

Eyes Wide Shut

Danny Andrews didn't so much fail the 11 plus exam as succeed in not passing it. He had the ability, and he was certainly not lacking in parental support, or their vicarious ambition, but Danny had no interest in academic subjects. He wanted to work with his hands, and he like electrical appliances. His family was one of the first in Danny's street to rent a television set and coming back from town early in afternoon of the first Saturday after it was delivered, his parents were horrified to find the back off their new black and white television set. Ten year old Danny was up to his elbows in capacitors, valves, tubes, resistors and more yards of colour coded wire than a non-technician would have expected to fit inside the box.

Mrs. Andrews having no idea what level of electric shock a fully charged capacitor could deliver was more upset that their prized new possession would almost certainly no longer work, while Danny's father, who was more technically aware than his wife, was furious with Danny for the risk he had taken. Danny's explanations that he knew what he was doing, that he was being very careful and that he would certainly not break anything fell on deaf ears. He was banished to his bedroom, with no tea, while Mr. Andrews rushed back into town to arrange for the TV repair man to call.

Since the repair man was able to fit in a visit late that same afternoon, and was also able to reinstall the television's innards back inside the TV casing with no harm done, Danny was forgiven, allowed by his mother to have some supper and strictly forbidden by his father to take any other piece of equipment apart. The three of them then settled down for their first Saturday evening televising session together. And Danny's path in life was fixed from that afternoon. He wanted to study electricity and electronics, and become a television engineer.

He duly succeeded in not passing the 11 plus, being careful to fall only slightly below the pass mark so he would not bring too much shame on his family, and he went happily off to the local secondary modern school where he breezed through the boring, but mandatory, academic subjects, enjoyed carpentry and metalwork, but excelled at all things electrical.

He worked a paper round before school and being a friendly and helpful boy he got to know many of the people he delivered to, and several of the families would let him take away their no longer working radios, TV sets and sundry other small appliances. The money he earned from the newsagent enabled him to buy the components to fix them, then he could sell them off second hand, thus earning more money to buy more devices to take apart and study.

Finished with school, Danny successfully applied for an apprenticeship with Marconi and went off to the Apprentice Training Centre in Chelmsford where he continued his general education but could also study and tinker with electronics to his heart's content. He met Bob Wright on his first day with Marconi and the two became good friends. Bob was neither as capable nor as dedicated as Danny, but he did have a great charm of manner and his silver tongue could talk most of the lads into taking part in any of his schemes for a good night out, or to put one over on their trainers.

Jerry Watson, Danny's other really close friend was impervious to Bob's sweet talk but he often went along with the group out of loyalty to Danny and to keep an eye on him. He frequently warned Danny that one day Bob would talk him into something he would regret, but Danny laughed off these prophecies, turning a blind eye, or on the more outrageous escapades, two blind eyes, to Bob's character defects.

As part of the apprenticeship, the lads were required to understand all aspects of the business and Bob discovered that he had the ability to become a very good salesman. He switched tracks but stayed in the same friendship group, and Jerry's hopes of dividing the two were not realised, until shortly before the end of the apprenticeship. In the summer of 1969 Danny had to leave Marconi to return home to look after his mother. Mr. Andrews had been killed in a car accident and Mrs. Andrews had sustained serious injury meaning that she could not live alone. Danny ended his apprenticeship and returned to the family home in Whitewell where he got a job as TV repairman for Domestic Electric, the company from whom his mother still rented her television set. Colour television was about to start being officially broadcast by the BBC and Danny was more than qualified to work on colour TV sets. Domestic Electric were pleased to be able to take him on.

But Danny had learned about more than electronics at Marconi, he saw an opportunity for himself with this newest Must-Have domestic status symbol. Many people were desperate to switch to colour and Danny left Domestic Electric to set up his own rental business, buying up old black and white sets cheaply, refurbishing them and either selling them on or renting them out to people who could not pay the large premiums on the state of the art sets. As newer models of colour TVs came out, he would also buy up the older ones, adding them to his stock.

The business flourished and Danny became both wealthy and seriously overworked. At a rare reunion with his apprenticeship class he met up with Bob, and several of the lads who were still working for Marconi. Jerry was not there, detained by imminent fatherhood as his wife was about to give birth to their first child. Deep in conversation about how their lives were going, Bob realised that Danny was making far more from his little TV business in his nowhere little market town than Bob himself made as one of the south west sales team for Marconi. He saw an opportunity for himself and started pointing out to Danny the advantages of taking on a partner who could help him run the business, take charge of advertising and generally build things up in a more structured way, increasing turnover but leaving Danny free to keep abreast of the technology and work with the appliances. Frustrated by the drudgery of administering the business, Danny agreed and offered Bob a partnership on terms agreeable to both men.

During the next decade, despite Jerry's misgivings which he occasionally expressed to Danny, the business flourished. Bob took on responsibility for the financial side of the business as well as the sales and administration, and Danny turned his eyes elsewhere. Micro computers had arrived and Danny was certain that home computing was going to become very important!

On the tenth anniversary of the formation of the partnership, Danny wrote a cheque on the company account for the purchase of a job lot of clearance Sinclair ZX Spectrums. The cheque bounced. Danny went to the bank, only to discover that the the account had been emptied two days before. Bob was not at home and neither Danny, Jerry nor the police could discover where he had gone.

Some two weeks days later, Danny received a postcard of the sunlit white sand and sparkling sea of Copacabana beach with the distinctive outline of the Sugar Loaf mountain in the background. It bore two words. "Sorry. Bob."