

## Mr. Blue Sky

You never forget the feeling of being eighteen, do you? For a shy grammar-school boy growing-up with only the vaguest idea of what to do with his life, eighteen was the first year of adventure. And I had *keys*!

There's a certain type of teenager – I guess they're mostly boy-type teenagers – for whom keys are a potent symbol. They spell trust, authority, independence - things grown-ups take for granted. For the luckiest eighteen year-olds, one of those keys will start-up a car, and so it was for me. I'd scrimped and saved through various Saturday jobs and bought an ancient, rickety Singer Chamois (basically a Hillman Imp a with walnut-veneer dashboard). And I'd spent ages lovingly installing the latest stereo radio so I could listen to the new local stations that were starting to spring-up back then.

But I haven't told you yet about the best keys of all. This was a big, bold bunch that were made for industrial-strength locks. They were the keys to Rymans The Stationers, and I was *the only Saturday boy in the whole company to be trusted with them!* You simply can't imagine the thrill of sauntering up to the shop-front, casually swinging the keys, to let in the staff for another day selling the latest electronic calculators and the brightest felt-tip pens. It doesn't sound much now, but when you're eighteen it means everything. It means you're suddenly a person in your own right, with adult responsibilities and your first sniff of power. Power had the smell of Tippex back then.

I loved my new local radio station – what's not to love when Sheena Easton's riding high in the charts? And on schooldays I only had to turn the car ignition key for the radio to blast from the speakers. But on Saturdays I had a different little ritual. I didn't like the soul music on Saturday evenings, so after I'd locked the shop and found the car I made a point of slipping the cassette into its slot before I fired-up the engine. Then I'd motor home to the sounds of *ELO's Greatest Hits*, another day done and the evening happily ahead.

One Saturday I forgot, and my whole life changed. It's the tiniest, tiniest thing. I turned the ignition key without remembering to push-home the cassette tape. And in the moment that followed there was no soul music on the air. Instead the DJ was doing one of his occasional 'public service announcements', appealing for volunteers. Volunteers for a *radio station*, broadcasting on a closed loop to a hospital. You cheer-up the patients and you learn the skills of being a radio DJ. Wow!

Thirty years have passed since that tiny moment, and I've spent them all in a delightful, happy, lucky, career in radio. I'm writing this while awaiting latest audience figures for a big station I now run on the south coast. The sun's shining and going through my head is 'Mr Blue Sky'. You know, from *ELO's Greatest Hits*.