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History Rocks

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

Posted by [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-22 19:46:15

Tags: reminiscences

(U) Reminiscences - 22 September 2009

(U) I've not done one of these in a long while, because I thought I'd covered most of the blog-worthy moments that came out of my early years here and deserved noting for posterity.

(U) But how could I have forgotten . . .

(U) The Day They Confiscated My Tape Recorder

(U) This was sometime between 1979 and 1980. I was an aspiring Computer Science Intern here at NSA. Every day I drove my beloved first car to work: a banana-yellow 1966 Ford Galaxie 500. Because the radio never worked during the time I owned the car (I inherited it through my father from his mother), I'd taken to having my portable cassette tape recorder in the middle of the big front bench seat. I'd play any of a number of prerecorded cassettes I'd bought from the cut-out rack of King's/Mammoth Mart Department Store in Odenton, or from Korvette's in Glen Burnie. Or sometimes I'd play assortments of music I'd either discovered on the radio (usually from the precursor station to WHFS-FM, broadcasting from Georgetown) or had assembled from recordings I'd made off my turntable. It was a quirky, eclectic mix of music that fit me well. One morning, I was playing Todd Rundgren's "Initiation" album, and I also had a number of books next to the tape recorder that I intended to bring into the office. I gathered up the disorderly pile of books after I parked my car in the lot outside Gatehouse 4 (the Credit Union gate), and walked in.

(U) My office was on the seventh floor of Headquarters, and when I got to my big, stainless steel, rubber-topped desk, I plopped the stack of books thereon -- and panicked. There, amid the stack of hardbound books, was my cassette recorder. Oh, boy. I immediately contacted my boss, [REDACTED], who directed me to our branch's SSO (I don't remember who that was). The person immediately confiscated my tape recorder and thanked me for being faithful in reporting this accident. My cubicle-mates mumbled something to the effect that I wasn't going to see that tape recorder -- or the Todd Rundgren tape -- ever again. I figured that was a reasonable prediction. Pity, too, because I'd carried that particular recorder around with me during most of my college years. It had a lot of sentimental value, since I'm by nature a nostalgic guy. I went to work, feeling somewhat miserable and severely chiding my own carelessness.

(U) Not that many hours later, I was called to an office that (I believe) was on the 9th floor of my building: The Director's floor. In any case, the office into which I was summoned was not DIRNSA's office, nor even on that end of the floor. But there stood a couple of men, my SSO and the fellow who ran this obviously more central security office. (I think I remember my SSO now as being [REDACTED] who had been a personal friend to me during my first year here.) The

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main security guy had my tape recorder in his hands. "When did you realize you had brought this in?" he asked. Right after I got to my desk, I told him. "Did you give it to anyone else? Did anyone ask to see it?" No, I replied. "What's on the tape?" An album by Todd Rundgren. "Who's that?" A rock and roll musician, writes pretty unusual stuff.

(U) The man pressed the "Play" button of my tape recorder, and the sounds of "Initiation" started spewing forth, at the volume I'd left the player, from the point at which I'd last stopped the tape. The security big-wig listened to about five seconds of this, switched it off, and handed the tape recorder back to me. "Take this back out to your car," he said without emotion, "and don't ever bring it in again."

(U) I was very relieved, and, thanks to his advice and the emotionality of this whole experience, I never repeated the mistake. My cubicle-mates were admittedly amazed that I hadn't lost the player or the tape forever... and so was I.

Cross-posted to [\(Leave a comment\)](#)

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