Blue Transistor
By Tamar Berk



I was sitting on my warm, concrete driveway in Cleveland, Ohio the summer between 5th and 6th grade. Summers in the Midwest were hot and humid, and I noticed how the sweat was making my halter top cling to my back. I leaned forward, listening to my tiny, blue plastic transistor radio my mom bought me from the Revco. I was impatient...waiting for the song I just requested to come on.

It was the first time I called a radio station to request a song. It was earlier that day and I was in my room listening to WMMS The Buzzard, THE classic rock station in Cleveland. The DJ came on and announced the phone number to call in for a request. I wrote down the phone number on a tiny piece of paper and memorized it. I picked up the phone and without thinking, dialed the number. As my fingers carefully turned each number on our white rotary phone, my hands trembled and I concentrated on making sure I wouldn’t mess up.

I was surprised when I heard ringing on the other end of the line. Normally, when I called the radio station to try to win concert tickets I'd get a busy signal, so this made me instantly feel apprehensive. Am I really getting through to someone or will it ring on endlessly?

Suddenly, someone picked up.

"WMMS what's your request?" they spit out sharply. Shocked at hearing an actual voice on the other end, my mouth went completely dry. "Um….Eleanor Rigby by The Beatles," I heard myself say faintly. They asked for my name and said, "OK" and hung up.

I stared at the phone and wondered what that meant. Did that response mean they would actually play the song? Did that curt, 'OK' imply that they hated The Beatles and would only agree to play bands like Foreigner or Black Sabbath? Maybe they could tell I was just a kid and wouldn't take me seriously? I had no idea. So, I grabbed my little blue radio, headed to the front yard, plopped down on the hot driveway, and waited.

Song after song passed….Cream, Doobie Brothers, Styx, The Who, The Eagles….. I could feel myself getting drowsy. I shifted positions to stay alert and stop myself from missing this important moment in my coming of age. I knew I would be a different person after this.

Finally, after what felt like forever, I heard, "Hi! Can you play Eleanor Rigby?"

I froze. The sound of my voice coming over the airwaves shocked me. It was so strange...so small and tiny, and didn't even sound like me. I was so embarrassed...I could feel my face turn red and my heart beating so fast that I thought I was going to pass out. My eyes darted across the street and then to the right and left. Nobody was around. I was sure everyone in the neighborhood, and all of Cleveland heard my voice and knew it was me. I stood up slowly and stretched nonchalantly, so that anyone who might be peeking through their windows or driving by would think I was just a kid casually enjoying a summer day.

Then I heard it….. "Ahhhhhh look at all the lonely people…." and all at once, I began imagining her face in the jar by the door….and I wondered, "Who is it for?"