the music – ABBA

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=0dcbw4IEY5w>

Chapter 16 Don't stop believing- Journey

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=PIFUWHvSixw>

Chapter 17 Without you - Nilsson

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=G-ZDKirjQgM>

Chapter 18 London Calling - The Clash

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=EfK-WX2pa8c>

Chapter 19 Do they know it's Christmas?

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=bjQzJAKxTrE>

Chapter 20 Radio Ga Ga - Queen (Live Aid)

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=o-0ygW-B_gI

Chapter 21 The Wedding Song - Captain & Tennille

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=po17EYNytfk>

Chapter 22 Ocean Deep - Cliff Richard

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=FUOagdNmMjA>

Chapter 23 Time of my life - Bill Medley & Jennifer Warnes

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=6eyCDj1s4NI>

Chapter 24 Nothings gonna stop us now

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=SZ_I0KZvezw

Chapter 25 Bridge over troubled water

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=4G-YQA_bsOU

Chapter 26 Embarrassment – Madness

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Jig6Hseyklw>

Chapter 27 The boys are back in town

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Us1u85PnfTg>

Chapter 28 First time ever I saw your face

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=VqW-eO3jTVU>

Chapter 29 Private Investigations - Dire Straits

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=P9K27HvhDxA>

Chapter 30 Everybody Hurts - R.E.M

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=FfggUztyO00>

Chapter 31 I Got Stripes - Johnny Cash

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=AUYk700_6W0

Chapter 32 Jailhouse Rock - Elvis Presley

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=PpsUOOfb-vE>

Chapter 33 I Am, I Said - Neil Diamond

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=QhEaHcQgyLs>

Chapter 34 Can you feel the love tonight

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=c56IJWgrkNE>

Chapter 35 The way it is - Bruce Hornsby

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=WyYC9qRIJxY>

Chapter 36 On the road again - Canned Heat

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Jcb-h8z1uQo>

Chapter 37 Ya Ana, Ya Ana! (*Oh Me, Oh My!*)
– Fairouz

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=BTICpPmf1yA&pp=QAFIAQ%3D%3D>

Chapter 38 Kindness of strangers - Courtney
M. Andrews

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=cWu8O5aYYC8>

Chapter 39 Never ending story – Limahl

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf1WT8VEZxk>

Chapter 40 Desert Rose - Sting

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=uck5s156F4I>

Chapter 41 Walk like an Egyptian – Bangles

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=4nuhja7y4TM>

