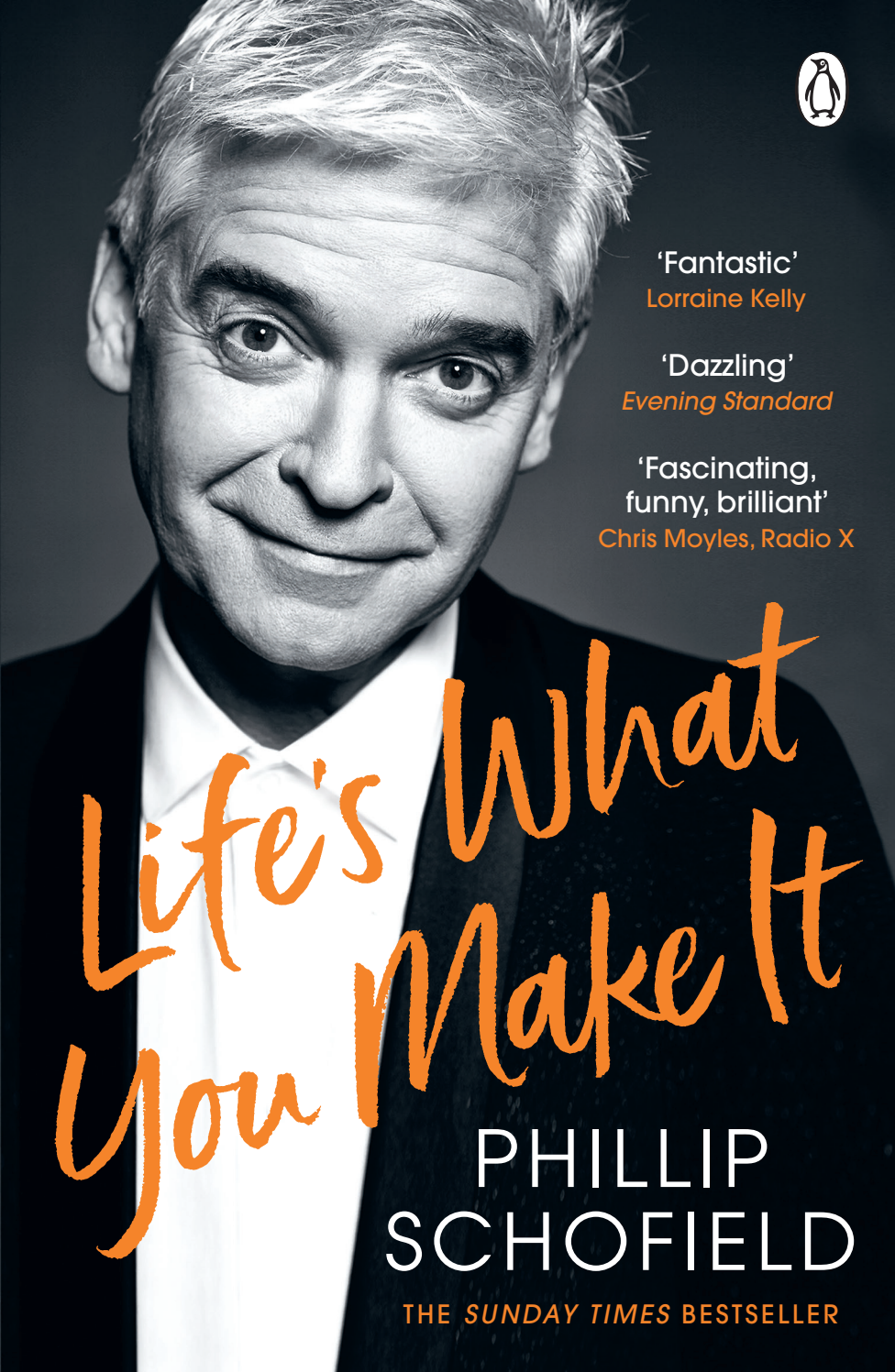
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Life's What You Make It
PHILLIP SCHOFIELD
THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER

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Life's What You Make It

Phillip Schofield is one of our most-loved TV presenters, having spent nearly forty years hosting some of the biggest shows on screen. Since gaining popularity working as a children's presenter for the BBC hosting *The Broom Cupboard* in 1985, Phillip has gone on to present multiple series of *Going Live* and more recently, *Dancing On Ice*, *The Cube*, *5 Gold Rings*, *Mr & Mrs* and two Royal Weddings.

He has performed on stage as Joseph in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* and as Dr Dolittle.

Phillip has hosted ITV's *This Morning* since 2002, now alongside his 'on-screen wife' Holly Willoughby, which has won the National Television Award for Best Daytime Programme fifteen times.

Phillip and Stephanie have two daughters, Molly and Ruby, and the family are based in Oxfordshire.

Life's What You Make It

The Autobiography

PHILLIP SCHOFIELD

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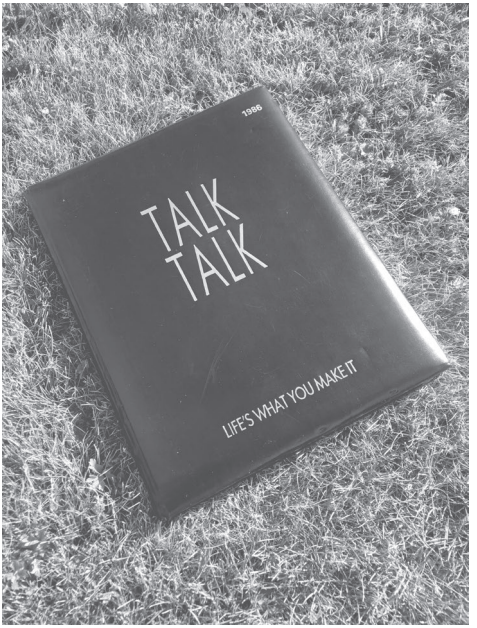
For Steph, Molly and Ruby,

Three remarkable women in my life, who, no matter what, still continue to love me and who have saved me more times than they will ever know. I love you all so very, very much.



Writing this book has been a fascinating experience for me, a sort of controlled unravelling of my head, in some ways a reboot, remembering things I didn't realize I'd forgotten. I didn't think for a second, as I sat with my fingers poised over my laptop keyboard at the start of this adventure, that I'd learn anything new about myself. As it turns out, I have. I've always documented my life in one way or another, keeping diaries and even jotting down lines that I imagined would go in my autobiography one day if I was to ever write one. I even wrote what I thought would be the first line, a line that ended up in this very book, when I was just fourteen. My diaries have helped me as I've written, and this 1986 diary has 'Life's What You Make It' written on the front. It rang true then, and it rings true still.

Prologue

On 7 February 2020 at 9.45 a.m. my thumb hesitated briefly over my phone. I looked nervously at those around me, then pressed send and posted these words (and some others) on Instagram:

> You never know what's going on in someone's seemingly perfect life . . .

The response was instantaneous and huge, a massive wave of surprised attention. In my life, I like to think I've been honest and open, mostly. Now, hopefully, I can add some detail to that statement and tell you who I am, the real person behind the bloke you know from the telly and the life that led up to those words, long before they were even a spark of awareness in my head. Some of my life you may already know. Here's the rest.

I've been asked to write a book for as long as I can remember. At first, I didn't think I'd lived enough, then I was so busy and distracted I couldn't be bothered. In more recent years, when the pressure to write my story got seriously intense, there was always a very painful consideration: I knew where it would, eventually, have to go, unless I wasn't truthful. I decided that I couldn't lie, so I never agreed to write it.

As you probably know, I have recently decided that the truth was the only thing that could save me. Let me stress, right from the start, that my 'truth' took a very long time to make itself clear to me. I have never deliberately hidden

anything, but as my psychologist has pointed out on a number of occasions, we humans are complicated. We can evolve within ourselves. If we are lucky, we find clarity in our lives. As I got older, that is exactly what happened: I discovered something about myself that I had no idea was there. I found clarity, and that has taken a long time to process. So, it's as a by-product of a lot of pain – pain that continues – that this book can finally be written. That, coupled with the fact that, as I type, I'm sitting in lockdown as the Covid-19 pandemic has put the world on pause, so I have a shitload of time on my hands!

Writing this book has been a fascinating experience for me, a sort of controlled unravelling of my head, in some ways a reboot, remembering things I didn't realize I'd forgotten. I didn't think for a second, as I sat with my fingers poised over my laptop keyboard at the start of this adventure, that I'd learn anything new about myself. As it turns out, I have.

As I wrote about the big, conflicting decisions that I've made in my life, a pattern has emerged. I stress and I fret, I worry and tie myself up in ever-tighter knots. I keep myself awake at night in never-ending loops of turmoil, but the outcome always seems to be the same. As I enter into a huge life choice, it would appear that I already know what I'm going to do, it just takes me a while to get there – sometimes overnight, sometimes considerably longer. I seem to put myself through rounds of torture before I'm prepared to take a life-changing step. That's odd for me, because when it comes to major career choices I trust my judgement implicitly and I'll willingly jump into a new challenge without any great analysis – I go with my gut and act instinctively. Not so in my private life. I strap myself to the rack and let my mind stretch me out in unnecessary, elongated distress.

I've discovered that, in later life, I've become increasingly more adept at creating these 'thought loops' in my head. One big, mentally destructive loop encompassing everything, and then there are many smaller loops of unfixable issues around that, like planets orbiting the sun, going round and round in endless, exhausting cycles. I have recognized that they were always a part of my analysis process, but in recent times, these loops have been very much bigger and immensely challenging. Seemingly unfathomable, uncontrollable issues and impossible decisions. I've also learned that, in time, most things work out for the best, that each loop, taken in isolation, can be broken. With help, I have taken a careful note of this new knowledge and I will strive to be better at 'loop management'.

Perhaps most importantly of all, I've learned that we are indeed the masters of our own destiny, but life doesn't happen to us without the people we love and the people who love us. We can't do it on our own – we all need help, and we all need to trust that our families love us because we're worth loving, and that our friends are there because they care, no matter what. Take it from someone who has sat on the very edge and looked over: things do work out, things do get better.

It's so easy to go through our lives so quickly that we don't take the time to stop, look around, look up and appreciate the moments that should be celebrated. We're always looking to the 'next' rather than enjoying the 'now'. Those moments can be huge leaps forward or even the very tiny everyday steps, but just pause for that moment, give yourself permission to reflect on an achievement before you rush on. Now I've stopped, I've looked up, taken a deep breath and quietly celebrated in my head. I made it this far, I'm happy to have done the things that I've done, I'm grateful for everyone

who has been with me on my life adventure. I most certainly could not have done it on my own. Everyone we meet is an influence on us in one way or another; they shape us, they guide us, they teach us to be wise or wary. So as I have taken a moment to pause and look around, I see you, we're still here, we're okay, and life is there waiting for us, if we are willing to allow ourselves to live it. Life, it seems, *is* what you make it.

Well, then, here we go, finally. I hope I'm what you expected me to be.

I

'Coke!' barked the large, bright-red man in front of me. At the age of fifteen, and safely separated from his painfully sunburnt fists and biceps by a wooden counter, I waited for a few seconds to see if he followed that with 'please'. He didn't. Game on.

I was born in Oldham, but I lived in Newquay, Cornwall, from the age of eighteen months. The beach was core to the life of the town, our family and my school friends, though I have a problem with sand (I'll come to that later). As the long summer holidays rolled out in front of me, the first thing I had to do was try and secure a summer job. As with most of the county, making enough money during the summer months means the difference between an easy winter and a difficult one. Obviously, for a business, hay in August has to be made to pay the employees' wages in February. For me personally, though, I needed enough money to buy my Christmas presents and some dodgy seventies Hai Karate talc, which I hoped might impress Louise Tucker. It never did. I did get to kiss her, however, when I was Prince Charming in our school panto and she was Cinderella. Louise lived on Pentire headland, like me, and was part of our school-bus gang. I never stood a chance, but she did appear on my *This is Your Life* twenty-five years later. Result.

The ice-cream kiosk was at the bottom of the steps at the Pentire end of Fistral beach. Landing a summer job in there was a triumph. Reasonable money, I could choose my hours, and occasionally a Pink Panther chocolate bar was thrown

in, too. I have no idea why that was my sweet of choice, but it was bright pink and looked a bit avant garde. Because I was fickle, later I was to choose Walnut Whips, but I went off those because my nan kept asking for the walnut: 'Ooh, can I have the walnut off the top, Phillip?' Obviously, I said yes, but internally I was screaming, 'What's the point of having a Walnut Whip if I don't get to eat the bloody walnut?' Anyway, soon after, I moved on to Bounty, and stayed there for life. (The dark-chocolate ones are the best.)

My nan was a hard, uncompromising Northerner. Walking into her kitchen was a horror show – she would eat anything and everything. I'd sometimes pop in after school and there'd be a couple of hearts bubbling away in a pan on

A terrific nan, not such a great mother.

the stove. I deeply regret not getting her recipe for muffins but, other than that, I wasn't impressed with her cooking. The conversation would usually run something like this:

'Phillip, you've left your chicken.'

'It's fatty.'

'There is *no fat on a chicken*.'

Well, on hers, there was. She was a fun grandmother, but a terrible mother. She could regale me with the most wonderful stories, yet would show no approval or love to my mum. The way Nan treated her daughter did, however, benefit me and my brother, Tim. Every bit of affection my mum wished her mother had shown her, our mum compensated for by showering the two of us with love. She still does.

So here I am. It's a beautiful sunny day, I've run barefoot, at top speed, for no reason, from the guest house we ran ten minutes from the beach. I never wore shoes – the soles of my feet were like leather – and if I wasn't barefoot, I was wearing flip-flops. There's still a gap between my big toes and the ones next to them where the rubber gripper went through. My shift has started, I'm in a great mood, and up comes the rude, red fool for his Coke. If he had said thank you, or smiled, that would have been that; we would both have gone about our days, enjoying the beach. But he didn't, he just stared me down, with his bright-red face and his peeling back, standing menacingly at the front of the queue. Every morning, for just such an obnoxious customer, who treated summer workers like something on his shoe, I arrived early, took a can of Coke from the shelf and banged it swiftly ten times on the wooden floor of the kiosk. Not enough to dent it, just enough to make the contents angry and explosive. Then it was put back in its own special place, waiting for a moment like this.

'Sure,' I said. 'Anything else?'

'Crisps!'

'What flavour can I get you?'

'*Plain*.'

'Fine.' (You arsehole.)

He threw his money on the counter, turned and headed off down the beach, with his crisps and a specially prepped can of fizz. As I served the other customers, I watched, my eyes carefully following him down the steps and on to the sand as he picked his way through the jumble of towels, inflatables and windbreakers. I knew I'd lose sight of him, but it didn't matter, I'd soon see where he had set up camp for the day . . . three . . . two . . . one . . . *there* he is! From about a hundred feet away came the brown, sugary plume, bursting from the confines of the can, climbing up, up, into the air. That brief, delicious moment when it paused before gravity beckoned it back to the beach and the bright-red man with the peeling back below. He was soaked: bald head, beach towel, too-small shorts. An almost imperceptible smile washed across my face. As he bellowed, it was only moments before the second instalment began . . . the wasps!

I knew he'd be back, I knew he'd be furious, as the others had been before him. I knew I'd have to be careful, because I'm allergic to wasp stings (I'll come back to that). I would feign horror at his stickiness, apologize profusely, give him a replacement, 'Better open that one carefully. Did you shake the first one at all?'

If you're reading this, and you ever got sprayed by a can of Coke on the Pentire end of Fistral beach, pleased to meet you again and thank *you*.

I've always been thankful that my mum, Pat, and dad, Brian, fell in love with Cornwall on their honeymoon. Don't get me wrong, I'm proud of my Lancashire roots, but to grow up in the place where everybody else came on their holidays was lucky and then some. Mum and Dad had moved down

from Oldham and my dad started work with Bilbo, a fledgling surfboard company. He was one of those guys who could turn his hand to pretty much anything, always busy, never still. In fact, the only time we ever rowed was when I said, 'I'm bored.' He couldn't understand what I meant by it.

'Get up, get off your arse and find something to do.'

He made the first surfboards in the UK. The factory on Pargolla Road was an adventure in itself, foam boards ready to be fibreglassed, each individually designed and coated in resin. I wish I had a picture of the resin room; there was every colour you can imagine, dripping waterfalls of colour that hardened into their own unique artwork. The fibreglass itched like hell, though, if you got it on your skin.

Downstairs was a vending machine that made the best chicken soup ever. It had never been within ten miles of a chicken, but its fakeness was delicious and is a lasting memory. I'm lucky to have eaten some of the best food in the best restaurants in the world, but give me a Pot Noodle or a Vesta Chow Mein and I'm yours. On the subject of food, if you ever ate a Matthews pasty in Newquay, you'll probably feel the same tantalizing thrill as I do when I mention them. Long since closed, their pasties were unbeatable. I think they used flaky pastry, but the meat juices would run out and caramelize on the underside. The pastry was just the right side of burned. (If you know how they did it, and you can re-create it, I'll come round.) No one could beat them but, even now, the family tradition when I go back to Cornwall is a pasty one day, and then the next day Flounders fish and chips, eaten out of the paper while overlooking Little Fistral, the wide Atlantic spread out in front of us. If you left the beach and travelled in a straight line, the next landfall would be Newfoundland.

Newquay has some of the best surfing beaches in the world. The swell can form perfect waves that peel over majestically

before crashing on to the golden sand, but it can also be brutal and unruly. I can stand for hours on the headland and watch the sea with its wild, untamable power relentlessly crashing against the cliffs. The plaintive cry of the seagulls and the salty tang in the air always reboots my head. The reef off Little Fistral is quite close to the surface, so on a stormy day it can create an awesome sight with the 'Cribbar' wave. It's a monster, also known as 'the Widow Maker'. Climbing to over thirty feet, it was first surfed in 1966 and now, experienced big-wave surfers from all over the world put their trust in their skill and take their lives by the throat to ride it.

You'd think, with that surfboard heritage, I'd be able to surf. But I couldn't afford a wetsuit, I was painfully skinny and it was just too bloody cold, so I never really took to surfing. I can, however, body surf, which is cheaper, because you don't need any equipment. One of my proudest moments was when my mum and dad went to a surfing museum while on holiday in Hawaii and one of the boards my dad had made

Mum and Dad in Hawaii

was hanging as an exhibit. He was thrilled. By the way, he couldn't surf either . . . same reason.

We took in visitors at our six-bedroom guest house on Lawton Close. Long hours and very hard work for my mum, but my grandma and grandad came down from Oldham every summer to help, which was great, apart from the fact that it wasn't, because my grandma drove my mum mad. However, Mum's hard work and our happy guests earned us a happy Christmas.

My dad was always at work in the garage, fixing things,

Stood at the front door of the house on Pentire with my grandma Hilda and grandad Harold, who were down for the summer.

making things. He was a French polisher by trade, so he was always polishing something for someone, so he had the best smell. He always smelled of wood. To me, my dad was made of mahogany.

In the summer we all slept in the garage, which Dad had converted into three bedrooms. During the winter, when the guests had left, I got the pick of the bedrooms. Which would I choose this year? Blue, yellow, pink, green? The yellow one upstairs was always my favourite, for two reasons. Firstly, I could climb out of the window, up the slate tiles and sit on the flat roof above my window. On a starry night, the view was beautiful, especially if I had a packet of Cadets! My best mate and I decided one summer holiday that we would smoke a packet of every brand of cigarettes from Mr Snell's tobacconist's down the road (there were lots more brands back then). Like a couple of elderly connoisseurs, we'd sit on the headland, open a new brand, and say, 'Hmm, I thought the Everest were much mintier than the Consulate,' or 'I thought the long, thin More would last longer,' or 'Christ! Capstan Full Strength?! Mate, I'm going to puke.' I know, I know, how utterly stupid we were, but those were heady days, when no one had told us what was going to kill us. For my night-time outing on the roof that particular summer, I'd chosen Cadets. I thought them 'very smooth'.

The second reason for loving the yellow bedroom was the secret camp I had in the wardrobe, where I could safely stash said contraband. Recently, I met a woman who lived in that house a few years after us. After telling her which bedroom I meant – 'As you look at the front of the house, it's upstairs on the left' – I went on to ask if there was still a removable panel on the inside of the built-in wardrobe. She was disappointed to relay that, unfortunately, she had never found it. Ah, what a pity. In my day, it was my hideaway. Through the

wardrobe, fingernails at the top of the panel, and there was my own teenage Narnia in the eaves of the roof. Where it lacked Tumnus, it excelled in *Health & Efficiency*. Those thrilling naturist magazines full of naked people playing tennis, having a barbecue (a risky business; people were much hairier back then!) and sharing a sauna. Looking back, it was as tame as flicking through the underwear section in my mum's catalogues, but that's how we got our thrills. Add to that my Manchester United football cards, my collection of stones (to this day, I still take stones from memorable places I've been; sadly, I omitted to label them and I now have a reasonable collection of anonymous gravel), and my MI5 secret spy tape, and there you have it – a proper camp.

The secret spy MI5 tape? Well, when I found it by the side of the road I was terrified I'd get caught in possession of something so obviously highly classified. For weeks, I didn't tell anyone I had it, I just waited for a late-night banging at the door, the barking of the sniffer dogs and the splintering of wood as Her Majesty's Secret Service smashed their way into the hall. It was small, rectangular and plastic, with two spools of oxidized micro tape. I'd never seen anything like it before. It was only when the woman next door upgraded her sound system that I saw more of them. I was dumbstruck. She could definitely be a spy – after all, she and her boyfriend had matching E-Types; his was red, hers yellow . . . God, I loved that red E-type. The day he pranged it I felt almost as bad as he did. Anyway, so, obviously, they're spies! I've busted them wide open. It was only when she put her cassette into the new player and out came the music of Rick Wakeman that I realized what I had in my possession might not be quite so special. Turns out it was the Bee Gees' *Main Course* album. Wasn't a bad listen, actually, and when I got to 'Fanny, Be Tender with My Love' I laughed for days.

It's a wonder I survived, really. Only when you look back at the madness of youth do you realize how bloody close you got to calamity. We used to ride our bikes up to the headland to hang out. We'd sit, chatting (and smoking) with our feet dangling over the cliff edge, the sea crashing into the Tea Caverns about a hundred feet below. These huge caves were notorious in the town's history for stashing smuggled goods, usually China tea, which would provide rich rewards, if they got away with it. What never entered my head was the fact that the mighty Atlantic was boiling on the rocks below. If you look at that cliff edge now, the bit we sat on has long since fallen in . . . and that's my point! We were literally sitting on the thinnest outcrop of heather and air. We were a miracle away from a one-way Tea Cavern excursion. DO NOT DO THIS.

We each made a 'Dilly', essentially, a go-kart consisting of a plank of wood, a box at the back to sit in, big pram wheels at the rear and smaller wheels at the front mounted on a

My happy place on the rocks by the sea in Newquay.

cross plank with a rope attached to steer. We would push off, yelping with delight as we picked up ridiculous speed down Riverside Avenue. Now, I've always been shite at DIY – any family member will tell you – so it's inevitable that something I've made is going to come apart, and those Dillies did so with alarming regularity and in spectacular style. My mates would scream with laughter as I flew past. I'd feel the first vibrations of an impending systems failure, then something would come apart: a wheel, the box, the plank . . . me. As another creation tore itself to bits at breakneck speed, I would roll and bounce, along with the rest of the debris, down the road, but it was worth it. 'Mate, that was incredible, you're such an idiot,' was all I needed to hear.

One of the happiest days *ever* came when I walked out of the back door to see my new present. My birthday is in April, but I'd waited until July to take delivery of my yellow Chopper. Oh, I loved that bike, almost as much as I loved the red E-Type. Long seat, three-gear stick shift. It had to be yellow. I didn't like the orange, and I wanted either the red or the yellow to match one of the E-Types next door, and I preferred the yellow. There it was, brand new and gleaming. I saved my summer money and bought two battery horns, a switch on each handlebar, so if I pressed them alternately it sounded like a police car (what a nob). One thing was missing – it had to have a speedo; but this was stretching the finances, so I had to put in a few extra hours at the kiosk. Finally, it was fully kitted out – oh yeah! I put mirrors on it, too. I rode it for miles. It's funny how everyone needs to know where you are now, every second. Are you okay? You didn't call – when are you home? In those simpler times, it was 'I'm going out on my bike' at nine in the morning, and I'd come home at nine at night to a dried-out dinner and the threat of a grounding.

With my brother on the yellow Chopper; the Dutch VW van in the background.

The day I 'Choppered' Rejerrah hill is a day I shouldn't be proud of, but I am. A day I was lucky to survive and one of those days I'm glad my folks didn't know where I was. The hill is a few miles out of Newquay, on the way to Goonhavern on the A3705, steep down, then steep back up the other side. On a bike, my theory was, the more momentum you build up on the way down one side, the further up the other side you'd get and the less you'd knacker your legs trying to pedal up it. I'm not sure if it was a dare, but I'm pretty sure 'You've got a speedo, how fast can you go?' were among the words spoken.

We set out early because it's a fair old trek, and later that morning I sat astride the yellow lightning streak at the brow of the hill, looking at the drop and the climb on the other side. This is a main road: it was then; it is now. My dad's mate had a car accident on the hill in a Lotus Europa, bright orange, made out of fibreglass. Thankfully, no one was hurt, but he was flying down the hill and he only touched the other car, but the Europa literally disappeared in a puff of fibre around him. Apparently, by the time he got halfway up the other side, he was sitting on just the chassis! Still makes me laugh.

So it's a dangerous hill, especially if you're a teen fool on a Chopper, and as cycling helmets were a good few years away, a teen fool with a fully visible Noel Edmonds hairstyle, centre parting, wearing jeans, a T-shirt and . . . flip-flops. The agreement was that my mates would watch as I attempted the feat, then I'd rejoin them and we'd all ride home, and I'd be the hero.

As I set off, I'm pretty sure someone said something about dying, but it was too late. It became very obvious, very quickly, that my legs weren't going to be playing a major role in the descent. After about ten seconds they were flying round on the pedals so fast I was forced to retract the landing gear and put my feet up by the gear stick. Now I'm really shifting it (at this point spelt with an 'f'!), 20 . . . 30 . . . 40 . . . 50 mph. My seventies Noel Edmonds cut is streaming out behind me. I realize at that point, if there is the tiniest of quivers in my hands, the bike will begin a catastrophic 'Dilly-like' wobble. (Now change the 'f' to a 't'!) This is ridiculous, way too fast. The speedo only goes up to sixty and the needle is almost there.

Three quarters of the way down, it hits sixty, the needle stops on the limiter pin. I'm almost at the bottom, galvanized with fear, the noise of the wind is deafening. Please make it stop. I glance down to see the speedometer needle

snap off. I don't have time to be angry that I broke it; it took a lot of red men and Coke cans to buy it, but I'll only consider anger and disappointment if I actually survive. I'm levelling off, at last. I start to fly up the other side.

One of the greatest surprises of the experience was that, on a bike, using only momentum, the speed bleeds off really quickly. In moments, I'm rapidly slowing. Did I really think I'd reach the top of the other side? A quarter of the way up, I can think about putting my feet on the pedals. Slower, slower, then stop. My heart is racing, my palms are wet through, I'm totally pumped with adrenaline. I turn back to my mates and wave, and they wave back to me. I'm alive, and surely that has to be some kind of yellow-Chopper record? I turn around, wheel the bike to the other side of the road and, using the brakes, coast back to the bottom and look up. Shit! There's no way I can pedal all the way up there, so I get off and push. It seems to take hours to get back to my starting place, and when I do, they're gone. Bored of waiting, they've set off home, and I ride back into town, tired but triumphant. I saw them the next day.

'How fast did you go?'

'The speedo needle snapped off at sixty.'

'Ah, right.'

'Yeah, broke the speedo.'

'Right.'

And that was it, but that was my mates. Next.

I can't say that my friends were always the best, if I'm honest, but that was partly my fault. There were principally three of us, never a great combination, and we were so good at making it difficult for ourselves. Only two of us were ever mates at any one time, so for the third there was an obligatory period in exile. It was so frustrating because I always seemed to be the one left out at the start of the summer

holidays. I say it was partly my fault, because when it was my turn to be 'in' the mix, I revelled in the attention and made whoever was the third wheel at that time pay. On the rare occasion the three of us would all get on and hang out together as a trio, that was when, for me, it was the best fun.

One of our summer holidays was spent working at the Tank Range. Obviously, you're now thinking Territorial Army and military hardware. Not quite. My dad's boss at the surf factory had diversified into boutiques and surf shops. The boutiques were a hippy cornucopia. I bought stupidly tight Karmann Ghia high-waisted jeans and cheesecloth shirts as the Beach Boys played. Every mystic fragrance of incense was there – sandalwood, patchouli, jasmine and pine (the back of that wardrobe smelled amazing). Quick note: you can't crush and smoke a patchouli incense stick, or indeed any incense stick; the taste is particularly awful.

So, with the shops came the brilliant idea of a tank range, built on the same principle as those remote-controlled boats on a lake. It was decided that twenty-five miniature Sherman tank kits should be bought. My dad designed the rolling hills, trees and pill boxes for the range and we were going to set it up in an empty shop next door to the boutique. The three amigos (currently all getting on) were to build the tanks over the winter. About a foot long each and incredibly intricate, they were pigs to build. The tracks alone consisted of hundreds of tiny parts. It wasn't long before one amigo got bored and didn't come back.

By the start of the summer, the range had been finished, thirty-two Sherman tanks built and individually sprayed. It was an impressive sight. My summer job that year was to supervise and fix. I worked in shifts, sometimes with Dad. The shifts with him were my least favourite, because he wouldn't let me sit down. It all seemed like a great idea, until

we reached the fundamental flaw: the batteries were fantastically incendiary. I'd have my back to the range, standing in the fake supervisor's pill box, fixing another broken track, when I'd hear a child cry out in glee.

'Oh my God, Dad, that's so realistic! Did I shoot you?'

'I don't know, son, but this is the best 10p I've ever spent.'

A rapid turn to face the range and I could see that it was happening again: the batteries had overheated and the tank was comprehensively on fire. In the middle of the battlefield the horror of the combat theatre had visited us once more. As impressed customers watched the show, a skinny kid in high-waisted flares ran from the pill box with an extinguisher. Choking black smoke, molten plastic, red-hot batteries – all part of the job. I removed the smoking wreckage and decided that combat wasn't for me (a thought confirmed some years later, when I was involved in a very frightening Red Arrows crash, but that's for another chapter). There had to be an easier way to earn my summer money. I refunded the tourists their 10p and resigned.

Until I finally hit upon my greatest money-making idea, I was on the look-out for another job, so when the local wide-boy offered me a gig selling candyfloss, I figured I was quids in. How hard could *that* be?! Turns out, on specific days of the year, it's tougher than it looks.

'So, you know what to do?'

'Yeah.'

'Just put the sugar and dye into the centre, turn the spinner on, turn the heater on, and then, when the floss sticks to the side, just hook it out and swirl it on to the stick.'

'Yeah, okay, cool.'

A word of advice: if your candyfloss audition should fall on a day that is both humid and windy, you're stuffed. As the queue lengthened, the farce unfolded. What the waiting

tourists witnessed was really rather pathetic. As the floss spun out, the humidity prevented it from sticking to the sides, so it just hovered in there as a sugary-pink, gravity-defying hoop, waiting for a gust of wind to lift it, fully formed from the bowl, and throw it at me. In the hour that I was left alone, I didn't make one single candyfloss; however, I was wearing about 4 lbs of pink, sugary goo. When the wide-boy came back, it was to the forlorn sight of a lanky teen, virtually glued to the spot. It was in my hair, my nose; it had all but sealed my eyes shut. Flip-flops proved powerless to prevent it getting between my toes and the soles of my feet. He looked at me, I (coloured pink) looked back at him, the wasps lazily buzzed around me.

'I'm afraid I'm going to have to let you go.'

'Yeah, okay.'

Wasps and bees have always been an issue for me. I found out very early on in life that I'm allergic to both. If I get stung, it makes me, initially, very light-headed, and then as I start to black out I feel like I'm sliding down a well, wrapped in black velvet. It's scary, but not altogether unpleasant. It usually takes me about an hour to recover. The more severe the sting, the further down the well I slide. I'm aware of everything going on around me but I find it difficult to respond. Usually those around me keep asking if I'm okay, and as long as I can give them a thumbs-up, no one panics. I carry an EpiPen with me just in case – well, I say I carry it . . . If I get stung, it's in the kitchen cupboard.

I've only ever been fired twice in my life, from Arthur's candyfloss stand, and from Capital Radio. The second one wasn't really my fault either, as you will discover.

That walk home from the candyfloss episode was hideous. There are a few things that go right through me. The scraping of metal on metal, which is why I can't ever go on *I'm a*

Celeb – the eating utensils are all metal, so I'd just starve, covered in goosebumps. I told you earlier that I can't bear being wet and sandy. When I was tiny, apparently I'd just sit on the beach with my hands in the air! A habit all those around me are thrilled I have outgrown. I can't stand to be sticky, and 4 lbs of candyfloss more than qualifies. If I touch anything that is sticky and it gets on my hands, I have to wash them immediately or I feel really uncomfortable and anguished. Oh, and I don't like glitter, for the same reason. This is really annoying, because it is exploited by those who know me. Glitter on my hands is torture, so why not send me the glitteriest card you can find?! And then there's that one speck on your face that means someone suddenly has permission to grab your head, turn it back and forth, seeking the correct light, and then start picking at your face to get it off! Don't do it. I don't like it.

I never found out who sent a purple glitter bomb to my home recently. I'd just got in from work and I was alone in the kitchen, opening mail. I came to a small wrapped tube, the kind of thing that might have a scroll inside, and when I opened it, it exploded with a huge burst of purple glitter. I was covered, the kitchen was covered, and I just sat there, glittery mouth open, stunned. I had been got, comprehensively! If it was you, and you're reading this and you've decided to come clean, don't . . . it's still not funny.

So, what to do? Kiosk? Done that. Tank range? Resigned. Candyfloss? Fired. I was racking my brains, and then one night as I listened to Peter Powell on Radio Luxembourg, I knew what to do – I'd buy a disco. I would have the daytime to myself, as I'd work in the evenings, *and* I'd make more money than any of my mates. For a year, I saved all I could. I waited on tables at the guest house (that's where I got my love of cold toast, which I ate when the guests left it), I

cleaned the rooms, did odd jobs, saved birthday and Christmas money, and by the following summer, I was there. We all drove to Bristol and I bought a pair of Citronic Hawaii decks, my dad built some lightboxes and, slowly but surely, I began buying the top forty.

Obviously, I had to think of a name. What should I call my new venture? This needed careful thought. And then . . .

'Your dad has got you a gig,' said Mum.

'No way.'

'They had to put it in the hotel events list,' said Dad.

'Oh, okay.'

'So, you needed a name.'

'Riiiight?'

'So, wait for it . . . you're the *Galaxy* Disco!' He beamed.

'That's a bloody chocolate bar!' I yelped, slapping my hand on my forehead.

'Oh, they'll never think of that,' said Mum. 'And don't swear.'

I was the Galaxy Disco by accident. We embraced it. Dad made me a lightbox with the name on it, which I still have, and I was in business. He was going to be my roadie. We'd always had VW caravanettes. He would fly to Amsterdam, buy an ex-company one cheap, then bring it home and kit it out as a camper van. As a family, Mum, Dad, my amazing brother Tim and me would celebrate the end of the summer by going camping, to France or Ireland. (In Ireland, I slid into an extremely precarious position and kissed the Blarney Stone, thinking maybe that might help me in the future and give me the promised 'gift of the gab' . . .) Though Mum could navigate beautifully, Dad would never listen, so we discovered all sorts of places we didn't mean to go and, as a consequence, never got to the places we intended to visit. Only trouble was, before it was pimped into a 'holiday home', it was still a former Dutch company van. So it was that I arrived at the Highbury Hotel

for my first gig in a VW painted red and green with 'ACF Farmaceutische Groothandel' on the side.

I went inside and checked out the spacious dance floor as all the guests were having dinner. We loaded the kit through the window, set up the huge speakers and the light boxes (carefully placing the word 'Galaxy' in full view). I drew the curtains so it was nice and dark, then wandered off to get some chips. At 8 p.m. prompt, I arrived back alone and stood by the decks, staring in disbelief at the sight before me. The disco-goers had arrived, and they were all over eighty. What the hell! Four vital letters missed off my booking: SAGA. Well, I tried valiantly for ten minutes, but it was no use.

'The lights are making me dizzy.'

'It's too loud.'

'This *is not* music.'

Forced into a lighting and volume retreat, I walked up to the hotel owner and asked him for a week's sub. Les was a lovely guy and paid up. I ran through town to Newquay Electrical Services, which, as well as Hoovers and plugs, also had a reasonable record selection.

'I need old-people music.'

'What?'

'Stuff that isn't loud.'

In ten minutes I had what I needed: Victor Silvester, Sid Gateley, Max Bygraves. What a rave it was going to be.

That night, we had a ball. I turned the lights off, opened the curtains so the majesty of a sunset over Towan beach flooded in (it got a bit bright for a scary moment), and they danced and they danced. Everyone went to bed happy, I'd survived my first gig, and I was set for the summer. Those two weeks before and after the high season when the SAGA louts came to town were always fun, but, I'm not going to lie, I preferred the younger crowd in between.

During a few of the winters that followed, when the guests had all gone I would set up the decks in the now deserted dining room at home and present hours of radio shows . . . to myself. The disco was perfect for two reasons. Firstly, as all my mates worked in shops every day and missed the bulk of the summer, I had every day to myself and only worked for a few hours in the evenings. Secondly, I was performing! I had the bug, and the following week, the highlight of my year was coming to town. The Radio 1 Roadshow, live from Fistral beach.

There is no history of the 'broadcasting gene' in our family. I wanted to be something very different when I was at Trenance Infants' School. I was in the Blue Class and Barbie Reeve was my teacher. She had seen me through the highly traumatic first days of starting school. I had been perfectly happy to go once; in fact, I enjoyed it very much. However, when my mum got me up for the second day, I was traumatized. I'd been once; I very much did *not* intend to go again.

On the Fistral rocks with Tim in matching outfits.

As fast as Mum dressed me, I undressed myself. When I was finally crammed into my uniform, I was dragged sobbing down St Thomas's Road and up the hill to school. I was thrown in through the classroom door and Mrs Reeve had to put her back against it in an effort to stop me escaping. This went on for days. My dad would sneak up the hill in his lunch break to see if I was okay. He would report back to my mum and say that I was sitting on my own in the playground, back against a tree, sobbing. I had to have lunch in the classroom for a while, because I made the entire canteen cry.

After a time, as most kids do, I settled into school life. One afternoon, Mrs Reeve asked us what we wanted to do when we grew up. I announced that I wanted to be a gravedigger, but I'd leave holes in the coffin lid in case the bodies weren't

St Thomas's Road, Newquay

dead. Mrs Reeve instantly created a new job in the classroom and I was the first to be given the role of 'Special Messenger'. I and those who followed me were given messages to take to the other teachers, a rudimentary internal-mail system. The job had been created for me solely so that I could be sent up the corridor to Mrs Chegwidden in the Yellow Class with a slip of paper. I handed it over, and she looked at me and thanked me. I found out years later that written on that slip of paper was: 'This is my little gravedigger.'

Barbie Reeve remained a friend long after I left school. She was round and bubbly and incredibly funny, with short dark hair and a slightly bohemian approach to life. Every summer, she and the local amateur dramatics society would put on a comedy show at the Cozy Nook Theatre on Towan beach called *Funzapoppin'*. I loved it. The Cozy Nook was also where our school put on its annual pantomime, in which I worked my way up from a mouse to Prince Charming. Miss Rowland, who always reminded me of the witch on the bike in *The Wizard of Oz*, was the teacher who organized it. She was so impressed by my princely performance that she gave me a grape. That was high praise indeed. The Cozy Nook Theatre on Towan beach is now an aquarium.

When I decided gravedigging wasn't for me and confided in Barbie that I wanted to work in radio, she was very encouraging. It has always been a source of sadness that she died before I 'made it'. I think she would have been very proud.

So, I have no idea where the 'broadcasting gene' came from. It started very early on in my life. I have always had a fascination with radio and television. I'd watch shows like *Top of the Pops* and *Tomorrow's World* not just for the content, but because I knew they were the shows where I was most likely to see cameras in their choreographed dance, capturing the action. It didn't really matter which cameras, but

there was one particular kind that would deeply excite me. The EMI 2001 had a white top. It looked incredible – proper telly – and had 'BBCtv' written on the side. I can't describe the joy of catching a glimpse of one. James Burke used to do a science show, I think from the old Pebble Mill studios, and they didn't care about hiding the kit or the crew, so it was everything I wanted from a television show, behind-the-scenes shown in all its glory. I loved those cameras so much I finally managed to track one down, and I have it now, pointing at the pool table. Few people who come for dinner

My pride and joy, the EMI 2001.

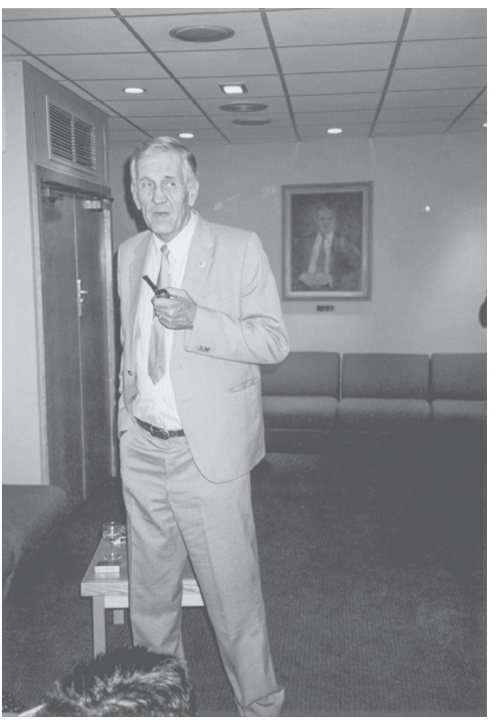
can resist having a play. Sadly, it doesn't work. I have all the necessary equipment to fire it up, but I'm terrified it will burn the house down.

I would put a cardboard box on our wooden tea trolley (my camera), and fix an old microphone to my dad's fishing rod (my boom) and follow my poor brother around, asking for an interview. I'm pretty sure his first response was 'No comment,' but that soon turned to '*No, Phillip!!* Leave me alone,' and quickly progressed to 'Sod off.' He used to love his Lego, and I mastered the art of building a TV studio out of it. I tipped a cardboard box on its side and had a full Lego TV studio within, cardboard lights strung from the roof on cotton wires, mobile booms, six cameras, a set – the works. I broadcast many a virtual *Top of the Pops* from inside that box. Come to think of it, I was easily pleased as a kid: a cardboard box was all I needed. One was a camera, one was a studio and, when our new deep freeze was delivered, I lived in the box it came in for a fortnight.

My most treasured book was the *Ladybird Book of Television*. On the inside cover it had a full aerial map of BBC Television Centre. I studied every picture and knew every word; I knew that building better than our house. I was gutted many years later when I realized that I had lost the book, but how wonderful that my long-suffering brother was the one to find one online and buy it for me for Christmas. I'd watch the cameras dance on *Top of the Pops*, and years later I would be presenting *This Morning* from that very studio in the building that I had pored over in the pages of my favourite childhood book.

There are many people who didn't realize at the time that they were having a profound impact on my life. Bruce Connock was our careers adviser at Newquay Tretherras school. When he asked us all what we wanted to do for a career, I

immediately said, 'Broadcasting.' Bless him, he never batted an eyelid; instead he spoke to a friend of his at the BBC in Plymouth and I was invited to go to watch the nightly local news, *Spotlight South West*, going out. It was so damned exciting, and I was so grateful that he didn't ridicule my ambition. I got the chance to properly thank him when he was a guest on my *This is Your Life*. We sometimes hear stories of teachers who were unsupportive of young dreams, only to be mentioned on the cover notes of a multimillion-selling album years later in a withering and public display of how unhelpful they were! Thankfully, Mr Connock wasn't one of those teachers, and the fact that he took me seriously has always



Bruce Connock at my *This Is Your Life*.

made me feel extremely grateful. Come to think of it, how lucky am I? When I told my mum and dad what my chosen career was, aside from my dad initially suggesting that might be more of a hobby than a job, they were never once anything other than totally supportive. Always watching, honest in their opinions, keeping my feet on the ground and, thank goodness . . . proud. I would eventually repay them by buying my dad a Hasselblad camera, which was his dream, and retiring him when he was fifty-seven after I got the role of Joseph.

You may be surprised that although I have been describing a fascination with telly, radio was my first love. I have a confused love affair with them both. A broadcasting threesome. I would listen to Radio Luxembourg in bed, in secret, and be captivated by the romance of a pirate-radio station forced to transmit from abroad. Whenever I could, I'd listen until it closed down at 3 a.m. The close-down sequence consisted of a song called 'Maybe the Morning', sung by Sunny, and the Luxembourg National Anthem. The signal was terrible and the station washed in and out like waves on a beach. The DJs – voices I knew so well – were Bob Stewart, Tony Prince, Stuart Henry, Emperor Rosko, Mark Wesley and Peter Powell. I always thought that Peter, who would go on to have a profound effect on my career and become one of my best friends, had the best taste in music, and I've had the chance to tell him many times.

Radio 1 was also an obsession. Every year, I'd buy the calendar; every day, I'd immerse myself in the station and its DJs. I wrote to all of them, asking how I could pursue a career in radio and, to their credit, in one way or another they all wrote back. Peter Powell had left Radio Luxembourg and was presenting a Saturday show from ten until one on Radio 1. I found out much later that the letter I had got back from him was actually written by his father, who was in charge of

his personal mail. I eventually got that letter framed for him, and he now has it hanging on a wall in his house. One DJ wrote back with a piece of advice I use to this day: 'Never address the world at large. Radio and TV are personal. I am six inches from the mic, you are a foot from the radio or six feet from the TV. We're close, it's just you and me, so never say, "How are you *all* today?" It's just, "How are you?"'

If there's one thing I will change in any script, it's that. You won't ever hear me say, 'Lots of you have called,' or 'Hope you are all having a good morning.' It's old school, but it has stuck. Annie Nightingale (who shares 1 April as a birthday with me . . . hi, Annie) echoed much of the advice. It was a tough job to get into, very few succeeded, be prepared for setbacks, practise and be patient. I was prepped. I wanted it so badly.

Every year, the Radio 1 Roadshow came to Newquay, and it was a travelling circus coming to town, but with great music from huge orange speakers broadcast from a stage on a red, white and blue lorry. For two hours, that patch of Fistral beach was famous. The Roadshow was the brainchild of Johnny Beerling, a Radio 1 producer and later controller of the station, and it was in that capacity that I would work for him as a DJ in the then-distant future. The first Roadshow ever – and I was there – was held in 1973 on Fistral beach, with Alan Freeman, who also became a friend many years later. I would wake very early, run (barefoot) down the lane and across the mile of sand that was between the end of the beach where I lived and the other end, where the trucks would arrive. I was always there hours before a single other member of the crowd and I sat at the very front and watched. Watched the engineers set up, listened to the soundcheck, watched Smiley Miley set up his T-shirt and memorabilia shop (van). It was the highlight of my year. I hated the fact

that in four hours I'd have to share the experience with 25,000 others. With about an hour to go, the DJ hosting the Devon and Cornwall leg of the tour would start their warm-up. Tony Blackburn, Noel Edmonds, Alan Freeman, Paul Burnett, and many more, I watched them all. By the time Paul Burnett hosted the show five years later I had managed to get a gig on Hospital Radio Plymouth, and he agreed to an interview. He was lucky to be alive that day – he'd drunk a wasp in his pint of beer and it had stung him in the throat! Being allergic, that would've done me in.

When I eventually got to work on Radio 1, in 1988, I found out that the Devon/Cornwall leg was the most sought after by the DJs. When I'd worked my way through other parts of the country the show visited, I was so thrilled to be offered Newquay. I made sure I looked very closely at the eager faces in the front row, knowing that, years before, it would have been my eager face looking back. Not one of the 25,000 ever knew, but, for a moment, I turned away from the crowd to wipe my eyes. The realization that a dream had come true washed over me and made me cry. Kismet.

If someone asks me how to get into broadcasting, I usually suggest hospital radio, if it exists in a hospital near them. That's the advice many of the DJs gave to me, and it proved to be fantastic experience. Finding the right hospital took a bit of trial and error. The first I approached was kind enough to ask me to go down and watch a broadcast, which I gleefully did. My dad dropped me off at the hospital, because I was still learning to drive and had recently scared him senseless when he was teaching me by threading his car through an impossibly small gap between two lorries in an unwise overtaking manoeuvre. I'll give him his credit, he never screamed, but he was silent for a mile or so, before saying, 'Don't *ever* do that again'. I haven't.