

Eighties Memories by Mike Mahon



This little book is my memories of the 1980s. My school days and then getting into radio here in Dublin.

1980

The 1980s began with me in my last year of primary school at St. Benildus school on the Upper Kilmacud Road. It was a happy and fun time and I had enjoyed my time at primary school, and especially the great long summer and Christmas holidays. The school day was pretty good too, finishing at just half two! And at lunchtimes the boys from the primary school would also be able to go over to the St Benildus secondary school, which had a "tuck shop" selling sweets and treats like giant gobstoppers and sherbet dips.

I lived with my parents and my grandmother just down the road from the school, and I was able to walk to it in about 10 minutes. It was in a nice quiet suburban part of south Dublin, about 7 miles from the centre of the city between Dundrum and Stillorgan.

In 6th class our teacher was one of the de la Salle brothers. They were the religious order that ran the school and had a big monastery on the site. Our teacher Brother John was a really nice guy, and he enjoyed teaching and encouraged us all to learn about the subjects. He also organized some great five-a-side football competitions in the school yard. I had some good classmates in 6th class and it was a nice school to be going to. The friends I remember from that class were Conor Moran, Daragh Hare, Kevin Johnson, Richard Barry and Cathal Lunny.

That spring of 1980 was also when Ireland won the Eurovision song contest. It was a big thing back then! Johnny Logan won it for Ireland singing "What's another Year". We were still a small country on the edge of Europe but winning the Eurovision really made everyone in Ireland feel a little bit prouder.

The other big thing happening that spring and summer was the TV show "Dallas". And in particular the question of "who shot JR?". The show was on every Saturday night and had a huge audience. At the end of the season someone unknown had shot the main character - JR Ewing, and who did it, and would JR survive? was one of the main subjects for debate and discussion that year.

Television did play a big part in our lives back then. Most places in Dublin were able to receive the three British TV stations (BBC1, BBC2 and UTV from Northern Ireland) as well as the two Irish ones (RTE1 and RTE2). Our viewing choices were fairly limited. Very few people had video recorders, and plenty of people still just had black and white TV sets. We'd only just got our first colour TV set the previous year. TVs didn't have remote controls back then so any time my parents wanted to change the channel I'd be sent from the sofa to change it.

Top of the pops was on BBC every Thursday night and that was where I got my first chance to see and hear the new band's and songs of those early days of the 80s. The Boomtown Rats from Dublin were very successful back then and I also remember a new band called U2 being featured. Elvis Costello's "Oliver's Army" and "Accidents will Happen" were two of my favourite songs that year. Swop Shop was another BBC TV show I liked, it was on for three hours every Saturday morning. There was also the Kenny Everett show which was very popular with us school lads with its irreverent humour. RTE had the Late Late Show which was hosted by Gay Byrne and was on a Saturday night. It was one of my parents favourites and I'd usually be allowed stay up to watch it, unless the show was discussing some very adult topic, which meant I'd be sent to bed early!

Other TV programmes from back then included "Tomorrow's World," on a Thursday, and "That's Life" which used to be on a Sunday evening and was the last part of the weekend before the new school week began the next day. Some of the other shows I remember watching from back then were "Hart to Hart" and "Mork and Mindy".

I'd been in the primary school since the mid-1970s so by my last year I knew it very well. There was one main building and then several prefabs set around a large yard where we played football, marbles and other games during breaks. Behind the school there were large fields which were used by the secondary school for sports and a disused railway line. When the final term at primary school finished, I knew I'd be going to the secondary school in the autumn, but at the start of the summer that seemed a very long time ahead.

Then in the first week of September 1980 I started at St Benildus secondary school. It was much bigger than the primary school, but I was soon allocated into a class - class 129. There were new subjects too - Commerce and French, as well as Science. A few of the guys from the primary school were in the same class as I was so it was nice to have a few familiar faces. These included Daragh Hare and Kevin Johnson. I also made some new friends there including Ian Rochford from Churchtown who was to become my best friend over the next few years. Another great friend was Niall Sheridan from Stillorgan Wood, and others included Justin Kinsella, Jerry McCormack and Eoin McElligott. Other friends I remember from back then included Theo and Brian Farrell, Ciaran Mooney and Dermot Costello.

During that autumn and winter of 1980, I got used to the new school. It was large and had about 1000 pupils in a big square two-story building which surrounded a yard. The hours were a bit longer and there was more homework, but I did enjoy it and began learning new stuff. I particularly liked art class, we had a great art teacher, another one of the de la Salle brothers, Brother Timothy. He specialized in calligraphy and ancient Celtic art and taught us how to do it. Probably the only subject I didn't like was PE. A lot of the time it was outdoors, and it always seemed to be raining.

Our teachers were from all parts of the country and were an interesting bunch - Eammon Lowery taught math's and was from somewhere in the north of Ireland and had a very strong northern accent. (Of course, we didn't call them by their first names back then, they were all Mr. this or Miss that!). Tim Griffin taught Irish and was quite young and from somewhere down the country, Kerry or Cork, I think. Paula Kennedy was our only female teacher and taught English. Felix Soden taught history. Joe Connell geography and Mr. O'Keefe taught commerce and bookkeeping. John Brennan taught science and was a great character. We used to call him Batty Brennan. Tony Doherty taught French. Our year master was Maurice McMahan from county Kerry and he pretty much ran everything. The headmaster of the whole school was a Brother Philbert, though we didn't see much of him (unless you were in real trouble!). Our classroom was on the ground floor and quite near the teacher's staff room. So, we could never go too wild without some teacher looking in!

One thing I remember from that autumn of 1980 is my aunty bringing me into town to see the final section of the very first Dublin city marathon as it finished in Stephens Green. Another thing that happened around that time was a big bank robbery at the Bank of Ireland in our local shopping centre in Stillorgan. Some guys had used sledgehammers to smash their way through the plate glass windows just after closing time and got away with a lot of cash. I remember seeing all the glass everywhere and the Garda cars parked outside it.

In December of that year the news came that John Lennon had been shot dead. I was too young to have known the Beatles music but now all his songs were being played in his memory, especially his classic song "Imagine".

For Christmas that year I got a chemistry set from my parents. And over the next few months I had fun doing the various experiments and growing crystals in jam jars. Christmas back then began with school exams though they were never taken as seriously as the summer exams. Another big part of Christmas back in the early 80s was getting the TV magazines to find out what treats were in store over Christmas. You'd have to get all three magazines (The RTE Guide, Radio Times, and the TV Times) to get all the listings for all the stations. Usually on Christmas Day there'd be a good James Bond movie to look forward to. Top of the pops also used to do a review of the number ones of the year on Christmas Day.

Ireland itself wasn't doing too well back then in the early 80s. The economy was in a very bad way with high unemployment and lots of strikes. Charles Haughey was the Taoiseach, and everyone had strong opinions about him. A lot of people thought he was great but equal numbers didn't like him at all. Margaret Thatcher was the British prime minister and the two of them had a big summit meeting in Dublin castle that year. I remember one-night Charles Haughey coming on TV and giving a big speech about the economy and how bad things were. My parents were interested in it but I was too young to really understand what it was about.

1981

The new year of 1981 began with going back to school for the second half of first year. In the outside world Ronald Reagan had just become the new American president. The biggest and saddest news story of that year was to come on the morning of the 15th February when we learned that 48 young people had been killed in a fire the previous night at the Stardust disco nightclub in North Dublin. The whole country was deeply saddened by the tragedy. My dad's sister lived very close to where that tragedy happened but luckily none of her family were caught up in it.

By now I had made a good few new friends at secondary school and I'd be cycling up to visit them in their houses. The TV shows we'd be watching about this time included The Fall Guy, The Dukes of Hazard, Monkey and Battlestar Galactica. The music of 1981 included Soft Cells "Tainted Love" and Bucks Fizz who won the Eurovision song contest for the UK with "Making Your Mind Up". Because Ireland had won it the previous year it was held in Dublin in 1981, down at the RDS amidst tight security.

I enjoyed first year at the secondary school and most of the classes - except math's! I particularly liked going to the science lab which was always interesting and where Mr. Brennan would demonstrate experiments. Sometimes there'd be substitute teachers sent in when one of the regular teachers was off. As a class we'd always have fun trying to distract them and mislead them about what we usually did.

School broke up for the summer at the end of May that year, and me and my parents went away on a holiday that involved driving across England and then getting a ferry to Belgium and from there then driving to Paris before getting a ferry home from Cherbourg to Rosslare. That summer was also marked by a general election in Ireland, the royal wedding in England and the hunger strikes in Northern Ireland. Dr Garrett Fitzgerald became the new Taoiseach after the general election. One weekend there was a big riot in Dublin outside the British Embassy in Ballsbridge. Both Ronald Reagan and the Pope were also shot and injured in assassination attempts that year. I remember the news flashes coming up on the TV about those events. In school whenever there'd be big news events, we'd always try to get the teachers to have a discussion and debate about it, mainly so we wouldn't have to do any real work that class. Other things I remember that happened from that year were when an Aer Lingus flight got hijacked and the whole country was watching the news to see what was going to happen. There was also a big siege at the Iranian embassy in London and the end of it was shown live on TV when the SAS stormed it.

Another thing I remember from that year is the Rubik's cube, everyone had one and it was a real craze trying to work out how to do it. I could never figure mine out!

As well as planes, the other big interest I had was radio and I enjoyed listening to all the stations on my parent's stereo system. From my school mates I also heard there was a new station on the air called Radio Nova, and when I tuned in I heard it had a great crystal clear stereo signal on 88FM. It was very American with lovely jingles and idents and a fantastic selection of pop music. It was completely different to anything we had in Ireland at that time.

The new school term began in September and we were now in third year - (for some reason there was no second year at

all for anyone in Benildus college. So, you went straight from 1st year to 3rd year). We were class 320 now and It was mostly the same group as before and we just had a different room. This time up on the first floor. I was well settled into the new school by now. Most of the teachers were the same too, and as schoolboys we were all merciless in our ways to have fun with them. They all had nicknames and we all enjoyed doing impressions of them, their accents, and their favourite catchphrases! Eammon Lowrey the math's teacher used to say "you're a knave" to anyone who was messing in the class. And so that became his catchphrase.

Another of the teachers used to start each class by pointing to one of us and saying, "say the prayer", so that was his catchphrase. Mr. O'Keefe had the nickname "eyeballs". Tim Griffin the Irish teacher at some stage had said he "was pig sick of some thing or other" so we all did impressions of him in his country accent saying that. Of course, we had nicknames for each other as well - a guy called Damian Malone was called Molly, and Noel O'Connor was called Noc. Within the first minute of every class we always liked to try and do anything which would divert us from having to do any real work that hour! I really enjoyed class 320 and I think it was my favourite of the years.

The big movie that year had been Raiders of the lost Ark which is still one of my favourites. On TV I was watching Quincy and The Fall Guy, while my parents enjoyed watching Nurse, Today Tonight and The Generation Game. Other TV shows that I remember from back then included Hill Street Blues and Magnum PI.

Towards the end of the year the weather turned much colder and we had some snow. My grandmother who was living with us in our house had been due to go to Australia, but her flight got cancelled due to the snow and she had to delay her departure for a week.

That Christmas I got a great present from my parents - a handheld space Invaders game, which was very high tech back then.

1982

1982 began with one of the heaviest snowfalls Ireland had ever seen. There was an interesting eclipse of the moon a few days into the new year, and that was perhaps a sign of the fun to come! The ground was still quite cold after the snow of December, and then at the end of the first week of January the wind swung around to the east and the temperature began to drop sharply. All of us at school were due to go back the following Monday, but on the Thursday night it began snowing, and then kept snowing right the way through the Friday and then the whole of the Saturday. It also turned windy and it was the first time I'd ever seen a real blizzard.

Me and my parents and one of our neighbors had been due to go to the RTE TV studios to be in the audience for that Friday night's "Live Mike" TV show, but we were snowed in and couldn't make it. The sight of so much snow falling more than made up for that disappointment.

On the Sunday morning the sky had finally cleared, leaving behind the most beautiful pale blue sky, and tons and tons of snow everywhere. The snow had been packed solidly by the winds, and it had made snowdrifts that covered cars and made roads completely impassable. My dad and me went out to walk up to my aunt's house, which was about a mile away, but that day it was like going on a trek to the south pole.

The beauty of the blue sky and the crisp white snow crunching beneath our feet is one of the best memories I have from the 80s, and one of the best memories I have of my dad too, the two of us setting off on our mission to visit my aunty and see if she was alright. (She was and laughed at the sight of us coming up to her house like Scotts of the Antarctic!)

By chance the Taoiseach Dr Garrett Fitzgerald was away on a sunny holiday somewhere warm just when the snow arrived. It fell to his Deputy Mr. O'Leary to go on the national radio station that Sunday afternoon and reassure the country. People, especially in the country were seriously snowed in, and the whole national transport system had ground to a halt. It was announced that the army and air corps were being called on to help get the country moving again. And one of the best pieces of news (for all us school kids) was that the schools wouldn't be reopening for another week!

We had tons of snow and an extra week's holiday! Quite a good start to the new year. I ended up shoveling snow from some of my neighbours driveways and made a bit of extra pocket money as a result. By the end of the week the last of the snow was melted away, leaving behind some excellent memories of the "great snow of 1982".

Another thing that happened around then was my aunty gave me her old television set when she got herself a new one. I was one of the very few at our school that had my own TV set. That was a real novelty back then! Quite a few of the class came around to my house just to see it, as it was that unusual back then. Of course, it was black and white and could only get the two Irish stations broadcasting on UHF, but it was my prize possession.

I was also still listening to the radio a lot, and by now Radio Nova had been joined by Sunshine 101 on the FM band and RTE Radio 2 had also now started to adapt to the competition and play more good music. Ronan Collins used to do a good breakfast show starting at 6.30 which I enjoyed listening to. There were some great songs around too at the start of 82, including "One of Us" by Abba and "I won't let you down" by PHD.

The school year was broken up quite nicely by the summer, Christmas and Easter holidays and we also got a day off for "Saint Benildus day" which was sometime in February, though we'd have to attend a special mass down at Kilmacud church that day. We'd always be hoping for other days off or half days, for teachers' meetings or if somebody like a Cardinal or an Archbishop died! Of course, there was always the chance to bunk off or go "mitching", though because my mam lived so close to the school it was something I wouldn't have got away with! It would have been just my luck to run into her out and about when I was supposed to be in school.

After the "great snow" Benildus reopened and I was now half way through third year. My favourite class around that time was history, especially as we spent quite a few of them watching videos of a TV series called "Ireland A Television History". It was an altogether more enjoyable way of learning stuff than just reading it from a text book. In Irish we were reading the book "Peig" and in English we were doing "The Merchant of Venice" and "Huckleberry Finn". In art class we were designing and creating album covers for records. Some of the guys were really good at art, including Mark O'Kelly and David Meegan who had a real talent for it.

I was now enjoying PE, as we were now doing indoor basketball (as well as the regular outdoor Gaelic football games), and I found I was pretty good at scoring in the basketball games which I wasn't in any of the other sports! Plus, it was springtime and the weather was better if we were doing outdoor stuff.

Outside of school Ireland was going through another general election. The minority government had collapsed and so there were election posters going up all over the place again. Ireland was also doing very well in the 5 nations rugby competition. Channel 4 television began broadcasting for the first time. And in the music charts there were some cracking great songs from The Jam with "A Town Called Malice", and the J Giles Band and "Angel In The Centerfold". My friend Ian also introduced me to the music of some of his favourite bands - Meatloaf, Stiff Little Fingers and AC\DC. "Bat Out of Hell" and "Two out of Three Ain't Bad " and "I love Rock and Roll" by Joan Jett were some of his favourite songs. There was a great record shop in the upstairs of the old Dundrum shopping centre where we used to go to visit and get some records.

I also recorded songs off the radio each week when they'd be played on the Ireland's Top 30 countdown show on Radio 2 by DJ Larry Gogan. It was the only time of the week when you could be sure they'd be played in full and you'd know for sure they'd be played. Madness was another of my favourite bands around that time with their songs "House of Fun" and "Our House".

Everyone in the class would have their favourite bands and styles like ska or reggae, and also their favourite football team to follow. Manchester United was always the most popular closely followed by Liverpool.

At school every year they had a special Irish week: "Seachtan na Gailge" which was a celebration of Irish language and culture. That was due to come up at the middle of March. As part of that, each class was going to put on a play in Irish which would be performed in front of the whole school in the main hall. Our class play was to be a comedy based on all the political events of the recent elections. Somewhat nervously I had ended up being selected to be one of the main parts in our class play and on 23rd March I found myself up on the stage in front of everyone. Luckily, I remembered my lines - actually had them written down just in case I forget them! It was great fun once it got started and when all the plays were finished, we found out that our class had won the top prize, and what's more, I had won a prize for the best performance. It was a great day, and the first time I'd ever won anything.

Our class's prize for winning the competition was a trip to the cinema. And so the very next day we all began pestering our Irish teacher Mr. Griffin to see what film we could go to see. A few of the suggestions were for pretty raunchy and racy movies! - like Stripes, though Mr. Griffin wasn't going to risk bringing his Irish class to something that might be considered a porno in the very conservative Ireland of the 80s! In the end we all went to see "Chariots of Fire". The feature did also include the shorter movie "Gregory's Girl", which had a few snogging scenes so there was something for everyone to enjoy. After the films a few of us went around town visiting some of the gaming arcades and playing the machines so it was a great day out.

My friends Ian, Niall, Justin and Eoin were all smoking so I didn't want to be left out and so that spring I started smoking too. My first smoke was a Major cigarette, and back then you could get a packet of 10 for less than 50 pence. They laughed at me for not inhaling properly that first time, but pretty soon I was smoking properly and inhaling and blowing smoke rings like the rest of them. It was like we had a smoking club, trying out all the different brands each week - Majors, Carrolls, Silk Cuts, Marlboros, and Rothmans. The Marlboros and Rothmans were very strong and left me feeling a bit queasy. I settled on Silk Cut Purples while Ian and Niall went for Majors and Carrolls. Our other friend Justin used to roll his own from loose tobacco. There was a place you could smoke down a laneway that was opposite the school entrance, or if you were very brave you could have a smoke behind the sports hall - though you'd have to keep an eye out for the year-masters.

My parents went nuts when they discovered that I'd started smoking. I had to promise not to, but then I'd be sneaking out the back door for a clandestine smoke in the back garden whenever they weren't looking. There's no sound as loud as the sound of a match being lit when you are trying to light a secret cigarette outside but right under your parents' windows!

One time my friend Ian was over visiting my house and we were smoking out in the back garden and my mam nearly caught us. We had to make up some story but I'm sure she saw through that! Especially when we came back in smelling of smoke.

Around the house and garden, I had all kinds of hiding places for my packets of cigarettes and years later I found a stale pack of Majors hidden under the oil tank from back then. We also used to go through loads of packets of polo mints each week trying to disguise our smoking!

Because I lived quite close to the school and went home for lunch each day, I often had company, two or three of my

friends would often come for lunch and my mam never seemed to mind feeding the extra lads. One day I remember there was about 10 extra of my classmates in the kitchen, and knowing us and how we were back then, we probably just went off and left her with all the washing-up to be done!

The summer of 1982 was about to begin. There were some great songs around like "Ebony and ivory" and "Come on Eileen" by Dexys Midnight Runners. Other songs I liked from around that time included "Key Largo" by Bertie Higgins, and "I'll find my way home" by John and Vangelis. On May 18th I had my birthday. I had a big party down at the Swiss Chalet bar-b-que restaurant in Stillorgan. Some of my classmates were there, and I got an interesting selection of gifts from them!

From my parents I got a digital watch which had a calculator, a stopwatch and a game on it. Back in 1982 this was the absolute cutting edge of technology!

School broke up for the holidays the following week. Class 320 had ended, and the lovely three-month summer break lay ahead. In the outside world the Falklands war was coming to an end too, and there were all kinds of political scandals and crisis swirling around Charles Haughey who was Taoiseach once again. The big movies that year were ET and Tootsie. There was a small cinema in Stillorgan, but most of the time it would be to the city centre and O'Connell Street that we'd go to watch films.

That summer my parents and me went on a holiday to the Costa del sol in the south of Spain. We spent a week in the Tamarindos apartments in Benalmadena which was a new resort just getting developed at that time.

The weather was great, but I ended up getting sunburnt which meant I had to be covered in yogurt one night as an after sun. Needless to say, that was very messy! I also got my first taste of tequila on that holiday in an Irish bar on the main street of Benalmadena. During that trip we also visited the little town of Rhonda up in the hills and it is a very beautiful place with traditional Spanish whitewashed houses looking lovely in the sun and under blue skies.

On another one of the days my dad and me went to visit the city of Malaga which was about an hour away by bus. It was a interesting day trip, but when we returned we heard some sad news from my Mam who had stayed behind that day. Her mother, my grandmother, had passed away out in Australia. It was a very sad day for my mam especially being away from home at a time like that. But she didn't want to have the holiday ended and we all went on for the rest of the week.

When we got home the rest of the summer went on. Ian and I went to the cinema in town a few times and went visiting some of the gaming arcades in the city centre.

By now the summer was nearly over. There were loads of thunderstorms that August. My parents and me took a quick trip to Scotland for a few days and to get there we drove up through Northern Ireland and got the ferry over to Scotland. It was my first time ever seeing the border and all the army checkpoints and flags. It was an experience to see it and brought to life so much of what I'd only previously seen on TV news reports.

Once in Scotland we stayed a few days in a quiet little town called Oban. It was very picturesque, and I think it was a place my dad had visited many years before and he had really liked it.

Soon enough though it was time to go home and we returned the same way through Northern Ireland and down across the border. On the way we passed the big Carroll's cigarette factory and later on I was able to tell my friend Niall I'd seen the place where his favourite smokes were made.

One other thing that happened that summer was a big outdoor community bar-b-que which was organized by our local church and parish priest Father Val Rogers. It was a great event, and everyone was at it and there was a nice video recording made that night which I have a copy of.

School began again at the start of September and this year we were class 414. It was also going to be the year of the first big serious exam - which in those days was called the Inter Cert. There was more work to do and it would all be leading up to the big exams which would take place the following June.

There was some very good music that autumn and winter including Duran Durans's "Save A Prayer", and the Human leagues "Mirror Man", A novelty song called "Save your love" by Renne and Renatta became the Christmas number one (though whether it was supposed to be a novelty song or just unintentionally very funny is anyone's guess !). Clannads haunting song from the TV show "Harry's Game" was also being played a lot then. And Culture Club had their first big hit with "Do You Really Want to hurt me" around that time.

TV shows I remember from around that time include "321" which was a game show that was on every Saturday night. There was also Grange Hill and The Bill from the UK. The American soaps Dallas, Dynasty and Falcon Crest were all also very big back then. RTE had stuff like "Murphy's Micro Quiz M" which was a game show based on the new technology of computers!

Christmas 1982 was the end of a very enjoyable year, and to round it off I got one of the best Christmas presents ever - a Toshiba beatbox stereo. This was a lovely piece of audio equipment with a great bass sound. I could now record more songs off the radio and do so in my own bedroom. It could also receive shortwave radio stations and I would sometimes lie in bed late at night listening to far off stations from America and Europe. Other fun we had with that stereo system was recording some of us doing impressions of the teachers!

The year had also ended with another general election, and after all that we ended up with the same government that we had at the start of the year and Dr Garrett Fitzgerald as Taoiseach once again. One thing I knew was that 1982 had been a really good year for me and I was looking forward to seeing what 1983 was going to bring.

1983

The new year began with a hope that the big and heavy snowfall from the previous year might be repeated, but although we got a small bit of snow in February it wasn't enough to close the schools. (In fact, it was to be another 37 years before we got a heavy snow that even came close to 1982). But there were lots of other fun to be had in the spring of 1983, including a big disco night at a local community center in Balally. This was one of the most anticipated social events of the year, with all of us school lads making plans for the big night. Especially as all the girls from the local schools would also be there. After all the fast songs like Come on Eileen, there was a set of slow songs at the end for dancing to under the dark lights!

Breakfast television also began in the spring of 1983 and I remember getting up early to watch the opening morning's programmes. At school we also did mock exams in March and April to get us ready for the real exams which were happening in June. Another thing that happened around that time was the kidnapping of the racehorse Shergar. There were quite a few kidnappings like that in Ireland in the 80s and there would often be big Garda search's and checkpoints on roads when stuff like that was happening.

My birthday was coming up in May and my friend Ian was helping me organize a big party for it. In fact, it turned into two parties on two successive Saturday nights and both were great fun. Somehow, we'd managed to get hold of a few cans of harp lager which livened the evenings up a lot. We also had some sound activated coloured disco lights which flashed on and off in time to the music.

Meanwhile in the outside world there was lots happening. The cold war was at its frostiest, with Presidents Reagan and Brezhnev with their fingers on the nuclear buttons. Mrs. Thatcher was in Downing Street and about to get re-elected. And in Ireland the government was about to close down all the pirate radio stations. This of course was the biggest concern for a music loving teen like me!

By now the FM radio band was crowded with lots of great stations like Radio Nova, KISS FM Sunshine 101 and Radio Leinster, as well as lots of other smaller stations that would come and go. They were all unlicensed as the laws were very out of date and there was no official local radio stations. Somebody in the government had obviously felt it was getting a bit out of control and all the big stations were suddenly raided and shut down in mid-May of 1983. Radio Nova came back on air for what they called a "proper goodbye" the next day and counted down to 6 pm when they announced they would go off the air for good. They encouraged all their listeners to come out and blow their car horns at 6 o'clock and make noise and converge on their studios. Meanwhile their DJs and newsreaders came on air one by one to say farewell. Right at the end came the owner and manager of the station Chris Carey.

After they had gone off the air there' was an immediate public backlash against the closure of the radio stations and luckily, they returned a few days later, with them coming back on the airwaves one by one. This time the government didn't do anything and after a few weeks everything was back to normal.

At that time Radio Nova had some excellent DJs including Jason Maine, Greg Goughran, Declan Meehan, and John Clarke. And some great news presenters too including Bob Gallico and Sybil Fennell.

Having almost lost the radio stations I became a passionate supporter of them, and over the course of that summer my love of radio and music got stronger and deeper.

Of course, that spring of 1983, along with the parties, discos and radio, there was also the little matter of the big inter cert exams. It was to be a whole week of serious exams but at the end of it I felt I had done ok. The results wouldn't be back till mid-September so at least I could relax and enjoy the summer.

There was always a great atmosphere around the school in those last few days before the summer holidays and quite a few pranks being played too.

A few of my schoolmates left after doing their inter certs, mostly those who had apprenticeships or who had been just waiting to be the age of 16 to be able to leave. My friends Ian, Niall, Justin and Eoin all were continuing on, so we hung out that summer, smoking, listening to music and generally having fun. The weather was great that year too with long hot summer days of blue skies through most of it.

We'd sometimes get the bus into town and visit some record shops. Ian liked songs like "Alternative Ulster" . Niall was a great Bruce Springsteen fan and his favourite songs were "Born To Run" and "Dancing in the Dark" Eoin was into some of the new romantic bands like Duran Duran and Depeche mode. The TV show Fame was very popular around that time, and several songs from it made it into the music charts including "Flashdance", and "High Fidelity".

That summer Ian also went to Wales on holiday with his family and Niall went to Denmark, Justin went to the Gaeltacht area of Ireland to do some of the Irish language. During that summer we also set up a mini golf course in my back garden which was great fun. My parents and me went on a short local holiday to visit my cousins who live in the Midlands part of Ireland. There I had my first go on a motorbike - very closely followed by my first crash on a motorbike and my last time ever on a motorbike! It wasn't too bad - my cousin got me up on it and I just took off across their yard, without any idea how to stop it. It toppled over before I hit anything too hard - except the ground! Ouch.

Some of the big songs from that summer were Paul Young's "Wherever I Lay My Hat" and "Love of the Common People", and UB40's "Red Red Wine". Also, a real summer song "Dolcha Vita" by Ryan Paris. One of the big sports stories that summer was Eamon Coughlin from Ireland winning the 5000 meters in world athletics.

I had been getting more and more interested in radio over the course of that summer, and one day I got a chance to go in and visit the studios of one of the biggest stations.: Radio Nova at 19 Herbert Street. They had a fantastic set up of studios and mixing desks and everything looked really professional. I also got to see a couple of the DJs and newsreaders I had heard on the radio - including Sybil Fennell who showed me around. Seeing all the wonderful equipmentmen and how fascinating it all was got me even more interested in radio and broadcasting.

After that back at home I began recording some cassette tapes of me 'reading the news' and also being a DJ. And then I started sending them off in the post to some of the big Dublin radio stations. I was still only 16 so most of them just wrote back nicely thanking me but saying I was too young. But one station did reply and ask me to come in - a station called radio Dublin who had their studios in a house on the Inchicore Road in Dublin 8. I went along for an audition and to my delight I was told I could try out reading the news on some afternoons the following week.

And so on 16th August 1983 at 4 o'clock I was sat behind the microphone on Radio Dublin and was ready to read the news live on air. Nervous at first but then pretty soon enjoying it enormously. That day I read three news bulletins including one with another new newsreader Liz Fitzell in which we took turns reading the different stories. My friend Ian was listening in at home and recorded it for me. After that I became a regular weekday newsreader for Radio Dublin until it was time to go back to school and I then moved to the weekends.

There wasn't any pay, as everyone there was just doing it for the experience and the fun of getting on the radio. The studios were in the front two rooms on the ground floor of the house and there was always a great crowd of people coming and going as lots of the listeners would call in. There was an enormous transmitter in the back garden with an Irish flag on the top of it. I soon got to know some of the DJs including Mike Young, Gerry Marsden and Mark Grace who were some of the best presenters. There was also a very nice lady called Valerie who used to do the overnight shows sometimes. Mike Barron was the stations manager, and it was him who gave me the chance to read the news. The other big stations in Dublin at that time were Radio Nova, Kiss FM, (both of which were broadcasting from 19 Herbert Street) TTTR , which was a country music station coming from somewhere in Terenure, and Sunshine Radio who used to broadcast from the Sands Hotel in Portmarnock. There was also BLB which was broadcast from Bray, and a couple of local stations from Dun Laoghaire.

Meanwhile Radio Nova was running their big "Three Songs" promotion and competition. This was where they played three particular songs and the fiftieth caller would win six thousand pounds. This was a very exciting competition as six thousand pounds was an enormous amount of money back then. Everyone was listening out for the three songs to be played, and the station would often tease the listeners by maybe playing just two of the three songs.

But eventually they were played in full in the right order and the competition was won. (The three songs were "Wanna Be Starting Something" by Michael Jackson. "Let's Dance" by David Bowie and "Baby Jane" by Rod Stuart). Another big promotion by Radio Nova was their All Time Top 100 songs, which was broadcast on the bank holiday Monday at the end of October. "Stairway to Heaven" by Led Zeppelin was the eventual all-time Top 100 song.

Meanwhile the school year began again in September of 1983, and we were all now in 5th year. Up to now our old class 129, 320 and 414 had been together for all the same subjects, but now we were in 5th year we began to separate out for different subjects, with some doing biology and others chemistry and other physics. There was a lot of moving around too in and out of different rooms. I took biology as my science subject, and business studies (rather than accounting), and I kept doing art rather than woodwork or technical drawing. We were all making these choices with an eye on the big and final leaving certificate exam which we knew we'd be doing at the end of 6th year.

5th year was definitely a lot more work, but good fun too. We started to have bowling as a sports option and every couple of weeks we'd go to the local bowling alley in Stillorgan for a game or two. Like with the basketball earlier I found I enjoyed it a lot more than the outdoor sports!

We also did creative writing which I enjoyed, and I had some things published in the school magazine. There was also a new headmaster, Brother Amady who was a friendly and decent headmaster. Our class now also had a different English teacher too, Joe McDonagh, who also was the career guidance counselor. We also now had another brother, Brother Gerald for religion. The school also announced they were going to start fundraising for a new sports hall which would later be built behind the main building.

All the while I was also still involved with Radio Dublin at the weekend. I was now doing a four hour music show on both Saturday and Sunday on the stations channel 2, and reading the news on both channels at the same time. I'd cycle over with all my LP records in a bag and arrive just in time to jump in front of the microphone and start my show. New orders "Blue Monday" was one of the big songs I enjoyed from that time. I was also able to do requests and dedications for all my school mates. I'd get a thump if I forgot to do any of them!

I used to get a lot of compilation tapes and vinyl records. The "Now That's What I Call Music" series of compilation albums had just started, and they were great. There was no record library in Radio Dublin, so you had to bring your own music to play. One day I came off my bike on the way over and I got a bit banged up but my main concern was that my records had got damaged. Luckily neither me nor my records were too badly scratched! Other songs I enjoyed from around that time included Billy Joel's "Uptown Girl" and "Tell Her About It".

I still used to call into Radio Nova down on Herbert street if I happened to be in the area to ask for car stickers and anything else, they were giving away. They now had another station running from the same building KISS FM which also had a crystal-clear signal and great music. One time I had called in to Radio Nova and in the background got to see the manager Chris Carey himself looking very professional in a pinstripe suit.

One-night Radio Dublin had a big disco event which was held in a big concert venue on Francis street. Hundreds and hundreds of listeners turned up and I was up there on the stage with all the other DJs that night!

The big highlight of my time on radio Dublin was a Christmas day show looking back over the music of the past year. My dad gave me a lift in and out for that one. It was nice to think how only a year earlier I had been listening to a similar show and now here I was behind the microphone myself.

So as 1983 came to an end, it had been a fun and interesting year for me, and I had got on the radio for the first time which I was very happy about. In the outside world one of the big issues had been the threat of nuclear war. There were

marches and protests going on all over the place against cruise missiles and the arms race. The songs "99 Red Balloons" by Nena and "Two Tribes" by Frankie Goes to Hollywood were all about the way the world looked to be heading for nuclear war. There had also been a big tv drama called "The Day After" which had been on over several nights and showed what a nuclear war might be like.

1984

The Christmas exams that I'd done in December had shown that my grades had slipped a good bit and unfortunately in the end I was told I had to drop my weekend radio stuff to concentrate on school work. The big leaving certificate exam was starting to loom large.

I was sad to be leaving the Radio station, but I promised myself that someday I'd get back to it, or onto another radio station, and get back on the air. Looking back now that spring of 1984 wasn't the happiest of times for me, I missed my radio friends and the fun of it and my school days also weren't the best. It was a tough time, and I also made a few mistakes like having a big fight with my best friend Ian. It's one of the few times in the 1980s that I don't really like to remember.

But once school had finished for the year, the summer of 1984 was a much better time for me. My Aunty Jackie from Australia came to visit Ireland and stayed at our house. We had a big outdoor party for her out in our back garden which went on into the small hours. A lot of my cousins came to it and there was a lot of drinking. One of my cousins fell off her chair and couldn't get up and an ambulance had to be called! I think my parents were mortified by how that party had turned out and what the neighbors must have thought!

On TV one of my favourite new shows was Airwolf. It was also the summer of the Los Angeles Olympics and the miners' strike in the UK and the Bob Dylan concert, and riot, in Slane. President Ronald Reagan also came to visit Dublin that June and the whole city centre was sealed off for security reasons and there were also lots of protests going on.

That summer Radio Nova also held a day of open auditions for newsreaders at their studios. By now they had moved out to a big new site in Rathfarnham which they called Nova Park. It was on the site of the old Greenacres country club and so I went along that afternoon and did an audition for the newsreaders job. Although I didn't get a job it was really nice to get to see their new studios and set up.

RTE had actually tried to jam the Radio Nova signal during the summer of 1984, which had caused a few problems for the station. As part of their response Radio Nova had put together a spoof song called the Jam Rap which was very funny and aimed at RTE. Some of the songs I was listening to from around then included "So Tired" by Ozzy Osbourne, "Glad it's all over" by Captain Sensible, and "No Stopping Us" by Ollie and Jerry.

It was now September of 1984 and the new school season began. This was 6th year and our last and final one at St Benildus. On the first day back at school I found out that Ian had left completely, to go to another school. I hadn't seen him over the summer, as we'd had that fight just at the end of 5th year. I really wish now I'd apologized to him and made things right if we'd been back again in September, but now I realized he was gone for good, and I'd never even said goodbye or thanked him for being my friend. That's always been something I've really deeply regretted.

Another sad thing that summer was the passing away of my cousin Orla. She had leukemia and was only 21 when she died.

Back at school I caught up with my other friends Niall, Justin and Eoin, and we continued our smoking and music listening through that autumn and winter. Though all of us were also now trying to do as much study and preparation as we could ahead of the big exams which were just a few months away.

Radio Nova did another of their three songs competitions around that time. This time the response was so great that it clogged up the Dublin phone system so much that people couldn't get through to anyone for hours afterwards. That got quite a bit of extra publicity for Radio Nova which they were probably delighted with. The songs that time were Joe Jacksons "You Can't Get What You Want", "Suzanna" by The Art company and "Sunshine Reggae" by Laid-back. By now Radio Nova was actively trying to get listeners and advertising from the north west of England and Wales. Their AM signal strength was good enough to reach as far as Liverpool. They had also changed frequency to 102.7 FM. There were also rumours going around that they might try to launch a TV service!

Meanwhile the area I lived in was quite different back then to what it is now. The main roads were all narrower and had a lot of potholes and narrow footpaths. There were just two buses that used to come out our way - the 86 and the 5. Though neither of them was very reliable. Dundrum had the number 14 bus and Stillorgan had the 46a. What is now the 'old' shopping centre in Dundrum was the only shopping centre there at that time. It had its record shop upstairs which I think was called dolphin discs, and a Quinnsworth and a Penny's. Joe Daly had a big bike shop and repair centre in Dundrum and that was where all of us school lads would get our bikes fixed.

Where the new Dundrum town centre is now used to be the PYE factory and then the Dundrum bowl. That was another of the places me and my friends used to go ten pin bowling. Further up that hill, and where the outdoor carpark for the new Dundrum town centre is located now, was a very large Crazy Prices \ H Williams supermarket. Beyond that it was countryside and then Wesley college. Churchtown was the other side of Dundrum and it was there that I went for haircuts as there was a good barber near the bottle tower pub.

Stillorgan had the Swiss chalet restaurant, which was very large and later became Blake's before becoming the Bondi beach nightclub. There was also a nice Chinese restaurant called the lychee on the Stillorgan road where the garage is now, and there was a restaurant called the peppermint garden in the South County hotel that me and my parents used to go to sometimes. The Mill House was the main pub and it's still there now.

Stillorgan shopping centre had a Quinnsworth, an ESB electrical goods store, a Bewleys cafe and a Dunnes Stores supermarket and also a branch of golden discs. There was also a big video tape rental shop across the road from it. Back then opening hours were different, and nothing at all would be open on a Sunday, except for the churches. There were also almost no buses anywhere on a Sunday and pretty much everything in the city centre would be closed on Sunday anyway. Only the very small local shops might be open, but even then, sometimes only for a few hours. Our own local shop was Hanley's which was up in Lakelands and was where I'd got some of my first cigarettes (before my mam found out and warned them not to sell them to me!).

Sandyford industrial estate was mainly just warehouses and was a lot smaller than it is now. The old train line (which is now the Luas) was just overgrown and you could walk along the old rocks which had once supported the rails. There was a bit of a forest of trees where the Benildus playing fields ended. Beyond that was the Wedgewood estate of Sandyford which is where my aunty lived.

Dublin city centre was much less developed than it is now. There was the old dandelion market which was where the Stephens green shopping centre is now. Temple bar was very run down and all the things that are nice squares now we're just car parks then. The DART train service had only just opened that year. The docklands were a wasteland of abandoned warehouses and derelict buildings. There used to be a massive gasometer down in the south docklands which

towered over everything. Back then there was also a jetfoil service which went from Dublin over to the UK. It was a very small craft and not really suitable for the Irish sea - apparently most of the passengers got seasick on it and it was cancelled after a couple of seasons.

The main shops were in Henry Street and there was also a big BHS store on O'Connell Street. A lot of us school lads got stuff in Army Bargains which was just off Capel street. They sold some great West German army jackets and shirts which were very good for the Irish weather. Most of the time though we were all in denim jackets when we weren't at school. (At school we had a grey uniform up till the 5th year after which you could wear what you liked).

One thing I can remember about back then is that it was easy and cheap to park a car anywhere. My dad drove a ford escort and you could drive right into the city centre and park anywhere. I don't think there were any tolls on the roads either.

There were a couple of big news stories that autumn including the Brighton bomb and a plane crash that killed several well-known journalists from the Evening Herald newspaper.

One thing that happened in the autumn of 1984 was a night my parents had gone out to some dinner party or event. My friend Niall came around my house and we decided to try and have a few secret drinks from my parents' drinks cabinet. There were half finished bottles of sherry, brandy, Whiskey and gin, as well as old bottles of liqueurs and we figured if we took just a small pour from all of them, they would never notice! Needless to say, we were both sick as dogs after drinking such weird mixtures of drinks. And my parents certainly must have noticed as the drinks were all locked away in a cupboard the next time they went out for an evening!

Niall was a great friend and lived just up the road in Stillorgan Wood. He had previously been in Synge Street school in the city centre, so he had lots of interesting stories to tell. One day he was round my house and being a bit of a daredevil, he climbed out the upstairs window onto the outer ledge - which was about 30 feet above a concrete patio!

The other friends I had at that time included Jerry McCormack, and Stuart Watkins. He was actually in a different class, but our parents were friends and I knew him through them. That autumn and winter the movie "Ghostbusters" was out and its theme song was one of the biggest of the year. Michael Jackson's song "Thriller" was also out around this time and got played a lot over Halloween.

Christmas 1984 was nice, though it had been a pretty tough year. The number one song was Band Aids "Do they know it's Christmas" which was to raise money for famine relief in Africa. Frankie goes to Hollywood's "The power of love" and Nik Kershaws "Wouldn't it Be Good" and "The Riddle" were other great songs from that time. Another thing that was happening at around that time was the arrival of personal stereo systems like the Sony Walkman. These were a big advance as you could now bring cassette tapes with you and play them without having to drag a big heavy stereo around.

1985

I knew 1985 was going to be a big year, as whatever happened with the leaving certificate exam, I'd be finished school one way or another by the summer. There was some snow around during the last part of the winter but still nothing as much as there had been in 1982 and I think we just got one day off as a result of the snow. Our class did our mock exams in March, and although most of my results were good, I was still doing badly at math's. I couldn't understand any of the equations and theorems at all. We were all studying hard those last few months but there was still time for bowling at the Stillorgan bowl and I also really enjoyed the music that was around that spring and early summer. One of my favourite new bands was Go West who had some great songs like "We close our Eyes" and "Call Me". RTE2 television began showing MTUSA which was several hours of music videos every Sunday afternoon and myself and Niall used to

really enjoy watching it. Radio Nova were still the biggest of the Dublin stations, with Sunshine coming in second. Sunshine was run by Robbie Dale and had a bit more of a community feel to it. They always used to play the song "You are a Child of the universe" at midnight every night. Nova was much brasher and commercial, and its most popular show was the Brekkie Trekkie with Declan Meehan and Bob Gallico. It had a high audience every morning. Radio Nova also had some excellent jingles which they had made in the USA. They also had a special jam jingles song, "Radio Can Be Fun," which included all the jingles from loads of different stations - including Radio Nova.

A couple of big events happened in the spring of 85, the miners' strike finally ended after nearly a year. And the Russian President Chernenko died and was succeeded by a new leader: Mikael Gorbachev.

Suddenly it was the end of May, and I woke up one morning and realized it was my last proper day at school. That day all the parents were invited up and there was a reception with all the teachers and students and parents for the last day. It was a very nice way to end my time at St Benildus school. My only regret was that my old friend Ian wasn't there with the rest of us.

One week later the big leaving certificate exam began and two weeks later it was all over. As I left the exam room for the last time, I knew I was closing one chapter of my life and a new one was about to begin. St. Benildus school had been a good one and looking back at it all now I had some great memories.

The songs that were playing around then included "Everybody Wants to Rule the World" by Tears for Fears, and "You'll Never Walk Alone" which was released as a memorial record after the big football disasters that had happened that spring. There had been a couple of major disasters - the fire at Bradford and the riot at Heysel stadium and a lot of people had been killed and injured.

My parents and me went to Spain on holidays that summer for a week to Fuengirola on the Costa del sol. It was a great holiday especially after all my hard work coming up to the exams. On one of the days my dad and me went on a day trip to Tangier in Morocco. This was quite an adventure and involved going by bus to Gibraltar and then flying the short distance to Tangier. It was my first-time outside Europe and that day is one of the best memories I have of my dad.

When we came home from Spain, I set about deciding what to do now that I'd finished school. I did some writing for a local newspaper called "The Dublin Journal", as I knew the editor, a friend of my dad's called Tony Gallagher. The stories I wrote were mostly local stuff about community organizations who were looking for support and funding. It was great to see my name getting published and I got paid for the stories I had written. The weather though was really dull and cloudy most of that summer which was a bit of a disappointment.

I think this was also the summer of the moving statues, where reports started to come in that religious statues around the country were moving and this led to large crowds going to see them. It was also the summer of the Live Aid concerts, which happened while I was away in Spain, so I didn't get to see much of them.

The results of the leaving certificate exam came out in mid-August and I had done pretty good in most subjects, except for math's - which I'd failed. However, I'd done very well in history and geography, so I was pleased with the overall results. With my interest in Radio and television I had applied for a training course at the Ballyfermot Senior College in Dublin 12 and I now found out that I had been accepted and had a place on the course. It began in September and straight away I found I really enjoyed it. There was a great bunch of classmates and after being in an all-boys school for so many years, I now had female class mates for the first time.

The course sounded really interesting and there was lots of practical stuff like putting on productions, writing scripts and editing stuff. There was also a college radio station and we all took turns to DJ and present shows on it every lunchtime when it was 'broadcast' around the college on the PA system. This in particular was great fun. Everyone in the class was really interested in radio and television and so it was a great atmosphere. On one of the first weeks we all went into town to see the movies "Streets of Fire" and "Dead men don't wear Plaid" at the cinema.

Ballyfermot was a complicated place to get to, but some mornings my dad gave me a lift in. In the afternoons I'd get the 79 bus into the city centre and then switch to an 86 or 46b bus to get home. Back then you could smoke upstairs on the bus, and the air on the buses would be really thick with hazy smoke most of the time. The 86 bus never seemed to run to its timetable, and you could be waiting ages for it out in the cold. Eventually I found another bus I could get - the 62 - and its stop was right beside the old Wonder Burger fast food place beside the Screen cinema, so I used to end up there a lot of evenings.

Ballyfermot senior college was a very modern building with great facilities right next door to the library in Ballyfermot. Jerome Morrissey was the principal and was very friendly and approachable. There was also a great canteen and a nice courtyard where us smokers could have our tea and smokes. The two main teachers who ran the course were Kevin MacNamidhe and Brian O'Neill. I had made a lot of new friends on the course, including Linda McKeown, Brian Graham, Aidan Farrell, Adrian McGibbon, Jennifer Faulkner, Declan Recks, Tom Dempsey, Joanne Millest, Hillary Jones, Mark Klinecivicz, and Jim Newport among others.

In Ireland back then unemployment was very high, so you got paid to do this type of course and for me this was great as I now had my own proper regular income coming in.

We went for drinks sometimes in Jason's of Ranelagh which was an area that a few of the class were living in. Another time we ended up in the Swiss cottage pub over on the Northside, so I was certainly getting to see lots of new parts of Dublin that year.

Moonlighting and Mcgyver were two of the big TV shows that I remember watching from back then, while my parents enjoyed stuff like The Golden Girls and Murder She Wrote.

Clock radios were another new thing that were very popular that Christmas and I got one from my Aunty as a present. And I'd still be listening in to Radio Nova, and one of my favourite shows at that time was the European Top 40 with Noel Clancy. I'd be recording all the songs to listen to again and again!

For me 1985 had been a really good year and had brought lots of changes. I had left school and got my leaving certificate (except for math's!). And I had made a lot of new friends on my course. I still saw some of the old gang around, though not very often. Niall was now driving a van and I'd spot him sometimes around the area. Christmas 1985 was a particularly good one, with everything going well. The big movies that year were "The Breakfast Club" and one of my favourite 1980s films "Back to the Future". Some of the big songs from that time included "A Good Heart" by Fergal Sharkey and "Body Rock" by Maria Vidal.

1986

The eighties were into their second half now, and the music just kept getting better and better. Songs around at that time included AHA's "The sun always shines on TV" and "Chain Reaction" by Diana Ross.

My college course continued with me getting the buses home through town each evening. One particular one I remember is the night I was upstairs on the bus listening to the radio on my Walkman and a news flash came across about the Challenger space shuttle disaster which had just happened a few minutes earlier. It was one of the biggest disasters that

year, the other big one being Chernobyl which happened in April though at the time none of us realized how serious it was. Everybody was outdoors in the rain the weekend after it and only later did we learn it was probably radioactive!

The second half of my college course concentrated on television and video production and each one of us had to put together a five-minute creative piece and a fifteen-minute documentary style production. For my creative piece I did some filming around Dublin city and up in the foothills of the mountains and around Killiney. Back then the camera and recorders were much bigger and heavier and needed a lot of work setting up tripods and getting the light levels correct. Luckily my aunty Kathleen offered to drive me around the day I did my filming and as a result she even ended up appearing in one of them.

We also did photography on the course and I went out and about with a camera and got some shots of the docklands and some stuff around Dublin and then developed the pictures in the college darkroom. We all helped each other with our productions and projects, and it was great fun too. One of my friends, Jim Newport, was doing his documentary about Aer Lingus, and a few of us went out to the airport and did some filming there. We were allowed special access to some areas, including inside a jumbo jet Boeing 747 which was in one of the hangers getting serviced. I'd always loved planes, so it was a real treat for me to get to be involved in that day's filming.

My own documentary project was going to be about my local community and some of the social groups that were active there. On one of the days I got the camera and recorders and did various interviews and recorded lots of scenes from the local area. Back at the college then over the next few days I edited and put it all together into a finished programme. There was quite a rush towards the end as we were all getting our final projects ready for assessment. We all helped each other and that also made it interesting as we would go along on other film shoots, and I got to go to the cliffs of Killiney on the DART train for the first time on one of those shoots.

One day during our second term we did an outward-bound orienteering day up in the Dublin mountains. It had been pretty mild down in the city but absolutely freezing and snowing up in the mountains and none of us had really prepared properly for the conditions. We all nearly ended up having to be rescued by the mountain rescue squad!

The final few weeks at Ballyfermot were very busy and there was also a competition for the best projects in different categories and one of the ones I had helped out on won the top prize.

There were exams as well, and then the course was over. It had been a great experience and a fun filled nine months. I had also made a lot of new friends and learned a lot about the world of Radio and Television.

There was a big awards day for the competition, and the Taoiseach Dr Garrett Fitzgerald was at it, and presented the awards. That was followed by a night out and overnight stay at the Sports Hotel in Kiltarnan. There were some bad hangovers there the next morning! The college also had its own presentation evening another night for all the different courses that had been running that season and we were all presented with our certificates. Doing that course was one of the best highlights of the 1980s for me.

Meanwhile in the radio world, Radio Nova had suddenly closed down. It was a big shock for all the listeners and fans of the station. However, a couple of new stations had come on the air over the previous year including Q102. Q102 was based in Mount Street and one of their special promotions was their Q102 Eye in the sky which was a helicopter that flew over Dublin city and reported live on the traffic during the morning rush hour. Mike Hogan was one of the managers of the station and he used to go up and do the reports live from the helicopter. After Radio Nova closed down Q102 became the number 1 station in Dublin. Another new station also appeared around that time: Energy 103.

I'd been smoking for about four years now but often giving them up for a few weeks or months but then starting again. Though around this time I did manage to stop smoking for a much longer time.

That summer I also did a thing called Teamwork which was a kind of work experience project based at the Ballyfermot College and it involved making career guidance videos for the local education authority. It was hard work but good fun too and we got properly paid for it. The big movies of 1986 included "Top Gun" and "Ferris Buellers Day Off".

South Africa was one of the big issues of concern to everyone in the 1980s. There were lots of protest marches and petitions against apartheid. There was also a strike and protest outside one of the Dunnes Stores supermarkets in Dublin that was selling South African oranges. And songs like "Free Nelson Mandela" and "Sun City" were being played a lot on the radio.

Other great songs from round this time included "Don't Leave Me This Way" by The Communards, "E=MC2" by Big Audio Dynamite, and "Calling all the Hero's" by It Bites.

Jobs were still very scare in Ireland back then and a lot of people were emigrating. But I didn't feel ready yet to move abroad. So in September I signed up to do another course, this one in communications at a different college in another part of Dublin: Colaiste Dhulaigh in the north Dublin suburb of Coolock. This was a more advanced course and was another step on the ladder. It was another modern college and our teachers were Jim Martin, Denise Dunphy and Ciaran Flynn. There were only two southsiders on the course - me and Kathrina Ryan and so we got some friendly jokes made about us from all the rest of the class who were all from the Northside. As part of the course each of us had to find a company that would let us do some work experience one day a week. I knew I really wanted to get back into radio and so one morning I went along to the offices of Energy 103 at 144 Upper Leeson Street and called in to ask if I could do my work experience there.

Energy 103 was now one of the stations that had really good quality equipment and a crystal-clear signal. After the old Radio Nova had closed down many people said that Energy 103 was actually owned and run by the same people who had run Nova, including Sybil Fennell who had shown me around Radio Nova all those years earlier. In fact some people said Energy actually was "NRG" , which stood for Nova Radio Group !

I met Sybil Fennell again and to my delight I was accepted and so began going in and doing various jobs every Thursday at Energy 103. The course I was doing was also very interesting and I learned a lot of new stuff about presenting and script writing. Photography was another big part of that course and a part I really enjoyed. I was on the buses again, and this time I was getting the 27 from Coolock to the city centre and then another bus on home. I actually liked the area around the college as it was next door to the Northside shopping centre and there was also a branch of Kentucky fried chicken beside it where we'd all go for very tasty lunches.

One big event that happened that autumn was hurricane Charlie. It was a big storm that left a lot of flooding around Dublin, though my own area was lucky to escape the worst of it. The weather was always very changeable in Ireland and one of the jobs I'd been given at the radio station was to organise Snow-Watch, which was a plan for what to do to help the listeners if there was another very heavy fall of snow like we'd had in 1982. Back then before the internet people relied more on radio stations to let them know if buses were running or not, and which shops and schools were open. We needed our listeners to stay with us rather than going looking for other stations that might have better information. Now that I was part of Energy 103, it was pretty clear that it was the old Radio Nova but now reborn under a different name. Though this was something that could never be said too openly.

That December there was also a big event organised by Energy 103 up at the Phoenix Park racecourse venue, for disadvantaged children from around Dublin. We'd organised collections of toys and games for the kids and gave them all

a great day out. I donated my old Space Invaders game, so I hope some youngster had as much fun with it as I had. In the week before the event the whole building at Leeson Street was full of toys and stuffed animals everywhere. Before they were all collected to be brought to the venue, the whole building was like Santa's grotto with all the toys everywhere.

The Energy 103 building on Leeson Street was four stories high and had previously been used as a studio for one of the old Radio Nova's subsidiaries "Magic 103". On the ground floor there was the reception desk and also a full production studio which people walking by outside could see into. Pat Courtney from New Zealand was in charge of production and making all the commercials and promotions. His nickname was The Flying Kiwi and he also had a great sense of humour and could do an amazing selection of funny accents and voices. Lisa Moreau was the receptionist and also looked after all the commercial scheduling. This was really important as the commercials were the income for the whole station and had to go out at the correct times they had been booked for. Lisa was also the partner of one of the top DJs - John O'Hara who did the evening weeknight show 'schools out' from 7 pm to midnight.

On the first floor there were two big offices - one belonging to Sybil Fennell who was the overall manager of the station. The other office was for the sales team, Alan Murphy and Alan Graham. Though most of the week they were out on the road getting new advertising business for the station. Joan Mythen also used that office as she did the accounts and wages every week. This was also where the mini phone exchange box was kept bringing all the different phone lines into the building.

On that first floor there were also the toilets and a little kitchen where we could make tea and coffee. On the third floor there was a small record library. One of the first jobs I was given when I arrived was to try and sort it out as it was in a bit of a mess with all the records in the wrong places. That floor also had the large newsroom which was at the front of the building looking out on Leeson street. In fact, people going by upstairs on the buses could look in and see us all. The newsroom was always busy and was also where general staff meetings and gatherings were held. There were often DJs in there too waiting for their shifts to start. The news readers included Teena Gates, George Long, Michael Lewis, and Sybil Fennell herself who used to do some of the main bulletins. There was a wire service printer linked up to the Press Association which used to print out news stories and the rest of the news was got from the Teletext service on TV. There were also radios hooked up to cassette recorders so we could record the news from other stations like RTE in case they had any stories we didn't have.

Sybil was always ready to respond when there was a big news story, and I remember one night there was an enormous explosion from an area not that far from where Energy 103 was located. Sybil gave me a tape recorder and sent me off in a taxi to go and try and find out what had happened. It turned out to be a gas explosion in Dolphins barn and I recorded a couple of interviews with people who had been on the scene and these were broadcast when I got back to the station.

Sometimes some celebrity might be seen drinking in the Leeson lounge across the road from the station and Sybil would get someone to run back and get a tape recorder so she could do an impromptu interview. Alex Higgins and Ian Botham were both interviewed that way.

The fourth and top floor of the energy 103 building had a small soundproofed news reading booth, and then the main on-air studio. It had carpets on the walls for soundproofing, and a very large transmission mixer desk with record turntables and audio cart machines. The back wall of the studio was covered by a shelf system where all the music carts were stored. Right at the back there was a small room filled with the transmission equipment, in particular the microwave transmitters that sent the signal up to the main transmitter mast which was up in the Dublin mountains.

I always felt a great sense of excitement going up into the main studio, being careful not to make any noise or distract the DJ who was on air.

Right at the end of 1986 there was a big night out for everyone at the station, and I was delighted when they invited me too. It was a lovely meal in a restaurant beside Teddy's in Dun Laoghaire and it was a great way to end the year.

1987

The new year of 1987 began with a trip to Spain with my parents. It was another one of those years that my dad couldn't take holidays in the summer, so we had to go in January. It was a short trip down to Gran Canaria, but one of the best things about it was i got to go on the big Aer Lingus Boeing 747 which was normally only used for the long transatlantic flights. This was my first flight on one and it was a really great experience.

Meanwhile my course was going well and was lots of fun. I had made some new friends including Catriona Ryan and Damien O'Donnell. I was working on a lot of research for a big video production our class would be doing on the history of the north Dublin town of Swords. I was scripting and researching it and was also going to be doing the presenting, so I was trying to find out as much as possible about the history of the town. I spent many hours in the National library in Kildare street looking up things to include in the script. One of the aims of the course was to generate some revenue from the productions, so the hope was that the local historical societies might buy a copy or two of the videos we were making.

At the same time, I was also continuing with my work experience at the Energy 103 radio station. I did everything from making the tea to going to the city centre record shops to collect the latest new releases which came out each week. There were two big record shops in the city centre at that time - the Virgin Megastore on the quays and HMV which was on Grafton Street. It was quite cool to think that the records I was carrying would be on the turntable as soon as I got them back to the station and getting broadcast to tens of thousands of people. There was also another smaller record shop down by the canal called Mespil music. U2's new album launch that year was a big event and I was sent down to get the station's copy of it.

Another thing I did at that time was the weekly listenership survey - this involved going into the city centre with a clipboard and pen and asking a random 100 people what radio station they listened to. Then I'd add up the results and go back to the station to deliver them. Energy 103 usually got the 3rd place after Q102 and Sunshine Radio, but a few weeks we'd be number 2, and that was great cause for celebration back at the station. Sybil Fennell, the manager, always said it was better to be number two or three, as if you were number one you had nowhere else to go but down.

I got to know all the DJs and newsreaders - Colm Hayes, Teena gates, Pat Courtney, George long, John O'Hara, Ernie Gallagher, Barry Falvey, Dave Andrews, Tony Mackenzie, Gareth O'Callaghan and Tony Allen. Although I was just the work experience guy, they were all really nice and included me when they were going over for drinks at the Leeson Lounge which was just across the road.

I was also involved in the production of a big outside broadcast which was done from Stillorgan shopping centre that winter. I was back at the station but looking after the playing of the commercials, which was quite a responsibility.

The station ran lots of competitions, and amongst these were ones like the old Radio Nova three songs competitions. When they played these three particular songs then the listeners would phone in and the 50th caller would win 10 thousand pounds. That was an enormous amount of money back then! (Energy's three songs were Isla Bonita by Madonna, Let's Go All the Way by Sly Fox and Cest La Vie by Robbie Neville) There was also a competition called Seek and Collect where the prize was a car! And another called phone fun where the listeners had to answer their phones saying they listened to Energy and then they'd win a prize.

A few times Tony McKenzie would be on the air doing his morning to afternoon show and he'd need to go downstairs to discuss something with someone, and he'd get me to sit behind the control desk and just play back to back music till he returned. So that way I learned how it all worked. There was also a programme that came on vinyl record from America each week called the Rick Dee's weekly Top 40 and I was given the job of sitting behind the control desk while that went out on air. Another job I had was cleaning the carts which was blanking the old audio carts ready to be recorded over again. They used a big electro magnet to do this and then Pat Courtney would record the new adverts or songs onto them. Another task I had was getting the traffic news - this involved phoning around various taxi companies and asking them where there were any hold ups or traffic jams. They'd get a bit of free advertising on air as a result. I also answered the phones for the listeners top 5 at 5, taking down the votes and numbers to work out the results. It was great fun doing all this and being a part of the station, it was a really friendly and fun place with a great atmosphere.

In February there was a big event organised for all the advertising agencies and there was a big presentation and reception held at the Fanny Hills nightclub in Leeson Street. We all had to dress up for it and do our best to impress the people from the advertising agencies who had been invited.

One Saturday afternoon in March I was at home and had a phone call from Tony Mackenzie, As well as being a top DJ he was also one of the station managers. One of the regular Saturday night DJs had suddenly quit and he needed someone urgently to fill in for that night. Would I be able to do it? I was delighted and immediately accepted. So that night in March of 1987 I was back on the airwaves. And the following week they asked me to do it again and it then became a regular thing.

At first it was just Saturday night but then it became Sunday and Friday night too. It was great fun, and an excellent time to be playing songs with some great music around that spring and summer. In particular I remember the New Order's "True Faith" and Starship's "Nothing Gonna Stop Us Now". I really enjoyed it all and they started paying me for doing those evening shows which was great as it meant I had moved from just doing the work experience to being actually one of the part time staff.

That summer Energy 103 also had Bob Gallico join the station and he was one of the best and most professional news readers I've ever heard. Fionuala Sweeney also joined the station as a newsreader that summer. Teena Gates and George Long had left to go to London and there had been a big farewell party for them on their last day.

In May our class at Colaiste Dhulaigh did our big filming for the documentary on the history of the town of Swords. We were really lucky to get a great week of perfect weather. And with that done, the course was finished.

Ireland also won the Eurovision song contest again that year, and once again it was a song by Johnny Logan, this time called "Hold Me Now". Another interesting thing that happened that year was that the national lottery was launched for the first time. And Stephen Roache from Dundrum won the Tour De France cycle race.

I then had a very enjoyable summer working at Energy 103, doing my three music shows at the weekends and other random stuff during the week. Sybil wanted to raise the profile of the station and so there was lots of advertising and promotion work going on. I took over responsibility for answering listeners letters and phone messages; back then before the internet that was really the main way people could contact the station.

There was also a strike around that time by the ESB unions and that meant there were some power cuts. Energy 103 had to get a generator so we wouldn't be knocked off the air if there was a power cut in our area. In the end we needed it a few times before the strike was settled.

I made some great new friends too during that summer, Bobby Spaine and Kevin Brannigan were listeners who regularly phoned in and later came down to visit the station and kept in touch. They both had a great interest in radio broadcasting too and had also been fans of the original Radio Nova. I've kept in touch with them down through the years and Kevin Brannigan in particular went on to have a very successful career in the radio broadcasting business.

There was also Ann Boylan, Ronan Carey, and Karen Murphy who used to phone in every week. There were also loads of people writing in looking for car stickers, T-shirts, and other stuff we were giving away, so I was forever running up and down to the local post office to get stuff sent out. The station had done a big sponsorship deal with Club Orange drinks and so we had tons of pens, stickers and other merchandise to give away.

Another thing that happened around that time was I started smoking again. I'd been off them for a full year but gave into temptation one weekend!

Garrett O'Callaghan was one of my favourite DJs who was on energy at that time. He did a really funny show every afternoon with all kinds of zany characters and jokes. He was very talented and also always happy to do requests and special dedications for the listeners. Tony Allen was also very talented and had a great wicked sense of humour.

One funny thing that happened that summer was that one night someone unknown hijacked our transmitter which was up in the foothills of the Dublin mountains. They began playing a parody version of the station with all kinds of weird adverts and pranks. It took a couple of hours before we got the transmitter back under our control, during which time some really bizarre stuff was broadcast as being from Energy 103. Amazingly when I did our listenership survey the following week we had had a big jump in numbers so everyone was happy!

As well as the three evening shows that went from 7 to midnight on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, I also did some overnight shows from midnight to 6 a.m. They were tough! I'd often end up having to have a sleep the next day in the little record library. One day one of the newsreaders came in and found me fast asleep and I had to explain I'd been on the air all night! When I was doing my shows I'd always stock up on popcorn and crisps and coke from the little shop down the road on Leeson Street. Then I'd spend a while in the record library selecting a few special songs to play. Most of the time the music choice was determined by the rotation of the carts on the wall. So we'd just be following the format and the songs that Sybil and Tony would have put into the system.

But the Saturday night show was a bit different and was meant to sound more like a live party with very fast and upbeat music as well as plenty of disco mixes. These were special mega mix records pulling together lots of songs into 10- or 15-minute mixes. They were very popular, and Joan Mythen used to get them, and Energy was allowed to play them but with some restrictions. (We weren't allowed play them too often and they had to have an advert for the disco mix club played during them).

One thing we also had at Energy 103 was a satellite TV receiver and for the first time I got to see this new and exciting medium. There was a station called Sky Channel, another called Music Box, and another called Super Channel which showed European music videos.

The songs that I really liked from around then included "It's a Sin" by the Pet Shop Boys, and "Nothing's Going to stop us" by Starship. Other ones I enjoyed included "Wishing I was lucky" by Wet, Wet, Wet and "Living In a box" by Living In a box.

One day I remember from that summer is when Sybil asked me to go with her out to check on something at the transmitter base in the mountains. It was a pretty remote spot and she probably wanted someone to accompany her for safety. On the way back she showed me the old Radio Nova place at Nova Park in Rathfarnham which is a little bit of radio history and it was a great privilege to see it in the company of Sybil Fennell herself who had been on the original Radio Nova. By then it was all closed and abandoned but you could still see where everything had been.

Another task I had that summer was logging the other Dublin stations. This involved listening to stations like Q102 and Sunshine and writing down all their songs and advertisers and giving this report to Sybil. She would then know if there was any new advertisers we could go after, and also what kind of songs the competition were playing. I was able to do this logging task while sitting outside in the sun so that was a nice way to spend a few days. One Friday I remember I sat outside all day logging Q102 and ended up completely sunburnt and then had to do my five-hour evening show.

Although the stations were in competition there was a good deal of cooperation between them too. Sometimes I'd be sent down to Q102 on Mount Street to collect or deliver something. I got to meet Martin Block the manager of Q102 and a few of the other people from Q. They had a nice set up in the basement of their building, though I definitely preferred our above ground studios at Energy.

Sybil Fennell would be in Dublin and running the station during the week, and then on Friday afternoon or evening she would go over to London. Sometimes one of my jobs was to go down to the British Airways or Aer Lingus offices in the city centre and collect her tickets. There would always be a lot of busy activity and stuff being organised before she departed and the same on the Monday morning when she returned.

Energy 103 had a really nice location on Leeson Street in south Dublin and there were some great places around it including the Kylemore shop on Baggot Street which did some lovely cream buns and Abrakebara which was a fast food kebab place also on Baggot Street. I must have been doing a lot of running around as I was eating these every day and didn't put on any extra weight. I used to have my lunch sitting out on the benches beside the Grand Canal and it was really nice out there that summer.

Clothes were changing too around this time. Everyone started wearing Miami Vice style jackets and T-shirts. Up until then it was mostly those snorkel hooded anoraks with fur on the outside edge of the hood. (I remember it being really risky crossing the road wearing those with the hood up as you couldn't see a thing either side of you!).

Another one of my jobs at the Radio station was getting all the pop music magazines like "Smash Hits" and "Hot Press" each week, which I got from the Number 8 shop on Baggot Street. The station was always trying to look ahead and anticipate the next big songs and artists that our listeners would like. By now on the evening Weekender shows that I did we played even more disco mixes which were proving very popular. The quality of these were excellent too. I kept the music tempo going very fast until the last half hour of my show and then I slowed it right down, just like they did at the Balally disco all those years earlier. Back then I'd never dreamed that someday I'd be the DJ playing the songs!

By the end of the summer of 1987 I had also started doing another course in communications, this time at a college in Rathmines in south Dublin. Though that turned out to be a bit of a waste of time as it was just stuff, I'd already done. The big movies that year were "Good Morning Vietnam" and "Empire of the Sun". There were some great songs around at that time including Erasure's "The Circus" and "No Memories" by Scarlett Fantastic and "Walk the Dinosaur" by Was Not Was.

Meanwhile at Energy 103 new DJs like Liam Coburn, Niall McGowan and Cassidy Jones joined as others left. At one stage part of the ground floor was converted into a small shop selling some of the keep fit and exercise products that

were being advertised on air. It was called the Tamwest shop and sold stuff like the Trimtrack and Gutbuster exercisers which we all tried out, and the place looked a bit like a gym at one stage!

Towards the end of 1987 the station got cd players for the first time. And I also got sight of computers for the first time in a regular workplace. They were just basic word processors, and everything still had to be saved on to those floppy disks but you could see it was just the beginning of a big revolution.

The course at Rathmines College had become pretty boring but I still went along for the lectures. They had a good photography darkroom and I was able to develop and print some nice pictures. I did a big portfolio of pictures of the radio station which turned out really well and are a great reminder of those days.

There was another outside broadcast from the Stillorgan shopping centre at the end of October and again I was back at the station running the adverts in between the outside broadcast sections.

Towards the end of the year Energy 103 went through a lot of changes. Several things happened, Sybil was now expecting a baby, and so was going to go over to London for the last few months. Her partner, the original owner of the old Radio Nova - Chris Carey now came back to Dublin in November and opened a second radio station in the building next door to Energy 103. I remember helping him move all kinds of equipment and cd players and UHF links between the two buildings. He was a very interesting person to talk to and I enjoyed hearing his stories about Radio Nova and Kiss FM from earlier in the eighties. And I was able to tell him how much I had enjoyed listening to the original Radio Nova all those years ago. Test transmissions began for the new station and it caused a lot of excitement around Dublin and among my radio friends.

This new Radio Nova opened on 18th November with Niall McGowan doing the breakfast show. Then on 24th November there was a big staff meeting when it was announced that the two stations would be 'merged' to become Nova Power 103. Then the next day Sybil announced the merger of the two stations live on the lunchtime news! There were various legal and financial reasons for all this, and it was a bit of a confusing time for the staff, but the listeners didn't seem to notice as the figures were still very good. The new radio Nova had been on 100 FM with all its music coming from CDs rather than records. There was also a new evening local news segment called Dublin Today, and on the first evening Chris Carey was interviewed about the station and his plans.

Meanwhile in 144 Upper Leeson Street the on-air studio was also moved from the top floor to the floor where the newsroom used to be. This was an enormous and complicated job. During it I actually was broadcasting the station from the old production studio on the ground floor while they worked upstairs moving everything. Later that month I was moved from my weekend music shows to start reading the news at weekends. It was interesting but not as much fun as playing songs. One other really significant thing that happened was on the 20th November - the announcement of the governments local radio bill.

I was sent down to the government publications office near Dail Eireann to get a copy of this document and as soon as I got back with it there were lots of very important meetings taking place behind closed doors. Sybil herself left Dublin at the end of November. Then in mid-December the receivers of the old Radio Nova stopped Nova Power from using the name Nova and the station changed name again to become Power 103, before finally changing back again to Energy. Brian Mackenzie also now took over as one of the managers and several other new people joined.

The music format also changed with much more emphasis on golden oldies. Meanwhile the Nova / Energy Care children's party had been due to be held again at the Phoenix Park leisure complex, but the venue was badly damaged in a fire and the event had to be moved to Blinkers Nite club at the Leopardstown Racecourse.

1987 was a very busy and fun year, probably one of my favourite years of the 80s, though as it ended there were a few storm clouds on the horizon!

1988

The new year began well but pretty soon turned into a bit of a rollercoaster. A whole lot of people left Energy 103 and then it suddenly closed down a few weeks into 1988 which was a real disappointment. The station finally went off the air for the last time on March 11th and the equipment and transmitters were bought by Q102. The signs had been there since the changes the previous months, but it was still sad to see it closed down and the building now empty. An awful lot of stuff ended up in a big skip outside the building.

While I don't know the exact reason, it closed down when it did, I do believe it had something to do with the local radio bill, and the timeline and what was proposed in that new system for local broadcasting. There was a requirement for stations to close down and then apply for licenses, rather than being allowed to continue broadcasting while their applications were being considered.

It's probably impossible to remember everyone who worked on Energy 103 during its three years but here's a roll call of who I can recall...Gareth O'Callaghan, Tony Mackenzie, Tony Allen, Sybil Fennell, Colm Hayes, Pat Courtney, John O'Hara, George Long (Henry O'Donovan), Teena Gates, Fionnilla Sweeney, Michael Lewis, Bob Gallico, Alan Burns, Gerry Stevens, Dave Johnson, Cassidy Jones, Barry Falvey, Liam Quigley, Mike Kingston, Tim Kelly, Niall McGowan, Derek Jones, Derek Flood, Richard Cooke, Aidan Cooney,, Richard O'Shea, Noel Clancey, Ernie Gallagher, Liam Coburn, Ian Scott, Lisa Moreau, Joan Mythen, Alan Murphy, Alan Graham, Brian Mackenzie, Rose and May, and of course myself !

A few months later Radio Nova returned as a satellite radio station being broadcast from the UK, so perhaps that was another of the reasons it closed down in Dublin, as the new satellite technology meant it could be done from there instead.

It was a rocky start to 1988 but a few weeks later I went to work for another Dublin radio station - Liberty 104 which was based in a building in Weaver's square in Dublin 8. It was owned by Sam Prendergast who was a great character - always smoking cigars and telling stories about Dublin and the old liberties area. The stations equipment was not as good as we'd had on Energy, and the signal quality wasn't great.

But it was a great time to be in radio as there were some brilliant songs coming out at that time including the Pet Shop Boys "Heart" and one of my all-time favourite songs "Love Changes Everything" by Climie Fisher. Liberty 104 was on the upper floor above a video rental shop and I spent some time in there too in between news bulletins. Teena Gates who had been on Energy 103 was also there at liberty 104 for a while. Tony Allen was also involved in Liberty 104 and had recorded the station idents.

One-week Liberty 104 did a big outside broadcast at a special event known as the Beano which was on every year in the liberties area and there was a great atmosphere at it. Sam Prendergast had a TV aerial business too and knew everyone in the liberties and Dublin 8 areas.

I stayed at liberty 104 for a few months but by the summer I knew it was time for a big change. I'd heard a lot of the other former staff from Energy 103 had gone to the UK and got good work there. I decided to try and do the same. I was also now eager to grow up and move out of my parents' home too, although I knew I'd miss them and all my friends and neighbours.

The summer of 1988 was an interesting time in Dublin, it was the cities millennium year with lots of fireworks and celebrating going on. The Irish national football team also did really well in the European championships in Germany, especially beating England 1-0 in a legendary match in Stuttgart. There were big celebrations around the city when they won their matches and when they returned home. "Die Hard" and "Beetle Juice" were two of the big movies that year.

There was also a lot of nostalgia for the 1950 and 60s among older people that year. Quite a few of the old songs from that era were being played again. On TV neighbors from Australia was one of the biggest shows being watched that year too. Aswads "Don't Turn Around", Vanessa Paradis's "Joe Le Taxi" and "Crash" by The Primitives were some of my favourite songs from that summer. Kylie Minogue, who had started out in the TV show Neighbours also a big hit with "I should be so lucky", and the Pet Shop Boys had their hit song "Heart". I also gave up smoking again around that time and this time was to last a bit longer than my previous tries!

I had originally thought about going to America to look for work but that would have taken too long to organise, so I decided to go to England instead. I put together a CV and some demo tapes of me reading the news and in July I started sending them out to the radio stations around the UK. A couple of weeks later the manager of one of them - Tony Attwater from Beacon Radio in Wolverhampton phoned up and said they had a couple of months freelance work available if I could come straight away!

The very next day, in August of 1988, I got on a plane and an hour later arrived in Birmingham England. From there I got the train to Wolverhampton and found the radio station which was based on the Tettenhall road just to the west of the city centre. I stayed in the local hotel the first night but the next day I went looking to find somewhere to rent for the next two months of the contract. The station was a full legal licensed station, with lots of news and current affairs programming as well as a good amount of music too.

I found a flat share for rent which was also on the Tettenhall road, about a 20-minute walk from the Radio station. It was an old house that had just been refurbished and so everything was brand new and freshly painted. So that became the first place I lived in away from home. I enjoyed being away and seeing all kinds of new stuff and there was definitely a buzz and excitement about doing something new and different.

One of the guys at the radio station gave me an old spare TV set so I was able to watch that in the evenings. There was also a great Chinese takeaway a few streets away, so I was nicely set up. My job was filling in on the newsroom, making phone calls and doing interviews. Sometimes it would be quite interesting people like the local MP. I got to do some news reading too, especially on a programme called Newsnight which went out live in the early evening.

My flatmate in the houseshare was a guy who was really into acid house music and would play it at all hours of the day and night! (The song "We call it Acieeed" by D-mob is one song from that time I never need to hear again!).

Wolverhampton was a fairly quiet English city, but it had a good shopping centre called the Mander centre which had some interesting shops. I noticed clothes styles were changing again - braces were suddenly cool (previously they had been something only your dad or grandad would have worn). Also mobile phones were no longer a complete novelty, and I saw a few people with them around the place, though at that stage they were still shaped like bricks, and probably as heavy as bricks too. I made some new friends at Beacon Radio, and there was one other Irish guy there, called Stephen Rhodes who was one of the DJs. Dale Winton was also working there at that time.

The contract with Beacon Radio finished up at the end of October and I could have then either gone home to Dublin or go on to London and get something else there. I was really enjoying being over in England, so I decided to go on to

London. I packed up my stuff and got a train south to Euston station and went to stay at a big long stay hotel called Driscoll house in south London near the elephant and castle tube station.

From there I then moved to a nice room in a house owned by a lovely lady called Mrs Cunniah who was originally from Mauritius. She was widowed and was renting out the back room in her house and it suited me just grand. It was on Millais Road in Leytonstone, and just a five-minute walk from the tube station which was on the central line. It was now November and the best thing about her house was that she liked it warm, so the heat was on full blast all the time.

London was really busy and in the middle of a boom at that time. The songs I was listening to were matching that mood including "The Only Way Is Up" by Yazoo and "Rush Hour" by Jane Weildon.

I knew I had to get a job pretty quickly or else I'd have to give up and go home. So the next day I set out for Tottenham Court road at the start of Oxford Street determined to find something that day. I knew it would take a while to get something in radio or TV and I wanted to get any job first so I could stay in London. One of the first shops I saw when I came out of the tube station was a branch of Rymans who were a stationary shop. That particular branch didn't have any vacancies, but the manager told me that their branch in high street Kensington did. I got the tube over to High Street Kensington and found the branch of Rymans and went in and applied for a job.

The manager was a lady called Linda Laurent, and she and her assistant Kay interviewed me and offered me a job. I started working there the next day and found I really enjoyed it. It was my first time working in retail and the shop was always busy, especially as it got closer to Christmas. Filofaxes were one of the best sellers that year, as well as expensive pens and specialist papers. It was a six day a week job but I was really glad to have it and found it very interesting. It was close to Kensington Palace and the customers were very upper class and spent a lot.

I hadn't given up on my original career of radio and television, so I kept applying for jobs in places like the BBC and Sky and Super Channel. The Guardian newspaper had a special media jobs section every Monday so I would get it and apply for anything that sounded interesting. Meanwhile I enjoyed my job at the shop and also exploring London on my days off. I really liked visiting the Science Museum which was fascinating and also the Geology and Natural History Museum which were all very good. I also enjoyed exploring the new docklands area of London which was just being finished. They had these driverless trains running around the docklands area which were great fun to go on.

There was always something new to do in London, and unlike Dublin a lot of stuff was open on Sundays (which was my day off). In the evenings Mrs Cunniah used to like cooking and sometimes gave me some lovely spicy curry meals from her native land.

Just before Christmas I had a job interview with a fairly new satellite TV station called Lifestyle Screen Sport. They had been advertising for a video library role and I reckoned that was something I could do. They had some really nice offices right in the centre of London in Wardour Street, and then their studios and technical department was a few streets away in Fouberts Place just off Carnaby Street.

The day after the interview I found out I had got the job and I'd be starting there in the new year ! I was delighted and looking forward to the fresh start it would give after a fairly turbulent year. Satellite TV was about to reach a whole new audience with the launch of the Astra satellite in early 1989 and now I was going to be a part of it.

December 21st, 1988 was the night of the Lockerbie disaster, and I was in my room in the house in Leyton when the first newsflash came on. It was a dreadful tragedy and all the sadder for being so close to Christmas. I flew out of Heathrow myself just two nights later. That was my first visit home since I had gone over to England back in August. It was a very nice Christmas back with my parents and aunty, though I ended up with the flu for some of it. 1988 had certainly been a

year of change, not just for me but the world too. The old cold war also now seemed to be ending thanks to Gorbachev. And another thing that happened that Christmas was that all the remaining pirate radio stations had closed down and gone off the air. This was to clear the airwaves before the arrival of the new independent local stations in the new year. It was the end of that era, but they lived on in our memories, and on the many cassette tapes that had been recorded of their output during their time on air.

1989

I went back to London on January 1st, 1989 on the first flight out of Dublin of the new year and brought with me a big suitcase full of stuff from home. Things like my favourite music cassette tapes and books and lots of warm clothes. It was a cold and foggy morning arriving back into Leytonstone tube station that day, and I must admit it was a bit hard going back to London after being at home with my folks for Christmas. But I had my new job about to start so I was looking forward to that.

I started working at Lifestyle Screen Sport the following day and began learning about the library system and who everyone was. The video library and technical areas were all in the basement and the offices were up on the 4th floor so I was certainly going to be kept fit running up and down between the two. The guy I was replacing was Robin Lurie and he was going to a new job, but he showed me how the library system worked and what I'd be needing to do. Basically, it involved making sure all the video recording tapes were edited correctly to the right lengths and in the right number of parts. I had to make sure they were all delivered to the transmission suite in time too and collect them afterwards.

Quite a few of the programmes were from America and they needed all kinds of customs waybills filled out before they could get sent back. There wasn't much space in the library so any delay in sending stuff back caused a big backlog. There was another guy working there too - Andy Rowe, but a couple of months after I started, he got a promotion to a new job in one of the production offices upstairs. So they hired another librarian: Donna Byrne, who was also from Dublin. It was nice to have another Irish person working there, and Donna's boyfriend Gareth who worked in the editing department was also from Ireland so there was another Irish connection.

The Astra satellite was launched, and it immediately was a game changer for the satellite stations. Up to then they had used a satellite called Intelsat but it had only a small number of transponders, and so the stations had needed to share transponders. Now the Astra satellite allowed each station their own transponder so Screen Sport could now go 24 hours a day, and Lifestyle could extend its hours into the afternoon and evening.

It was a fun place to work and I made a lot of new friends. A few evenings each week a group of us would go to the White Horse pub which was just a few doors away. There was always a great atmosphere in there, and plenty of laughs. Some of the new friends I made in the new job included Martyn Taylor and Jake Lior, as well as Nikki Cooper. It was nice to be working with people from loads of different places and backgrounds.

The programmes we were broadcasting were a curious mix of old American gameshows like *The Price is Right*, as well as American soap operas like *The Search for Tomorrow* and *The Edge of Night*. We also broadcast a chat show hosted by Sally Jesse Raphael and some really odd cookery shows. David Hamilton the veteran DJ came in once a week to record the segments that went in between the programmes. Screen Sport meanwhile was being broadcast from a neighbouring transmission suite, and it had the added complications that it broadcast in about 6 different languages at the same time. The audio would all be on different tapes to the video. Sometimes this led to mix ups and you'd find out they broadcast a golf game, but the German commentary would be from a basketball match by mistake.

For the first few months I was still living in Mrs Cunniahs house in Leyton but in May I moved into a new flat share at The Common in Ealing. It was a great place to live and a really nice view out the back windows looking at the squirrels in the trees in the large back gardens. Ealing was a really nice part of London and had a great shopping centre, which was something that I hadn't had in Leyton. To get to and from work I took the central line from Ealing Broadway to Oxford Circus. It was a nice journey with a good stretch of it being above ground rather than underground. (The tube ride to Leyton had been almost all underground which was ok in the winter but in spring and summer I didn't want to be underground as much). Quite a few times I also took the overground mainline train from Ealing Broadway to Paddington station and walked from there to Oxford Circus and Fouberts place.

There was a tube and train strike for a few days during that spring and summer, but the company sent taxis out to collect all the staff and bring us home again.

At the weekends if the weather was good, I'd sit out in Hyde park reading books and listening to music. And I'd sometimes meet some people to chat to who were visiting London and took me for a local. There was some great music around that summer too including "Eternal Flame" by the Bangles and "Song for Whoever" by the Beautiful South. Madonna also had a big hit with "Like A Prayer"

I also joined a club called the London Irish network which was a social club that organised events like trips to the cinema and pub quizzes. One thing I really loved about London was the great cinemas, especially those around Leicester square. Sometimes there'd be world premieres going on. Some of the big movies that year were "Back to the Future Part 2" (which I saw in one of the biggest cinemas in Leicester Square) and also "Born on the 4th July".

I really liked central London, especially around Oxford Street and Regent Street. Though one weekend I remember there was a big riot on Regent Street against the 'poll tax' which had just been brought in. That summer I went on one last holiday with my parents. I flew down to Malaga from Gatwick on a Britannia Airways Boeing 767 meeting up with them down in Spain. It was a nice holiday for us all as I was all grown up now.

In early August Donna Byrne who I was working with in the video library was moving to another job and that meant there was a job vacancy for an Assistant Transmission Controller. So I got in touch with my old friend Bobby Spaine who was over in Dublin and asked him if he might be interested. We had kept in touch after the closure of Energy 103 the previous year, and he had very kindly made some radio recordings for me from Ireland while I was over in the UK. I asked him if he'd be interested and he came over for an interview for the job and started the following week.

Some of the other great songs around that time included "Ride on Time" by Black Box and "Poison" by Alice Cooper. (As you can see, I have a pretty eclectic and varied taste in music!).

Another thing I remember that happened around that time was the Marchioness disaster when one of the cruise boats on the River Thames crashed and sank with a lot of people lost.

Meanwhile I was working away at Lifestyle and Screen Sport. It was great having other Irish people around at work, as it certainly made me feel less homesick. My immediate manager was a lovely lady called Tina McCann and she was from Liverpool but had some Irish family connections. For me It was also nice that Dublin was only an hour away by plane from Heathrow. And the good news was that the airfares were now dropping. There was now a good bit of competition on the Dublin-London route and you could get a return flight for just £59. British Midland had also started to fly between London and Dublin joining British Airways. Aer Lingus, Ryanair, Dan Air and Club Air (a joint venture with Virgin Atlantic).

A few times British Airways would put on a big Boeing 757 if it was a busy weekend and I got my first chance to fly on one of them, on one of those weekends. Another time Aer Lingus had hired in an American Trans Air widebody L 1011 aircraft and it was a real treat to get to fly on it. Sometimes British Airways and Aer Lingus would also use the older and smaller BAC 1-11 aircraft and I also got to go on them a couple of times. Though most of the time it was Boeing 737s. Club Air used a Boeing 727 and I got to go on that too. Though they only went to and from Luton so it wasn't very convenient. The only one I didn't get to try was Dan Air who went from Gatwick, and it was quite a long trek to get to that airport. By comparison it was very easy to get to Heathrow as the tube station was right underneath terminal 1 and I could use my London underground travel pass.

A few times I'd go to Dublin for a weekend and get an early flight back on Monday morning and still be in work before a lot of the other staff even though I'd flown in from another country that day!

Lifestyle \ Screen Sport was quite like Energy 103, in that it was a great fun place to work, and I made a lot of new friends. These included Pete Hammond, Mike Saunders, Spencer, Jeff, Mark Lynch, and a lot of the other video editors and technicians who worked down in the basement with us.

That autumn and winter the world was changing fast as the Berlin wall came down. The cold war really was over.

One interesting event that autumn was the Cable and Satellite TV show at Earl's court. This was a big gathering of stations and retailers selling satellite dishes and aerials. And I got a free ticket and went along, and while there met Sybil Fennell and Chris Carey who had a stand and were marketing their satellite receivers. It was great to see them again and it was also the first time I had seen Sybil since the birth of their son.

The eighties were now coming to an end and the Lifestyle Screen Sport Christmas party was a great way to celebrate the decade and remember all the songs and music that had been its soundtrack.

I flew home for Christmas 1989 with my parents and aunty Kathleen. And this time I didn't get the flu! One of the last events of the decade was a big dinner party for Aunty Kitty's 90th birthday. This was a great occasion and brought the whole family together.

And that was the 1980s. What a rollercoaster ride of a decade! I went from being a schoolboy in primary school to be a full adult living and working in a different country. Of course, there were some regrets and sad days too, the passing of my grandmother, and my cousin Orla, the closedown of the radio stations, and I was never able to find my old friend Ian. But there were a lot of good memories too, finishing up school, starting my first proper job, getting on the radio, flying on the 747, 757, 727, BAC 1-11, 737, L-1011 and 767 and getting my own places to live.

I still have all my old cassette tapes and sometimes I'll put them on and go back and remember the 1980s, listening to all the songs from Aha, the Pet Shop Boys, Go West, Climie Fisher, Paul Young, Dexys Midnight Runners, The Jam and Leval 42.

Now if only I had a time-machine!!



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