

PATRIK GARTEN

THE RADIO 4U STORY

With great thanks to all Radio 4U staff and everybody who
helped to make Radio 4U possible

When I lived in Germany everybody called me crazy, now people only say : " Don't worry he's from Germany".

For me, Radio started sometime in 1971 when I was seven. After I got my first transistor radio, life was no longer the same; and that very receiver was never switched off for the next 20 years.

I was eight when I gained the first experience with electric gear, setting up my massive electric model railway, until then my dad's privilege.

It seemed there was only one goal: getting into Radio. Soon I started my first attempts to create my own radio plays, took tape recorders out on the streets to interview people ("do you believe in god?") and tried to impress granny with my (butch) DJ Voice.

This is now where my friend Wilfried Fritz (Willy) comes in. We are both the same age, but already as a child Willy was an electronic genius.

Soon we attempted to use the sparking nature of car ignition coils for radio transmissions; an attempt bound to fail.

Nevertheless the first working LW transmitter left Willy's production line in 1975 and only two months later we were proud eleven year olds, stocked up with self built FM transmitters.

Now, Germany is a country where you get your hover closed down for illegal broadcasting if it causes interference with your neighbour's television. Obviously, facing heavy fines, our parents were not too pleased about our excursions into Radioland.

Of course this was not reason enough for us stop, but certainly we were not in the best position to gain their support in this respect.

The next years were mostly spent with pop-ing up the otherwise boring and, then, government controlled radio waves, always one foot in prison, but fortunately never caught.

Those adventures would fill a whole book in its own right, stories about how to broadcast without a mixer and still get a great output or our first 48 hours non stop broadcasts or how we pretended to have interviews, live via satellite from Bombay, which were in fact coming from the living room via the in-house telephone.

Without going too far off the main aim, to write about Radio 4U, I would still like to take the opportunity to describe my most favourite mishap which ever happened to me while on the air.

We were about 13 when Willy and I had a fairly regular programme called the Ghost Hour, which went on the air between midnight and 1 am, usually from under the blanket. The purpose of this semi-comedy was to inform listeners of the whereabouts of Count Dracula and his friends, sometimes using outside broadcasts.. (Willy reported live from the other end of the room via CB radio pretending to be in the local grave yard.)

One night however, the programme was in its final quarter, we told our audience that there was a vicious ghost in the studio and that we had to hide in the wardrobe in fear for our lives, verifying this by talking into an empty drinking glass.. At that moment the door opened and my father shouted "That's it! I'll put a stop to this!" meaning of course that we should switch off and go to sleep. But those ghostly words went on the air.....

- Willy faded the next song in. We were told off and were ordered to pull the plug. So Willy hit a couple of switches. "Is it off now?" -"Yes." -"Good, now go to sleep."

Once he was gone I asked Willy to switch it back on. -"It`s ok " he replied , "We are still on the air, I only hit some useless buttons."

That kind of thing went on for several years and RADIO HABI was always present, at church and community festivals, school trips etc.

At about the same time I joined the school campus newspaper and eventually became the publisher of my own campus journal. Even though as a charity it was not allowed to make any profits, I still got enough out of it to pay for my travels all over Western Europe and Turkey..

On one of the last trips in 1985 I came (once again) to London. On a Saturday afternoon, my second day in town, I was sitting in Trafalgar Square chatting to a bloke (Andre) about his HiFi and his job. It turned out that he was involved in a bid for a community radio licence.

The British Government invited applicants to bid for 21 community radio licences.

To support his application Andre and his sponsors (the Central London YMCA) were running an in-house Radio Station for the YMCA Hotel.

This Station (CLR) now needed a production studio installed, so I got myself a job as engineer and was soon up my neck in English radio.

Andre introduced me to Angela who was the music adviser at BBC Local Radio HQ when we at CLR, were waiting for the government to grant us a licence. She offered me a clerical position at her office, part time, just to keep my head above the water.

At christmas time everybody expected the result. Come 1986 and no news about the licence. By easter we were told to wait "only a few more weeks"

-One Sunday in June the papers dropped the bomb: the government is postponing their plans indefinitely and a white paper was to be expected in the autumn.

This was the very Sunday that Germany lost the World Cup final but I was offered a free return air ticket to Belfast.

Actually, I happened to be at a party where an American was giving his non-refundable ticket away because his friend had been run over by a bus and broken his leg while jogging..

As you probably can imagine it did not take more than half a second before I made up my mind, especially as Ireland was the only country in Western Europe I had not visited yet.

Next morning I was in Ireland. I really enjoyed the beautiful countryside but even more so the peculiar natives I came across.

Do I need to say more?

After a great week of travelling I was already envisaging the London working day again,

when, on my way back from Derry to the airport, a lad told me about the freedom which radio was experiencing in the South. According to him Donegal was only being covered by weekend amateurs.

I felt like I was in a bakery, standing on a bun with the currants going up my leg, causing my brain to spark....

Radio 4U was born..

I had a plane to catch and so further research had to be conducted from London.

Back at the BBC I went through the news archives libraries and I sent an inquiring letter to the Department of Communications in Dublin.

The reply to this was obviously very discouraging and mentioned the new proposals with heavy fines and even imprisonment.

Nevertheless I already knew that the truth was somewhere off this statement, but even in my most daring dreams I did not expect the total freedom I was going to experience a year later.

Eventually an article written by Chris Carey finally made up my mind.

The last thing I wanted to do, was to get into trouble with the Dublin authorities. Even if I would broadcast from their territory, the signal should not be receivable there. Consequently if another government would object to my transmissions I would get warning before anybody would touch me.

Also, this way I would have some protection in case the proposals should become law.

If I would have aimed for the British mainland I would have come across too many obstacles, so what about the North ?

Fair enough, but where was my market? -And what about the competition? -You don't need a lot of imagination, just a bit research, to stumble across Derry.

A city with 100,000 potential listeners and no serious commercial FM operators in sight, ideally sited at the border with magnificent geography. The eastern side of the city was situated towards a potential transmitter like the audience in a theatre would be facing the stage; easily accessible and no apparent obstacles in the way.

After drawing the plan it is necessary to dig a hole and lay the foundations.....

A radio station is only as good as its transmitter. So where should I get one? One phone call to Willy and I had the probably best engineer working for me. There was only a minor catch, we were, so far, operating in the below one Watt range, good enough for small neighbourhood radio..... -but a whole city?

To double your range you have to increase your power 16 times, accordingly 16 Watts for a large neighbourhood and 256 Watts for a whole town.

It did not occur to me at the time, that being 255 Watts short, was like asking Willy for a miracle, especially as 25 Watt transmitter diagrams are about the hottest item on the German black market. But Willy told me to

leave this problem in his trustworthy hands.

Even more careless was my attitude towards a sufficient music supply, namely records, and had it not been for Angela I might have got myself in a big mess.

My worries were more related to everything under the headline Business Plan while my friends and relatives were concerned about the political and legal situation in Northern Ireland.

All the advice I got was full of caution even though not everybody went quite as far as my Granny, consulting a fortune teller who predicted dooms day.

If you ask Willy for a wonder it will take him only days to fulfil the task, but for miracle he might need a bit more time.

It was already October 1986 when I set out for structural preparations such as raising the necessary finance and to give Willy the final go-ahead. By then I was promoted to Angela's assistant after she realised that not only am I a good engineer but that I also know about music. I now had a fairly permanent fulltime position at the BBC and was not too much in a rush to get to Ireland, also giving Willy a bit more breathing space. Some people actually started doubting that I will go at all and some were probably hoping that I wouldn't.

At the BBC I had the honour to assist Angela with the difficult task of introducing the first computerised music selection system in Europe.

After years of persuasion and despite all the usual BBC objections Angela was setting up the American Selector System for two Local Radio Stations, on a trial basis.

Selector is a computer programme which compiles a whole day's music running order for a station within only three minutes.. (A BBC network producer takes about two hours to compile the music for a three hour show.) Opponents of this system claim that a machine cannot produce a radio programme; but that is not the true fact.

You can only get out of a computer what you put in, all this system does, is relieving you of unnecessary time spent in record libraries. You are in control of what music it will schedule and in which order, according to what policy, as you are dictating your station policy to your computer. Therefore you will play your station sound strictly to your rule, rather than to the rule of your disc jockey who usually doesn't give a toss about station policy -but more about this later.

Unfortunately I could not afford Selector for Radio 4U.

Anyway, I left the Beeb despite a lot of other lucrative offers, loaded up my famous van with all the gear: aerials, transmitter, a whole studio set-up, maintenance equipment, tonnes of tape material and most of all, what was to become the biggest Irish radio library outside the RTE : loads of tapes and records. (You'll be surprised what you can stuff in a Volkswagen.)

In the late afternoon of the May Bank Holiday (Monday 25 May 1987) I left London and arrived Tuesday morning at

dawn in Larne.

My second step on Irish soil and this time I had no intention to leave.

The plan was to sleep before setting off for Donegal, but it was a nice sunny morning and I was much too excited. So I kept the engine running to arrive at about half six in, still sleepy, Derry.

The planned prime position was Muff or maybe the hills of Inishowen just north of it. My second choice was Burnfoot another village further to the west. Both places were less than five air miles from the city centre. Actually from what he could see on the map Willy recommended Burnfoot. But planning stage was over, I was on my own and all I had was the hope of finding a place at all, to use as Studio and Transmitter site. Setting off north I passed the Culmore Road army check-point and thought I was now in the south .

-Foolish me !

All my worries about customs were gone and I already started browse for some suitable premises when I saw this customs check point appearing in front of my eyes.

I felt like Smuggler King when I passed through with all that gear on board.

Seriously I examined the area but did not seem to be too lucky in finding something suitable. So I remembered Willy's advice and aimed for Burnfoot. An old burned out night club and a seemingly disused garage gave me hope to ask at the local shop. The keeper advised me to approach somebody down the road who might have some suitable place.

When I knocked at the door his wife opened, I was asked in and offered a cup of tea.

Yes I was in Ireland !

After explaining my plans she said that she had to see her husband about it and asked me to come back in the evening.

Ah well, at least I knew myself to be in good hands and approaching high noon on this summer-like hot May day I left and found a place to sleep on Fahn Beach.

Once I woke up I started spying on my competition.

There was the British Broom Cupboard (BBC), not too much to handle, ILR Downtown Radio, which is extremely unpopular in the city and of course the RTE, which I feared strongly. I already knew and respected Radio 2 from my previous visit. -And there were the south border pirates, more than I expected : all of them with an FM signal so terrible, you would not even expect something like it in the remotest parts of Italy.

NWCR was the strongest and longest established station in the area, popular mainly west of the Foyle. They were feeding their Medium Wave Signal in a 300 Watts FM transmitter (great engineering!) The station format was country music (need I say more?). Radio North played also country, popular mainly east of the river.

Much as I appreciate country music to listen to their presentation you had to be brain dead; at least that is what I assumed.

A mixture of Country and MOR, reasonably

well presented came from Letterkenny's DCR, but they could never establish an audience in the city, partly due to permanent trouble with their relay north of Strabane.

And lastly there was Radio Nova, not related to Dublin's Nova. This Nova aired pop and chart music and was run by the local mafia, to say the least. Regarding the music format this station was probably Radio 4U's most likely local competitor, but then again maybe not. --More about the station with the pinched name later.

In the evening I returned to see the man in charge who was not too happy about me running a radio station from his premises. It was one of those cases "I can't help you but I know a man who will." -and so he took me up to see Tom Brolly who had a cottage which was previously used by City Sound Radio, a predecessor to the local Radio Nova.

Tom's only objections were the proposed changes in the law. -And there was me, a foreigner, telling a local about his country's law.

"Well, come back in the morning and have a look at it"

That certainly made my day and the worst fear I had was overcome. I had my Station premises and from now on the future was looking bright, even though I was not entirely sure about the legal situation.....

Next morning I was back, right on time, just to see a police car parked outside Tom's house.

"Argh !!" Running a Radio Station was probably not quite as legal as I thought. -I suppose I could set up a station in Portugal instead.....

But so far I had not done anything illegal as far as I knew. "Lets go in the house to get kicked out of the country" I thought.

So I knocked on the door and Marie, Tom`s wife opened. I was asked into the kitchen where the guards were. Marie offered me a cuppa.

They all chatted away about local stuff and my hopes were raised that they would not know what I was up to. Then Marie left the kitchen and the gardes turned to me: "So you want to open up a Radio Station?" All hopes were down the drain now. -"Ahm.....yes ..but it is supposed to broadcast only to the North...."

---"We wish you good luck with it." was the most sensational reply I ever got in my life.

Now I knew that I was alright.

Marie took me up to see the cottage and the rest is history. The place was usable and I was more than happy to have reached that far, even though the straightest optimist would not assume this as the headquarters of an up and coming business empire..

It took me a whole day to clear out a massive

pile of garbage which had been accumulated in the cottage, and at the end of this first day I just got my van unloaded but no installation had been touched yet.

I achieve most if I get up late in the morning and carry on non stop for about 18 hours. So, one night at about 4 am, a police car pulled up outside the studio. After their initial surprise to find me still working they asked if I was already on the air, but I had to keep them in suspense for some more days.

Considering the circumstances I did not do too badly, finishing the studio the following Sunday, on the seventh day since leaving London.

The basic design was a desk top with two turntables at the far end, in between was the mixing unit and plenty of writing / working space in front.

I knew from previous experience how much DJ`s like to fiddle with sound control buttons, putting too much bass on their voice with the intention to sound butch. The result of those practices is usually a dull mumble on the receivers end.

No chance for those bad habits at Radio 4U: I bought a straight forward mixer from the shelf and expanded it to have two studio microphones and two record players attached.

Two further channels were switchable for a) cassette drive one or reel to reel -and b) cassette drive two or telephone .

I also knew how terrible DJ`s are when it comes to reading meters in order to keep the right volume level.

To overcome this obstacle, I preadjusted the mixer inputs permanently (fiddle free zone) and led the mixer output through a built in limiter and equalizer before feeding the very first stereo encoder in the North West.

Limiter and equalizer were all manufactured by Willy and the encoder was even designed by him.

All the jocks had to worry about was to open the right fader at the right time.

However a few experts were allowed to play: the Aiwa cassette player had a secret speed control button; and I can assure you that some rather funny trailers and links were produced with this facility.

This had nothing to do with Station Policy to play the silly, then current, chart hit "Star Trekking" at double speed to make it sound even sillier.

Special thought was given to the microphone facility. Do you know the echo sound or even feed backs of pirate radios just because the studio monitors are left on? Not so at Radio 4U. They were switched by the mike fader as well as a tape recorder upstairs for ROT's (recording of transmission). By recording all voice overs I was in full control of whatever went on the air. None of the Donegal operators ever bothered that much about security and nobody had that tight station policy about the do's and don'ts

Of course, the microphone fader operated an On Air light too. Really it was a bit small and so Marie suggested that I should attach a further warning sign to it. -You should have seen her face when she saw this little tiny typed note (smaller than the light itself) next

time she came up to the cottage.

A reasonable headache gave me the question for a telephone. When I asked Telecom Eirann how long it would take to get a line, I was told that I would be given an answer to this question only within three months, provided I'd apply for a phone in the first place. Some people in the area actually waited for ten years to get a telephone. I had a business to run and so my only option was to call British Telecom Mobile Communication for a portable radio phone. Asked for when I would need it my reply was "Yesterday", so it was delivered the next morning.

Back in 1987 mobile phones were still very expensive, and even though the Telecom transmitter was within view on top of the next hill the service used to be very unreliable. This yuppyish feature was the most expensive single item within the RADIO 4U operation.

On Monday (01.06.1987) and Tuesday I started to tackle a remarkable bit of RF engineering: the RADIO 4U transmitter.

Willy supplied me with two transmitters, (don't laugh!) a 35 Watts and a 10 Watts FM unit, as emergency reserve.

As I mentioned before, to supply a city like Derry one would require at least 250 Watts transmitter power. Now, if you give a 35 Watts transmitter signal on an omnidirectional aerial (eg. dipole) you will receive 35 Watts ERP (effectively radiated power) in all directions from your antenna.

Radio 4U was planned as a City Station and therefore I could afford to restrict the signal

to a small beam directed at Derry. Considering the distance between the transmitter and the City, a 45 degrees beam was sufficient.

Radio waves work quite similarly to electric light. If you put a mirror behind a light bulb you restrict the light into just one direction but double its brightness. You can achieve the same effect with radio waves by using directional antennas. Radio 4U's was a nine element Yagi antenna reaching 45 degrees with a gain of transmission power times 12. Accordingly the effective radiated power of Radio 4U's first transmitter was 420 Watts. (35 W X 12 = 420 W ERP)

Only Willy could come up with such an Idea !

Besides the obvious low cost transmitter, there were some more advantages with this system, such as, low wear and tear of the equipment and extremely low running costs (£2 for electricity per month compared with £ 48).

On Wednesday I started the first test transmission. By Friday I'd got so far that only the library needed sorting. That took me until 2 am Saturday .

In the meantime Tom persuaded Marie to do some voice-overs for me, some simple links like "420 Watts Music Power you are Listening to Radio 4U ". When she came up to the studio all her friends made jokes and told her that they would listen in on the wireless. After my reassurance that the recording session would not go on air and some professional guidance we managed to get quite a selection to keep the station going for several days.

On Saturday morning 06 June 1987, at 7am Radio 4U went officially on the air, Frequency: 97.4 FM

7am - 9am non stop music

9am - 9pm music and information (programme with very low scale DJ-talk: me, announcing songs and reading out infamous Guinness Book Records. I also played old BBC comedy records and some of Marie's links or Station jingles)

9pm - 11pm Stereo Sequence of Featured Artists . Originally designed to kill air time during the dark hours when people usually watch TV. This programme featured every evening one or two artists exclusively. The scale reached from Koko Taylor via Bruce Springsteen to even Beethoven, and the artists were often requested by the listeners.

11pm - midnight Rock Garten a heavy metal and comedy programme presented by Rock (me with a funny rough voice) who took the mickey out of his co-host (me with normal voice).

This programme received quite a lot of my efforts and gave me quite a bit of fun as it was the only slot where I actually featured by name as the presenting DJ -and people really believed that there were two different persons in the studio. Even months later somebody asked me about Rock and who he was.

My idea was to advertise Radio through radio and by 1pm on this very first day on air I already had two people popping into the studio volunteering as helpers.

Ok, I don't have to lose a lot of words about

them. The brightest ideas and the greatest enthusiasm cools down very quickly after the third stylus goes in the bin.

Within the next few days I realised that there was a need for news. I do not like this system of News On The Hour, even though there is some convenience for the listener and it's cheap to pinch. At CLR we were licensed to use IRN (Independent Radio News) which is used by most Independent British Stations.

Unfortunately Downtown did not subscribe to this service and IRN was not available yet on the Astra Satellite. So, there was no way of an easy bit of stealing. Anyway news in Ireland do not quite meet with my idea of objective and unbiased journalism.

My guidelines were not to report about any violence of any kind. Exempted only were international conflicts and revolutions abroad, such as the ousting of General Noriega (Panama). The only time Radio 4U ever reported about terrorism in Ireland was the horrific Enniskillen bomb. Even then we only reported briefly and mainly repeated the condemnations expressed by leading members of both sides of the community.

Radio 4U was criticised for this policy and listeners openly admitted they were changing channels to listen to these news, even though the Radio 4U News Service was otherwise the most comprehensive one about. That might be the price to pay for strict and clean journalism but then again I found it important to establish some contrast to the warmongering sensationalism of other stations, especially Downtown Radio and Ulster TV.

Reported violence will only lead to further

violence.

On the other hand Radio 4U's channel was always open for any kind of political statements from both sides of the community, however extreme they might have been. We presented anything but a clean shaven, flat american style journalism either and were sometimes very controversial indeed.

News reflected on Radio 4U were usually taken from, and double checked with, several sources.

A very important part of our policy was never to name the city as "Londonderry" or "Derry".

This rule applied to news as well as any other part of our programme. Derry was to be called the "City". Only in impossible cases, such as some news items, were presenters allowed to say the name, but both versions had to be used in the item; eg.: "Today in Londonderry people were late for work, because Derry bus drivers went on strike."

(The reason I tend to call the City "Derry" in this book is only because I am too lazy to type "Londonderry" all the time,-I hope you don't mind.)

All these policy guide lines were very strictly enforced and were never broken during the whole period that Radio 4U existed.

Even though a bit controversial at times, these rules were probably the main reason why Radio 4U was the only station which was popular with both sides of the community.

Coming back to the very first days I decided

not to do news on the hour but to transmit two extended news and information magazines. The first issue was during lunchtime (11 - 12pm) the second was an early evening edition 6:00 - 6:30 pm. The programme format was: song, two news items, song, two news items, song...etc. Towards the end of the programme the information content got a bit lighter with the weather forecast and in the mornings: horoscopes.

Before I bought a TV with Teletext it was like the old junior pirate days with news taken from the papers. After I failed twice to come back from the paper shop in time, Marie volunteered to bring the papers up in the mornings and, as it happened, she used to stay on and make us a cuppa while I presented the news. It did not take a lot of persuasion to make her read one news item and then another and after a couple of days Radio 4U had it's second permanent newscaster, and probably one of the best you have ever heard.

Marie was a real professional. Half an hour before the programme started, she came up to the studio to prepare the news, usually with the latest updates from her TV's teletext. While Mary's part of the programme was well edited the other part contained scruffy Pat's yobbo-news: preparing the next news item while reading the current, not forgetting to line up the a record simultaneously. Thereby I was often forced to do some chit-chat with Marie on the air while trying to get my act together.

One can easily imagine how the introduction and the run down of the headlines sounded, especially with my attitude. Then again

Marie's more organised approach was a good contrast and gave the programme a special flair. Talking less seriously between the news items gave the listeners some breathing space, so that we did not lose their attention. Soon those links became more and more of the private kind. To cut a long story short, we had a lot of fun doing the programme and the listeners could certainly hear the result. We came up with a lot of funny ideas such as inventing a new, 13th star sign every morning (eg, "Librarian") and making up a horoscope for it. This mixture of fun and news actually got out of hand on a few occasions: One day Marie's seven year old son even asked Tom: "Dad, why do they only talk about sex.....?"

A disaster happened the day Fred Astaire died, when I started "I haven't stopped dancing yet" (Gonzales) right after this news item. (-Bad move!) Anyway our style was probably the most entertaining way to present news, a way only allowed on pirate radio.

This fun-packed, sometimes even raunchy but clear and straight-forward presentation of facts is the style which made Radio 4U.

Like the "Rock Garten" late night programme, which provided Comedy for those who don't like Metal, the news service offered light entertainment for those who had difficulties digesting heavy information.

It was during the second week of running of Radio 4U that I showed the first signs of depression and exhaustion, doing 17 hours of programmes on my own.

Two new recruits started as DJs, the only jocks I ever had with radio experience prior to Radio 4U . Even though I was glad, at last, to have some relief, these two lads got on my nerves immensely, only for me to have to sit down and listen to their ROTs: the typical bad pirate habits of announcing every song, actually making up the release date of the record, giving 20,000 time checks, telling the audience that they are listening to the best station and most of all, wishing the housewives a "Good Morning" 13 times during a one hour programme. Let alone the fact that they were operating under false names.

Back to the policy drawing board :

Only announce songs if they are not well known, do not bore listeners with information which they are bound to know anyway. Do not announce time checks at any other time than early mornings, because this puts unnecessary pressure on the listener. Time checks make the listener either nervous if expecting some appointment or bores him if he listens to the wireless to pass time. In either case you might lose his / her attention.

Also, do not direct greetings to a specific group of listeners as this makes other listeners feel unwelcome. Lastly don't tell fibs, if for example you don't know the precise release date of a record then just don't announce it, because if you tell tales, somebody out in Radioland will prove you wrong and you'll lose not only your own authority but make a laughing stock of the whole station.

All in all, don't tell your audience that you are the best, just be the best by what you are doing.

As far as names are concerned, I think this is a personal matter and I left it up to the jocks to decide what they wanted to be called, but it was customary just to use the real christian name on air.

Obviously old pirates with those usual habits were no good for Radio 4U and in future I tried to steer clear of big headed oldtimers who know everything better than everyone else .

I think it was the 10th or 11th of June at approx. 2:30 pm when a young lad came up the station with his mother. Actually he was quite lucky to catch me as I just put on a tape to nip out for a while.

His name was Michael and he was just in the middle of his O-Level exams. Michael must have been one of the very first Radio 4U listeners. He also introduced all his pals to the Station and they all thought it was quite fab. When he heard the staff recruitment jingle he must have seen his big chance.

Even though he was a bit young, I never turned anybody down without giving them a fair chance. So we agreed that he would give me a shout as soon as the old exams were over.

To be quite honest, I did not expect too much of this meeting. Too many people came up to enquire, and then never showed again, in those early days.

Some days later I cancelled "Rock Garten" , the late night Rock show, for several reasons: I assumed that there was not too much demand for such a regular programme, I ran out of material, music as well as jokes and, frankly, I could not be bothered any more.

Instead I resumed ordinary programming like daytime Radio 4U from 11 pm until closedown and extended transmission time until 1 am.

This programme was recorded and repeated the following morning between 7 and 9 am. Again, it was me who usually presented this programme over the following months.

Being broadcast at two different times of the day I had to watch my words quite carefully. So I started every night / morning with the legendary greeting: "Radio 4U! Good morning, good evening, good night!" This phrase was copied by quite a few of Radio 4U DJ's later and soon became the typical greeting form by our presenters.

It was the beginning of week three. Marie co-hosted the news, the two oldtimers were on their way out, and at the end of the day I still had a 17 hours per day job. This was to change rather quickly.

Michael actually turned up and even brought his friend Ciaran. I sat them both down for about two hours and taught them Radio. Then they were put in the Hot Seat and I let them play records for an hour. Then I allowed them to fire a few jingles and finally their first voice over.

I kept on listening to their programme for two days in the mornings and only dropped in occasionally to give some tips. Eventually the two oldies, who were by then scheduled in the more favourable afternoons ruined their last chance. I replaced the morning slot with Declan K. and I could move the junior team in their place:

The Ciaran and Michael Afternoon Show was born.

If until now, all my efforts would not have been good enough to establish the station, the Ciaran and Michael Afternoon Show put Radio 4U on the map. The telephone was soon red hot and it was a real joy to listen to this witty and humorous presentation by those two 16 year old.

Ciaran and Michael were almost wiping the floor with Steve Wright (our strong BBC Radio One competitor).

The only reason they didn't was a technical problem. The Radio 4U signal was all over the City but Northern Ireland was still Medium Wave territory. Many people still had MW only receivers and those, who could pick up FM, did not have a clue about the necessity of using the old telescopic on their wireless. Even my old pirate friends used a hair curler as a makeshift aerial.

I had the cleanest signal, even cleaner than the Beeb's FM and was only beaten by RTE's Radio 2, if they played Compact Discs. Radio 4U was the very first private South Border Stereo operator and we were receivable all over the City. But Radio 4U was not strong enough and not AM enough to beat the biscuit out of the competition.

For a while I considered the idea of buying an AM-rig from England. This would have defeated the object of providing quality Radio and might have been dearer than upgrading the FM as recommended by Willy.

So, after consultation, I settled for the HEAD THROUGH THE WALL proposal and became even more determined to make people listen to FM.

I expected Willy to come over in August but for the next six weeks we had to make do with 400 Watts from the current base.

Let me wander off the actual broadcasting side of Radio 4U for a moment, and introduce Piepenbrink, a special Radio 4U staff member. Do not even try to pronounce his name; I called him after an acquaintance of my parents', because I thought that name was hilarious.

Two nights before opening the station I'd cleaned the cottage's chimney at two o'clock in the morning. Obviously not quite the time to sweep funnels, -anyway down on to the studio floor dropped three birds of the feathered kind, which I, in my ignorance of wildlife, assumed to be black birds. Of course these "black-birds" were in actual fact crows.

(If you just had a flash back to Granny's fortune teller, let me just add insult to injury: The locals believed, that the cottage was haunted.)

Two of the birds died shortly after, probably because of the cold at nights. Drastic situations require strong measures: I put Piepenbrink right in front of the heater at nights, and with the aid of good old fashioned porridge he became a big strong crow. Every spare minute I had I spent teaching him to fly.

Yes, I actually taught a bird to fly! Not a lot of Radio Managers can write this in their CV.

Once he understood this trick, he used to wake me in the mornings at seven when the station switched on automatically.

Until shortly before nine when Radio 4U went live he kept on dosing on my arm while I had another nap.

All day he followed me around, usually sitting on my shoulder. When I took him outside and threw him in the air, he came back like a boomerang. You could either play this game for hours or you had to run inside fast and slam the door to get rid of him.

When I came back from shopping and drove up the yard there was always this tok tok tok on the van roof and I knew Piepenbrink was there even before I had time to switch off the engine.

As soon as I opened the door he was back on the shoulder. Obviously he was freely flying about in the field behind the house but if I called his name he always came, like a dog.

There were only two things wrong with him, I had to lock him out when I spread butter on my bread, otherwise he used to divebomb in the butter box. Piepenbrink just loved to eat butter. His second fault was that he was always well behaved and kept very quiet unless you switched the microphone on the air. Then he could talk ! Probably he mixed with too many DJ's while he was young.

This little story explains why Radio 4U became known as The Station with the Green Van and the Crow.

Some more Want To Be DJ's came, tried and left, some of them were Ciarons` and Michael`s friends some were just other keen listeners. The next one to stay and to leave a lasting impression was Joe, resident DJ at the "Venue" night club in the City. His Radio 4U slot was scheduled one hour after the lunch time news magazine until the start of the Ciaron and Michael Show at 3 pm. Joe too was a real professional. His mixes were perfect and the new releases he brought in, blew a fresh breeze over the otherwise Old Gold, MOR oriented Radio 4U flavour.. Joe`s presentation was entertaining though he preferred to stick rather more to the music than talk. He was the typical Club DJ who had to stand behind the mixer to feel comfortable. Luckily the console was higher than usual studio desks.

The phone response to his programme was not bad, but was, by far, not comparable with the programme to follow. Also he had some regular callers, one of them, being the manager of the "Venue".

One day however, he called up but refused to speak to Joe: "I don't want to talk to you, Joe, I want to have a word with the crow." -You see, Piepenbrink was quite a star. A few days later he even came up with Joe, not being interested in the station, he just wanted to spend two hours playing with the crow.

On the 16th of August Piepenbrink died after being poorly for a few days. I assume that he must have eaten some poison in the fields. A Radio 4U legend died.

When I met Joe early this year (1991) he said: "We had a great time then, but once the crow died, that was it....."

I kept the studio decoration fairly plain with just a couple of stickers and badges from other, mainly foreign, radio stations and some defect records. This changed when Ciaron and Michael stuck a note on the wall thanking Joe for warming up their audience, which was countered by some other silly note.

Eventually the afternoon possies left their autograph for Joe with the message "flog it for a million once we become famous stars".

This sort of funny friction set off an avalanche of graffiti. Almost every programme team joined in, with more or less witty comments, notes and pictures and with the time our wall decoration became a real graffiti art exhibition.

Obviously, even though most locals in Bridgend and Muff could not pick up our signal (because it was directed, see above) the word about this ominous Radio 4U spread quickly, not at least because the van was flying through the village. Anyway, one of the nosy guys who dared to put his foot across the door, was Kieran. Before he could say no, he was recruited: same introduction like Ciaron and Michael and straight in the Hot Seat. He was ok, not really professional, but ok. Kieran introduced his friend Chris. He was ok too, actually he never made a bright impression on the air, but in his slightly ignorant way he was well funny. You could almost call him a natural Donegal Tommy Cooper. Chris and Kieran brought their pals around and sooner or later we forced everybody in front of the mike. Chris and Kieran had their fixed slots, mostly evenings and weekends, but the presence of their mates gave the radio station a second meaning: Radio 4U became also some sort

of a local meeting point.

Sometime between late June and early July a lad called Simon came along. He was a CB enthusiast and also a bit of an Anorak. Like so many before he was keen to face Radioland.

As I said earlier on, I always gave everybody a chance.

Now, Simon did not prove to be Radio 4U calibre but I have to thank him for introducing me to JP and Paul. Those two guys were invaluable and absolutely radio crazy. "Closedown" was the most hated word in their vocabulary.

Once they even went for a 24 hour marathon just to go down the pub afterwards and to plan the next record breaking non stop programme.

Radio to them was fun and that is what Radio 4U was supposed to be anyway.

By now we were quite a nice team and social get togethers became a vital part of our doings. The station was run by a mixture of fun, enthusiasm, creativity and pure socialising, guarded by an extremely strict constitution, the Radio 4U Policy.

This constitution was a guide line for speech input (see above), general discipline (eg. library rules) and most of all music programming. As long as you stuck to those basic rules, you were allowed everything you wanted.

This sort of management kept staff happy, supported creativity and produced a damn good output on the air.

Certainly there was a lot of discipline besides a good deal of laissez faire and, like any other manager, I was often the most hated person on board. One day Paul and JP found the headline "Is Your Boss A Jerk ?" in a newspaper. This clipping went straight onto the graffiti wall and was a substantial talking point for the next few days. You've got to see the funny side.....

Whenever I think back of those times, I remember more parties, outings, the communal run arounds in the Radio 4U Van, than the actually workings of the station. This obviously took up most of my day and was always on my mind, but the whole atmosphere around it was to become much more than dreaded work from which you go home after you finish your job.

Radio 4U became some kind of lifestyle.

The little cottage was the place to be if you had nothing else to do. Here you met friends, did a programme or you persuaded Pat to go for a spin in the van for a couple of pints.

Now, don't forget, a Radio Station is not like a corner shop which you can close when you feel like it. Radio is an ongoing business, 17 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Whatever you do, you have to organise all your time according to the requirements of the station.

As a station owner- manager you are "on call" 24 hours a day, and that applies to your scheduled work-time as well as the time

which you intend to keep spare for private leisure activities

Whenever we went to the pub, somebody had to stay behind. So did Declan T. once. A friend of JP and Paul. Declan T. was the latest recruit at the time. We came back late from the pub and he needed a lift home. So Paul took over while Marie and I drove Declan home. To our surprise Paul sounded absolutely great and very sober on the car radio. Nobody would ever have guessed that he was plastered. Only when we returned Paul confessed that he fell off the chair twice.

Even afterwards, the show had to go on: Well after midnight by now, it was time for some routine transmitter maintenance.

Paul and the other lads showed that they had other useful skills, apart from radio. The lads decorated the front hall in the cottage, which connected the entrance with the studio. More than a whole weekend was spent wallpapering, painting, hammering and carpet laying etc. Marie too, put herself out to get some second hand furniture, carpet and wallpaper etc.

Now we even had a proper party hall and some evenings the party noise and mood came across the air too. Some people in the street even asked me : "Did you lot have a good time last night". Fun was the theme on the air waves, but of course, not drunken disorderly quality. Some other stations followed our example and Donegal weekend evening programmes became quite relaxed and featured often a noisy background flair.

During the second week in August Willy arrived. With him came his friend Heiko, stacks of aluminium (for aerials), power tools, sprays and glues for electrical installations and the contents of a long order list which I'd posted to him. This list contained carpets and seat covers, a hover, and many more bits and pieces. (As I said before, even little VW's are big !!).

The plan was to increase the magic Radio 4U FM power. We intended to install the 35 Watts transmitter on a geographically better site and to quadruple its efficiency by stacking four of the nine element antennas on **one mast**.

As described before, those aerials give a 40 degrees beam and increased the radiated power output in this direction 12 times.

If you stack four of these antennas on top of each other (leave a gap of a half wavelength {1.5m}) you improve the radiation performance even more. Coming back to the example with the light bulb, it is like the difference between a flat mirror and a dish shaped mirror behind the source. Anyway the radiated power (ERP) was 35 Watts X 12 times gain X 4 sets of aerials = 1680 Watts (ERP).

I must advise you, that the more complicated an aerial construction is, the more losses you will have in junction terminals, Rf transformer loops and coax cable links. So when I spoke of 420 Watts ERP you could assume that the actual output (ERP) was really only 380 Watts , accordingly 1680 Watts were only about 1300 Watts (ERP) . But this makes hardly any difference if you bare in mind that you will have to increase your power 16 times to double your range.

Much more important for FM broadcasting is the location of the transmitter. Heiko , Willy and I spent almost two weeks doing test transmissions from various locations around Muff and Inishowen. We used the 10 Watts transmitter, with a car battery which really reduced the TX output to something between two and four Watts, depending on the charge of the battery. The signal was radiated by one nine element antenna provisionally mounted. Even with this (48 Watts ERP max.) set up we equalled our strongest competitor, NWCR, from some locations

Within that time we clocked up over 1500 miles with our motors for reception reports and even got some test equipment temporarily impounded by the RUC and British Customs. Eventually we settled for three possible locations. Going further up the hill, just behind the Burnfoot studio, did not prove to be too successful.

Up the hill, three miles further to the east, towards Muff was the best spot, and even though we got the permission from the landowner this site showed three disadvantages: the studio frequency to be used as link signal from the station to the main transmitter site would not have reached the City any more. (we would have had to redirect the studio antenna.) Also, even though cables were laid, the reconnection of that place to the National Grid would have taken some time, and lastly being unattended in the middle of nowhere the security problem worried me too.

The most favourable location was some private residential property high up the mountain, 3/4 miles nearer to the studio.

The loss in strength and cover area would have been marginal compared with the first site, but the redirection of the studio frequency would not have been necessary and power supply as well as security would have been perfect. But the family who lived there was unfortunately run by a right dragon and I still feel sorry for her really gentle husband. Firstly she agreed to let us use the land and electricity at reasonable conditions. So we started setting up the whole thing. Almost finished two days later she insisted that we would have to pay a fairly unreasonable amount of rent. And when we returned to sign a contract next day she even doubled that amount. Heaven knows where this inflation would have ended, so I decided to move out. Eventually I even had to threaten her with the police to return Radio 4U `s property. This was the only really nasty experience I had during all my time in Ireland.

Heiko`s annual leave was already over, so he left for home and Willy phoned his employer and told him some story to extend his stay by one week - well I can`t possibly say "his holiday."

To cut a long story short, we ran out of time and settled for solution No 3. : The main transmitter site was located at friends, at Lenamore Riding Stables.

This location was secure, had power, was guarded and was well situated, only 1/4 mile from the border. The advantage lay in a possible long term use after a change in the legislation. The disadvantage was the low site, and therefore we were still restricted to the City only. The two mountain sites would have enlarged the service area but being closer to the City we got an even stronger signal across.

The evening before Willy left we finished, and by installing his Blaupunkt car radio with an directed three element reception antenna at the relay we did not even lose our original Studio frequency, now slightly shifted to 97.3 Mhz. Unfortunately there was no in-car entertainment on Willy's two day journey home .

But I suppose the bare satisfaction to see the BIG 100.8 FM opening was little compensation.

The same weekend that Paul and the lads decorated the hall I was introduced to two other friends of Paul and JP , their names were John who was Irish American, born in the US but for the past years he'd been studying in Derry, living with his mother and sister. The other friend was called John too. So he was nicknamed JJ for easier differentiation.

JJ was like Kieran and Chris, very keen but not too creative. Don't get me wrong, this does not mean that those lads were bad presenters. Indeed they are radio hosts who present a show perfectly to station policy but maybe they are lacking a little bit of drive and individual flair. A lot of managers prefer this type of presenter because they worry too much about their station sound. Really, I did not give a toss about station sound as long as the programme was interesting.

The only hilarious thing which I can remember about JJ is, that he went mouse chasing during his programme. I must admit that by the end of autumn we had quite a few field mice in the party / front hall. So he followed the mouse, took a shoe off and threw it at the poor little thing, just to scare it.

When I entered the room I saw JJ's baffled face and asked him "Are you alright mate?" With a stunned look he pointed at a dead mouse. "I killed it with my shoe, by accident." Heaven knows why the mouse had such an unlucky day. Those things are usually much too fast to get caught in a proper trap, but JJ got it with a boot.....

Well, normal people did not work for Radio 4U .

John was a right character. Under no circumstances would I call him a Disc Jockey. In short he did not have a clue about music and because of that we had some minor rows.

Apart from that, he was a great presenter - one of the best.

John positioned himself in the studio and started talking. While everybody else played approx. 13 songs per hour, you could consider yourself lucky if John played six. The remaining time he was japping away with inserts of Barbara Woodhouse's Dog Training or Children's Story records. In short, after one hour listening to John you were not a teeny weeny bit wiser than before.

That was John.

Nigel Kennedy was still unknown in 1987. But since John read the tour guide for Nigel's first Northern Irish tour I wonder who is the bigger punk..... -at least Nigel Kennedy is well known now (thanks to John?)

But then again John wouldn't have been himself if it wasn't for Joan Whitbay :

Joan Whitbay was his producer. I'll never forget the programme when he spent one hour telling Radio 4U listeners that Joan Whitbay had told him off for kicking the metal litter bin in the studio. Obviously during this hour he kept busy kicking and hitting this same bin.

Listeners could hear him dropping everything known to mankind into the bin. Never forgetting to remind the audience that Joan told him to leave the bin alone.

I don't really know how to describe this programme, but he really spent one hour talking about Joan Whitbay and the dustbin. It was so incredibly funny, I have rarely laughed as much as I laughed that day in front of the wireless.

Besides, Joan Whitbay did not even exist. John invented this person and for months she was given the credits for being the responsible producer behind John's verbal rubbish..... (-at least the bin was near!)

After two months John resigned, telling me that his studies at the polytech took too much of his time. Only three nights later he was sitting in Nova's hot seat. Obviously the money was much better there, it was that much better that he was even willing to travel twice as far as he'd had to travel to Radio 4U .

Nova was not interested in talent.

Suddenly John had to shut up and play records to represent the Station Sound. Also, he'd expected a much higher telephone

response to his programme, as Nova gave a lot of rubbish-talk pretending to have many more listeners than they actually did. As a matter of fact the only calls John got were local response within Donegal as Radio 4U wiped the floor with Nova in the city.

How do I know? Well, after less than three weeks John forgot about the little \$\$\$ signs and considered proper radio more important. He stayed with Radio 4U until its very last day. The last thing I heard about him is that he is now with BBC Belfast.

According to tradition every DJ introduced another potential talent, and John introduced Frances, his sister.

Radio 4U's mixture of different sounds was full of strange accents: -John and Frances were American, -JP tried to sound American, -my accent was hard to recognise (people guessed everything from South African to Mancunian accent) Ciaran and Michael sounded like well educated Derry Men but nobody represented the Donegal Farmer accent which you could hear on Radio North, DCR or NWCR.

Coming back to Frances :

She was the perfect lady disc jockey, nice voice and, unlike her brother, great musical knowledge. Frances was a broadcaster who could handle every situation on the radio -well almost.

Even though she was sometimes in charge of the news, she never left a great impression there. She was hopeless at pronouncing foreign names and cities. -"Sorry Frances, where is Port's Mouth?" But then again I must admit that we (the lads) gave her a hard time on some occasions. It is certainly not

easy to keep a straight face during serious world news when five lads take the mickey in the studio.

Well, the news was Marie`s job, you could try every dirty trick in the book with her and she kept a straight face, she was a newscaster and while she was on the air everything came second to her news.

Frances was not a newscaster but a broadcaster, she loved the music and enjoyed her little bits of useless DJ waffle, be it cooking recipes in the late morning, book reviews in the afternoon or the smoochy hours late at night.

Frances gave Radio 4U the needed female touch.

Soon afterwards she joined she moved in the upstairs room in the cottage. Radio 4U now had a resident assistant station manager. In all fairness to everybody else, and there is a very long list of people who were essential to Radio 4U`s survival, I doubt very much that Radio 4U would have lasted as long as it did without Frances.

Only six other female voices were heard on Radio 4U :

A local lass Nuala and her friend Teresa who was on holiday from England did a few night shows in early August 1987.

Marie`s friend Jannet assisted her on occasions and on August 16th she hosted an afternoon phone-in with her friend.

Finally JP`s mother gave it a try for a couple of weeks and Frances persuaded her Ma to host some evening programmes.

I reckon that more than fifty people passed through the Radio 4U talent selection system, but only eight of them were women. Generally speaking I think that these female jocks had more potential than their male counterparts but I think, that the majority of women are too shy to dare to make excursions into Radioland.

JP, John, JJ and Frances certainly did their part to promote Radio 4U at the Derry Polytechnic.

A few weeks later we recruited a whole team of students namely Badger, Kivi, James and their friends. Later on they were also joined by Dutchie. Well, those were their commonly known nicknames and obviously they used those names on the air too.

All of them stayed with the station right until April 1988. Their music choice was not quite my taste but a selection from Booker T. & The MG`s and the Doors through to modern Indie Rock was certainly a welcome contrast to the usual Family MOR. As they were scheduled on Saturdays I gave them as much freedom as possible, within reason of course, and with all the well known requirements of the Radio 4U Policy Guidelines. If I had to ask them to sit in during the week I could rest assured that they would curb the Rock input. I believe in supporting talent by non-interference.

Almost since the very start of Radio 4U we had a regular telephone caller. Darin phoned in at least three times a day.

Usually the phone went quiet for a couple of days after BT sent out the phone bills.

During this phone bill aftermath a lot of people try to cut down on their spending. But not Darin. He must have been the most faithful Radio 4U Anorak ever. His persistence was quite amazing and Jocks even refused to answer the phone in case it was Darin again. If you can't beat them, join 'em: the only way to stop him phoning was to invite him down to the studio. So the next time Darin got me on the line I asked him over.

A few days later he showed up with his dad, Kevin. I remember that Darin seemed a bit disappointed by the simple Radio 4U set-up.

He thought that I was having him on .

Such a crystal clear professional stereo programme could not possibly come from such a simple looking studio in such a shed. Even though the shed, the cottage, looked pretty good by now, compared to the state it used to be in. I already mentioned the work we spent on the inside, the outside too got some paint and even the ground got some gravel to make it suitable as a car park.

Nevertheless Darin was not impressed. So I offered him the opportunity to do a programme. I spent a couple of Saturday mornings sitting in with him.

Man, was he a slow learner !

I believed that I could tell within the first hour whether somebody has a gift for radio or not.

I must have felt sorry for him in that I did not

tell him to get stuffed. I guess, I am an optimist and I must have been seeing something in him.

Darin was so keen but useless and slow. I suppose I just let him continue for a while because he knew his music and I knew that he was able to handle the equipment once he'd got the hang of it.

Ok, he could even say simple things such as "hello this is Darin on Radio 4U, 100.8 FM in Stereo" but I should not have asked him to read a film review.

Even his own mother switched off her kitchen transistor.....

I was fighting the whole week with myself. I knew I had to sack Darin next Saturday to protect the station. I knew also that it would break his heart. I decided to give him one more chance, but without telling him that his position with Radio 4U was on the line.

On Saturday Darin's programme came as a great surprise. I wonder if his Ma told him off or if he noticed himself, but what an improvement it was! Certainly not perfect, but greatly improved.

Surely, I was not in a sacking mood and I am glad I wasn't.

From that day on Darin got better and better and within the next months he became a really good and recommendable little broadcaster. By March I had the pleasure to meet his school headmaster. Darin persuaded him to allow him to do two weeks work experience at Radio 4U. Afterwards I had to write a report about him: "Darin, what do you want me to write?"

Of course he had to tell about his work at school. I bet that he did his best to impress his pals.

This experience shows what Community Radio should really be about.

But that's not all: Whenever Kevin came to pick up Darin, he used to hang around the studio to watch Marie's News Magazine. You could see that he fancied himself in the hot seat.

Like I'd done some months before with her, Marie asked him to read one item then another one and soon we had another part time, relief newscaster.

To the surprise of many listeners, Kevin was the closest NWCR sound alike on Stereo FM. Obviously I am only talking about his accent.

In late autumn Daniel joined. He was an unemployed nurse, who was just back from Wales, where he'd stayed for the past years. He was the only Jock who did not mind doing the morning programme. Afternoons and early evenings did not present too much of a problem getting staff but mornings, forget it. Anyway he was great. Just the right soft talking voice which turns on the housewives.

Unfortunately after a few weeks he became a bit unreliable and the possibility of his presence became more suitable to be dealt with by betting shops than by Radio 4U.

His programme was first class and so I warned him once. But the next time he turned up late he was out.

Very unfortunate on one hand but inevitable. Even the best were not allowed to take any liberties under Radio 4U rules.

Daniel's exit left a slightly nasty after taste but at christmas 1987 I was caught by surprise when the phone rang and Daniel was on the other end calling from London where he'd moved recently.

Who am I to keep grudges?

Basically we were a great team but every now and then it happens that you fall out with somebody. But personally I am in favour of forgiving and forgetting.

Certainly that does not mean that I don't try to get my own back occasionally :

One evening the phone rang and four lads enquired if they could do a programme. So we fixed an appointment and I sat them down and went through the rules. They made it quite clear that they intended to have their own go on Sunday afternoons with an Indie / Punk Rock programme.

Not quite my cup of tea, or shall I say my pint of Guinness, but ok, I was open to new suggestions, within reason.

All went quite well until I changed the station format in January 1988. I will come back to those changes shortly. Let me just say that much, that all programmes had to be prerecorded forthwith and every programme was to be recorded according to a certain format.

All the programmes recorded on a Sunday afternoon were to be played throughout the week and Indie was out.

This decision was not appreciated by those Punks.

The third weekend they left as usual but, unbeknown to me, in their bags were not only their own records but also some great T.Rex rarities of mine and even their personnel file. Fortunately Frances was in the studio where they produced their programme at the same time. She was scheduled to do the evening news programme this Sunday and was preparing her show. The programme which was produced while she sat in went on the air the next day. By then we'd already noticed the missing records. The programme was fine, only the introduction "Happy Christmas" was a bit unsuitable for February not quite unusual for Radio 4U but very suspicious for this DJ. So we checked the other three tapes which were recorded when nobody else was with them. Two tapes were so, so.

Because we'd gathered what the name of the game was, we ignored the bits of unsuitable language on the recording for Tuesday and Wednesday.

The fourth programme, which was scheduled for Thursday was full of bad language used by the presenter and bits and pieces which were taken from rather filthy punk movies. The music was diabolical.

If this would have gone live it would have been the funeral for the station. They obviously must have told all their friends to listen in to this programme to hear how they were taking the Mickey out of Radio 4U. Hence on Tuesday and Wednesday we left them with the illusion that we would not have noticed any of their dirty tricks.

John, Frances and I sat down on Wednesday and reedited this tape which was due on air the next day. The Jock said on one occasion: "As I said before, I don't know the f*** what I am talking about" We edited the f-word out and kept the clip. Another part was taken from a film : "It has something to do with cheese, I think" We used that in conjunction with the first bit. The only other usable bits of this programme were "Live Radio and America" and "That's enough of that" . Those great words were spoken by the presenter too.

We mixed those clips with music by James Last, Brendan Shine, Abba and the Bay City Rollers to produce a new 45 minutes long programme.

It still makes me laugh when I imagine those punks sitting in front of the radio with their mates.

I know how other listeners reacted to this programme: They enjoyed the music but thought that the presenter was a funny idiot.

This too is community Radio.

Coming back to the great changes which took part in January :

Even though Frances and I were working fulltime at the station, we faced an extreme and permanent shortage of staff. Most jocks were students or had a main job to go to. Once the summer recess was over it became more and more difficult to prove to the listener that there were more than two voices behind Radio 4U.

Way back in October I thought up a scheme to prerecord programmes and to repeat them throughout the day.

The average radio listener is only tuned to the wireless for about two hours a day anyway.

Even if you listen to the BBC you will notice that certain information and quite a lot of music is actually repeated over and over again.

Willy got me a second hand Sony MTL 10 cassette deck in which you can load up to 10 tapes. Three months passed before I actually had it operative.

Firstly, Willy needed to do some work at the unit and then it went missing in the post, hence it's introduction in January:

Besides the obvious advantage of cutting down on production time I also aimed at an improved programme quality. Up to now I left it widely to the discretion of the presenter to read book or film reviews or to broadcast other information.

Radio to me is more than music and brainless talk. Radio 4U was intended to be an information channel too. Now I wanted it my way, as the new system freed a lot of resources as everybody was now able to put more effort in a much shorter programme.

In a way it spoiled the fun a bit for the jocks, the excitement to be on live radio was gone but I can honestly say that the programme quality improved immensely and I guess that a lot of listeners agreed with me:

It is better to listen to a good programme twice than to hear a bad one once.

We recorded seven programmes plus two news magazines for each day. Some programmes were suitable to be recorded several days in advance others had to be produced just before broadcasting.

Also, Radio 4U was now the first regular 24 hours operator in the City, another advantage of this new schedule.

Every programme lasted 47 minutes with the exception of live news magazines.

The programme day started at a quarter past ten at night when we read the latest headlines and then repeated the early evening edition of the news magazine. This was followed by Programme 1, containing Horoscopes for the day and a cooking recipe. At 23:50 we followed with Programme 4 which contained a film review and a feature such as health, motoring or consumer tips. Half past midnight came Programme 3 with brain teasers video reviews and a look back on a funny event which happened on that day in the past. Next came Programme 5 with book reviews another brain teaser and consumer advice. At 2:10 am we repeated Programme 1 again followed by the light entertainment Programme 6.

Final repeat of the evening news was scheduled at 3:45. Programme 2 with an event guide and gossip from behind the TV scenes followed at half four until a quarter past five.

Then it was time for the first broadcast of the Radio 4U Sports Service, internally known as Programme 7. Kieran took over the Sports Service in March. Until then this programme was hosted by Frank Bruno and me.

-Well actually I had a sound collection of answers which Frank gave in a TV interview.

I could ask him a lot of very stupid questions every day and got always the same pattern of answers: "Frank, what other sports do you like besides boxing?" Frank: "I like athletics, football, watching cricket, ehm, boat-racing, motor- racing....." Me: "Ok let me read some golf news then....." Next day I asked: "Frank what are your plans for the weekend?" and the answer would have been again: "-I like....."

Another clip was "Yeah" or "Not really" very suitable for all sorts of things. With the words: "She is a strong lady" I let him pass a lot of comments about various people. A funny one was "I ate so much beef, I could be a cow myself"

I havn` t got a clue about sports really, but pirate radio allowed me to use Frank`s clippings to liven up the otherwise boring sports news.

It is the same old thing again, if you do a specialist programme, don` t forget your faithful audience who might not be interested in this topic.

After dawn the schedule was as follows:

6:05 Programme 5
6:52 Programme 1
7:40 Programme 2
8:26 Sports

9:13 Programme 6

At 10:00 precisely the fresh morning edition of the news service was presented life in the traditional Radio 4U news-style which listeners got used to since day one. Only the lighter bits such as the horoscopes were rescheduled to other slots. Also Marie had left by now, because she'd moved house. This was certainly a great loss for Radio 4U.

At about five to eleven the last repeat of Programme 1 with the horoscopes was played, followed by Programme 5 , 3 and Programme 4. At 14:00 (2pm) was the morning news service repeated in an edited and slightly shorter version.

After Programme 2 and the Sport Service which concluded with a short Yoga session we approached twenty past four, just enough time to squeeze Programme 6 and 5 in before the live Evening News Service from 17:55 until 19:05. The early evening was filled with Programme 4, 3 and 2 before a last repeat of the Sport Service concluded the programme day at approx. ten past ten.

Programmes were scheduled according to possible target audiences and I spent a lot of thought to reduce the possibilities that the same target audience would listen to the same programme.

For example you don` t want to hear the same programme which you listened to at breakfast to be repeated when you come back from work. No programme was repeated more than four times.

Surely this was by far not the ideal way to run a radio station, but nevertheless I was pleased with the station output and even more with

my personal working time / achievement ratio. Gone were those days like Christmas were I spent 12 hours in the studio.

For the first time I could take full charge of the business side of Radio 4U and for the first time I saw some small profit by the end of the week.

I knew that this was the closest I could get Radio 4U to sound the way I always wanted it to sound.

Still looking for ways to improve Radio 4U I got the vision to design a Fully Automated Radio Programme Selection System which is able to mix fade and crossfade (fading one signal over another one) different programme items such as music, information, commercials and news, which are automatically selected from several tape recorders.

Such a System would have to provide an uninterrupted programme flow as it is commonly known from public broadcasting services without the immediate need for a Disc Jockey in the studio.

By March I started to do some research in this direction, timing speech inputs, analyzing the turn over of records etc. After consultation with Willy I realised that neither he nor I had enough time on our hands to develop such a machine.

Business was not too bad but I was fed up after over ten months to see so little reward. Things were looking much brighter now, but I had to realise that Radio 4U would never become a licence to print money.

Resources in Derry are limited and the city was very much a closed club as far as business is concerned.

You have to offer a bit more than excellent listener figures, quality production and logical thinking to get to the cream of the cake.

One local HiFi dealer told me straight, that he did not care about a suitable target audience for his product as he would continue to advertise on another station because the owner of this station was his friend.

In Derry you need local contacts and backers -and it was here where I did not succeed in getting my foot on the ground properly.

The final part of my consideration was the uncertain future of Unlicensed Radio.

I never liked Radio 4U to be called a Pirate Radio Station. Radio was not illegal in Ireland but unlicensed.

In early February the papers and a lot of people, especially my jockeys started to panic about the new proposals. At that time I just laughed and demanded to be told another joke. But almost three months later, by the end of April, you had to be a fool to ignore the warning bells from Dublin.

That was the time when I decided to cut my losses, and look for a new venture. I examined a great opportunity to set up a BIG FM in France. However my prime target was to develop this Fully Automated Disc Jockey System.

I wanted to get out of Radio 4U and so I started looking for a potential buyer. Radio North's owner had the same intuition and with the proposed legislation in sight his station was to change hands. NWCR had the second strongest signal in the City and they were so well established that their interest in a Radio 4U close down would not have met my demands.

Of course the local Radio Nova would have loved to see the back of me, but then again you don't sell your baby to the devil.....

Even though Nova was strongly supported by the Railway Tavern night club which belonged to the same outfit their bank balance was deep in the red.

For the past months they'd done everything to get in my bad books anyway.

Not only were they claiming to be broadcasting in stereo, (not a single stereo receiver in the world would have supported this claim) but they were blunt enough to rebroadcast whole sections of Radio 4U programmes, obviously omitting our station ID.

On the hill behind the Radio 4U Studio they tried to set up a new 200 Watts rig. The trouble was that the mains current was only 180 Volts up there and they spent a lot of time messing about to improve the output. This mess resulted in strong interference with my studio signal 97.6 FM. The last thing I was interested in, was to relay Radio Nova on my big 100.8 FM in Lenamore.

So finally I went down to Nova and blew my top. That solved the initial problem but behind my back the programme controller

called me "Little Hitler ".....-so be it, what did I care ?

Later it was found out that this "new" transmitter was in fact stolen from WABC. -Now, I have not mentioned WABC yet.

They were a black soul and dance music station where the music never stopped. No announcement was to be made over dead air and back in the early days they even banned news programmes.

WABC was the station to tune in to if you like music radio, pure.

WABC started five months after Radio 4U and was the second one in crystal clear FM stereo. WABC was based in Greencastle and served Coleraine, Ballycastle, Portrush, Portsteward and all along the North Coast reaching as far as the outskirts of Glasgow but Derry was screened by mountains. Even though you could pick up WABC in some parts of the City the signal was fifty times weaker than Radio 4U's 97.6 FM original studio link.

I assumed that WABC might be interested in expanding their activities to Derry. One Sunday afternoon I drove out to the Lenamore relay and measured WABC's signal strength there. It was just about suitable to relay the complete stereo FM multiplex signal. The next step was to get the station's telephone number.

It was quite funny : the DJ organised a phone-in but it took me two cups of tea until he finally announced the telephone number.

That same evening I left a message for Paul, WABC's owner. My idea seemed to work and when Paul returned my call he showed immediate interest. The following week we met twice. When John and Frances learned that I was seriously thinking of packing it in they also entered the negotiations with a staff buy out proposal.

I would have loved to see my own people succeed with Radio 4U but eventually WABC's offer turned out to be the more favourable one for me.

In the afternoon of April the 27th 1988 Paul, Krissi, his wife and business partner, and I finalised our deal.

They made a good buy, I think, not only did WABC expand its service area with the strongest FM in Derry, but also because they bought this complicated aerial construction and the knowledge behind this system. After all this was German engineering made by Willy, actually it was so solid that it was the only antenna mast in the area which survived those two strong storms in autumn / winter 1987 / 88.

I went back and did the Radio 4U evening news service without mentioning anything on the air about the sale. Paul picked me up from the studio, we went down to Lenamore, retuned the receiver and redirected the reception aerial.

From now on WABC was blasting 1300 Watts (ERP) from Lenamore.

The tapes which had already been produced for the next day were played on the small 97.6 FM until 10 o'clock the next morning when I replaced them with a loop tape

announcing that Radio 4U had ceased broadcasting and advised listeners to retune to WABC on 100.8 FM. This tape was played for another 48 hours, when I officially hit the button for the last time. Then I took a deep breath.....

After almost one year of hard work I wanted to sit down in a rocking chair doing absolutely nothing. After three days I started rocking... (very slowly)

Well this might have been a little bit exaggerated but I stayed in Burnfoot for another six weeks and enjoyed a well deserved holiday. One evening I met Paul and JP in a pub in the City. We started talking about Frances' and John's earlier proposal to buy Radio 4U.

There was still the chance to revive the Little Radio 4U , namely the 97.6 FM.

I did fairly well with it alone for three months and the lads thought that they could do the same: Paul and JP had another meeting with Frances and John and they planned to get the Poly-Student Union involved too.

Eventually this idea died when Frances' mother entered an argument which I had with her daughter about Frances' dog chasing the Radio 4U cat.

When he was still a tiny kitten, the cat had been dumped in the freezing cold last December. To escape the snow the cat sought refuge under a harvester which was parked nearby the studio.

During those cold days Frances and some other DJs used to feed the cat secretly on one side of the harvester, because they thought

that I would mind a cat in the house but I too fed him on the other side of the harvester. After some days I became suspicious because no cat in its right mind would hide under a harvester in this weather. I decided to get to the bottom of this mystery. I grabbed it by its tail and forced it to come out. Only then I realised that he was a starved and half frozen kitten who needed urgent first aid in front of a warm fire.

After I sold out, I occasionally hosted some programmes on WABC. I really enjoyed it because now this daily pressure to work was gone. Now I was free to be or not to be on radio. On top of that WABC was a new challenge, a partly new audience, a much bigger coverage and also this Non Stop Music Policy was new to me.

By Mid June I loaded the remaining equipment, everything which I did not want to sell, eg the records and most of the dismantled studio in my VW and together with the cat I set off for Germany where we met Willy and Heiko and all four of us went to France.

The proposition looked great but I did not want to make the same mistakes which I did in Ireland. I knew that the French project was two sizes bigger than Radio 4U and I knew that I did not want to run another Radio Station on a shoe-string budget. In short, I predicted that I would need another £10,000 which I did not have.

So I went back to London where I got a government grant and spent the next two years inventing a Fully Automated Radio or Television Programme Selection System.

Originally I only wanted to develop a device to mix automatically certain tape drives with the aid of preprogrammed subaudible pilot tones. But when I applied for the first patent in 1990 I'd achieved a little bit more, something which even Willy thought to be impossible :

All available programme sources are subdivided into two programme branches namely a main (music / entertainment) branch and a link (speech / information) branch.

This is to enable the Fully Automated Radio or Television Programme Selection System to use almost all commercially recorded music tapes on the main music branch.

This main branch can be controlled by an Electronic Ear, a device which listens to the music and detects the fade out just like a human DJ. Alternatively you can control this branch with a computer according to a timed data base or, if you want to, by subaudible pilot tones.

With the Electronic Ear, the music inputs do not have to be specially recorded or prepared (eg. timed or recorded with subaudible tones) for broadcast purposes.

This Fully Automated Programme Selection System compiles different Radio or Television programme inputs.

When the entertainment source begins to fade out, an information tape starts and is mixed over the entertainment input.

After the actual end of the entertainment input its source will be stopped.

When the information input is about to finish, the entertainment source starts and is mixed under the information.

After the actual end of the information input its tape drive will be stopped.

When the entertainment input ends again, the process as described above will be repeated.

The order of various information inputs can be preprogrammed. Commercials can be repeated, news can be broadcast on the hour, basically this system can do all the mechanical work of a human Disc Jockey. Only announcements must still be made by humans. You can put all your speech inputs of your programme on one tape. After one hour talking you load your tape in the machine and then you can go home, down to the beach or wherever you want. The system will now produce 8 hours of great Radio entertainment.

The music can be any kind of signal source, eg. multi tape cassette players CD-juke boxes etc.....

The whole System is protected against operational errors. Even if one tape drive is jammed or you forgot to load it, you will never have more than 15 seconds of dead air.

This Fully Automated Radio or Television Programme Selection System will provide an uninterrupted programme flow as it is commonly known from public broadcasting services. You can not tell the difference between a programme which is produced with this machine or one which comes from BBC Radio One or RTE Radio 2.

Selection of input items, energising or deenergising of sources, mixing, fading and crossfading of signals will be initiated by the system according to the immediate requirements of the programme in accordance with a preset programme policy rather than a single indication, solely determined by one programme source.

My modest guess for the reason why this system is so sophisticated is because it was designed by someone who had the expertise of an engineer as well as that of a disc-jockey and a radio station manager.

Besides the obvious possibilities in Radio and TV there is also a need for such a system for in-house broadcasting or its use in hotels, shops etc.

I will be pleased to submit further information about this system and its commercial uses if requested.

I kept in touch with Damian, one of the Radio 4U presenters. He told me that WABC came back on the air some months after the Close Down on January 1st, 1988. Damian passed me WABC's new telephone number.

By the end of 1990 I got in touch with Paul and he invited me back to Donegal where I stayed until February 1991 working for WABC.

The situation there had undergone some changes since the general close down of unlicensed Irish radio back on January 1st, 1989.

All stations but Radio North closed down at the time. Actually Radio North moved from Carndonagh to Muff and the new owner bought the old 35 Watts Radio 4U transmitter unit of Paul and used it for his studio link.

A new station in Letterkenny got the official licence for the North West. Funnily enough: this was also the first Donegal Radio Station which got temporarily closed down by the Department of Communication. The reason: their transmitter interfered with the real pirates.

NWCR counted its profits and the local Nova probably counted its debts.

At about the same time when WABC came back on the air, Riverside 101 was established. The station manager Frankie realised a lot of ideas which I'd had three years before. Unfortunately, a lot of them remained a dream for me. Riverside too promotes a crystal clear strong stereo FM with a very professional programme. Riverside 101 has a sales office in Derry's City Centre and even the studio is in the North.

Nevertheless the whole operation is perfectly legal as the transmitter sits exactly on the border in no man's land.

Electricity comes from both sides, the North and South. Only the main relay can be called a pirate.

Besides the new technology such as IRN News via satellite, Frankie has the great advantage that he and his family know every businessman in Derry. So Riverside 101 became a big Power Station and I would

assume that Frankie has a little licence to print money.

Besides, AM radio is finally outdated now.

WABC and Riverside agreed that nobody entered the other's service area. Therefore WABC had to keep out of Derry. Instead Paul opened a second programme WABC Gold, a special oldies channel.

For family reasons Paul and Krissi had to close WABC and left Ireland in Spring 1991.

Radio North got another country music competitor, Atlantic North. Both managers / owners hate each other and it appears that Atlantic North was only set up to destroy Radio North.

Both stations fight a desperate price war but one thing remained the same:

-You still have to be brain dead to listen to certain radio stations.

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