

A Look Back
By Joe Bunn
For Disc Jockey News

I was recently asked if I recalled my first event and honestly, I can remember most of it. The year was around 1985 if I'm not mistaken. I was 14 years old and my parents took me to a gig at a little community center in a neighboring town. They sat in the car and drank while I played tunes for about three hours...it was a different time back then LOL. I got the show because I knew a kid from this town Elm City and somehow I convinced him that I was a "pro DJ" and should DJ the teen club dance. I believe I got paid a whopping 50 bucks! I rented a trailer to get the sound system there and attached it to the back of their Jeep Wagoneer, you know, the ones that had the faux wood paneling on the sides. That thing was boss. I eventually got it when I got my license. I digress...

I did try and prepare for the gig. I went to the local record shop, Valli's, and bought a bunch of records and tapes. Now keep in mind that the DJ that worked there was a sixty year old African American with a Jheri curl named Mean Rod Dean. He was the one that pulled the records for me. Probably not the greatest idea since all the kids were 13 year little white dudes with Polo shirts and khaki shorts. I thought I was ready...not so much.

I had pieced together a sound system from home stereo stuff I stole from home and then other odds and ends from Radio Shack! Oh yes, Realistic and Tandy stuff was hot back then! I had a mixer with a crossfader but was using one turntable as a source and one double cassette deck. I could keep the music going and there wasn't any dead air, but it wasn't great. There are several things that I remember about this event that honestly are so vivid in my head, that I feel like they were yesterday.

The main thing I recall is that I totally ran out of music. I don't think I realized that I needed about 60+ songs to cover three hours. I might have had about 40 that were really good 80's jams, and that was about it. I remember killing time and slowing it down at least 4 times with "Stairway to Heaven" by Led Zeppelin because it was so long! LOL. The lesson I learned? Be more prepared and carry more music than you could possibly ever play in a night.

The second thing I remember is that in the middle of finally getting the guys off the wall and onto the dance floor, the music stopped dead. I was frantic. I looked back and saw this kid Tad Rhodes (I still remember his name!) holding my orange extension cord in his hand and looking all red-faced and embarrassed. I was like "Plug it back in you jackwad!" Obviously I had not learned the benefits yet of having black extension cords and black 3" gaff tape. But from that day until present, I have always taped my cables down. Always.

The last thing I recall was how the party ended. All of the kids were outside waiting for their parents to pick them up. My parents backed the Jeep up and I grabbed the

tongue of the trailer and locked it to the trailer hitch...or so I thought. I grabbed a speaker off the ground, stepped into the trailer and it immediately tilted backwards and dumped me on to the ground, on my back, with a speaker crushing my sternum! Those kids were rolling! I would say the lesson learned on this one is to always check that your trailer is locked to your car before loading it. LOL.

That gig, albeit pretty terrible, taught me so much about DJing. I started practicing at home (not at gigs) and getting better. I started building up my record collection and saving my money for actual commercial grade equipment. Eventually, the local pro DJ decided he wanted to get out of the business and become the town golf pro. He sold me his trailer, gear and contracts, and the rest is history. After 30 years in the game, I still love it and still remember that first gig. Greatest job in the world.