

GIMME SHELTER AND UNTAINTED MEAT

by Dan Kennedy

EDITOR'S NOTE: *In Rock On, Dan Kennedy writes about his escapades working at a major record label, trying, unsuccessfully,*



to fit into corporate culture. A music geek all his life, Kennedy tells us about those early years.

Remember back in the days before iPods and MP3s, the premise of Desert Island Discs? Desert Island Discs was a popular feature in *Pulse Magazine* where people would write in lists of the ten CDs they would need to have if, for whatever reason, they were stranded on an island. Of course, you're reading the *Algonkian*, so chances are you're smart enough not to have spent the late eighties reading lists from shortsighted strangers detailing what music they absolutely could not live without if stranded without food and potable water on some island. Well—ahem—some people used to read those lists; trust me when I say that for some people, Desert Island Discs was *very* popular. This was maybe a decade before being stranded on an island involved mugging for TV cameras while subsisting on a steady diet of bark and spiders in hopes of

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winning temporary fame and a fat cash prize.

Google tells me Desert Island Discs was based on a long-running BBC Radio 4 program of the same name, but living in the suburbs of California, I came of age thinking that the origin of Desert Island Discs was based in, well, simply having the foresight and spiritual fortitude to ponder a darkest fate of being alone, marooned on a small purchase of land without shade, food, hope—and, Christ forbid—without a copy of Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon*.

Readers who had the time and inclination—people I always pictured as bored middle-management burnouts excited at the prospect of escape at any cost or middle-aged first-time misdemeanor types in minimum-security correctional facilities longing for simpler times—would send music magazines these lists of ten compact

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discs that they were certain they could not live without. And as an aimless teenager stuck in agricultural towns on the outskirts of Sacramento (don't envy me, it makes you appear weak), I read hundreds—who knows, maybe even thousands—of these emphatic, carefully thought out lists. They comforted me. I took solace in this proof that not only were there living, breathing people in the omnipresent, brand-new, pleasant, and faceless housing developments bordering freeways, punctuating malls, and lighting the horizon, but there were people who were imagining themselves stranded and forsaken by everyone from God to the Coast Guard. They were fearless, these people! They weren't getting all hung up on things like staving off infection, fighting off monkeys, or determining whether or not one can nourish the body with one's own urine if food is not present. Ken from Citrus Heights didn't need malaria pills and a diving knife; he needed a copy of *Sports* by Huey Lewis and the News and nine other favorites. Carl from Orlando didn't need a makeshift latrine that wouldn't pollute the water table; what he needed was *The Way It Is* by Bruce Hornsby and the Range on CD.

Of course, now it's twenty years later, we've all outlived the CD, and nobody writes lists of Desert Island Discs. And after spend-

ing all of that time reading all of those lists in my late teens and twenties in California, I find myself now, stuck on the island of

Manhattan, walking around the city on any given day with three thousand MP3s in my pocket—three thousand songs I apparently just can't leave the apartment without.

I never got around to writing my list, let alone sending it in to a music magazine, but if I did, it would go something like this:

“Ken from Citrus Heights didn't need malaria pills and a diving knife; he needed a copy of Sports by Huey Lewis and the News and nine other favorites.”

—DAN KENNEDY



My Desert Island Discs

1. *Tim* by the Replacements.
2. What's it matter, I'm going to die stranded on a desert island. And I'm going to be alone. It's going to be slow and painful, due to exposure and starvation, if I had to hazard a guess.
3. *There's Nothing Wrong with Love* by Built to Spill, wrapped in meat, placed between two slices of bread, then balanced on a gallon jug of water that is safe to drink.
4. What's it matter which ten you bring? You know you're definitely going to get burned out on them. It's forever. On an island. I'd almost rather have no CDs.
5. Any CD with a reflective cover that might be used to signal distant passing watercraft.
6. Forget it. I just seriously hope it never happens. Can you imagine? Stranded. On an island. ■