On Your Mark! Get Set! Go Get A New Life.

Going back to the CKY reunion in Winnipeg recently got me thinking about my very first day in Radio. I remember it was on a Monday around noon and I was trudging up the well worn dimly lit staircase of 432 Main Street on my way to the 2nd floor studios of CKY-AM & FM. I was there to deliver some hop money to "Man About Midnight" Mark Parr (pictured). I had no clue nor any idea my life was about to change forever.

I was the leader of a band at the time called "The Jury" and we frequently would hire the CKY Dee Jays to MC our gigs. In those pre Beatle days their presence meant a larger crowd because they were bigger than the bands. The bigger crowd was good but the on air mentions we got were even better.The way it worked was the Jocks would arrive about the time we were ready to go on then they would say hi to the crowd, throw out a few records, introduce us and were gone. I would usually get their money to them by Monday.
When I arrived at CKY's studios that fateful day Embree McDermid was sitting behind the reception desk and I asked her to please tell Mark Parr I had arrived. Em told me he was waiting for me in the FM control room and just to go on in.
CKY- FM in those days used board ops to operate their sorta Beautiful Music operation. They would insert weather, time, ID's, and commercials from prerecorded tapes plus play the very soft music. Over on the AM they had all the big air personalities and they played nothing but the hits .
Mark was behind the consul when I strolled in because one of his duties each day was to relieve the FM board op at noon so he could grab some lunch. When we settled up the money Mark asked if I had ever run a board before. I remember thinking it must take months maybe years to learn how to do that and once you did you would officially be a Radio guy. Little did I know that I was about to become one of the best board ops ever and I was going to do it in less than an hour. This miracle though was not going to be accomplished without first going through some extreme terror.
We continued chatting for a little while when suddenly Mark gets up and says ... Hey Man, sit over here and I'll show you how this all works, pay attention now. This round knob its called a pot and when it's pointing straight up it's on the air when down it's off and in the cue position. In cue is where you get to preview everything. OK now this button here starts the turntable and this one stops it and all the tape machines in back of us all have their own start and stop buttons. Alright here we go this record is about to start to fading and when it goes almost all the way out count to two and start start the next one with this button and turn the pot up to about 12 o'clock. Now pull the other one down and stop the turntable and then check the VU meter of the record playing on air to make sure its not in the red. You're going to be a natural, I can tell, he says to me. Now put the album away in the numbered bins and bring me the next one that's listed here on this music sheet and lets cue it up. Good man you've almost got it! Back here is where we cue up the time and temp tapes tape that we play on the quarter hours. Over here is the weather tape that we play on the half hour so we need to make sure it's all set to go. OK the

record is starting to fade, start the time tape when it's almost all the way out but remember it's very short so be ready with the next record. Very good I told you this was simple didn't I and you're doing great. Hey there's Dennis Corrie in production I need to see him for a moment so I'll be right back just wave to me if you're having any problems. Hey Mark I say, I dont know about this he just laughed and said you'll be fine and left.

The next 15 minutes was probably the most horrifying time of my life because It wasn't long before everything was running at once. I had no idea what was on air and what was just coming through the cue speakers and man was it noisy! I was waving frantically at Mark who just waved back at me as he and "Deno" were yucking it up in the production studio. He was probably filling him in about some new lady who had taken advantage of him over the weekend. Mark was the type who always seemed to have a lot of women trying to take advantage of him and the reputation he had as being a "Great Swordsman" came mostly from all the practice he was getting I figure.

But back to my dilemma because if all of this wasn't enough the studio door opens and in trots Lloyd Moffat the station owner with a small group of his cronies who've come to check out his brand new FM station. Are you sh**ing me! I just stared straight ahead frozen in fear as I prayed for their speedy departure so I could figure out how to solve this disaster. Finally they leave and I calmly shut everything down and remembered thinking ... Hell they can't fire me I don't even work here! Thanks to Mark that would soon change and by the time he finally got back to the studio I had it all together. I knew how to do it and I knew how to do it in rhythm Man!

After the board op got back from lunch Mark and I went out for coffee and that's when he suggested I should consider becoming a board op and he felt he could get it done if I wanted to try it. Wow talk about good timing my Father recently told me I needed to get a job because in the Johns family we work we don't play guitar for a living. I dreaded looking for a job I'd already had most of them and wasn't good at any of them plus I hated working. Now you say somebody might actually pay me to hang out with the likes of Mark, Jimmy Darin, Deno Corrie, Gary Todd, George Dawes, Chuck Dann, Daryl B. and the rest of the CKY Good Guys, Hey that's not work baby that's sheer joy. Hell these guys spend most of their work day just laughing. Sign me up for some of that babe!

It took me a long time to realize just what Mark had done for me. I am told he pounded everyone so hard to hire me that they probably did so just to shut him up. Thankfully I turned out to be a much better Radio Guy than I was a Guitar Player and I can never thank Mark enough for launching me in a new career which ended up providing a pretty good life for a kid from Transcona.