just any old music, but thrilling new sounds, angelic harmonies and funky folksy riffs. When I started meeting and befriending the locals—people like Joni Mitchell, Linda Ronstadt, Carole King, David Crosby, and Stephen Stills, to name just a few of my immediate neighbors—it slowly began to dawn on me that I was not living in a normal residential zone. I had moved smack into the middle of a burgeoning musical renaissance.

A handful of the inhabitants were already celebrities. Micky Dolenz, who lived in a big house on Horse Shoe Canyon Road, and David Cassidy, who lived on Cole Crest Drive, both had hit TV shows in 1970—*The Monkees* and *The Partridge Family*. But many of the future musical superstars living in Laurel Canyon had not yet achieved the global fame that they would soon enjoy. Some, like Frank Zappa, another nearby neighbor, had already landed their first record deals. Others were still struggling to find their sound and make their rent. But, to me, all of them, famous or not, were merely the folks next door, my startlingly affable neighbors.

One thing almost everyone had in common in Laurel Canyon was that we were all transplants to the neighborhood: we had made a conscious choice to move here from a variety of far-flung origins. Zappa came from Baltimore. Mitchell was raised in Canada. Ronstadt hailed from Arizona. My own journey began in New York City. My dad, an immigrant from Poland, had worked his way up through the garment business and started his own company manufacturing plus-sized ladies' coats and suits. He made a decent enough living to afford a small but comfortable two-bedroom apartment—my younger sister and I shared one of them—in Washington Heights, which back in the 1950s was something of a starter neighborhood for Jewish families who were taking their first tentative steps into the middle class.

I was, to put it mildly, an unlikely candidate for a career in radio. For one thing, around the time I turned fifteen, I developed a severe stutter. Making my speech even more inelegant, I also had a strong

absolutely no movement at all. It's one extreme or the other, but it's usually moving very fast and there's always a small hurricane around us."

The interview went on for some forty minutes. At one point there was a harrowing technical glitch: about seven minutes in, the call got dropped, every radio host's nightmare. Fortunately, it was reconnected after a few frantic seconds. And there were one or two other rough patches, like at the end, when I said goodbye to John—the man who'd just released a song imploring listeners to imagine a world with no religion—by saying to him, "God bless." But for the most part I was quite pleased with how our conversation turned out. Afterward, driving to Laurel Canyon at 2:00 a.m., I wondered how many people had tuned in. I hoped at least a few.

Turned out, a lot had.

The day after the interview, I took Shane for a stroll. There were the usual waves and smiles as I passed acquaintances on the dirt roads and paths that made up the labyrinth of the neighborhood. But, to my surprise, more than a few of them stopped me to comment about how much they enjoyed the Lennon interview, remarking on how comfortable John seemed with me.

Later, when I drove to Sunset Boulevard for a haircut, I was seated in a chair between two patrons who were deeply engaged in conversation. As my barber snipped at my shoulder-length '70s locks, I began to realize they were talking about the radio chat with John. Obviously, they had no idea the shaggy-haired customer sitting between them was the host of that interview. (This sort of moment, by the way, was one of the great perks of being a radio host: since so few of my listeners knew what I looked like, I could listen in on people's conversations about me without anybody being the wiser.)

A little later that day, back at home, my phone rang, and for once it wasn't Yoko. "Hey, Elliot, what are you doing?" David Cassidy asked me. "Can I come over?"

David and I had become friendly, one of the many casual hanging-out pals I'd made in Laurel Canyon. He was five years younger than me but at the time was at the height of his TV fame. Hordes of fans, mostly teenage girls, would swarm outside his house on Cole Crest Drive, hoping to catch a glimpse of the dreamy Keith Partridge. Whenever he popped over to my place, David would avoid the throng by ducking out his backyard and following a "secret" path through a wooded plot of land that abutted his house and mine.

"I loved your interview with Lennon," he told me, lounging on my Naugahyde sofa as I uncorked a bottle of wine. David, like a lot of my musician friends in Laurel Canyon, was obsessed with John, so I took this as a high compliment.

"I'm so glad you liked it," I said.

"You're so lucky," he went on. "I'd give *anything* to meet him."

As I poured each of us a glass, I fleetingly considered telling David about my phone calls with Yoko. It was tempting. I knew he would find the revelation that I was in regular contact with the woman who shared his idol's life fascinating. But just as I had with Luna, I bit my tongue. Although it hadn't yet been stated out loud, I instinctively understood that my phone relationship with Yoko was a delicate affair. If I started blabbing, it would shatter our trust. And I wanted that trust to grow and go both ways: Yoko had shared so much with me, and I'd shared a great deal about myself in return. I decided that, for the time being at least, I would keep the calls to myself.

In the days that followed, as more and more friends (and strangers) complimented me on the show—dropping by my table at Dan Tana's to offer kudos, shouting in my ear about it while I was listening to a set at the Troubadour—I considered phoning John to thank him for the interview. I wondered if he might be expecting a call, since he knew I was now such close pals with his wife. Wouldn't it be the polite thing to do? Wasn't it common courtesy?

another, television is a visual medium, which meant I had to put much more thought and effort into where my interviews would take place. One of my first on-camera segments for *Eyewitness News*, for instance, was with my old neighbor Alice Cooper, who had undergone a metamorphosis of his own, from humble Laurel Canyon minstrel to an enormously successful shock rock performer infamous for such stage stunts as impaling baby doll heads on spikes and strapping himself into an electric chair.

I ended up doing an on-camera interview with Alice at a golf course. Much to my surprise, it turned out he loved nothing more than hitting the links in his downtime.

Another complication: my radio show ended at 10:00 p.m., just an hour before the TV news went on the air. I had to dash from the studio on La Cienega up to East Hollywood, where the TV station was located, sit in a makeup chair while my face got Pan-Caked, and be camera-ready in time to shoot the live bumper that introduced whatever taped interview we had coming up. It was all incredibly, exhaustingly frantic.

But my biggest problem with being on TV was…being on TV. I had dabbled with video a few years earlier, hosting a super-low-budget UHF show called *Headshop*, on which I interviewed folks like Moe Howard of the Three Stooges (as well as a then completely unknown young piano player named Billy Joel). But the number of people tuning in to that tiny production airing on the remote outskirts of the dial—channel 52—could be counted on fingers and toes. KABC's local news program was broadcast on real VHS television—channel 7—reaching hundreds of thousands of viewers. Being on that show, I worried, could give me a far more recognizable face than I ever wanted to have.

"I wouldn't worry about it, Elliot," David Cassidy said with an eye roll when I told him my fears of losing my anonymity. "It's a local news show. I don't think we're talking about a crowd-control situation here."

I don’t remember how long I stood there watching—it may have been minutes; it may have been longer—but eventually I found my way back to Laurel Canyon. My telephone messaging service had collected dozens of calls from friends and reporters who’d heard about the murder, but also a few from a homicide detective who wanted to talk to me. I returned that call first, and within minutes, a couple of officers were knocking on my door. They interviewed me for a very long time, asking me about Sal’s private life, about our friendship, about my whereabouts during the evening. It dawned on me that at this early stage of what would turn out to be a two-year investigation—ultimately resulting in the arrest and conviction of a twentysomething gang member who already had a long rap sheet stretching back years—I was what they’d call today a “person of interest.” I didn’t take it personally. As far as the police were concerned, at that point anyone who knew Sal was a suspect. The next day, I drove to the police station and took a polygraph test to clear my name.

At the request of Sal’s brother, I ended up arranging to have Sal’s body flown across the country for burial in suburban Mamaroneck, New York, where Sal’s family lived. Of course, I was on the flight escorting my friend’s remains. But I didn’t go alone. Sal had also been close to David Cassidy—the two shared the common bond of being teen idols—and David volunteered to join me on the grim crossing. It was, to put it mildly, a difficult trip, made even more grueling by how David dealt with his own grief. We started out sharing stories about Sal, which was somewhat cathartic and helpful. But as the flight dragged on, David began to drink heavily and would take frequent bathroom breaks, returning to his seat full of nervous, coke-fueled energy.

As terrible as the journey was, though, what was to follow on the ground in New York was so much worse.

The funeral—which David didn’t attend, fearful that his presence would create a media frenzy—was beyond brutal. I suppose all of