



Memoir Mixtapes

Vol.1: Origin Stories

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Letters from the Editors



To our beloved readers, listeners, and contributors,

Not to be incredibly dramatic, but Memoir Mixtapes saved my life.

Well, maybe it's more accurate (and less histrionic) to say that Memoir Mixtapes gives me life.

Since the idea came to me on one fateful commute from Santa Monica to Koreatown, this project has brought a new sense of purpose and passion to my daily existence.

The response we've had for this first volume is above and beyond what I imagined it would be, and I'm so grateful to every single person who has been a part of it, and that most certainly includes you if you are reading this letter.

Hall and Oates, as always, said it best: "You make my dreams come true."

I want to give an extra special thanks to my husband, Andy, for helping me get the website off the ground (and keeping it online), and to Kevin, my co-curator/co-editor, who has been down for MM from the jump.

I hope you enjoy Memoir Mixtapes Vol.1: Origin Stories. I certainly enjoyed every single moment I spent reading these brilliant pieces, listening to the songs that inspired them, and co-arranging them here for the rest of the world to experience.

Stay tuned, and don't stop the music; we've only just begun.

XO

Samantha Lamph/Len
CREATOR & CO-CURATOR



Hi there.

I'm glad you could join us for the inaugural Volume of Memoir Mixtapes. I think, by the time you've read through all the wonderful and fantastic writing we've been privileged to put forth here, that you'll feel as good about this Volume as I do.

Memoir Mixtapes is very special to me. Music and writing have both always been important in my life, but I hadn't written anything of worth in years. Getting involved with MM helped me reconnect to a part of myself that I had genuinely thought was lost years and years ago; it gave me just the kick in the ass I needed to get writing again.

That's why I feel that this is a special endeavor; it gives me, and our contributors, the chance to reconnect to themselves. Whether that's getting back in touch with who you are, revisiting long-lost memories, or simply letting your voice sing out, you can with us.

I'd like to thank and bestow praise upon Sam, Memoir Mixtapes' glorious creator, for not only coming up with this great idea in the first place, but allowing me to play a role in bringing it to fruition.

I'd also like to thank my wife Elise, who not only encouraged me to get writing for the first time in years, but continued to support me as my involvement with Memoir Mixtapes dramatically expanded.

But most of all, thank you, dear readers, for having faith in our little project. I hope you enjoy Memoir Mixtapes Vol.1: Origin Stories, and I hope even more that you stick around. We don't plan to quit anytime soon.

Kevin D. Woodall
CO-CURATOR / EDITOR

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Jukebox Girl

Ann Kestner

You can find me
at the five and dime
soda jerk counter

I'll be in my
bobby socks
eating banana splits

I can't promise you
a rose garden
but I can tell you
love is in his kiss
and what really happened
on the Tallahatchie Bridge

Put another quarter in
I only exist
when the needle hits
and I start to spin



SIMPLE PLEASURES

BOBBY MCFERRIN

Bobby McFerrin

“Don’t Worry, Be Happy”

Simple Pleasures

08/1988

Manhattan



Whitney Houston

“I Wanna Dance With Somebody (Who Loves Me)”

Whitney

05/1987

Arista

Don’tcha Wanna Don’t Worry?

William Stephen Davis

The first song I was obsessed with was actually two songs, and I wasn’t obsessed with them, they were obsessed with me.

The year was 1987, we were the Baby Eagles, I was in second grade. My mom, a third grade teacher in the northern part of the county, dropped me off pre-trek and dead center each morning. A half hour drive Wilkes County time is two city hours minimum. Mom added to it by swinging through a fast food window each morning after leaving me in a school cafeteria. Maybe it was to save money, or perhaps the logic of my location provided a sense I was somehow fed through osmosis, which wasn’t the case.

I arrived an hour before the first busloads of students showed up, alone in an l-shaped room, dark and quiet sans the occasional janitor cart passing by. I would otherwise stare at the concrete wall, painted letters filled with children squeezed past physical limitations into shapes spelling out “WILKESBORO” on the wall. This was ground zero for learning.

It came about two weeks into my being there alone. The principal arrived and found me staring at the wall, the late dawn light casting a dim glow across my shoulders. As would anyone with a sharp eye and knowledge of melancholy, she saw the existential paws of a lukewarm life only worth coasting through visibly sinking in.

I was the cog in the wheel, this was the backwards hat predecessor of No Child Left Behind...just one, dropped off early before most kids woke up, save the super rednecks on top of the mountain who had to catch the break-of-dawn bus.

Fearing the worst, the principal found the sole cafeteria worker. Focused and panicked, she was bobble-heading around a new metal device the size of a motel ice machine in the corner of the cafeteria. We were the recent recipient of a brand new orange juice machine, a county-wide contribution to benefit learning from the liquids up.

The glory of the device was it would pass oranges through the front display before squeezing them into the general vicinity of a waffle mix-sized cup for students who could afford the steep one dollar price tag. Seeing as roughly half the school was on free lunch, it stood as a constantly malfunctioning prison for aging citrus that slowly coated the tile floor into a velcro soundscape. Even still, in a land and time of hyper color t-shirts and WWF Wrestling Buddies, this machine was a godsend to everyone, and we knew class when we saw it.

Can’t do anything with him, the cafeteria worker said. Had to get this brand-new contraption ready for the children, she said. It wasn’t as easy as they had said, this new technology.

Exasperated, the principal looked on. The cafeteria worker clearly didn’t understand a golden opportunity for career advancement, even when it landed right at her doorstep. Her position’s immobility matched her entire squad’s fixed positions behind the lunch line as children slid beige, brown and salmon-colored trays ten thousand meals deep over the metal rails, past the ham melts and beans and right into middle school. No sir. She would be here, right here, forever.

Aha, the janitor. There were two of them, always rolling carts of some sort, disappearing behind doorways leading to who knows where storing secrets no one could even begin to comprehend the contents of. If the cafeteria worker wasn't going to step up to the plate, perhaps this mobile lot would be ready for a responsibility increase. Now mind you, neither of these figures were mind-molders by occupation. These were service providers in niche fields, clearcut positions with lines fading fast towards the direction of more work and less pay just like a neighbor claiming your yard one extra strip at a mowed time.

I watched as the principal and janitor talked in the doorway. Up to this point I hadn't seen any high-profile crime cases on tv or films where someone comes and saves another person's life at just the right moment, so it looked exactly like a principal talking to a janitor. Their words were silent riddles, some silhouetted adult tongue boiled down to pantomime like a couple shadowbox puppets.

The principal quickstepped it toward me and hooked a sharp right toward her office like a jet ski splashing someone. Passing by, she spoke as if I did something wrong and she had to correct it. "He'll get you fixed, I took care of it. You just sit tight."

The janitor sauntered up and stopped, looking down as he loomed over me. I was a cracker bag of sticks accented by a Trapper Keeper with geometrical shapes galore and an ever-changing series of striped shirts my mom bought in bulk and picked out for me on the daily. He eventually let out a huff and gave it the best he could.

"You like music?"

"Yeah."

"All right then." He turned and strolled out of sight, behind the cafeteria counter. The steel blue light of the dying night was starting to turn, fluorescents still off to keep the overhead low.

Then, the sound came. A low rumble, notching up and echoing off the walls and drop tiles of the empty cafeteria.

*Fwee fwa wa wa wa
Fwa wa wa wa wa wa wa...*

Cruising out of the cafeteria, the janitor didn't even have to look at me. His job was done.

*Here's a little song I wrote
You might want to sing it note for note...*

God knows how he even managed to pull this music out on such short notice, there was no internet, let alone Pandora or Spotify.

Don't worry, be happy...

CDs had only been invented the year prior and 8-tracks were out, so proper deduction revealed a cassette as the logical answer. Only the next track seemed to betray that logic.

The silence broke with a plinking drum beat, followed by a woman moaning. Soon after, her ecstasy turned to confident iterations, like a catcall to the sky.

*Clock strikes upon the hour
And the sun begins to fade...*

It was getting light out and the lyrics were getting ready for the night. Everything was opposite of my life experience up to that point, down to the hour.

*Still enough time to figure out
How to chase my blues away...*

So here I was, left alone in the cafeteria, music blaring for me and me only. The crescendo hits.

*Oh, I wanna dance with somebody
I wanna feel the heat with somebody...*

While we regularly jump-roped to provocative songs in physical education class, I can say with great conviction there's nothing quite like the sensation you get from hearing Bobby McFerrin and Whitney Houston singing songs to ward off the darkness by yourself in a lonely cafeteria chamber. But this is about obsession, and as stated before, the obsession was not mine to share, but one that was delivered unto me.

At the end of Whitney's song, all the notes were hit, jubilation exploded past its crescendo, only to be tamed through a slow, painful fadeout as many a feral song were abused with during this era.

Then, it happened.

Fwee fwa wa wa wa...

Like clockwork, Mr. McFerrin's song started up again. And then Whitney was back on, immediately after. And Bobby. And Whitney. Ad infinitum.

Either the janitor was a bonafide psycho who made a never-ending mixtape of just two songs over and over, or there was some deep, dark magic at play in Wilkesboro Elementary School.

The music always turned off prior to the other students' arrival, an evil trick by the musical forces, to be sure. My new task, to communicate with other human beings, proved problematic as my exposure to two intense messages too early in the day and at too young an age. Normal banter was an impossibility. I had flown too close to the sun for too long, and there was no coming back.

As expected, I walked to class with a strange swirl of love and happiness in the face of loneliness and losing one's house reverberating to jovial tones inside my head. My school memories for the rest of the year are scant: teachers rotated our second-third split class two times that year. I didn't think anything of it then. As a part-time teacher, I now know all those motherfuckers quit.

As for me, the cafeteria was my morning holding cell. The first hour a sound prison, the second hour a cacophony of student tribes. The orange juice machine remained a hot topic, conversations mostly revolving around student politics and the have-nots found themselves associating with near-friends who had the extra dollar to splurge, just to have a chance to watch the machine do its slave labor alongside their fiscal sponsor.

The first hour, though, was always Bobby McFerrin and Whitney Houston. Back-to-back, one hit each only, same song every time. I never saw anyone start the music again, it

simply automated whenever I arrived in the lunchroom. Sometimes it would start a few minutes late, giving me false hope in a promise for room tone until Bobby's doo-wops sashayed their way into my ears once more.

It's no surprise my mom was called in for a parent-teacher conference due to my noisemaking in class. They were all convinced it was due to my parent's recent divorce. Everyone was so worried, they said. I would be alright, though, they said. It was hard, they knew, and I was taking it so well. It was impossible to not take it well, you see, because anything you did was the right thing to do when you're sad, at least for a little while.

But I wasn't sad, I didn't have the option to be. Whenever I worried, Bobby forced to be happy. So that I could find the heat with somebody. With somebody who loves me.

And then others would roll in, one busload at a time. the music always off before their entrance. This was the Stanford Prison Experiment with no guards. They never heard the songs...they were my songs only. I was Jack Torrance in the Overlook Hotel.

And the songs, they continued to be my songs, one hour every morning for three more years, second through fifth grade. Do the math on that shit.

So here I am today, actually not happy. And I hate dancing. Both things put me in a mood and make me generally skeptical. My wife says I listen to sad bastard music, and she's right. Because I've experienced the other side, I've faced happiness dead-on, and I've had my fill. That shit's too weird, too quick, too energetic and too relentless in its evangelical quest for followers. Plain and simple, I just don't trust it.

You can find me in the back of the bar, drinking room temperature beer and scowling at the fair-faced revelers moving in unison like a pack of dumb animals pre-slaughter. Me, I like long, slow, painful songs that blur together until you don't remember where or when they started, or if they'll ever finish. Just like Bobby and Whitney taught me.



Blondie
"Heart of Glass"

Parallel Lines

09/1978

Chrysalis

On "Heart of Glass"

Cate Meighan

Monday morning. It's like a curse if you work as an entertainment reporter. Deadlines never feel more pressing and the close of another weekend inevitably opens up to a day full of catching up on who is fighting, dating, divorcing and dropping new music while trying to curtail a potential scandal. From my perspective, life for celebs would be a whole lot easier if they took a page from the life playbook of an average Joe and kept their clothes on, paid their bills, and remembered that the Cloud makes everything accessible. Monday morning and here I sit buried beneath work and unsure of where to start. While I figure it out I decide to go back in time and listen to a few old tracks that will prepare me for an interview with an old school musician later today.

*Once I had a love and it was a gas
Soon turned out, had a heart of glass.*
-Blondie

A few lines in and I'm standing in my parents very first apartment where my love of music all began. It's a few days before Halloween and my parents were throwing a party for all of their friends. The night before was my kiddie party in our basement. I wore a Wonder Woman costume that was so NOT a Wonder Woman costume because it had a skirt and no lasso. I remember a punch bowl and bobbing for apples and little else. But my parents' party, well that was the real deal. There was neat lighting, a table full of sweets that I was never allowed to have, and all of our doorways had beads hanging from them that you were supposed to walk through.

I was 7 years old and beginning to develop my own taste and, thanks to my dad's music obsession, disco was a big part of it. When I was about five Dad started to train as a DJ at a local radio station, and his little record collection on a tiny cart with wheels suddenly took over a whole wall of our living room. Even in that small apartment Dad's stereo was front and center. His love of music turned into an educated love of stereo equipment. He spent two hours without fail every night cranking out tunes, everything from Pink Floyd to Blue Oyster Cult to ABBA, and all the while he was fiddling with levers on all sorts of boxes that were supposed to somehow enhance the sound. I didn't know if the "woofers and tweeters" did any good, but the day that he played Chic's "Le Freak" my life immediately changed.

The last song of every evening was picked out by me, and by the time 1978 rolled around I was choosing things like "Ring My Bell," "The Hustle," and "Disco Inferno". I also waited anxiously for Saturday afternoons to roll around because, thanks to cable television and WPIX in NYC, I had discovered The Soap Factory, a weekly dance show. A few weeks before my parents' party we were all watching as Blondie performed a song called "Heart of Glass." I was mesmerized by the lead singer's blonde hair, bright lip stick, and her turquoise pants suit. My dad always watched The Soap Factory with me, but this time even my mom stopped to check out Debbie Harry. I mean, how could you not?

My mom spent the next week or so in party planning mode. She would fill the bathroom sink with water and bubbles, and I'd spend an hour in there playing with all of my Fisher Price Little People. I loved having them swim and ride in their boats every night after dinner, and I can remember my mom on the phone in the next room, night-after-night, making plans for this bash. My dad was always the laid back one and seemed to have little

involvement. She hung sparkly decorations, made food, and spiked the punch all while Dad was engrossed in his albums. Neither of us realized what he was actually up to and, as it turned out, Dad's involvement was actually monumental because he was preparing to put all of those newfound DJ skills to good use.

My mom had a surprise or two up her sleeve as well. The creativity was always flowing in that little apartment and so for the week leading up to the party when Dad and his music were taking over the living room, Mom was in her studio. It was a small room with her easel and mountain of art supplies on one side and her Singer sewing machine on the other. Beneath a window was a big cushion with built in pillows to nap on. That was my spot to read or draw when Mom was busy drawing advertisements for our local newspaper. Dad had thought that Mom was working on extra assignments for art school when in fact she had been busy at her sewing machine making a turquoise satin pants suit, just like Debbie Harry's. She had decided to put her blonde wavy hair and 100 pound frame to good use and transform into his new favorite singer, gold cuff bracelet and all, for their Halloween party.

This one night in particular reminds me that at one point in time my parents really, truly were on the same page. They really did "get" each other. As Mom shocked Dad with her costume, he was just getting the party started. Dad was the man, but his music collection was the true star of the evening. His friends were all on the floor in front of his racks of records, flipping through everything in amazement and helping him to decide what to play next. Dad's dedications were also a hit because the songs that he played weren't just for particular people, but he also had hilarious reasons for his selections.

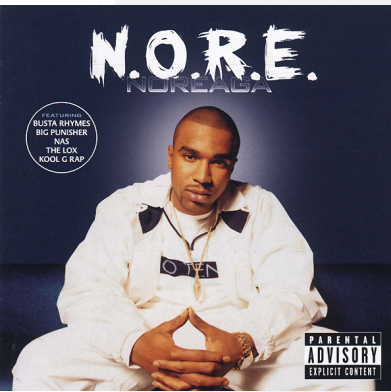
An hour or so into the party Dad pulled out a surprise record that he was really excited about. It was Blondie's "Heart of Glass," an extended dance mix that wasn't available in the States yet. When he ordered music for the station he would also add a few import records from the UK for his own collection, and Blondie had just become available. It was a song that no one else knew until he played it that night, but everyone loved it. Even the guys that had been downing their Michelob beer on the floor in front of the stereo all night were finally dancing. One spin of that record led to about 20 more before the night was over.

At first, I might have been the only one not in costume, and that was because there was no way that I was going to put that fake Wonder Woman thing on again. My aunt (Mom's younger sister) decided in the middle of what looked like a Soul Train line dance that I needed some makeup at least. She grabbed me and her purse and hauled us both into the bathroom. There Aunt Elaine pulled out her black eyeliner and within a few minutes had transformed me into "Cleopatra." I wasn't sure exactly who that was, but my eyes looked like I belonged on The Soap Factory so that kinda sorta made me Debbie Harry for the night too, right?

Everyone left after midnight. I remember my dad explaining the concept of time to me, and how the digital clock turning to 2:01 am meant that it was Sunday morning, even though it still felt like Saturday night. Truth be told it was far later than that and somehow I was still awake. My mom tried to make me go to bed, but when I begged for one more spin of "Heart of Glass," my dad put the record on before she could even bother to protest. My room needed to be cleaned up anyway because my bed was where everyone left their belongings upon arrival. They and their coats might have been gone but my toys were all over the place and my precious Little People were scattered all over the room.

I swore that I would help clean up if they let me stay up but instead I climbed into the green recliner that had been temporarily moved into my room during the party. The French doors to my room were open and I curled up there, watching as my parents dragged garbage bags around to clean up the wreckage. My mom told me that I had 5 minutes until she was putting me to bed and so I closed my eyes as Debbie Harry sang.

Who knew that nights like this one actually existed? If beaded doorways, little packs of M&M's, and unexpected dance battles were what it meant to be an adult then I really couldn't wait to grow up. I closed my eyes tighter as I heard Mom approaching, and when she whispered to Dad that I was asleep I stayed extra still until she went back to cleaning up. Eventually I really did drift off to sleep in that chair, and woke as Dad was carrying me across the room to my bed. As Mom tucked me in and kissed me goodnight, she did the only thing that could have made this night any better—she took off her shiny cuff bracelet and put it on my arm.



Noreaga

“Superthug”

N.O.R.E.

07/1998

Penalty Records

Noreaga Shouts Out The Philippines

Janice Lobo Sapigao

“Ya, what? you found Manuel Noreaga?

In the Philippines?

He has a mansion?

Okay, we on it, on it, right now, right” —Noreaga “Superthug (What What)”

And my brother and I replayed the track

At least five times

Before we could confirm

That he didn’t say spilled beans,

Other means, or in the machines.

The first time we found our ears

Stuck to a stereo praying

Nore really knew anyone who was Filipino.

We thought he could see us

Between helicopter beats and

The repetition of a single-word
chorus trapped inside of itself.

Before we had been there,

We found the Philippines first before

We could visit. We heard its name

Calling ours, wanting to sit with

a sound system

synonymous with homeland.

To a beat that bumped for us

Brown (over) and

Black (over) and

Belonging (over again).



Alanis Morissette

"Ironic"

Jagged Little Pill

06/1995

Maverick / Reprise

Who Would've Thought It Figures

Eric Wallgren

Growing up, there's this dumpy room in my parents' basement with a ripped up couch and a T.V. that I watch too much of. Mostly I watch Nickelodeon, but one day I go down there and I see something else that blows my mind. There's this woman in a car with three of her identical friends. Four of her. Why is there four of her? The one in the back draws with her fingertips. The one riding shotgun hangs out the car window—fucking crazy—and the one driving, she sings. The song is "Ironic." And the duplicated woman is Alanis Morissette. I'm six years old and I've just come across my new obsession.

"Ironic," I learn, is a music video. And this channel, MTV, is like a river of them that flows day after day, hour after hour. There's this one where these guys are rocking out by a pool and there's a bunch of girls swimming and wearing glitter (Red Hot Chili Peppers "Aeroplane"), one where this woman is at the movies with her friends and they all start throwing popcorn at each other (Fugees "Killing Me Softly"), one where this funny-looking guy with white make-up and pinprick eyes keeps going up the screen and smiling (Marilyn Manson "Sweet Dreams"). It's all so fascinating, but not that first high, and when I flip on MTV, always, I'm looking for "Ironic." I see it and I breathe in every word, every scenario: the free ride when you've already paid, the no smoking sign on your cigarette break, Mr. Play It Safe, afraid to fly, who goes ahead and dies in a plane crash. They all become my most insightful paradoxes.

Sometimes I watch with Patrick, this kid from two doors down that's just a grade above me in school. I tell him I like "Spiderwebs" by No Doubt and he tells me they have this other video, "Just a Girl," that's also good. I don't know if I should believe him—because he lies a lot, and about the most random shit—but then, sure enough, I see the video and it's real. "Mo' Money Mo' Problems" comes on, and he tells me that the guy they show talking in the middle of the song is Biggie; he was a rapper, but he's dead now, and a friend of Puff Daddy's. Turns out, that one's also true.

Patrick and I watch the whole video for Busta Rhymes' "Put Your Hands Where My Eyes Can See" just because there's a man painted green at the very end who puffs out his cheeks in a way we think is funny. We really like this video "Breathe" by The Prodigy, which has centipedes and two of the wildest looking people I've ever seen. And one day when a number flashes on the screen, we try calling in to request it. But over and over we get put on hold, and when Patrick finally seems to make our request, I know he's just mimicking the call and that he isn't actually reaching MTV. So the video never plays. But we love those shots with the centipedes.

Around this time, I notice that "Ironic" doesn't seem to play on MTV anymore: my first taste of what it means to love a song and then lose it from heavy rotation. This is before downloading, and before I'm old enough to buy CDs with my own money. It's a loss I should just accept, but I haven't figured this out yet. I keep watching MTV, all Matchbox 20 and Spice Girls now, and no "Ironic." Like ten thousand spoons, when all you need is a knife.

But I move on. Hanson comes along and I'm so into it that I go as Zach for Halloween that year. I buy their CD, and it's the first CD I ever buy, but nothing I see or hear gets me the way "Ironic" did. And I don't think it's just me who thinks that from this point onward—in the TRL era—MTV gets plain boring in all that gloss. So I move on. And even if it's not that song—even when I'm fifteen and listening to My Bloody Valentine for two weeks straight because I just discovered them and just discovered weed—it's the "Ironic" feeling that I'm chasing, from when I walked into the basement and a whole world that opened up to me.



Don McLean

"American Pie"

American Pie

10/1971

United Artists Records

On "American Pie"

Drew T. Coble

"A long, long time ago
I can still remember how that music used to make
me smile."

A toddler in purple Barney pajamas
clutching a dollar bill
swaying toward the stage
in a hole-in-the-wall Mexican grill
north of Atlanta.

The guitarist would put his boots up on a tattered
case, crooning, holding the music close to his chest
and the toddler would let the dollar fall
into a hat and the guitarist would smile
never faltering.

This was sometime after the divorce,
sometime before Centennial Olympic Park,
there was a mortar attack in Greece,
and nobody wanted to play the Chicago Bulls.

"A long, long time ago
I can still remember how that music used to make
me smile."

A toddler in blue Batman pajamas
clutching his blanket
swaying toward his fathers bed
in a down-in-the-heels apartment
north of Fayetteville.

The father would put his feet down on the tattered
carpet, crooning, holding the toddler close to his chest
and the father would let the toddler fall
asleep and the father would smile
never faltering.

This was sometime after his termination,
sometime before Maria,
there was a cold war looming,
and nobody wanted to play for the Chicago Bulls.



The Police

“Walking on the Moon”

Regatta de Blanc

10/1979

A&M

Walking on the Moon

Ben Jatos

Growing up, there's this dumpy room in my parents' basement with a ripped up couch and a T.V. that I watch too much of. Mostly I watch Nickelodeon, but one day I go down there and I see something else that blows my mind. There's this woman in a car with three of her identical friends. Four of her. Why is there four of her? The one in the back draws with her fingertips. The one riding shotgun hangs out the car window—fucking crazy—and the one driving, she sings. The song is “Ironic.” And the duplicated woman is Alanis Morissette. I'm six years old and I've just come across my new obsession.

“Ironic,” I learn, is a music video. And this channel, MTV, is like a river of them that flows day after day, hour after hour. There's this one where these guys are rocking out by a pool and there's a bunch of girls swimming and wearing glitter (Red Hot Chili Peppers “Aeroplane”), one where this woman is at the movies with her friends and they all start throwing popcorn at each other (Fugees “Killing Me Softly”), one where this funny-looking guy with white make-up and pinprick eyes keeps going up the screen and smiling (Marilyn Manson “Sweet Dreams”). It's all so fascinating, but not that first high, and when I flip on MTV, always, I'm looking for “Ironic.” I see it and I breathe in every word, every scenario: the free ride when you've already paid, the no smoking sign on your cigarette break, Mr. Play It Safe, afraid to fly, who goes ahead and dies in a plane crash. They all become my most insightful paradoxes.

I was 13 years old and a seventh-grader at Shumway Junior High School, a cesspool of pubescent hormones and knockoff Polo cologne. Julie Hood was also in my grade and she was a goddess. She had red hair that was feathered perfectly, wore gorgeous light blue James Jeans with matching eye shadow, and always had on sexy, auburn colored feather earrings. I was just a dorky kid who happened to catch her eye and she was my girlfriend even though I didn't know what that entailed. We held hands sometimes and that was good with me.

She tried to kiss me once but I bailed. It was the beginning of our relationship and I went to her house after school. We dropped off our stuff and she went into her bedroom to change clothes before we went to go to her neighborhood park. She emerged wearing a white tube top and tiny pink shorts while I had on a blue Izod polo and dark brown corduroy pants. I started to sweat. We held hands and walked the two blocks to Hidden Park. I don't think I spoke the entire time. I had never kissed a girl at the time and she had definitely kissed a few boys. I knew it was my time. We got to the park and she guided me to a fallen log where we sat down next to each other. She was right next to me with her arm around me while I just avoided her stare and sweated. I made small talk about our silly History teacher and tried to get out of my own head about how I was just a giant failure with girls. It was amazingly awkward sitting there, torn between complete and utter fear and raw desire. After about ten agonizing minutes, I told her I had to leave and ran the three miles home. I forgot my backpack at her house.

Julie broke up with me the next day in a note as she returned my backpack and I wasn't surprised. I still loved her with every ounce of my being. The next girl I went out with, Kellie Bain, was a step down from Julie, but I needed to kiss someone to get it over with and wipe off the stench of my previous failure. The day after we started going out, I walked her to her first period class and before she went in, I held her close and stuck my

tongue down her throat. It was so cool and easy that I repeated it several times that day. I was now a kid who kissed girls. Yep. Sweet.

I broke up with Kellie three days later and asked Julie if I could walk her home again. She had heard about my kissing prowess and said that sounded fun. We set it up for the next day. I wore the same blue polo and cords because I wanted to redeem myself. Again, we went to her house where she changed into a black halter-top and denim mini-skirt. I was so excited. We walked to the park where I took her to the log and kissed her before we were even sitting. We stayed there for 30 minutes kissing and kissing more and grinding, which I didn't even know was a thing, and it was pretty much the best day of my 13 year old life. Finally, she said she had to go, and I felt like I had proven myself. We walked back to her house, where I grabbed my backpack and headed out for the triumphant return back to my house. It was about a 45-50 minute walk, so I took out my Sony Walkman and headphones and pushed Play as I left Julie's.

Regatta de Blanc by The Police was the tape in my Walkman that day. It was one of my favorite tapes, and I listened to it often, but I think this is the first day I truly heard it. The first song was "Message in a Bottle," which was relatively famous and it had always been my favorite on the tape. It was about loneliness, and what 13 year old didn't feel alone? The fourth song was "Bring on the Night," which was my second favorite prior to this listening. But it was when Side A finished and I turned the tape over to Side B that my song world changed.

Sting, Stewart Copeland, Andy Summers. They were The Police and their song "Walking on the Moon" was my song that day and for many other days since.

*Giant steps are what you take
Walking on the moon*

As those lyrics entered my head, I was literally taking the lightest, happiest steps possible. It felt like I was floating.

*We could walk forever
Walking on the moon*

This was like crack to my 13-year-old brain. I had just completely made out with the love of my life and redeemed myself and it was going to last forever.

*Walking back from your house
Walking on the moon
Feet they hardly touch the ground
Walking on the moon*

I stopped in the middle of the sidewalk because Sting was speaking directly to me. I WAS walking back from her house. My feet WERE hardly touching the ground. This was amazing that a song could so incredibly sum up my feelings and life at this very moment. The song was five minutes of perfection and for the rest of my walk home I hit rewind after the song finished. I listened to that song seven times on the way home and another dozen or so that night. I had a song.

In the adolescent years that followed, "Walking on the Moon" served as a victory song of sorts. I would listen to it after a good date. I'd put it on after a great day at school. Each of the roughly seven hundred mixtapes I made for girls throughout my youth/early adult days opened with that song. Thank you, Sting.

Now I'm 49 years old, with a wife and a six year old daughter. I still listen to "Walking on the Moon," but only when it comes on Pandora. It's no longer a victory song for me, but rather a memory jog. It reminds me of days when the world was mine. Of days when hope was real and tangible. It reminds me of days when walking home after kissing a girl meant everything.

STARSHIP



knee deep in the hoopla

Starship

"We Built This City"

*Knee Deep in the
Hoopla*

09/1985

Grunt / RCA Records

This City and Those Who Built It

C.C. Russell

My family wasn't big on music. Though my father was a DJ at the local radio station, he had very little love for music that had been produced in the last twenty or so years. I don't remember ever hearing a song played on the record player that gathered dust in our basement. My soundtrack was always either the television or my parents screaming at each other.

They were also the kind of Christian that was popular in that decade. No sleepovers, no D&D, no R-rated movies. Evil was waiting everywhere to steal away their children. So how I was allowed to attend a co-ed dance birthday party is beyond me. It is one of only a few birthday parties that I can remember attending. But there it is in my memory: my father dropping me off, me timidly stepping down the carpeted stairs to the sound of Top 40 tunes.

And so it was that I found myself in the basement of Angie Jones' house, somewhere in the middle of sixth grade, dancing – for the first time – with a girl, my hands on her hips as "We Built This City" poured from woodgrain and mesh speakers. I want to tell you (trust me, you're going to hate me for this cliché moment) that it was the first time that I had truly noticed music, but I don't think that's too far from the truth. It was the moment that showed me how songs can color us in, how they can hold all of these emotions in such a succinct little container.

We danced in the way that young people did then: the girl places her hands on the boy's shoulders. He reciprocates with his hands on her hips. The arms are held out straight, elbows locked to keep the maximum amount of space between them while still touching. They then step out with one leg (opposite leg to each other so that they travel the same direction) and into it with the other, and then repeated the opposite direction – two steps to the left, two to the right. Once we got better at the timing, some among us would even start adding a slow rotation, our barely-joined bodies slowly moving in a large circle along with the shuffle.

We Built This City by Starship has been voted the worst song of all time by both Blender and GQ, and the worst song of the 1980s by Rolling Stone via a reader's poll. I suppose that they have a point. It is a goofy song that somehow manages to combine anti-corporate lyrics with a completely corporate bubblegum pop sound, a song with ludicrous lyrics that treats itself with deadly seriousness. But it is the first song that I purchased. The day after that birthday party, I took my allowance downtown to our tiny little Pamida and I bought the 45 single and proceeded to play it repeatedly for the next few weeks. It was the beginning of my lifelong obsession with music, worst song ever or not. And I danced. Danced there in my empty basement, danced over the carpet sample squares, danced more to the memory than to the song itself.

My mother often said that music was one avenue that the devil takes to get into your life. I picture her watching Footloose (as if she would have watched a film like that) and siding with the villains who were just trying to protect those children from the evils of music. She wasn't happy with the fact that I was spending my allowance in such a way, but she

didn't stop me. Years later, when we are fighting about my music (her threatening to burn my Siouxsie and Concrete Blonde albums), she will tell me that she thinks it is the music that has made me this way, that she never should have allowed me to buy those records and cassettes over the years. In her mind, I was possessed by Starship. I suppose that there is the tiniest little bit of truth in that. That song wormed its way into my heart, and I was never again content without music in my life.

It is possible, probable even, that almost any song coupled with that moment, coupled with that first touch would have led to this realization, this fully fledged sudden understanding of music and what it can do to us. But for me, it was this. Grace Slick belting out lyrics about corporation games while my hands rested, sweaty, against the belt loops of Angie Jones' jeans. It had a beat, and we could dance to it. And so we did. Back and forth until the needle left it behind. That static and we parted, at least one of us forever altered.



Fugees

"Killing Me Softly"

The Score

02/1996

Ruffhouse / Columbia

Killing Me Softly

Jennifer McIntyre

I'm a sad person. Like...really sad. Like, to this day, I sometimes lock myself in my bedroom and watch YouTube videos of soldiers returning home from war, just to give myself a cathartic cry. I am the definition of existential woe and malaise.

Sadness has been my best weapon for attention since I was a kid, so when I had the choice to be anything, I chose to be sad. By two and a half, I had my pout face down pat. I would spend my daydreams on time-consuming, elaborate answers to the question, "What's wrong?" And when people didn't ask, I would fall into a deeper woe that no one noticed my rain-cloudy attitude. It took a solid two decades to understand that rain-cloudy people just kind of suck.

Is it any wonder, then, that my first favorite gift was an expensively hand-crafted rosewood music box that played a rendition of "Killing Me Softly?" Eight year old me could not get enough of the plucky notes and the depressing melody. Finally, I found the crooning of my soul. I found the melancholy of my heart, incarnate. Someone finally understood me and put all of my feelings in a tiny little music box. For months, I fell asleep in my sweet water bed to sadness in E minor. I was obsessed.

Enter the devastating 1990s radio release of Lauryn Hill's version of the song. Be still my perpetually broken, dismal heart! There are words. There is rhyme. There is devastating exposition behind my music box tune. At last. At long last. She sang to my soul.

The minute I earned enough allowance money, I begged my mom to take me to Music City at the Boulder Mall to get the newly released cassette single. I listened to it all the way home from the mall.

*I felt all flushed with fever, embarrassed by the crowd
I felt he'd found my letters and read each one out loud
I prayed that he would finish, but he just kept right on*

Yes! Sing it, Lauryn Hill!

*Strumming my pain with his fingers
Singing my life with his words
Killing me softly with his song
Killing me softly with his song*

On the way to school every day of my third grade year, I would push play on my Walkman, listen, rewind the cassette, and listen to it again. I spent the entirety of my bus rides staring longingly at trees and corn fields and fancy red barns, imagining myself to be the beautiful, forlorn woman the song was about. I liked to pretend I was in a music video, and there was a camera finally capturing my perfect pout face and begging the question, "What's wrong?" I would sit on the bus, window-side, and choose to be sad.

I was eight years old. I hadn't so much as kissed any of the boys who chased me on the playground. They were icky. I was a tomboy that played soccer and was bullied by my brother. I didn't know how to brush my hair and I hated wearing shirts. I was growing so fast my bones ached. I didn't know what it meant to be in love, to be a voluptuous woman

enamored by the allure of men. But I had been training for nearly a decade in the art of being heart-broken.

I would listen to the song, imagining my heartstrings being strummed into breaking over and over again. I would watch myself in the mirror while I cried to make sure I wasn't an ugly crier. I would crumble in my bed and journal about Lauryn Hill and "Killing Me Softly" and what a stupid-head Robert Onulak was. Robert Onulak had just lost his mom to cancer that year and was desperately trying to cope. I was a jackass. Sometimes kids just don't get it.

I wouldn't experience real loss until I was 13 when my best friend was killed in a single-car drunk driving accident with her father behind the wheel. I wouldn't have my heart broken by a man until I was 19. And I wouldn't learn to give myself the permission to be happy until several years later. I've learned I was selfish that way.

The thing about your first sad song is that it's the worst kind of gateway drug. I still listen to sad music like some sort of powerful barbiturate. Bon Iver's "Skinny Love" was a college staple. "Fix You" by Coldplay still makes me cry most of the time. Death Cab's "Transatlanticism" makes me cry every time. I don't pretend to be the sad girl in the music videos on busses anymore, but I think that's probably mostly because I don't ride busses anymore. I'm still a pretty sad person. But at least I don't pout for attention anymore. My sadness usually stops at my musical selections, and that's okay by me.



Kelly Clarkson

“Breakaway”

Breakaway

11/2004

RCA Records

A Poem in Two Parts

Sarah Little

small-town girl

a girl clicks new buttons into place
in the discman, taps it a couple of times. makes
sure they're in properly and
finds a CD. she handles it
carefully, as though frail:
picks it up at the edges and slides it
down her pinky finger.
flips it over, clicks it onto the mechanism.

play.
the quality of playback is tinny,
the headphones the thin kind which will
only wear out after further use.
she tries to mimic the beat
and fails.

the lyrics spill out, and she
unravels them
with all the care of a Christmas
present.

small-town girl listens
intently, waits for clarity.
it comes in the shape of
another small-town girl,
telling her about dreams and imagination.

small-town girl listens
to vague silhouettes outlines
of cityscapes and wonders
what's so great about the city.

(she meets the city
when she's still old enough to be
impressionable.
soon, she understands)

her friend pops on the cd
and she waits for the song to come through.
she listens, and thinks of the slice
of city she met.

thinks of skyscrapers and mazes you could
get lost in. thinks of careful danger, risk-taking,
and draws a blank imagining it.

she listens again to the lyrics,
wonder and excitement and ambition bleeding
through the chorus, melting
into energy.

she wonders if she is supposed to
imagine the same.

city, take two

small-town girl shuffles off
to the city. she lives here now,
and one suburb looks big enough to fit
the small town she came from.

population x times y, she writes.
no, that's not right. *y divides by x*
equals. she reads the number, it's too big to
wrap her mind around.
so she doesn't try.

the city has its own bubbles
and her residential area becomes
hers. she rarely ventures outside
of the area. this tiny suburb-town
shrinks the city for her,
becomes a micro-town in a city.

the music is played on the radio here
sometimes. she doesn't have to wear out
batteries on her discman.
anyway, the headphones are
starting to break apart. the foam on one
earpiece is tearing away.

so she listens to a small-town girl
singing about a small-town, but
now it's a big city.
every scale is bigger.
she just doesn't realize it yet.

small-town girl goes to university
a few years after moving.
she extends her reach around the city,
knows how to get from *a* to *b*, but also from
b to *e*. *e* to *c*.
she draws lines on a map,
circles points of interest.

university is its own
major scale to her: she fits the small-town population
into the university, pictures a few thousand townspeople
packing into a lecture hall.

in her time out of classes, she explores:
tall buildings, dizzyingly high – she
cranes her neck, wonders if this is what
vertigo feels like.
tries to count the number of floors
by the lines of windows.

half the buildings
have revolving doors.

she stands on the highest floor
of one of them, surveys the world
below her feet.

this world is home now
and she is the better for it.



Otis Redding

"Try a Little Tenderness"

Complete & Unbelievable:

The Otis Redding

Dictionary of Soul

10/1966

Volt / Atco

The Two-Lane Highway of "Try a Little Tenderness"

Ryane Nicole Granados

I was 10 years old when I first heard Otis Redding's rendition of "Try a Little Tenderness." I actually heard his voice, drenched in emotion, piping through the recorded sounds of my family's brand new VHS player. It was out with the Betamax and in with every 80s movie a 6th grader needed to understand the animal kingdom of adolescence. A Friday night viewing left me enthralled by a scene from *Pretty in Pink*. The iconic character Duckie was serenading his best friend and unrequited love, Andie. In a choreographed lip sync, Duckie, via the writing of John Hughes, introduced a song I became vehemently convinced was written just for me. While acknowledging the heteronormative nature of traditional gender roles featured in a song that provides advice on how to woo a woman, I would argue that it could also be a song reminding a woman how to love herself.

This is a song that sketches a girl during her transition into young womanhood. This is a song that reminds us of ponytails held high and the weariness of being forced to grow up far too soon. This is a song for an entire generation of brown girls accused of being angry if they don't smile, who are told to dim their light and hide their style, whose curves spread beyond their jeans or shaggy dresses, but their hearts still long for tenderness. This is a song for the girls never featured in John Hughes' movies even though we watched them and we loved them and we rooted for the Duckies and the Andies anyway.

From the opening instrumentation filled with organs and horns and an arranged harmony by Isaac Hayes, this soulful fight song of "Try a Little Tenderness" unveils a rallying cry of women striving to be seen. The song is both the sobs of a baby girl told to wipe her tears and the feverish build-up of a full-fledged woman orchestrating the awkward balance of society's rhythm and her own discounted blues.

As an African American woman, I have struggled to find my place in the nostalgia of my childhood movies in the same way I have struggled to find my place in the characteristics of mainstream feminism; instead, I more closely identify with the inclusive term "womanist," first coined by renowned author, Alice Walker. An excerpt from the lengthier definition found in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose* describes a womanist as someone who "appreciates woman's culture, woman's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength." I didn't come across this term until I was in college. But once I found it, I also found a greater clarity for why, every time I heard Otis sing "you got to try" I wanted to laugh, I wanted to cry, and I wanted to slow dance across the hardwood while celebrating love as my entire happiness.

No matter where I am when I hear this song, I find myself going back to that couch in my house in South Los Angeles. It is there where I first attempted to marry the ideology of the strong black woman with someone in need of tenderness. The marriage was a rocky one, but with maturity, I have gained a greater appreciation for the duty and the danger of this female archetype. Emotional strength for my kind has been a necessity as far back as the 17th and 18th centuries, but for a little girl in 1989, my sentimentality was a revolutionary act all its own.

Maybe I always desired something bigger than myself. Maybe I preferred a dance partner and even a dance crew of Mommy's b-boys spinning windmills around my tender heart. But I am not so limited in my perspective that I can't also see how this song is a reminder to unequivocally and without apology save some of my gentle love for me.

It is for this reason that on a Monday night, that customary night often reserved for order and conformity and the domesticity of family life, I decided to meet up with a friend at an 80s club and celebrate the awesomeness of our existence. In between our impeccable knowledge of all the dance moves to *Thriller* and our dramatic singing to the incomparable Sade, a young man came sliding across the floor in an oversized blazer, a bolo tie, and deliberately scuffed Duckie Dale white shoes. His grand entrance prompted the DJ to instinctively spin Otis Redding. There was a collective cheer throughout the dance floor, but my friend and I, already being wise, knew the truth about being tender. Tenderness cruises down a two-lane highway paved with both romantic serenades and an off-key 38-year-old me singing to that childhood memory initiated by *Pretty in Pink*.

If I had to give that once little girl in me some advice, if I could go back to the future and watch her waiting and anticipating, I would tell her to be kind. I would tell her to shine. I would tell her to breathe and sing and go out dancing on a Monday night. I would tell her to allow herself to be loved, for she is beyond worthy. And mostly, I would tell her to drape herself in a pink tapestry of well-deserved tenderness.

Calculus Crush

Emili Lamph

Life is complicated when you're 16, awkward, and, for all you know, in love with the boy from your fifth period.

I've always had a true love for music; my dad raised my sister and I on the best, but anyone that knows me knows that film is my first love. It's not a coincidence, then, that many of my musical obsessions stem from film-nostalgia.

While there are plenty of times where I have hit the repeat button on a track, Des'ree's "I'm Kissing You" had me hooked indefinitely my junior year of high school.

Though I had watched Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo & Juliet* years prior, it wasn't until a re-watch my junior year that the soundtrack hit me. First, I was obsessed with Prince's "When Doves Cry," but who wasn't? Next, it was Radiohead's "Talk Show Host." But Des'ree's "I'm Kissing You" crept into my school-girl heart just around the time the seating chart changed in fifth period. It had happened. The boy I admired from afar sat next to me now.

As a highly protected teen, dating was off limits up until this year of my life. I was sixteen, technically allowed to date, but petrified of the new liberty. As the year continued, illiterate in love, I sat through many a fifth period distracted while Des'ree's lyrics surrounded me and images of Romeo and Juliet, wings and all, danced around me.

I felt like Juliet looking at her Romeo through that wonderful aquarium; he was in arms' reach but impossible to touch. I should have mentioned: Romeo had a girlfriend.

Already with a Rosalind, my heart ached like the baritone notes from the song in my head as I considered the impossibility of my calculus crush.

Don't worry, this story does not end like a Shakespearian play. Eventually, after months of endless and fruitless flirtation, my heart became wiser and told my head to move on... even if he was so really very super cute.

Even so, Des'ree's melody followed me throughout the rest of that year—she was the soundtrack to the young adult novels I read as the girls got their hearts broken. (Literally, I pulled out my sister's blue, fifties-styled boom-box, and played "I'm Kissing You" on repeat as I read an Ellen Hopkins novel on my living room floor.) Her harmonies kept me company as I grieved my own love lost. Forgive the dramatics, this was high school.

Jokes aside, it's odd and amazing how a song can transport you to a time and place, there to remind you of things you had long forgotten.

Until now, I hadn't given much thought about this once consuming obsession; guided by this prompt and a couple of clicks on YouTube, though, and I am right back there, a giggling school girl infatuated with a boy and a song instead of doing her unit circle. It's like taking a book out from a full, intricately organized library, skimming through, and returning it. It was good to see you, little me, now go back on the shelf.

Des'ree

"I'm Kissing You"

Supernatural

06/1998

Sony Soho / 550 Music /
Epic Records

You Oughta Know

Leah Baker

Awkward middle schooler that I was in the mid-90s, I thought having a boom box made me marginally cool—at least, cool enough to pass as normal around my peers—and that listening to the alternative radio station made me even cooler. In the days of The Radio, you couldn't just pick up your phone and check which artist was playing—you had to listen for it. And if the radio DJ didn't announce the artist, or had announced it before the whole set of songs, well, woe is you. At the time, I had a favorite song and had no idea who sang it, but I did know that its chorus contained a melody that made my soul shift forward each time it passed through my ears. It also had one bleeped f-word in it, which made the listener an instant badass.

One evening I was with my cousin, who was much cooler than me because she was older or had dark brown lipstick or hoop earrings or whatever makes someone cool, when the song came on the radio. I was itching to ask the much-cooler-cousin who the artist was, and I'm sure I tried to play my question off coolly in a mumble of something like, "Oh, this song is nice I guess. Who sings it again?" She responded nonchalantly, and in two flashes I was at Fred Meyer purchasing my first ever CD: Alanis Morissette's *Jagged Little Pill*.

I couldn't Google her at the time obvs, but according to the album insert, I knew Alanis was one edgy chick. Grungy 90s hair. Played guitar. Discordant font choices. Her aesthetic made complete sense to me in a way nothing else had; I had found my new idol. I listened through and through. I listened day and night. I memorized the lyrics faster than I had memorized the Pocahontas soundtrack in 4th grade. My father started to notice the grunge rock emerging from my boombox. A conservative military man, he felt it was his duty to protect his daughter from bad influences. "I'm going to have to give this album a listen before you can have it back," he said one weekend and took it into his office, slipping the shiny disc into his stereo.

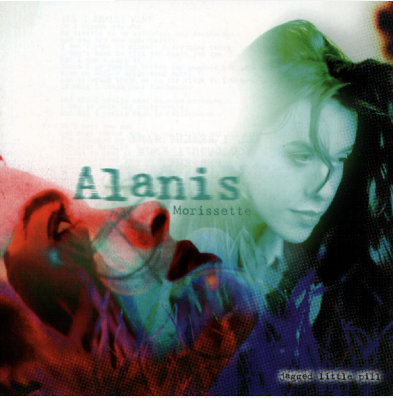
I paced outside the room, wondering what he was thinking. His favorite album at the time was Yannii: *Live at the Acropolis* (Google that one, kids), so this was certainly a genre outside his comfort zone. When my favorite song came on, "You Oughta Know," I casually entered the room. I knew the f-word was coming up, and I wanted to do a subtle coverup at the right moment the verse came around. Lyrics beloved by me were floating harmlessly through the air...

*Is she perverted like me?
Would she go down on you in a theater?*

I tried to look mellow, relying on the song's overall innocence until the one incriminating word approached. I sang along angelically...

*And every time I scratch my nails
Down someone else's back I hope you feel it
Well, can you feel it?*

At the time, I couldn't tell if things were going well because my father is the strong, silent type. I can't remember if I successfully talked over the f-word because I started to be absorbed by the fact that he was more silent than usual—angry, almost. "Do you



Alanis Morissette
"You Oughta Know"

Jagged Little Pill

06/1995

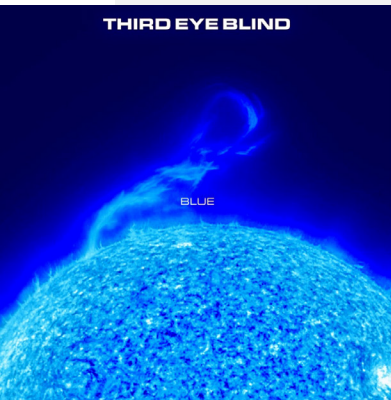
Maverick / Reprise

understand the things she's saying?" He finally asked me. And shame quietly filled the room.

It's possible that the divide that had been forming between us in the years leading up to this was cemented that day, or in the days leading up to it, or some other time I can't pinpoint. What I do know is that our ability to relate was diminishing, and his ability to raise daughters and prepare them for the realities of the world was well-intentioned, but ultimately lacking. In these matters, he was as awkward an adult as I was a middle schooler. God forgive him; his daughter now wore a bra and bled and never did these realities come up in conversation. I wasn't allowed to date, although I certainly did in secret eventually, and this conversation never happened, either—it was just silently enforced. My interest in matters to which he couldn't relate was often met with silence or a simple, "I don't understand."

My father ended up giving me the CD back, silently and without question, but without question, disappointment and confusion lingered in him. Eventually, I learned the meanings of the not-so-secret innuendos in her songs—but this was beside the point. In the years that followed, the ferocity of Alanis' unapologetic music was my teacher, and she my guide. The tenacity of her words helped me develop my own sense of power as I navigated breakups and the inevitability of being cheated on. I still cared about being cool, like any teen, but I learned from Alanis the sort of f-k-it-ness and confidence I needed to learn at that age.

So thanks, Alanis. For the lessons my household couldn't teach me.



Third Eye Blind

"Slow Motion"

Blue

11/1999

Elektra

(excerpt from) You Can Never Tell What Will Happen in the Past

Gabrielle Gilbert

You

On the calendar in May as well

As September

Bedroom culture spiders killed in the

Carpet thinking about you

In my own room crossed legged amongst spiders on the carpet of my own room
and I'm thinking about you even though I never met you warm as if I
wasn't here: mother sleeping and dogs step-father guns in the attic and the moon
reflected on the lake a song on repeat found by accident - Slow Motion - and I
talk to you through some false memory at seventeen

There was a falling, a pulse within

The math of a song

Linger, get separated, a sort of false

Following of the gut

In the bathroom with me on a school

Night - ghost

Of impulse

Shower running

Think of my mother across

From me then, a dinner

A talking that forged a wanting

To get better

Wink towards the sore spot

The true world

A flood of you seeps under the door



Fleetwood Mac

“Silver Springs”

The Dance

08/1997

Reprise

You Will Never Get Away

Samantha Lamph/Len

I don't know if all depressives can pinpoint the exact moment they first felt that existential dread creep into their consciousness and start setting up permanent residence. But I know that, for me, it happened at the tail end of sunset on one of the last days of summer in 1998.

My birthday had just passed, and I was about to start the fourth grade. The rest of the nuclear family and I were packed into our blue Plymouth Voyager, making our way home from visiting my mom's side of the family in northern California.

We were entering the seventh hour of a nine hour drive, but we had made this trip so many times that I had begun to enjoy spending extended time with my Discman, my books, or daydreams about my current crush.

I was desperately hoping that Robert would be in my class again that year, and that he would sit in front of me as he had in the third grade. I had memorized his hairline, and had become remarkably successful at predicting when he would come to school with a fresh buzzcut.

That same intuition told me not to get my hopes up, that there were a lot of fourth grade teachers, and the odds were against me. I turned out to be right, and I spent the first week of school utterly heartbroken and despondent. Luckily, Thomas, an even better crush, would take Robert's spot in my heart, and it would, as Celine Dion would remind me later that year, go on and on.

Continuing an impressive streak that had already lasted the entire summer, my dad was, once again, playing Fleetwood Mac's, *The Dance*. It was a live album they had recorded the year before. Of course, my dad also had the VHS tape of the concert, which he watched nearly every single night.

My dad had loved the band since he was a teenager. The legend went that he had asked his mom for a Led Zeppelin record for his birthday, but it was out of stock, so the record store employee sold her on *Rumours* as an adequate substitute. As he tells it, my dad was pissed upon opening the gift. Fleetwood Mac was a pop band, not a rock band, after all. But they grew on him. And here we were, 20 years later, living in a Fleetwood Mac echo chamber, listening to the same 17 tracks on an infinite loop.

I fucking hated Fleetwood Mac.

At nine, I knew way more about the sordid affairs that had transpired between Stevie Nicks, Lindsey Buckingham, Mick Fleetwood, Christine McVie, and the ultra-mysterious John McVie (who even is he?) than was reasonable or appropriate for a girl who had not yet reached puberty.

At this point, I had all of the lyrics to every track memorized, along with the corresponding video of each performance.

As Stevie sang the first few verses of “Silver Springs,” I pressed my forehead against the window, staring out at the desolate fields on either side of that last, long stretch of the 5 before it enters the twists and turns of the Grapevine.

Whether the foliage was grain, dead grass, or weeds, I still don't know. But the rosy-orange tint the dismal landscape took on as the sun slowly disappeared made me feel suddenly and inexplicably sad in a way I never had before.

The rows of crops were whizzing by so fast, too fast to really see. It occurred to me that my life was passing me by just as quickly.

I was already nine, and I had barely noticed it happening at all. I could still remember a specific science lesson from the first grade with astounding clarity, yet here I was, three years older. I had the sense that, from then on, I would always feel that way, and that, if this was the case, I might as well already be on my death bed.

Soon, I would be a teenager, which was a terrifying thought because the teenagers I saw on Jenny Jones were so mean to their parents, and I didn't want to be mean to my parents. I loved my parents!

And then, before I knew it, I would be an adult and have to move out of my parents' house and fend for myself. I wondered how long I could reasonably postpone this inevitability. 24 isn't too old, is it? I couldn't grow up to be a loser.

Would I ever find a boy who loves me? Would I be weird and chubby forever? Would I have children, and if I did, would they love me unconditionally, and take care of me when I got too old to do it myself? Or would they leave me in a nursing home to spend my last years delusional and alone? I would definitely never be leaving my parents in a home; I decided that right then and there. How could anyone bear to do that to their mom and dad?

In a panic, I saw entire futures flashing before my eyes, and somehow I knew that, from then on, I would be digging in my heels, desperate to hold on to each moment for as long as possible, until every single one fought their way out of my hands and it all went dark.

I was experiencing #FOMO nearly twenty years before it became a staple in the millennial lexicon, and it's a feeling that has followed me my whole life.

I've always been pretty good about setting goals for myself, and then doing whatever it takes to make it happen, whether it's winning a spelling bee, graduating college with a 3.9 gpa (let's hear a big fuck you to the UCR Archaeology department), landing a job, publishing a piece of writing. But I've never found a lasting sense of satisfaction from any of those accomplishments, no matter how big or small. As soon as it's happened, I've moved on to doubting whether I'll be able to accomplish anything ever again. I don't think that cycle is ever going to stop.

It's what has spurred me to make major life decisions with a haste that only an overwhelming sense of anxiety could fuel.

Changing majors. Then changing back. One more time. Going to grad school when I knew I wasn't ready, just because I was too scared to get a regular 9-5. Frantically picking up new hobbies and putting them down just as fast. Dragging my boyfriend-now-husband across southern California because I was "literally going to kill myself" if I stayed in Riverside any longer, and then proceeding to move three more times within the span of two calendar years.

At each of these junctures, I never had any doubt that I was making the right decision, and that I needed to pull the trigger fast for fear of wasting any more precious time. And, like clockwork, once I had settled into that new path, I was miserable again.

And it all started because my 500th listen of "Silver Springs" coincided with a sunset most people would find beautiful.

That night, when we got home, my dad watched *The Dance* video again as my sister and I lay in the bed we shared across the hall.

The day-long drive should have been exhausting, but these thoughts kept me up all night, and for the millionth time, I listened to those 17 tracks, hoping at the beginning of each song that I would be unconscious before the next. But sleep never happened.

Instead, I pretended to be asleep when the tape ended and my dad turned off the lights to head to his own bed. Something about this precise mix of stimuli triggered the beginning of a year long battle with insomnia, and the routine was the same every night.

I'm not sure what, if any, theories my parents had as to the cause of their nine-year-old's insomnia, but they went to great lengths to remedy it.

My dad brought his boombox in from the garage and bought some nature sound CDs that he hoped would help lull me to sleep, but I was immune to the soothing sounds of summer rain, crashing waves, and chirping grasshoppers.

Later, he connected two red Solo cups with a length of yarn that could span the distance between my bedroom and the master.

"If you get scared, just tug on this, and I'll tug back."

It's the thought that counts, but more often than not, my tugs were met with radio silence. At least he was getting some sleep.

I tried to devise my own methods.

I knew that worrying about not getting enough sleep wasn't helping my plight, so I would create a list of topics to think about in-depth until I drifted off. But I always made it through the entire list and found my mind wandering back to the *Aimlessness and Ultimate Futility of this Uncertain & Short Life*, original score by Fleetwood Mac.

The Spice Girls movie had recently come out, and I was a big fan. I'd memorized the movie, so I could replay it in my head as I attempted to sleep. But I was always awake to catch those final credits.

I began to pray, repeating the same message to God verbatim every single night like the world's most desperate mantra.

Thank you for my family and my friends. Please don't let anything bad ever happen to them, or to me. Please watch over us tomorrow, and help us do our best. Please help me sleep tonight.

I felt less anxiety, but the sleep still didn't come.

I had recently begun to appreciate reading a lot more, and I figured such a mentally-engaging activity would expedite my unconsciousness, so I asked for a reading light. Some nights, after reading for four hours or so, I could finally fall asleep. So I kept that habit, and eventually, sleep became easier and easier until the sleepless nights were fewer and farther between.

But that fear that my life would be over before I knew how best to live it still perseveres, cropping up, to varying extents, nearly every day.

As an adult, I re-entered the Fleetwood Mac rabbit hole of my own free will, listening to all of their albums and watching all of the live performances I could find on YouTube.

If you watch their performance of "Silver Springs" from their 2004 tour on YouTube, you'll see that, even after all these years, there is an intense chemistry and tension between Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham. I saw the band perform this past summer, and it was still there.

They've been an intrinsic part of each other's lives for decades, and you get the sense that, for them, the years cannot be forgotten or forgiven, even if they do manage to reunite for a tour every few years.

When Stevie warns Lindsey, time and again, that she will follow him down until the sound of her voice will haunt him, and that he will never get away from the sound of the woman who loves him, you believe her. And you can tell he believes her too. And he's not even mad about it. I'd say he's even gone further than merely accepting it. I think he takes comfort in knowing its true. That, at the very least, this aspect of his life will never abandon him. He can count on it.

Something tells me I will never get away from these thoughts and feelings that have followed me down the decades of my life. But, like Lindsey, I've come to love that part of me in a strange way, just as I've come to love Fleetwood Mac, and especially "Silver Springs."

Maybe it's because this anxious part of me makes the rare, sublime moment I experience more euphoric; maybe it's because it makes me feel like a uniquely complicated individual; or maybe it's because hating myself for it would be just as awful and infinitely more pointless.

Either way, my life is what it is. Even if it continues to elude me forever as I always feared it would.



The Cure

“Pictures of You”

Disintegration

05/1989

Fiction

Robert Smith and the Hormones

Abigail Lalonde

Her bedroom was in the basement. Four straight walls assembled for her older brother who had moved out. So she took it. DIY eighties basement bedrooms are generally windowless, as was this one. I also had a windowless room. What was once a skylight gave way to a sealed ceiling with a new roof that no longer leaked curse words from my father’s mouth with every rainstorm. Sure, probably unsafe, but like most of the eighties, no one questioned it. We didn’t wear helmets. We didn’t wear seat belts, and we didn’t question fire exit strategies. In fact, we relished in the ability to darken our rooms to nothing.

I’m not sure which one of us discovered The Cure first. Probably her, but we both had the older brother influence, plus I had MTV. We had been through many musical phases together—the whatever your parents listen to phase, the teenybopper boy band/mall girl phase, the learn your roots classic rock phase, etc., but we settled on the music that made us feel something the most. And then we never left.

I found myself staying over at Jen’s house most weekends. Her house allowed for more freedom, she was older, and she had a pool. Without question, at some point during every sleepover, we would conduct our ritual. With one person in charge of darkness, the other would press play on Side A of *Disintegration* (because tapes, duh), then we’d meet in the middle of the room. There is a good seventeen seconds of silence before “Plainsong” begins. That is the exact amount of time needed to stretch two lithe teenage bodies onto the ground and allow them to sink into the shag of the carpet. The music crashed down upon us at a volume that said we were young enough to not fear hearing loss. We had time.

“Pictures of You” made us feel like everything was okay, like Robert Smith himself was our best friend—another teenage girl dealing with zits and divorce and rage. The music mimicked our existence—longing—even if we didn’t know what for. The feeling that came with listening to those songs in the dark, it was friendly, like a hug. The kind of hug you want when you can’t stop crying, but you don’t want to stop crying. And sometimes we did cry, in the dark, side by side, but alone. It filled up something in us; something we didn’t even know was missing. It burned its way into our memory. There’s a reason that movies have soundtracks—because life has a soundtrack. Music holds memory in the beat, the personal experience inserted into each cymbal crash, each lyric. It stops becoming about the song, but instead about the way the song and the life fit together.

Some songs are fleeting, some stick with you for life. The ones that stick, they hit hard the first time. They are a knife to the gut. They touch that nerve, the one you’ve been protecting or nursing. But they also provide a level of comfort, opening a wound just to nurse it back to health. Despite how many times we sank into her basement floor it never got old. And of course the lyrics, the lyrics we hoped a boy would one day hear and decide to put on a mixtape for us, or play for us on a boombox outside of our non-existent windows. The lyrics we didn’t fully understand because we weren’t yet broken.

I always thought I'd look back on those songs as the songs of boys, heartbreak, and love. Instead I look back on them as a time capsule to a friendship. I'm still friends with Jen twenty-seven years later, but that was the time in our lives when we were closest. On that floor, in that fire hazard of a bedroom. Just us, Robert Smith, and all those hormones.

Daniel Defying the Silence

Ann Kestner

We were children imprisoned.
My oldest brother escaped.

"...I can see Daniel waving goodbye..."

My parents would invent many stories.
In truth, he simply got tired of the beatings.

We couldn't mention his name without
an outpouring of my father's rage.
So we listened to the old turntable
in the living room.

"Daniel" filled the house with all the words we
could not say, were not allowed to say.

"...Daniel, my brother..."

That song filled the room
defying the silence of our sorrow.

"...you are older than me..."

Slim stood at the record player
picked up the arm and started
the song back from the beginning.
Again and again and again.

We were talking through Elton John.
We were having a conversation
through that song.

*"...Do you still feel the pain
of the scars that won't heal?..."*

I still have the old 45, cracked years ago
but I kept it anyway. Kept the living room,
kept Slim playing "Daniel" for me. Kept
all the words our parents would never
let us say. Kept the truth etched
in that cracked black vinyl.

"...Lord, I miss Daniel..."



Elton John

"Daniel"

*Don't Shoot Me I'm
Only the Piano Player*

01/1973

MCA / DJM



U2

“Where the Streets
Have No Name”

The Joshua Tree

03/1987

Island

An Abridged List of Enduring Wants

Nina Sudhakar

1. *I want to run*

Joshua Tree came out two years after I was born, a time before memory that nonetheless imprints itself on one’s consciousness. It played in the background throughout my early childhood, until I started school and grew old enough to understand music and develop my own tastes. These turned, unsurprisingly to U2.

The album that had existed nearly as long as I had was about America. No—it was about a foreigner’s vision of America, a vast and mythical place. A country as it was imagined, not as it actually was. As the first-generation child of immigrants, I knew in my bones the place Bono was singing about. However far I ran from my parents, experiencing a childhood for which they had no reference points, we always agreed on music.

When I was seven, my parents took me to my first concert. It was U2, of course. Such events are not usually a place for children, but my parents knew I would never forgive them if they went without me. I hand-wrote a letter to Bono on a piece of lined notebook paper, telling him how much I loved the band’s music. My parents folded up the note and passed it off to a grumpy roadie. I still like to think Bono read it.

2. *I want to hide*

Even though we owned *Joshua Tree* on CD, my parents were used to record players. They assumed every album had an internal logic and listened to songs in their proper sequence. Perhaps this is why I grew to love “Where the Streets Have No Name” so much—because it came first, because even if my listening was interrupted, I would almost always hear those first several minutes at the very least. I quickly latched on to the song, which spoke to me in a way the next few tracks—the hymn-like doubt of “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For,” the longing, lovestruck refrain of “With or Without You,” the angry, howling tone of “Bullet the Blue Sky”—did not.

I remember, when my brother and I were younger, we unearthed my parents’ American visa papers, and stamped at the top in huge letters was the word “ALIEN.” We teased them relentlessly, tickled at the idea of officials labelling them extraterrestrial. We didn’t know this label would also attach to us, even though we had been born in America. It’s almost hard to imagine now, but this was years before Gwen Stefani started wearing bindis, long before Hindu gods got put on fashionable tank tops, long before yoga got turned into a form of exercise, long before the turmeric craze. Back then, we were the only brown kids in our school and therefore curiosities, visitors from a strange and outlandish place no one could imagine even though we lived a few blocks away.

What refuge, then, but music? I had the chords and lyrics my parents had carried across oceans and the ones they’d picked up along the way. I had rock that felt both timeless and of my time specifically. After school, I’d come home and instant message my friends, tell them yes, I’d listened to *Jagged Little Pill* and *CrazySexyCool* and agreed they were the best things I’d ever heard. In the background, I watched our VHS copy of “Rattle and

Hum," fast-forwarding to the performance of "Where the Streets Have No Name," that foggy, backlit opening where the band is visible only in faceless silhouette.

3. *I want to tear down the walls that hold me inside*

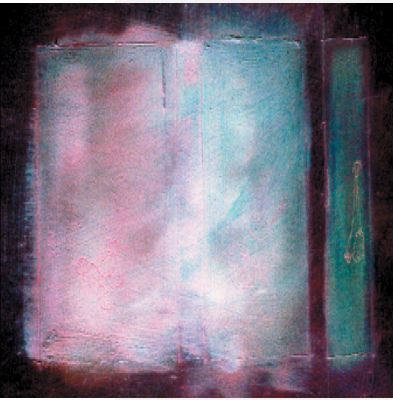
When asked about the meaning of "Where the Streets Have No Name," Bono has said he wrote it in response to Belfast's geography, where knowing the street a person lived on could tell you, with near certainty, that person's religion and income. The song expresses a dream of a place beyond easy identification, where existence is not preceded by labeling, where all of us are allowed to defy categorization and the boxes we are herded into.

Who among us would not want to live in such a place?

4. *I want to reach out and touch the flame*

All of this must have been subconscious, of course. In childhood the song was simply the Edge's sprinting riff and Bono's breathless voice, the lyrics I heard on the surface and understood viscerally. Much as stadium rock gets derided now, there is something undeniably uplifting about power chords paired with a soaring chorus.

I never stopped listening to *Joshua Tree*; in fact, it's one of the only albums I still listen to all the way through. I always repeat "Where the Streets Have No Name" a few times, as I am wont to do, and notice how the other songs have gained an urgency I could never have recognized without entering adulthood. But I hear in every note of that first song the idealism and longing of my earliest years, that nostalgic time before getting jaded, before selling out, before relinquishing a utopia of nameless streets—that time when anything I wanted might still be possible, when everything I sensed about the world did not have to come true.



Rainer Maria

“Tinfoil”

Past Worn Searching

12/1997

Polyvinyl

Tinfoil

Ann Petrolionas

The forest green carpet isn't so ugly when all the lights are off. It scratches at my chin as I bury my face in it so he can't hear my sobs or my screams. I have my headphones on so I don't wake my sister. And so He won't know how I angry I am.

I can't be angry. I went to Catholic school. I am only allowed to be sad. I can't be angry that she's gone. I can't be angry at God for letting her die. I am supposed to find comfort in the fact that she is in heaven now. God says she is at rest. That she is with her father and mother. That she isn't suffering. That she doesn't need any more surgeries. Or chemo. Or radiation. Or bone marrow transplants. That she isn't scared anymore.

Fuck you, God.

I'm going to lay here in the dark on this scratchy forest green carpet that has been my floor since I was 2 and listen to Rainer Maria scream "God Damn It" over and over again.

And I am going to do it with my headphones on so God doesn't know I'm angry. So my dad doesn't know I am angry. So that in a half an hour I can wake my sister up from her nap and drive her to ballet class. So I can get dinner on the table by 7. So that we can keep pretending to be a middle class suburban family with a white picket fence.

You know what, God? I am going to keep listening to angry people screaming over guitar riffs. And I am going to tell dad that I'm going to Jenny's house but I am going to take his minivan to the city to the Fireside Bowl to see Rainer Maria play "Tinfoil" tonight.

And I am going to smoke pot in Tony's room. And cigarettes in your minivan. I'm going to pretend that if I keep the windows down you won't notice. And I'm probably going to have sex. And maybe stick something up my nose.

Because that's what happens to 17 year old girls whose mothers die and whose priests tell them it's not okay to be angry. That I should trust God instead.

Fuck God.

I trust Rainer Maria. I trust Sleater Kinney. I trust Braid and Ambition Mission and the Ramones. I trust Jenny, and Tony, and Steve. And all the other Flounders who helped carry the hospital bed and ventilator out of our house and then drove our mini-van so I could get drunk.

So I could come back here to this scratchy forest green floor to listen to Rainer Maria take the Lord's name in vain and feel something other than emptiness.



Smashing Pumpkins

"Disarm"

Siamese Dream

07/1993

Virgin

Cut That Little Child

Kevin D. Woodall

I was a lucky child, in that my parents have always made an attempt to stay current with music. This meant I had exposure to a bunch of excellent alternative and indie music at a really young age. I got ahead of the curve on a lot of music that other kids my age wouldn't discover until they hit college.

But I was also an unlucky child because this meant that, while I was sporting ripped jeans and flannel, jamming out to Pavement and fitting in with the Gen-X crowd ten years older than me, I was wildly out of step with the kids my own age, who were all wearing wife-beaters and shaving their heads, listening to Boyz II Men or Bone Thugs-n-Harmony. I was about one mortifying school-talent show appearance away from being a real life Marcus from *About a Boy*, only instead of getting bailed out by Hugh Grant I probably would have just got an ass-beating.

A freak at school, a novelty to the older teens and twenty-somethings in my neighborhood, I never quite fit in with anyone anywhere. But, though it would have made my life easier, I couldn't stop listening to the music that resonated with me. It would become my safe harbor in turbulent times.

Disarm you with a smile, and cut you like you want me to.

I didn't really think too much about it, the meaning behind those lyrics, because I was a nine year-old listening to Smashing Pumpkins' "Disarm" on Star 98.7 back in 1994, and I didn't really know much about anything, let alone knowing how to critically listen to lyrics or melody.

All I knew was that I really liked that song, and I couldn't get enough of it.

It wasn't the first time I'd heard Smashing Pumpkins, but there was something about "Disarm" that haunted me. It starts off so quietly, with Billy Corgan's vocals, the cello, and the acoustic guitar, punctuated by the initial peal of bells ringing, but then that sweeping crescendo of strings hits you from nowhere as the chorus starts. The song goes on and it builds as more strings come in, and by the end you can almost hear how the song shimmers and radiates silver light. But I also recognized a tremendous weight of sadness throughout the song. The words would eventually come to hold deep meaning for me, but not until later in life. All I knew when I was first listening to it was that, within this song, there dwelt a sadness that reached into me in a primal way, calling out from a place beyond my understanding and offering me something that was vaguely comforting.

The song had me in its grip and I couldn't free myself. I didn't have any money to buy *Siamese Dream*, so I did what any self-respecting kid in the nineties would have done: I sat around listening to the radio every day, blank cassette loaded-up and ready to go, waiting for the song to come back to me so I could record it.

It took about six or seven attempts to get a good, clean recording off the radio. The first attempts failed because I was either too slow to hit record, or the song faded out early, or the DJ talked over the beginning and/or end, (only 80s and 90s kids will remember the struggle and et cetera). Eventually I got it, though, and once I had a good, clean version of the song I went a little nuts.

I didn't want to have to keep rewinding the tape to hear the song play; I just wanted to hear it, uninterrupted, over and over and over again. So I took my original tape, and I got a second tape, and I made that second tape into one where the song ran back-to-back for the whole 90 minutes. I spent a good amount of time over the next few years giving that tape a listen every so often in 90 minute bursts, until it was devoured by my cassette deck.

...leave you like they left me here to wither in denial; the bitterness of one who's left alone.

Friends were always hard for me growing up. I had a knack for losing them. They'd move away, or we'd lose touch with each other when we were in different classes the next year, or I'd be too nerdy or weird for them and it wasn't cool to hang out with me anymore. In fairness to the latter group, I really was a strange and poorly adjusted kid. See the previous point on *About a Boy*; it's social suicide to hang out with a kid like that, I get it.

There was the bullying too; pretty aggressively bad bullying. For example, when I was in sixth grade, a kid who'd been held back twice made my life a special hell, particularly with his penchant for smashing chairs over my back.

Year after year of dealing with trying to make new friends, or getting shit on by former friends, or being bullied began to take its toll. It seemed like I was stuck in some kind of loop of loss and loneliness.

When I was sixteen, I turned, like so many awkward and lonely sixteen year-old kids, to music for my comfort. I was back on the Pumpkins again at this point, looping "Disarm" once more. I found refuge in that sad, beautiful sound, and at first I fell into wallowing in my own self-pity. I focused on the themes of loneliness and denial, and I began to think there was something wrong with me. Something in me was anathema to everyone else, and triggered defense mechanisms in them to drive me away, or outright harm me. For a time I really, truly believed that I must be the broken, defective one, and the rest of humanity was trying to tell me that I didn't belong.

But then I started listening to the lyrics on the whole, not just piecemeal, and I heard something new. There came to me, from the relentless percussion and soaring strings, a sense of power. I started to feel that it was a song about recognizing toxic behavior in other people, and how that can lead to a self-sustaining cycle of misery if you let it. The song was telling me to take agency for myself, to choose to smile instead of withering in denial and loneliness. Once I stopped allowing the actions of others to define me I suddenly found that I could make friends. I was in a much better headspace, and I was able to sustain it for years, making lots of friends and feeling accepted. I thought I was finally doing okay.

The killer in me is the killer in you.

I'm not sure exactly what caused it, but about seven or eight years ago I lost my way.

Over time I stopped doing the things I traditionally did to recharge and get my energy. I stopped writing. I stopped taking photos. I stopped exercising. I stopped disappearing into nature for hours. Doing those things began to feel like a selfish luxury that I couldn't afford, because if I wasted time on myself I'd be letting everyone down and they'd cut me out, just like my friends did when I was a kid. These thoughts and habits wormed their way into my work as well. I couldn't say no to any request, even if I was doing the work of three people all by myself. If I turned down work I knew I'd get fired, even if it was literally impossible to meet the deadlines I was given.

This line of thinking eventually led to me resenting everything about my life. I woke up each day (if I managed to sleep at all) with an increasing sense of panic and dread. I had a growing urge to burn my life to the ground and run away because it all just felt like too much to bear. Everyone was so unreasonable, and my only way to get out from under them was to run away, or worse.

When you let the actions of others control you, and you deny yourself agency, you can hit a breaking point. I was getting pretty desperate, and I felt like I was getting burnt alive from all of my stress and anxiety. I was at the lowest point I've been to since I was a teenager, considering dark alternatives to carrying on with existence.

But fortunately, over the years, I've somehow managed to break that cycle from my childhood. It turns out that most of my friends didn't actually expect me to drop everything for them at a moment's notice, and, in fact, they were very supportive when it came to helping me get the professional help I needed. I finally reached out and sought the aid of a therapist. After putting in some time and work, I was diagnosed with a high-functioning form of depression and anxiety called dysthymia. It's a relief to know that a large part of what caused me so much stress and anxiety was built up to unreasonable levels in my head due to a known, identifiable, and diagnosable mental illness.

I'm doing better these days, but, as I'm discovering, there's no instant fix. This is something I'm going to have to manage for the rest of my life. It's going to be difficult.

But I'm trying.

I used to be a little boy, so old in my shoes.

I came back to "Disarm" a couple of weeks ago, after having not listened to it for years. I was at a 30th birthday party which featured hours of drunken karaoke. We were mostly sticking to nostalgic hits from junior high and high school, ranging from Blink 182's "What's my Age Again?" to Britney Spears' "Oops! I Did It Again" to Limp Bizkit's "Rollin'." I had settled in for a night of lame-in-the-best-way 2000s hits when quite unexpectedly one of my friends declared, "Fuck it, I'm gonna go do "Disarm." I hope you dicks like Smashing Pumpkins."

Now I've had an on-and-off again obsession with "Disarm" for about 22-23 years, and yet, the second I heard that opening guitar it was like I was hearing it for the first time again. That sad, powerful, beautiful song came back to me out of nowhere just as I've been trying to claw my way out of one of the darker valleys in my life. I'm not really a spiritual or religious person, but I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a little spooked by the coincidental timing of its reappearance.

Since then "Disarm" has once again become my obsession. In the car, at work, at home, it's almost exclusively what I've been listening to, letting that melancholic, beautiful music wash over me again and again.

Now and then I fall into the trap of thinking that I'm a grown ass man, and I have life figured out, when more often than not I find that I'm still that little, messed up, awkward boy, so old in his shoes. Only now I'm trying, once again, to choose my voice.

The killer in others doesn't have to become the killer in me. Sometimes the killer in others doesn't even exist outside my own head. I'm reminding myself of this, day after day, and trying to do better.

After all, what's a boy supposed to do?

WHAM!



MAKE IT BIG

Wham!

“Careless Whisper”

Make It Big

10/1984

Epic / Columbia

Careless Whisper

Ingrid Calderon

<<<<I know you're not a fool>>>>

I knew it when I saw your wild hair,
your red dress,
your huge smile and chiclet teeth,
your red lips...

"the end will be beautiful", you giggled with young enthusiasm--

your face like a prized pony
pliable and free

you came speaking words that looked pretty falling from that smile

your fingers, long
clawed lovingly at my scalp
lulled me to sleep/

the men looked,
but never touched
their fingers clutched like small bombs in their hands

you walked with thunder in your heels
like a storm category 3/

the burning paper
between your lips,
smelled like hot earth/

come night
your smile ceased
it set with the sun
it left with the breeze

you'd claw my scalp
and chew on sugarcane

&

sloooooooowwwwwwwlyyyyyyyyyyy

float to the cassette player and
fumble in
a translucent grey tape-

in thick marker graffiti IT READ:

W H A M - CARELESS WHISPER

closed the lid,
pushed P L A Y

I'd heard those words hummed from your mouth before
usually on our way to the bus-stop

but...

WHAT DID THEY MEAN?

WHO SANG THEM?

Why did it leave me sad, and melancholy?
Why did I swell up with saltwater?

a small lake on my cheeks

why did my throat mimic his french horn lungs?
his commas?
his fucking crescendos?

my small lungs,
incapable of swallowing that much air...

you'd laugh and sigh and claw my scalp
digging tunnels through my hair

we'd listen
for hours,
and eventually
I'd fall asleep
to the rustling of your chest
to the alto sax
to the breeze coming in through the open window...

(It was November of 1984, 5 years into the Salvadoran civil war. My cousin, who had spent some time in the States, came back to live with us and brought back American music on cassette tapes. At night, my father had his *cumbias* and *boleros*, and I finally had the 80s.)

The Coldest Winter

Naomi Loud

January 13th, 2009

I woke up on a bench, holding my purse tight to my chest, and my backpack between my legs. At least I had my pillow from home to rest my head upon. It was freezing in the Heathrow airport. I kept my winter jacket zipped up and wrapped my scarf around my face as I slept. I opened my eyes and looked at the time. I cringed, realizing I was only on hour three of a fourteen-hour layover heading to Suvarnabhumi airport, Thailand.

I had turned twenty back in August, barely an adult. I was finally on my own, leaving behind parents in denial and their good intentions. I was moving away from messy childhood memories, and from the darkness that had plagued me until now.

I was free from it all; I was my own puppeteer, heading to Pattaya Thailand to become a scuba instructor. I felt fate pushing me forward, thrusting me into a world full of light and full of love. Or so I thought. I was running and running fast. Unaware that the vast expanse of darkness I was running from existed within me.

I first met Sawyer my first shift waitressing at Pistol back in July 2008. Pistol was a hole in the wall where they served cheap beer and sandwiches. It had a somewhat disjointed James Bond theme. The sandwiches were named after the movies and the TV above the bar - always on mute - played James Bond movies on a loop. Aside from that, the bar had more of a grunge feel to it, and the staff sported no dress code. They showed up for work wearing whatever they wanted. It was love at first sight; at last, I had found my people.

I noticed Sawyer as soon as he walked into the bar. He was wearing a baseball cap with the visor flipped upwards, black-rimmed glasses, a white t-shirt with the sleeves rolled up, black jeans and tattoos down his arms. He looked like he had materialized from my teenage wet dreams. He introduced himself and his girlfriend, Annie, as they both leaned at the bar for a quick pint on their way home.

Sawyer was in a reggae band with his best friend Kip, who also worked at Pistol. They had moved from Calgary to Montreal a few years back to pursue their music careers. They now lived side by side in the same building complex.

"Oh, you guys are in a band?" I said sarcastically, using air quotes as I said band. I didn't believe that two white dudes from Calgary could possibly have a legit reggae band. They laughed and told me to listen to their Myspace page and decide for myself.

The next morning, I sat outside my apartment door stealing the neighbour's wifi, while I tried to find their band page. I was shocked to realize they were actually good and added both Kip and Sawyer on Facebook. I crushed on Sawyer's profile pictures knowing full well he had a live-in girlfriend of almost four years.

But by winter the status quo had been changed and on December 23rd, I woke up gasping for air. My eyes still glued shut by a Guinness induced coma. My subconscious tugged at the edge of my mind, eager to remind me of my night out. "We kissed." I let out with a



Kanye West

"Coldest Winter"

808s & Heartbreak

11/2008

Roc-A-Fella / Def Jam

croak. Sawyer and I had kissed, and I was set to leave for Thailand in less than three weeks.

The memories of our first kiss were blurry. I replayed them on a loop to keep them intact - in order for it to feel real. Through the boozie haze, I recalled images of Sawyer and I sitting across the table from one another. Our eyes full of liquor and sexual tension. I grew bolder under the influence and played footsie with his crotch under the table. His loaded smile could vaporize me, like a puff of smoke, I disappeared under his stare. I replayed the memories in sequence. Relishing the build-up towards our first kiss almost more than the kiss itself.

The kiss. The touch of his cold hands under my winter jacket as he pushed me against the wall. I was still young enough to feel like his touch, a man's touch, meant everything and was everything. Still, a guilty pang slit through my gut thinking about Annie.

That morning, I tried to apologize to Sawyer, feeling sheepish about my behaviour. After all, I was the one to blame. Surely, I had thrown myself at him, knowing our time together was coming to an end. He assured me there was nothing to apologize for. We had made the decision together and we were both better off for it.

In the following weeks, we plotted to see each other as much as we could before I had to leave him. The first time he came over to my sister's apartment, we locked ourselves in my room. I put on *808's and Heartbreak* by Kanye West on repeat and sat next to him on my bed. He scoffed but said nothing as I rested my legs over his, my back to the wall. Sawyer was a musician and loved to tease me about my music choices, no song was ever good enough for his ear. He assured me he would teach me what "good music" was one day and I sighed as he leaned over to kiss me.

Instead, that afternoon, Sawyer taught me the difference between sex and love. I wanted to melt into his very core and stay there forever. I made sure to savour every touch and every kiss. I felt robbed by my own drunken memories. Our first kiss was now more like a sketch than a photograph in my head. I ached for his attention, his affection. Sleeping with him felt right and eased my guilt of being labeled a home-wrecker. I had no fighting chance. I was now Sawyer's slave, his disciple, and a ticket out of his own mundane existence. Yes, technically, he was still with his girlfriend, but I was leaving in a week.

Sawyer had reassured me, telling me he needed to show me how much he cared, how much I meant to him. He said he wouldn't have cheated on Annie if I wasn't leaving. "I would never do that to her but this is different," he told me. I would have slept with him no matter the situation, but I didn't tell him that. When he left that day, I ran back to my room and fell into bed, Sawyer's smell still lingering on my pillows.

When d-day finally came, I sat on the edge of my bed alongside Sawyer as he handed me a tattered book from his bag. It was thin and compact with the corner of the cover page torn off with age. He told me he had found the book in a hostel in Thailand and had kept it with him throughout his travels. He told me to keep it. It was mine now, to keep it safe while it was my turn to travel alone to South-East Asia. I couldn't shake the feeling that I was leaving him behind. I didn't even know when I would be coming back. I cursed the universe, wondering why I had met Sawyer mere months before leaving the country.

I cried in Sawyer's arms as we stood beside my sister's idling car. He told me he loved me for the very first time, and I promised him I would come back "now that someone loves me." I watched him turn away and start down the street as I cried. My tears felt beautiful, even poetic, as I waved him a final goodbye.

Later that day, as I sat waiting for my flight to board, I fished out his book and traced the fragile corners with my fingers. Slowly, I opened it and discovered he had left me a note inside. I had to swallow my heart back down into my chest as I reeled from the romance of it all. I memorized it, his words heavy with wisdom. Imploring me to wander the earth and explore as much as I possibly could. After all, he wrote, we were all children of the earth.

I had split myself in half when the plane had taken off back in Montreal. My other half now lived inside of someone else and his name was Sawyer. Our love was true love, I knew this because he told me. I believed him with every part of me, even the parts of myself I hardly understood. Sawyer was older, fourteen years my senior. Still, he told me he never loved like this before. Sawyer was my first love, and this he always would be. Whether the love was in fact real that I could not say. But at that time, between us both, it was real and that's what mattered. Every single moment spent with Sawyer was like a prayer answered, and I longed for the day we could be real.

Back at the Heathrow airport, I was in a state of limbo. Wandering the halls thinking of Sawyer, still feverish from his last words to me. "I love you." I listened to *808's and Heartbreak*, only to be reminded of us locked inside my sweltering room weeks earlier. Memories of the coldest winter, when we kissed on icy sidewalks drunk on Guinness and lust. The winter I fell in love.



Son Volt
"Windfall"

Trace

09/1995

Warner Bros.

Love in the Time of Cirrhosis: How Son Volt's "Windfall" Crushed One Love and Sparked Another

Nick Hartman

Son Volt's "Windfall" revolutionized my taste in music.

That wasn't easy in 1995. Nihilism and grunge ruled the day. From Generation X's perspective, everyone and everything was fucked. But somewhere between the omnipresent drone of Nirvana, clove cigarettes, and pocket Camus readers, a total stranger introduced me to a genre of music that would become my personal soundtrack.

Unfortunately, I wanted to punch this guy in the face.

I had my reasons.

Most revolved around losing my job and a tenuous relationship with a new girlfriend, Angeline. A mutual friend introduced us. Curly brown hair, beautiful legs, athletic, outgoing and warm. And she drank like a man. You know, marriage material. She wanted to spend time together, and we did. But she wouldn't think of having sex until I had been tested.

Eager to prove my commitment, I bounced into the county health clinic for what I thought would be a blood test. Instead, I found myself in an examination room with some male nurse. After he explained the assortment of medieval instruments on his stainless steel tray, he unexpectedly jammed a pipe cleaner into my dickhole so hard I expected him to reach for some cue chalk and yell "Stripes!"

If that wasn't bad enough, not long afterward, I lost my job. I went from making \$25 an hour as a media relations specialist with a large utility company to making \$7 for small daily newspaper in the Inland Empire. I went from shopping for dress shirts at Structure in Montclair Plaza and \$30 lunches during the week to informing my befuddled roommates that I wouldn't have enough for rent the following month. So, for the next six months, I lived out of my '91 Isuzu Rodeo during the week, occasionally parking and sleeping in orange groves around Redlands and showering at the local Family Fitness.

In retrospect, I spent three years trying to convince her and her family - and ultimately myself - that I was worth the investment. That's a tough sell when you're a homeless reporter making \$7 an hour.

Most, if not all, of this had to do with why I wanted to punch this guy.

Angeline was working on a psychology degree at the time. Naturally, most of her friends were counselors-in-training. If you've never spent time around a group of mental health care majors, they're like theater majors, only they don't read. Sometimes they would

study as a large group, but other times Angeline would study with one guy in particular, Tyler. This was some red flag shit for me. Was it insecurity on my part? The homeless reporter in me said yes.

After making the trek from Redlands to Fullerton one weekend, Angeline announced plans for a party. All of her school friends would be there, including Tyler. As I stacked salami and cheese on crackers, I fumed. At least as much as a guy making hors d'oeuvres could fume. I secretly pondered my order of operations. Would I punch him first or crush his hand and then punch in the face? Definitely a game-time decision.

When Tyler first walked into the apartment, my first thought was, 'He's a goofy fucker.' Sadly, this put me at ease. I exhaled, and in my mind, merged seamlessly onto the high road. He didn't seem too bad. No over-earnest affect and didn't say hello through clenched teeth. I could hang with this guy.

After some uninspired prattle, Tyler spied my CD tower and asked, "You ever heard Son Volt?"

I didn't realize the profundity of this question. I can't remember my response. It probably involved a long pull from a beer bottle, blithely removing whatever CD was playing, and putting in Hall and Oates' *Rock and Soul, Part I*. That was always my way of saying, 'This party sucks and the only thing that can redeem it is the power of Hall and Oates.' He told me about an album - *Trace*. I needed to check it out.

A couple days after our talk, I found myself at some music store in a 70s era strip mall in old Fullerton. Flipping through the 'S' bin, I found Son Volt, and lo and behold, *Trace*. I flirted with several other titles, but nothing seemed right. As I shuffled between stacks of overpriced CDs, a single thought pulsed through my head: Was this guy making time with my girl? Why in the hell would I entertain his suggestion and pony up \$15.99?

For reasons unknown, I left with "Trace."

Angeline was at work when I returned home. After the obligatory 10 minutes of CD plastic removal, I slid the disc into the player. The opening acoustic guitar lick for "Windfall" rang out.

Fuck.

It's everything I hated in one song. Fiddle. Pedal steel. This guy pulled the caper of the century. Not only did he maybe bone my girlfriend, he made me buy a CD I hated.

This was country music. And if there was one thing I hated, it was country music. It was my father's music, which meant that it was my enemy. But halfway through this three minute song, tears rolled down my cheeks. For some reason, I felt permission to grieve. For what, I don't really know. But Jay Farrar's bloodshot benediction made me a believer.

"Both feet on the floor/Two hands on the wheel/May the wind take your troubles away."

Maybe it wasn't the best advice at the time. It reinforced the idea that with the right combination of gasoline and apathy I could outrun my problems. Farrar's mournful incantations prepared me for the night, but never the morning after. His voice always rang through my head when I tried reclaiming some dignity by throwing on the wrinkled, smoky clothes from the night before and limping squint-eyed and hungover into the sunlight of some strange neighborhood.

While I'm sure we crossed paths again, I don't remember any other conversation with Tyler. His suggestion shined a light directly at Uncle Tupelo and its other offspring, Wilco. These three bands remain familiar drinking partners.

The relationship? Well, that ended in a mushroom cloud of fear and self-loathing. After Angeline returned from an unannounced trip to Europe (another episode of *Memoir Mixtapes*), we had breakfast at Mimi's Cafe in Placentia. She confessed her desire to get married and start a family. I told her that I wasn't done drinking yet and that if we got married that she would inherit a son, not gain a husband.

We drove back to the apartment and I started packing.

Tyler's ghost even provided my relationship's outro music. As I stuffed clothes into white trash bags, the chorus of Uncle Tupelo's "Still Be Around" hit dead center: "*When the Bible is a bottle/and a hardwood floor is home/when morning comes twice a day or not all/if I break in two, will you put me back together?/When this puzzle's figured out/will you still be around?*"

Nope. And I couldn't blame her.

She eventually married and started a family. Unfortunately, my love affair with alt country came at the expense of someone I loved. But doesn't it always?

And Tyler? I don't know if he ever became a counselor. Don't care. He gave me the one song, the one narrator, who took an assemblage of empty whisky bottles and gave my sadness a name and gave it flesh and bone. He unwittingly accounted for half of my music catalogue over the years. That's worth more than any degree. And if I saw him today, I'd still crush his hand, but I'd give him a big hug and thank him for figuring me out a long time ago.

On “Dreamer” by Tiny Vipers

Jon Johnson

Here comes one of those “back in my day” stories. Where’s my prune juice?

If you look at Menifee, CA today, it is trying to look like nearby Temecula, which in turn is trying desperately to convince everyone it belongs in Orange County. I’m sure the pattern continues ad infinitum. But I remember—and here is our key phrase—back in my day, Menifee was little more than an annoying growth lumped from Sun City’s bald, liver-spotted head.

There was a certain culture in that time. It was seeing someone from your school at the old Target and not saying a word to them (though sharing stiff, knowledgeable glances). It was spending Sundays in some daze at a huge church, where everyone masks their uncertainty in the safety of numbers.

It was deciding between Carnitas and Cathay’s and actually making it down Newport in less than 10 minutes in your sweet lifted truck that got four inches per gallon. It was trying to remember which one of these identical houses was your friend’s and climbing dirty hills to look out at our patch of existence.

Yet at the ripe old age of nineteen, I was lost.

You ever have those “what the hell am I going to do with my life that gives it meaning and staves off this gnawing truth that I am speeding towards an inevitable death which nothing can stop” moments?

Naturally, the best thing to do is escape. And I was certain I was doing everything necessary to forget this annoying, black winged truth, but sure as a sunrise there she was. In the bottom of every red solo cup, in the roach of every joint, after every sweaty climax she clawed back in like a harpy...

My favorite routine I had back then (to escape myself or her screaming inevitability in my ears) was to ride my bike late at night. Aim for 2am. Not another soul on the road. Well, maybe a coyote or an owl, but they don’t hit you with cars, so don’t pay them any mind.

As was custom back in my day (two times, not bad), I made myself a mixtape, and heading up that mixtape was “Dreamer” by Tiny Vipers. The simplicity of the song met the percussion of the bike chain to create the “Menifee Symphony No. 6 in C minor”.

It was both moving and motion sickness. Something in the cadence of the song, my legs, and the emptiness lined up like the stars I couldn’t see through the orange street lights.

Existential is overused, enlightening is condescending, this was...individual. In the sense that nothing had ever felt individual or unique in my otherwise banal existence. In the daylight I was intelligence unapplied, skills unused, and chances not taken. Yet here I was, lost, confused, and alone and yet somehow right where I needed to be. I didn’t have the answers, but I didn’t need them. I just needed to keep pedaling.

In a sense I’m still not unique. There are about 7.8 billion versions of me in their own versions of Menifee, riding their bikes on empty midnight streets and wondering what

Tiny Vipers

“Dreamer”

Life on Earth

07/2009

Sub Pop

the actual fuck they will do with their lives. "Dreamer" by Tiny Vipers wont give you the answer, but it makes a damn good soundtrack for the inquisitive journey.

I never outran her, by the way. That razor toothed harpy, that tattered, winged beast, that greasy crow-faced rat muttering through the trash in the night. The reminder that life is a short term contract before we are snatched up to meet the unknown. She's still there. I've just learned she has a place in the song.



Swing Out Sister

“Breakout”

It's Better to Travel

05/1987

Mercury

On “Breakout” by Swing Out Sister

Alexis-Rueal

Give me that wide, gliding voice.
You've got to *find* a way

Star to wish on
Say *what you want to say*

Prayer for escape
Breakout

1987-- Singlewide trailer.
narrow with parents fighting.

1997-- Efficiency apartment,
married at 20 and already regretting it.

2007-- 30 years old,
and can't remember what hope feels like.

Listen to that song.
Program a prayer into the radio.

Press Repeat on the iPod.
Wait for blooming wings and helium bones.

2017—40 years old and familiar
with the tops of clouds, now.

Press Repeat when the song comes on.
Sing along to the chorus.

Pick the shattered ceiling from you wings.
You know what it is to be free.



Pavement
"Grounded"

Wowee Zowee

04/1995

Matador

On "Grounded" by Pavement

Joseph S. Pete

As a young enlisted soldier at Fort Lewis, Washington, I had an evening routine when training permitted. I would head to the chow hall to dine on a bland nursing home-like meal of rubber chicken, starchy mashed potatoes, and a mushy vegetable, usually one with a lot of butter and marginal nutritional benefits like green beans or corn. It was institutional feeding for cannon fodder instructed to tie a dog tag into your boot laces so they could identify your corpse. After filling up on the overcooked cafeteria fare at the dining facility at the end of a long day, I'd hit the pull-up bars just outside the barracks before heading off to the gym.

As a bookish nerd and anomalous recruit, I worked hard to bulk up and build up my upper body strength in particular. But I found exercise to be dull. Seeking out some mental stimulation while lifting dumbbells or hoisting myself up on the wooden pull-up bars that had a makeshift, primitive quality, I made sure I had headphones at all times. Often I listened to audiobooks. But I was young and enraptured by my roiling internal sea of emotions, drifting me like the tide to sad, serious, thoughtful music. I listened to a lot of Wilco, Decemberists, Sufjan Stevens, anything with a literary sensibility and dazzling lyrics. Stephen Malkmus was the Shakespeare of lyrics, the patron saint of all English majors and bookish sorts. Pavement played on repeat, especially "Summer Babe (Winter Version)" off the album *Slanted and Enchanted*.

Rolling Stone Magazine named the jangly melodic song as one of the top 500 songs of all time, even though it never trended on any chart.

"We didn't know how to record," Malkmus told the magazine. "We used reverb on the drums—the cheapest, worst reverb ever."

He confessed he was trying to ape Lou Reed and sing about "sad boy stuff."

Wistful lyrics like "she waits there in the levee wash/mixin' cocktails with a plastic tipped cigar" and "in an abandoned house but I will wait there/I'll be waiting forever" appealed to my youthful sense of isolation and loneliness. The hook wormed its way into my eardrums and stayed there, overriding whatever basic cadence we sung during our PT runs. The initial crash of the fuzzy, lo-fi guitar riff primed me like a young pup waiting for a sonic treat.

When Malkmus's highfalutin but opaque lyrics came in, I was completely transported to another place. His lyrics were so notoriously cryptic yet so permanently inscribed on one's memory I laughed out loud years later at a YouTube comment that "all I want is a man who will treat me like an oil well."

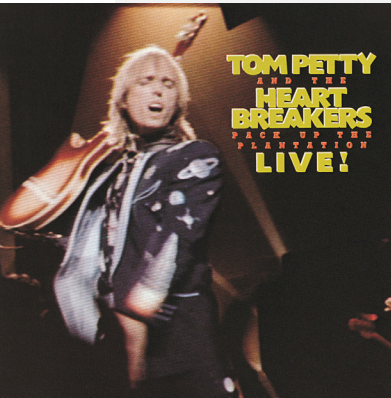
And yet, I thought of the song as lesser Pavement. The term "babe" struck me as somewhat cretinous at the time, even though I now use it as a term of endearment for my fiancée. Though catchy, the lyrics just weren't as well-crafted. It's not even the most relatable song on the album when Malkmus is spitting heart-rending truth on *Here* like "I was dressed for success,/a success that never comes/and I'm the only one who laughs at your jokes when they are so bad/and your jokes are always bad." Lacking the emotional resonance of Pavement's better cuts, "Summer Babe (Winter Version)" also was poppy and maudlin in a way that seemed more coarse than anything else.

The more experimental and avant-garde Pavement record *Wowee Zowee* was the one that truly captivated me during my high school years. Like Neutral Milk Hotel's *In the Aeroplane Over the Sea*, it's an artistic triumph from beginning to end, a masterpiece best appreciated by listening all the way through. *Wowee Zowee*, which has been commemorated by a 33 1/3 book and was re-released in a re-mastered format by Matador Records, features a variety of genres and a requisite streak of rebellion, including the song "Fight This Generation" and lyrics dumping on the then-popular Smashing Pumpkins for not being relevant and not saying anything the singer understands, or would even care enough to understand.

Nearly every song on the album is perfect: poetic and freighted with resonant emotion. But the one I probably listened to most on repeat was "Grounded," 4 minutes and 14 seconds of profound sadness and withering class warfare. Having grown up in the highly segregated Chicagoland metropolitan area, I could relate to lyrics like "he foaled a swollen daughter in the sauna playing contract bridge/They're soaking up the fun or doing blotters, I don't know which... which... which... /Boys are dying on these streets."

The social justice dudgeon is high, the tone is romantically, wallowingly melancholic, and the lyrics are some of the most exquisitely lapidary ones ever recorded. "He spoke of latent causes, sterile gauzes, and the bedside morale" rolls off Malkmus's tongue as a feat of high art.

It's just a song an alienated suburban teenager can relate to, as he wails "pariah!" as it winds down. "Grounded" spoke to me in the red-hot emotional cauldron of my teenage years, when a standard romantic rejection had me melodramatically contemplating the extreme finality of self-inflicted death, and it still speaks to me today, when I devote more of my attention to mundane things like automotive maintenance and life insurance. It's a gorgeous song, the aural equivalent of an impressionist painting of a lush countryside. It's packed with profundity and a *cri de coeur* against pampered comfort disconnected from what really matters in life. I had it on repeat for years because, no matter how many times you've heard it, it's a lovely, lachrymose song that makes you feel something.



Tom Petty and the
Heartbreakers

“The Waiting”

*Pack Up the Plantation:
Live!*

11/1985

MCA

The Hardest Part

Ryan Peckinpaugh

Growing up in the 90s, I had to listen to some shitty music. At the time I didn’t necessarily think the music was so bad, but then again, hindsight. Recently, I found a box of CDs in my childhood bedroom. Among them included Creed’s “Human Clay,” Nickleback’s “Silver Side Up,” Lifehouse’s “No Name Face,” “NOW 6,” and a CD called “Everything You Want” by a band called Vertical Horizon (yes, I actually spent money on this). Needless to say, they all went back in the box.

When I was a kid this was the music readily available to me. I enjoyed the pop of Third Eye Blind, the cheese of Smashmouth, and the incessant catchiness of the Goo Goo Dolls. Even today, when browsing a random 90s Pandora channel, this music still induces fits of nostalgia. But it doesn’t mean it was good.

I’m very aware that there was good music in the 90s. However, where I grew up, the station I listened to (Y-102) didn’t play it. Instead of Radiohead, they played the Backstreet Boys. Instead of Weezer, they played Everclear. Instead of Foo Fighters, they played Hanson. To put this into perspective, the DJ of Y-102 once appropriately chastised me off the air for calling three days in a row to request “Fly” by Sugar Ray.

As one would expect, I didn’t really have a song or an album or a band to latch onto. Even with the CDs I owned, I really only listened to the tracks that were popular on the radio. In the 90s it was much more common for a band’s hit single to be the only palatable song on the album—something I have dubbed the “Chumbawamba anomaly”. This led to a lot of ill-advised purchases, such as investing in Lou Bega’s album “A Little Bit of Mambo” solely to listen to “Mambo No. 5” (unsurprisingly, the rest of the album is cancer of the ears).

This was my music experience from elementary through middle school. By high school, I couldn’t stand contemporary music. Thankfully, I had a little sister to constantly remind me how much I hated Good Charlotte and the All-American Rejects and Evanescence, etc.

I changed school districts from middle to high school, so I had the ability to start over. I didn’t have to be the chunky kid who rocked Payless shoes and the best clothing Factory 2U could offer. I had the real chance to begin anew. My mother knew how difficult this would be for me, so she offered to spend some real money on some good clothes for my first semester. Unfortunately, clothing styles between the two districts didn’t exactly overlap in popularity. The standard of “cool attire” at my district in middle school either never made it over to the other district, or they’d already moved on from this unfortunate trend. I didn’t make a great case for re-invention when I showed up wearing an Allen Iverson Sixers jersey, yellow Dickies pants, and Etnies skater shoes. I spent the first week eating lunch in the portable bathrooms.

Making friends was tough, but luckily I was given some semblance of a sense of humor and a moderately outgoing personality. Through this, I was able to make a couple of acquaintances. They weren’t exactly friends, but I didn’t have to eat lunch while having to intermittently wait for the sound of a piss stream to stop pummeling a urinal cake anymore. What was difficult, though, was maintaining conversation. I entered high school without a musical identity. My interests at the time were baseball and movies (admittedly, these are still my core interests). But music taste was important at this new

school. Over half the students repped band t-shirts (I owned none) and headphones frequently protruded through backpacks where Walkmen were stashed. When music became the topic of discussion, as often was the case, I had to appear engaged without actually being able to contribute.

I was facing a pretty harsh reality: I didn't like music.

Who the hell says that? It's like saying you don't like food. It couldn't possibly be true. But I didn't like it. The music I liked in elementary and middle school was no longer cool—so I couldn't like that. The trendy music of the time I felt was so bitchy and whiny I couldn't even feign interest. And anything preceding my birth was 'old people music'. I was stuck in a music-less world with people who seemed to judge character on musical tastes alone.

Then I met Dorian.

Dorian wasn't a conventional high schooler. He didn't fit into any clique. He didn't play sports. He wasn't part of any extracurricular activities. And his style didn't really conform to any set high school law. He was invisible at the school, but not the way that I was. I was just the unnoticeable new kid, but Dorian was invisible because he didn't yield to any popular trend or posse. He had already achieved individuality and confidence—something teenagers usually discover in their third year of college.

He loved Friends, after it was cool to love the show. He quoted Wayne's World a decade after everyone had already forgotten about it. His house parties consisted of pizza and Coca-Cola, when everyone else was playing beer pong. And most of the time his attire consisted of a faded pair of jeans, cowboy boots, and a band t-shirt representing a favorite band of his or a souvenir from a concert he'd been to.

His shirts ranged from AC/DC, to The Rolling Stones, to Def Leppard, to Ozzy Osborne, to Led Zeppelin, among several others. Half the shirts he owned were of bands I didn't know, and the other half I related to music my dad listened to.

After several weeks in class (an acting class we both publicly detested, but privately loved), Dorian and I became friends. We'd eat lunch together (outside the portable toilets) or loan DVDs to one another or hang out after school until that fateful day that I was deemed worthy of an invitation to his house.

I'm not sure I ever saw the inside of his home because Dorian spent most of his time in a detached garage, about ten yards from the house, that he turned into his own chateau of testosterone. It was everything a young pubescent male could dream of. He had his own pool table, a dart board, a TV, a leather recliner, a sound system, and eventually, just outside, his own built-in Jacuzzi. As fascinating as the garage was, it was the décor that caught my eye.

The walls were nearly all music-themed. He had posters of his favorite bands next to vinyl record album covers peppered all over the walls. Finally I was ready to start the conversation, and asked him about his taste in music.

He talked to me for hours about classic rock. Like me, he couldn't stand modern music, but only because it couldn't match the sound and quality of classic rock. No guitarists could shred like than Eddie Van Halen. No drummers could attack the kit like John Bonham. No songwriters that could match the poetry of David Bowie. No group had the showmanship of KISS. He spoke with such enthusiasm; it didn't take much to convince me to look into this music of olde.

He made me a list of the bands I needed to check out. I went to a (now extinct) music store called the Warehouse and rummaged through bins upon bins of used CDs searching for bands on my list. It didn't matter which albums they had, I hadn't heard any of them. As long as they were cheap, all were fair game.

After an hour, I had a basket of CDs, all under \$6.99. I left that day with Black Sabbath's *Greatest Hits*, AC/DC's *T.N.T.*, Def Leppard's *Hysteria*, Van Halen's 1984, Aerosmith's *Toys in the Attic*, Led Zeppelin's *IV* (untitled, or *ZOSO* depending on who you ask), Foreigner's *4*, Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*, and *Pack Up The Plantation* by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.

I didn't know it at the time, but I had just walked out with a CD that would change the way I looked at music forever.

I began listening to the albums. I started with Aerosmith because they were still somewhat relevant and I was familiar with a few of their songs. My father was overjoyed that I now possessed music he'd listened to in high school. He advised me that I should never blast this music in my car, in fear that I would blow out my speakers (or eardrums), but if I ever felt the need to do so, I was allowed to blast Foreigner's "Juke Box Hero" as loud as I wanted (something he'd done in his own car in high school).

I listened to three or four more albums before I got to Tom Petty. I inserted the disc and immediately heard a crowd roar as "So You Want To Be A Rock & Roll Star" began to play. I hadn't realized I bought a live album, something I tried to shy away from. I'd never been to a concert at that point, and always thought the live versions of songs never sounded as crisp as the studio versions. I nearly turned off the CD, but I didn't have another Tom Petty album to replace it with and decided to give it a chance.

The second song, "Needles and Pins", a duet with Tom Petty and Stevie Nicks, didn't hit as hard as the first song, so I gave it the standard thirty seconds we all do when judging a song, and skipped ahead. This is when everything changed. "The Waiting" is the third track on *Pack Up The Plantation* and it was everything.

It begins quite slow—not the same tempo for those familiar with the studio track from the *Hard Promises* album. Enter Tom Petty, solo, strumming a 12-string electric guitar. He begins to sing—the performance is quieter and more subdued than the studio version. He slowly builds using only the guitar, his voice and the intermittent claps of the crowd. As he commands the crowd, he builds the song up louder and louder. Then, Mike Campbell launches in with his guitar. Stan Lynch bursts through on the drums. Benmont Tench on keyboard and Howie Epstein on bass follow suit until finally, the song explodes into a fury of some of the best live classic rock I've ever heard. It wasn't just music, it was poetry.

I must've listened to "The Waiting" fifty more times before moving on to the next track. By the time I hit "American Girl" I had a new favorite band.

I returned to school the following day and raved to Dorian about Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. How had I never heard of them? Sure, I'd heard "Free Fallin'" a few times before, but didn't love it enough to pursue any further research. As soon as I could get another ride to The Warehouse, I purchased four more Petty albums: *Damn the Torpedoes*, *Full Moon Fever*, *Into the Great Wide Open*, and of course, the *Greatest Hits*.

While I was still beginning my adventure into the world of classic rock, not only was I able to appreciate music again, but I'd found a band, and a songwriter, who spoke to me

personally. As strange as it sounds, a lyric as simple as "the waiting is the hardest part..." rang true. His songs were lively and ranged from electrifying, to poignant, to intimate, to, well, heartbreaking. I became obsessed with many, many Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers' songs, but none as much as "The Waiting".

Junior year of high school, I attended my first concert. Dorian and I (and a few friends) saw Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers at the Hyundai Pavilion in San Bernardino. From our lawn seats we could barely make out the stage, but I was able to hear them live and truly understand the remarkable experience of listening to my favorite band right in front of (or a great distance away from) my eyes. I purchased my first Tom Petty band t-shirt as a souvenir, a tradition I also learned from Dorian, and one I continue to this day with every show I attend.

Over the next fourteen years, a beautiful love affair blossomed with a band I still truly deem my favorite. I purchased a record player at the Goodwill and spent several years locating all of Tom Petty's albums on vinyl. In college, the album covers created a mural on my dorm room wall. I bought a \$25 guitar from a friend and made him teach me how to play "The Waiting" (along with several other Petty songs). I'd see Tom Petty in concert at least a dozen more times and collect a dozen more shirts commemorating each event.

June of this year, 2017, was the last time I saw Tom Petty perform. He headlined at the Arroyo Seco Weekend music festival. Once again, I went with Dorian. We had no interest in any other band performing, but the price of admission was worth Petty alone. We arrived early and staked out a spot close to the stage. As a poor high school/college student, I'd always imagined a day I'd be able to afford being right next to the stage, but never had the money to get very close. With each concert I attended, each ticket I bought was a bit more expensive than the last, inching me closer to the stage with every performance. The Arroyo Seco show got us within five to six rows of people from the front. If Tom Petty had been wearing a watch, I'd have been able to read the time.

He played for nearly three hours and it was one of the best shows we'd ever seen him/the band play. He played all the classics, even some I'd never heard live before (thank the Lord baby Jesus I got to hear him play "Wildflowers"). He was as youthful and magnetic as I'd ever heard him and the show left a lasting impression on us. As we headed toward the exits after the show to purchase our t-shirts, we had no idea this would be the last Tom Petty concert we'd ever attend. Since 2005, for me, the sure things in life were death, taxes, and getting to see Tom Petty shows every other year for the rest of my life. This tragically ended on October 2, 2017.

The first time I saw Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, a band that finally taught me to love music, Dorian was with me. So, it's fitting that it was he and I were together for the last one.

But I never got to see him perform "The Waiting". I've seen him play "I Won't Back Down" and "Runnin Down a Dream" every time. I've seen him close with "American Girl" every time. I've seen him play new songs, and Traveling Wilburys songs, and Animals covers, but in the dozen or so concerts I've attended they never performed "The Waiting." And even though I never get to now, I'm still satisfied. My first experience with Tom Petty was listening to the live version in my car on repeat. So, while I never got to see them do it in person... I'll always have the memory of hearing it live.



David Bowie
"Drive-In Saturday"
Aladdin Sane
04/1973
RCA Records

On "Drive-In Saturday" by David Bowie

Lisa Matthews

Drive-in

Saturday. My father spent his working life with other people using his skill to make money. He came home and talked about the men he grafted alongside, the sparks and the brickies and the plasterers. *Jung, the foreman prayed at work.* Half-rhymes and surrealist imagery fold back and forth, bound by a voice and face I'd not seen before. None of it made sense. *Pour me out another phone / I'll ring and see if your friends are home.* Where we lived, there was poverty and tradesmen making profit from other people (refer back to first line of prose-poem). There was no-one called Buddy in my street, but I imagined him leaning on a wall, flicking a rolled-up cigarette into the gutter. *He'd shrug and ask to stay.* So, he stayed. And he opened my world to Astronettes, The Stones, video films and the juxtaposition of strange characters and cut-ups. I had no idea what the *bureau supply for aging men* might be, but I knew the voice coming out of the radiogram was saying something important. I was compelled to listen, I took it in and felt it start to grow. For months, this song filled my room – on Saturdays – when my parents were out at the working men's club. To feel a bigger world beyond the top of our street, to know for the very first time that life was more expansive than the one I could see above the backyard wall, to consider the man with the red flash down the side of his face, his supine body dissolving away into grey sediment. To witness people – and their language – moving around in rooms, and streets, and cities, all lying and dying and living to extremes I was yet to know.



Laurie Anderson

“O Superman”

Big Science

04/1982

Warner Bros.

Your Long Arms

Marcus Civin

I convinced my parents to spring for the bus to San Francisco. I said, “It’s hard.” I said, “But it’s good.” I said, “At least I know I’m not ready for college.”

A roommate fresh from Peace Corps falls in love with an Italian lawyer. Leaving for his family olive farm, she says: “I’m bad at goodbye,” shoves at me two shoe boxes stuffed with cassettes. One is orange. One is unadorned brown cardboard.

“Thanks. Grazie di cuore! Listen, Peter will be in touch for these at the end of summer. He’s an old college friend. He’s on his way back from Wyoming. Mi dispiace. Devo andare. È la stagione del raccolto!”

My parents underwrite my sixth of the rent for my windowless portion of an old washing machine warehouse. I blame them for my schooling. Though I studied, lessons never took. I’d worn a uniform, attended football games. For a pep rally, my drama teacher had asked me to recite the rallying cry from Shakespeare’s *Henry V*. I botched it, in shame, jumbling the order, forgetting everything after the lines “But when the blast of war blows in our ears, imitate the action of the tiger, stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, disguise fair nature with hard-favored rage...”

In San Francisco, I feel purpose as the temporary keeper of Peter’s two boxes of cassette tapes. I feel responsible. He will be in touch at the end of the summer, quick, unemotional, frank like he is picking up a book he’s ordered at the library. He will be less than I want. To me, his tape collection suggests more. While I have his boxes, I take it as my duty to listen to every tape. I feel I can’t hold them or pass them on unless I listen. I am conduit.

It is Laurie Anderson who sticks with me from one of the boxes, her 1982 album, *Big Science*. On it, her 1981 single “O Superman.” There, über man. There, a set of well-meaning, if clueless, parents. There, Anderson’s menacing electronically processed voice singing about soothing maternal body parts gone robotic: long arms, automatic arms, petrochemical arms. Something is wrong. Arms, I think, as in: human arms, Mom and Dad, a hug in winter, and also: arms stored in an armory, an arsenal of ammunition, M-16s, and Uzis.

There is sweetness in her voice, harmoniousness. I can see her singing by a bedside, and I can see her singing over roadkill. More, I feel her forcefully beckoning towards an aggressive hate, packaged-in passengers about to be sent off into a universe bereft, unjust. In the song, the distance between answering machine and apocalypse is a surprisingly easy slide. There, a singing voice message: “This is the hand, the hand that takes.”

There, the same voice issuing assurance that a staff of dedicated couriers is hard at work; they seem to have something to do with airplanes. The more I listen, the more I think of the planes as flying hearses, death jets.

The warehouse where I live is large. It sucks up sound. Before I leave every morning, to get me up, I listen to Laurie Anderson: “Oh Superman. Oh Juuuudge. Oh Mom and Daad. Mom and Daaaad.”

From San Diego to San Francisco I carried a bulbous lamp, a towel from the bathroom closet at home, my father's tape measure, his T-square, screwdriver set, and plug-in drill. I work for a man named Ward. I help him flip apartments. We cut, set, and drill studs, unload, load, and hang drywall. We restore the occasional restaurant or bar, a new bistro where there had been a Salvadorian place.

Ward has something to say about everyone. I think his particular sourness might overtake him. It makes me nervous, but we manage. He doesn't stop to eat lunch. Instead, he runs. He has a talent for ending up his runs nearby a young woman, getting her talking as he starts sit-ups and push-ups on the sidewalk. His pick-up gimmick is pretending it is his Birthday.

I learn by surprise he is allergic to bees. His face blows up one afternoon while yelling at me and one of the other guys about how stupid salad dressing is. Somehow, he seems unaware of the swelling or the original sting. Or, he doesn't care. "Dante," he screams puffy-faced at my co-worker, "Who would want to make salad dressing?! Eat a fucking vegetable! Just eat it, don't dress it up! Fuck you and your fucking salad dressing!"

I make enough working for Ward to purchase a video camera. This feels good. On the tapes, I make only snippets, putting multiple events on a tape, playing them back at night listening to Laurie Anderson, her talk-singing, her techno rise and fall. There are blue spaces on the tape where the image falls off and the timer keeps going.

Laurie Anderson: "Hello? This is your Mother. Are you there? Are you coming home?"

0:08:16 - 0:16:15

On a car ride, my neighbor Bev driving, I record the passing buildings. Bev says, "Here we are, Sir." She parks by the copy shop, chews at the side of one of her fingernails.

0:16:45 - 0:28:09

I stack books to stomach-height, set the camera on top and record my hand just in front of a rough wall: my finger pointing up, a fist, then my hand waving, my finger pointing down, fist, thumb folded-in to make the number four, a fist then a peace sign, two hands holding a precise distance between them, lifting that up and down.

"Well, you don't know me, but I know you... So you better get ready. Ready to go. You can come as you are, but pay as you go. Pay as you go."

0:32:05 - 00:33:31

Sitting naked, sucking in, hands holding in my stomach, pushing up under my ribs. Me holding my breath.

0:34:59 - 0:45:58

With Bev, I go to the woods lugging a heavy sack of clay, collecting sticks and trash, a lot of broken plastic lying around. With this, we make what we call torches. We hold up our new stick-clay-branch-trash torches. We shout: "Y equals aloft water bottle!" And: "Y equals medicine bottle broken and stuffed with clay!" Then, "Thanks, mouthwash bottle! Thanks to spray cleaners! Thanks, flower coffee cup!"

"This is the hand. The hand that takes."

0:46:17 - 1:02:04

We go back to the woods, find a rusty bathtub, bring it deeper into the woods, fill it with dirt. Bev says: "Isn't it?"

"Here come the planes. The American planes"

I say, "It is."

"So hold me now, in your long arms. Your automatic arms."

I say: "Wash!"

Bev takes a photograph, prints a life-size image of me in the bathtub covered in dirt. I reprint the photograph onto fabric and sew it into a dress. Bev and I take turns wearing the dress around her room.

I receive in the mail a blue-and-white blanket from my Montana Aunt. I cut garlic, sauté spinach. I notice the two hammers rest against each other on the shelf. I scrub the warehouse kitchen, the dented toaster and the burnt microwave. Bev's elbow, her light blonde arm hairs, her huge sigh.

I shellack the torches from the woods walk with Bev thinking they'll last longer. I store them on the top shelf in a closet sticking out of a metal toolbox.



Soundgarden
"Black Hole Sun"
Superunknown
03/1994
A&M

Elegy for Chris Cornell

Justin Karcher

When I wake up in the garden
All the flowers are screaming
And the sun has a giant hole in it
Chris Cornell is dead

I gouge my eyes out
And give them to the sun
To use as catheters
So it stops dripping everywhere

The sun pisses into my brain
And I have visions of volcanic eruptions
That have happened all over the earth
Anger burning out the roots

There's a Vesuvius of sex offenders
Skiing down slopes of ash
Straight into the bedrooms of mouthless cheerleaders
Who have nothing to cheer about

Mount St. Helens has had too much to drink
Vomiting syringes and guitars into the air
Straight into the bedrooms of angels
Who are sick of trying to slit their wrists with feathers

When I crawl out of the sun's blowhole
I wipe a whale of ash off my face
And pluck any flowers still smiling
Times are gone for honest men



Don McLean
"American Pie"

American Pie

10/1971

United Artists Records

The Way that Kindness Died: An Updated "American Pie"

Gavin Lakin

The man there said the music wouldn't play.

Eleven years old, in the sweat and smog of the San Fernando Valley, I learned about the day the music died. Actually, it was my understanding from listening to 93 KHJ that rock music was alive and well. James Taylor was singing "You've Got a Friend." *Tapestry*, Carole King's living room album brilliantly produced by Lou Adler was changing the world. With cinnamon bun sugar sticking to our acne-filled faces, as we played triangle-shaped paper football at the lunch tables, Don McLean's epic lyrical tale resounded over the school's speakers. Meaning flew over my head like the daily seagulls that swarmed in for scraps. Understanding its many verses wasn't necessarily the point (or even possible); "American Pie" captured something about my country, about being human, about innocence lost. I may have been a kid, but I was able to innately feel he was speaking for us all.

They took the last train to the coast had a finality to it. My life was ahead of me. This juxtaposition of a much more tranquil and civil American society with an emerging transition toward random violence, abuse and addiction, self-help, and an unwinnable war set the rather shaky foundation upon which I would stand and journey on toward what awaited me. I hoped Satan, jesters and holy ghosts would step aside.

Flash forward to 2015, when James Morgan, BBC correspondent wrote on the topic of the lyrics of Don McLean's 1971 song, his best-known work that was named Song of the Century by the Recording Industry Association of America in 2001. Citing Jim Fann, author of *Understanding American Pie*, the line "The man there said the music wouldn't play" speaks directly to the 'cynicism of this generation had annihilated the innocent world the narrator had grown up in.' That kind of music simply wouldn't play anymore."

For nearly fifty years since Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper and Ritchie Valens died tragically on that chilly February night in an Iowa cornfield, until the original handwritten lyrics were auctioned in New York, McLean kept the song's meaning close to his vest: "I wanted to capture, probably before it was ever formulated, a rock and roll American dream." However, he gave us all some answers after its sale: "Basically in 'American Pie' things are heading in the wrong direction... It [life] is becoming less idyllic. I don't know whether you consider that wrong or right but it is a morality song in a sense." Historians would likely concur.

Our sparkling democracy; the beacon for the world, right? Well, let's have a look. Civil War? Indian Wars? Ft. Laramie Treaty (Government promises to Native Americans completely disregarded)? Chinese Exclusion Act? Executive Order 9066 (Japanese-American Internment during WWII)? Initiating the Atomic Age? Jim Crow? HUAC? Vietnam War? Watergate? *Please*, tell me when to stop. Egregiously poor decisions and misguided leadership, with puppeteers pulling the strings all in the Herculean effort that the rich remain rich through monopolies. And the rest of us? Not their problem. Keep the disenfranchised down where they belong. In fact, while captains of industry are at it, go ahead and create more divisiveness through manipulating the economy, employment,

technology and obliterating the pride once omnipresent on products marked *Made in USA*.

2017 has been the most vitriolic, violent, persistently disturbing and fear-inducing human fault line on record during the modern era. The fissures, cracks, rifts, the palpable divisiveness amongst our fellow countrymen and women exceeds—in cruelty and impulsive action—anything America has ever experienced. *Including the above atrocities.*

Perhaps Americans have lost what being exceptional means. Or conversely and quite the intriguing point, as Salmon Rushdie commented on Bill Maher's program a few weeks back, *when was America ever great?* And how do we define *great*? For it will not be government or leaders that will save us, or technology gurus and demigods, or even futurists with visionary acumen; it will be the impact of the arts across the genres. Music, with its universal language. Film, where two hours can unite us. When we aren't binge watching, television can be an event that grasps the nation's attention. Visual arts such as photography, art, performance art, even flash mobs, if even more a few moments of one's day, derailing us from our inner white noise. Theatre, with its "in the moment" realism, constantly expressing the human condition.

Dance, its own communication that reaches deep into the soul. Sharing with others in your book group your takeaways from a novel, accessing our emotion in a way that only the written word can.

Kindness is endemic. With a nudge, it can become the most necessary pandemic this planet has needed. It isn't about "random acts." That's a catchphrase. It's about a cultural commitment. I am not claiming to have the answers. There are literally hundreds of books, articles, research in journals all identifying this downturn of society and approaches to recapture it—only this time, we must embed it into our very sociological foundation.

Dacher Keltner, from his book *Born to be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life*, has plenty to say on the subject:

"This kind of science gives me many hopes for the future. At the broadest level, I hope that our culture shifts from a consumption-based, materialist culture to one that privileges the social joys (play, caring, touch, mirth) that are our older (in the evolutionary sense) sources of the good life. In more specific terms, I see this new science informing practices in almost every realm of life. Here again are some well-founded examples.

"Medical doctors are now receiving training in the tools of compassion—empathetic listening, warm touch—that almost certainly improve basic health outcomes. Teachers now regularly teach the tools of empathy and respect. Executives are learning the wisdom around the country of emotional intelligence—respect, building trust—that there is more to a company's thriving than profit or the bottom line. In prisons and juvenile detention centers, meditation is being taught."

In that spirit, if I could write to Don McLean, the nerdy eleven-year-old in me would offer up a science lesson:

Dear Don McLean,

Let me inform you about the vagus nerve. When active, located at the top of the spinal cord, it is likely to produce a feeling of warm expansion in the chest, as when we are moved by someone's goodness or when we appreciate a beautiful piece of music. Though I have humbly rewritten your iconic song lyric, with its implied tone of "loss" and "death" so to speak, I am eternally optimistic that our scientific nature is very much alive and won't be seeing "Satan laughing with delight" but, in the end, our better selves "will catch the last train to the coast."

Sincerely,
Gavin Lakin

The Way that Kindness Died

Not so many years ago
I wasn't much more than a child
I said "please" at every chance
"Thank you" in each circumstance
This was just the fashion, just the style

But then there came the red lights flashing
Answering machines amassing
Six rings and you'd listen
I noticed something missing

I felt a rift was growing wide
Just the slightest shift inside
It felt as if a best friend lied
The way that kindness died

So why, why did America buy
Dreamy twilight, iron pyrite when the pyrite was dry?
And the good ole folks turned the latchkey and why?
Thinkin' this would be their day in the sky
This would be their day in the sky

Did you look out for #1?
And did you scream when all was done
Did the movement make you grow?
Can you believe LPs were tossed?
Replaced by tape and tangled gloss?
And not long after came the video

Well, I know the puppets loved the din
As the disco balls would spin
The twenty rolls and booze
Man, it was hard to refuse
I was a friendly teenage naïve pup
People, I would lift 'em up

But I could sense the turning tide
The way that kindness died

So why, why did America buy
Dreamy twilight, iron pyrite when the pyrite was dry?
And the good ole folks turned the latchkey and why?
Thinkin' this would be their day in the sky
This would be their day in the sky

Then some eight years trickled down
An actor wore his Bonzo crown
And we were rapt by MTV
I felt it start to slip away
True enough, Spandau Ballet
And big hair, shoulder pads and the CD

Meanwhile out in Northern Cal
A microscopic chip, not HAL
All inertia turned
The algorithm learned

And while we went about our days
These Einstein's and Da Vinci's played
And demarcated all the ways
The ways that kindness died

So why, why did America buy
Dreamy twilight, iron pyrite when the pyrite was dry?
And the good ole folks turned the latchkey and why?
Thinkin' this would be their day in the sky
This would be their day in the sky

Shock and awe and oil-melter
One thousand points of light they dealt her
Surgical strategic blasts
Landing in the sand
Pawns racing through the land
The puppets watch from their ivory masts

Now the end game was a dot.com boom
With all of us, the lemmings' doom
We bought every floppy
And made another copy

Few could see the trap concealed
The rest of us were wheeled-and-dealed

Do you recall how fate was sealed?
The way that kindness died

So why, why did America buy
Dreamy twilight, iron pyrite when the pyrite was dry?
And the good ole folks turned the latchkey and why?
Thinkin' this would be their day in the sky
This would be their day in the sky

Oh, we clamored Y2K
A thousand years of hell to pay
Not even silicon could save us then
So, come on, Tech be *fly*, be *sick*
Rescued us from the tick, tick, tick
'Cause the puppeteers would never bend

The narrative turned back a page
I felt a generation age
No letters in the mail
And caller ID failed

And road rage by the traffic light
Kids gunned down at school in fright
"Have a nice day," a flat soundbite
The way that kindness died

So why, why did America buy
Dreamy twilight, iron pyrite when the pyrite was dry?
And the good ole folks turned the latchkey and why?
Thinkin' this would be their day in the sky
This would be their day in the sky

I met a girl who shared her views
Loudly, in the Starbucks queues
On her mobile phone she had her say
Soon the newest slimy trail
Was "Hey, I'll shoot you an email"
A cup of coffee face-to-face had gone astray

And when the planes flew through the glass
In that moment *normal* passed
Where all the rules had changed
America's twilight rearranged

And my trio of admiration
Presence, Care, and Consideration

They caught the last boat to Libation
The way that kindness died

So why, why did America buy
Dreamy twilight, iron pyrite when the pyrite was dry?
And the good ole folks turned the latchkey and why?
Thinkin' this would be their day in the sky
This would be their day in the sky

So why, why did America buy
Dreamy twilight, iron pyrite when the pyrite was dry?
And the good ole folks turned the latchkey and why?
And thinkin' this would be their day in the sky.



The Breeders

"Cannonball"

Last Splash

08/1993

4AD / Elektra Records

Shot Through the Heart with a Cannonball

Joyanna M.

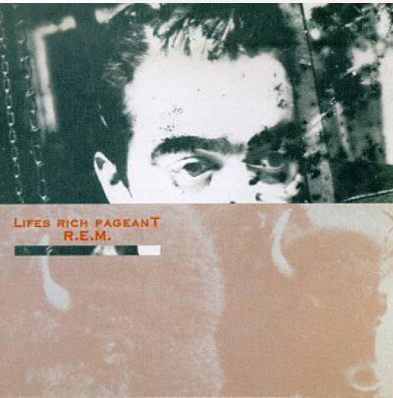
When "Cannonball," by The Breeders, first came out, I couldn't get enough of it. The bursts of machine-gun snare, and the pop harmonies; the chunka-chunka guitar riffs and Kim Deal's alto voice. But when they run the vocals through the distortion in the chorus is pure musical orgasm. The edgy anger smoothed over with a fat compression, a blend of cotton and steel wool, makes you instinctively reach for the lube.

I have not heard much since that can capture that same level of sensuousness, music like sparring, where you want your partner to hit you harder so you can feel it more. It is like a couple of double espressos with cream and tinnitus. A cardio workout for your tympanic membrane, vibrating against your skin until you're numb.

It has been my goal, as a musician, to find or recreate that sound. I have found pieces that approach it, including Diamonds by the Neo Kalashnikovs, a regrettably obscure New Zealand band fronted by Volita Bioleti. They have the good fortune to be stuck in the grunge era, but they are good soldiers for the cause, faithfully extending the enthusiastic hopelessness that makes the music endearing.

Recreating the sound has been challenging. My partner, Lily Bell, who sings for me in Aquamarine Space Unicorns, has a dulce voice that I have been able to use to great effect. It's the same alto range as Kim Deal and Volita Bioleti, so I had hoped that getting the same love-snarl would be easy. However, notching out the perfect comb of frequencies to add a shot of whiskey to her voice has been elusive.

The Breeders have remained a fundamental part of my musical collage. Other bands of their time are now only dated postcards. I continue to search for that same spellcasting enchantment. They showed me the potential in the crux between a woman's voice and modern audio textures.



R.E.M.

“Cuyahoga”

Lifes Rich Pageant

07/1986

I.R.S.

On “Cuyahoga” by R.E.M.

Rory Porter

Cuyahoga! You say, and I agree.
Mick Mills, teach me how to be.

Cuyahoga! You sing, to me alone.
A step, a half-step, a semi-tone.

I’m not a musician,
I wouldn’t know,
But please Mick Mills
Teach me how to grow.

Your basslines, a system of levers and pulleys,
A perfectly working Ottoman compass,
Your back-ups a butterscotch flavouring sachet
A baklava thumbprint on a dead sea scroll.

How do you care that no one knows?
Michael danced in the clearing, you worked in the shadow
You let him have the name that belonged to you both.

But without you there’s nothing
Yet you want no prize,
no trophy, no sum
For lifting the song
Like an olive tree’s branches,
Up with the sun.

No laurels for your harmonies, no ovations for your grooves
Just a life of thankless service to an indie-rock tune.

I dream of what you do now the band is done.

Among the pomegranates in the Caliph’s palace
that’s now a tea room,
that’s where I see you.

Waiting tables
Being patient
Giving directions
Refusing all the vulgar tips.
Laying down an ascending scale in E
And letting the lizards and crickets sing the lead.

Mick Mills, you showed me how to be.



Otis Redding

"Try a Little Tenderness"

Complete & Unbelievable:

The Otis Redding

Dictionary of Soul

10/1966

Volt / Atco

On "Try a Little Tenderness" by Otis Redding

Leesa Cross-Smith

I don't know if I can remember a time when Otis Redding wasn't my favorite voice. I have other favorites too like Stevie Nicks and Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra and Miranda Lambert and Nina Simone. But, Otis. Who sings like Otis? No one before and no one after. So often when I listen to Otis, I turn to my husband, my kids and go *who sings like Otis? No one.*

There isn't a song by Otis Redding that I don't like. But "Try A Little Tenderness" was my personal gateway to all things Otis. My dad's favorite song is "(Sittin' On) The Dock of The Bay" and my dad isn't really a music person. My mom loves Otis. *Who doesn't love Otis? No one. Who sings like Otis? No one.* I thank Otis Redding in the acknowledgements of my debut novel *Whiskey & Ribbons*. My characters dance in the kitchen to "Chained and Bound." Back in 2000, right before my husband and I left for our road trip honeymoon to Santa Fe, I bought a double-disc Otis Redding album to take along with us because being in the car for twelve hours a day means listening to Otis. When I gave my kids my old iPhones to load up with music, Otis was already on there.

In *Pretty In Pink*, "Try A Little Tenderness" comes on and Duckie beats on the wall, slides into the record shop in his dusseldorf-mustard blazer to perform his lip sync song and dance. It's what he does. He sings to Andie, throws himself into it completely. He spins, wildly throws his arms out, pulls them back again because it's all he can do to get his body to match Otis's voice. He grabs the railing and humps the air. When I hear "Try A Little Tenderness" I am Duckie. A lot of us are Duckie. Otis warrants this. Otis demands that we sing our hearts out, our souls out. Otis sings every song as if it's his last. Otis was taken from us far too soon. Otis will live forever.

"Try A Little Tenderness" is easily my favorite song. It is tied for that spot with "Stand By Me" by Ben E. King. They are both songs of heart and sweetness. Otis's "Try A Little Tenderness" begins like a gentle suggestion and by the end, it has turned into a desperate, fully-gutting, not-tender-at-all bit of pleading. There's a point when he sings "you got to try na na na got to" and he doesn't even really need the lyrics anymore, because you can just *feel* what he's trying to say. "Try A Little Tenderness" begins with horns and Otis singing "Oh she may be weary. Young girls, they do get wearied wearing that same old shaggy dress. But when she gets weary, try a little tenderness" while the organ and piano play underneath him. A guitar, another horn. Then the metronomic clock-drum kicks in as he sings "You know she's waiting. Just anticipating..." and then Otis goes hard early on when he sings "the thing that you never never never never possess, yeah" he tenders that immediately by singing "but while she's there waiting without them, try a little tenderness" over the churchy organ and adds "that's all you gotta do" in a spoken voice. The song has a slow, steady build until around the 2:00 minute mark of the single version when it quickly picks up steam. Otis sings "young girls they don't forget it. Looove is their whole happiness." By 2:30 the whiny horns and drums are playing all at once, no longer taking turns. "Squeeze her, don't tease her, never leave her." And by 2:50 Otis completely owns the song. This is Otis's song forever no matter who else records it. Who sings like Otis? At 3:04 Otis drops the *got to try na na na* and I think *who sings like Otis? Who? Who doesn't love Otis's version of this song? Wait. Don't tell me. I never want to know.*

"Try A Little Tenderness" isn't Otis's song. He didn't write it. Jimmy Campbell, Reg Connelly and Harry M. Woods did. The song has been recorded by performers like Aretha Franklin, Sammy Davis Jr., Frank Sinatra, Johnny Mathis, and Michael Bublé, among many others. "Try A Little Tenderness" existed before Otis sang it. But in another, much more real way, "Try A Little Tenderness" is Otis's song and "Try A Little Tenderness" didn't exist before Otis sang it.

The internet tells me Otis was reluctant to record the song. It's hard to believe when you listen to it because it sounds like God wrote the song first, then created Otis in all his glory and splendor to sing it specifically for Him. Otis singing "Try A Little Tenderness" is akin to David playing the secret chord that pleased the Lord. The internet also tells me it is the most popular and most highly-ranked Otis song among Otis-lovers. And Otis has a lot of really good songs. Proof:

"I've Been Loving You Too Long To Stop Now." (The way he begs at the end *"I've been loving you a little bit too long. I don't want to stop now no, no, no. I'm down on my knees please, don't make me stop now. I love you with all of my heart. And I can't stop now."*)

"Pain In My Heart"

"I've Got Dreams To Remember"

"Mr. Pitiful"

"That's How Strong My Love Is"

"Can't Turn You Loose"

"Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa (Sad Song)"

"The Happy Song (Dum-Dum-De-De-De-Dum-Dum)"

"These Arms Of Mine"

Etc, etc.

I'll end with another important Otis Redding movie moment. Johnny Castle attempts to teach Baby to dirty dance to the sounds of Otis singing "Love Man" at the after-hours staff party in *Dirty Dancing*. Otis's sexy stutters of *"cau-cau-cau-cause I'm a love man"* fill the smoky, hormone-sweaty air soon after Baby awkwardly tells Johnny *"I carried a watermelon"* because she can't think of anything else to say. All this passion, all this heat and Otis is there.

I grew up on Otis and don't remember a time before him, which is a blessing. I grew up on these movie moments, these songs. I make and live my life underneath this powerful drug-like nostalgia. The songs that can instantly take me back to being a little girl, sitting on the floor watching movies. A little girl singing into the handle of her jump rope in front of the full-length mirror in her pink bedroom. I did this a lot to Disney soundtracks and Michael Jackson and Madonna. Tiffany and Debbie Gibson and New Kids on the Block. But Otis stands out. *Who can sing like Otis?* He is unrivaled when it comes to singing from the gut, when it comes to raw passion. "Try A Little Tenderness" is my favorite song. How could it not be? And it will stay that way. How could it not? He is gone from us, but the recording remains. It is a national treasure. *He was a Georgia gem, a national treasure. Who can sing like Otis?*

THE
WEEPIES



The Weepies

"World Spins Madly
On"

Say I Am You

03/2006

Nettwerk

On "World Spins Madly On" by The Weepies

Brianna Rae Olsen

I found "World Spins Madly On" by The Weepies when scrolling through my sister's iPod Classic, which I stole from her (she always got better birthday presents). The music video was one of the first things I ever searched on YouTube and I remember waiting patiently for my dial-up to load the whole thing before pressing play so I wouldn't have to hear the sound of myself crying whenever it paused to buffer.

If you haven't seen the video, just imagine a depressed little claymation monster. That's me. A little seventh grade monster who half-assed made my bed in the morning and avoided eye contact with my reflection while brushing my teeth. Headphones permanently installed into my ears, never said more than two words a day to my family if I didn't have to, and was best friends with my bedroom carpet and the way my ceiling looked at sunset.

I would listen to "World Spins Madly On" on repeat until I fell asleep or until the iPod died—the latter usually came first. I spent most middle school nights that way and I also spent most of middle school finding new and creative ways to hate myself. I eventually came to a point where I felt I needed to pull myself together somehow and I made myself stop listening to the song as frequently, as sort of a diet. I stored it high up in the top cabinet of my brain labeled "Do Not Open Unless Already Sad."

But I climbed up on the counter to reach it quite often—all the way through high school and well into college. My first breakup, all the times I had to pack up my room and stare at the empty walls before moving again, the days I skipped school and hung out with my anxiety at home, my first time seeing a psychologist, the first time I ever really recognized the face behind my trauma, any time I hurt and needed something to cuddle me. I was probably so attached to the song because the lyrics made up my first vocabulary around what it's like to have a mental illness. And also because The Weepies truly are "subtly intoxicating folk-pop" (Wiki never lies).

I think that's an apt way to describe any song obsession, honestly, because it fucks you up in a way that you don't realize until you suddenly wake up on the floor wearing the same clothes as yesterday, and the song is still playing. Binging on songs that fuck you up is surely self-medicating—a proper dose can relieve pain, but too much can also set you into a self-inflicted coma of nostalgia and regret, and the pictures you should really have deleted by now, and the act of prying open all your past heartbreak to put some of that pretty pink himalayan salt in your wounds so it hurts in a more palatable way.

I guess that's the thing about sad music. It puts something beautiful behind all your ugly: the snot that drips onto your shirt when you're sobbing, the unwashed dishes and stacks of laundry you don't have the energy for, your swollen eyes and frizzy hair and purple trembling lips and the dumb sound your voice makes when you're still choking back tears. Having a soundtrack almost makes it seem curated, like maybe all these things naturally occur together and maybe it's okay to temporarily indulge in the validation of your aching. So long as you eventually muster the courage to pause your Sad Song and start a new one.

Contributors

Ann Kestner is the founder and editor of the online literary journal Poetry Breakfast. For over 25 years her poems have appeared in various journals. She is the poet in residence at the Poetry and Arts Barn in Cream Ridge, NJ where she hosts a variety writing groups and poetry readings.

William Stephen Davis was born in the Appalachian foothills of North Carolina. He was selected as a Sundance Screenwriting Fellow, and he writes and directs films for his Charlotte-based visual marketing firm, Small Creatures.

Cate Meighan is an entertainment writer by day, a radio DJ at night. Vinyl, coffee & cat obsessed. Her first book, *Diary of an 80's Girl*, is coming in Spring 2018.

Janice Lobo Sapigao is a daughter of Filipina/o immigrants. She is the author of two books of poetry: *microchips for millions* (Philippine American Writers and Artists, Inc., 2016) and *Like a Solid to a Shadow* (Timeless, Infinite Light, 2017.) She is a VONA/Voices and Kundiman Fellow, and the Associate Editor of TAYO Literary Magazine. She co-founded Sunday Jump. She earned her M.F.A. in Writing from CalArts, and she has a B.A. in Ethnic Studies with Honors from UC San Diego.

Eric Wallgren lives in Chicago, His writing has appeared in *Entropy*, *Queen Mob's Teahouse*, *Fanzine*, *Clash Media*, and elsewhere. He's online at ericwallgren.tumblr.com. Also, he makes music at eric-wallgren.bandcamp.com.

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Ben Jatos is a 49 year old high school English teacher in Vancouver, Washington. His work has been published previously in *Slice Magazine*.

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Jennifer McIntyre is an English teacher and theater advisor at a high school in Vancouver, Washington. She has a particular love for music, writing, and live theater because all three of those things capture the depth of the human experience in a way that nothing else can.

Sarah Little is a poet-storyteller. When she isn't conjuring new tales or trying to keep pace with her to-create list she blogs, knits, and sometimes goes looking for shenanigans. Her work has appeared in *Cold Coffee Stand*, *Twisted Sister*, and *Halo Literary Magazine*, among others. Her first poetry chapbook, *Tiny Moments*, was released in April 2017. She can be found on Twitter, @tuckedinacorner or blogging at <https://tuckedintoacorner.wordpress.com/>

Ryane Nicole Granados is a Los Angeles native, and she earned her MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University, Los Angeles. Her work has been featured in various publications including *The Manifest-Station*, *Mutha Magazine*, *The Good Men Project*, *Expressing Motherhood*, *The Nervous Breakdown* and most recently *Scary Mommy*. Ryane is best described as a wife, writer, professor and devoted mom who laughs loud and hard, even in the most difficult of circumstances. As a result, she hopes her writing will inspire, challenge, amuse and motivate thinking that cultivates positive change. When not managing her house full of sons, she can be found working on her novel, grading student essays, or binge watching reality TV shows while eating her children's leftover Halloween candy.

Emili Lamph is a soon-to-be English teacher living in Riverside, California with her fiancée and three adorable cats. She enjoys film, cooking, and red wine.

Leah Baker is a high school language arts teacher, acrobat, aerialist, yogi, seamstress, world traveler, and writer.

Gabrielle Gilbert has left Pratt Institute with a Bachelor's degree in writing as proof, as well as many ghosts and student loans. Her weird words have been published in multiple issues of *Selfish Magazine* and multiple issues of *Alien Mouth*, as well as *Dum Dum Zine*, *Vanilla Sex Magazine*, *Crab Fat Magazine*, *Witch Craft Magazine* and *Literary Orphans*. She also has a book! A chapbook. Which can be found through *Dancing Girl Press* under the title *Change of Engagement*. Her instagram is sometimes @gabbigilbert and she is sometimes living in Portland, ME.

Samantha Lamph/Len is a writer and cat masseuse living in Los Angeles with her bitcoin-obsessed husband and three cool cats. You can read more of her work in *OCCULUM*, *Queen Mob's Teahouse*, *Vanilla Sex Magazine*, *Connotation Press*, *Inlandia*, and *Mosaic*. She is also the creator and co-curator of *Memoir Mixtapes*, the publication you just finished reading. You can follow her on Twitter and Instagram @quandoparamucho, but please don't follow her IRL. That'd be creepy.

Abigail Lalonde holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Rosemont College. She is the Social Media Editor at *Literary Mama*. Her work has been featured in *Sanitarium Magazine*, *Pretty Owl Poetry*, *Crack the Spine*, and *Yellow Chair Review*. She lives with her husband, daughter, and three cats in Philadelphia. Her spirit animal is a combination of a goth teenager and Holly Golightly (from the book, not the movie. Don't be silly).

Lisa Matthews is a poet, scholar & collaborative artist. Her fourth collection of poetry, *Callisto*, will be published in the UK by *Red Squirrel Press* in the spring of 2018. Lisa is currently working on a part-time, practice-led PhD looking at the relationships between prose-poetry and sequential writing and their roles in the creative exploration of grief and trauma. <https://lisamatthewswriter.dunked.com> & <http://northumbria.academia.edu/LisaMatthews>.

Nina Sudhakar is a writer, poet and lawyer. She is the author of *Matriarchetypes* (forthcoming), which won the 2017 *Bird's Thumb Poetry Chapbook Contest*. Her work is forthcoming or has appeared in *Ecotone*, *Arcturus*, and *WhiskeyPaper*; for more, see www.ninasudhakar.com.

Ann Petroliunas is a 2017 graduate of the prose certificate program at the Independent Publishing Resource Center in Portland, OR. She is an educator, traveler, and editor at Arq Press. She's Chicago born and raised, but loves to surf, and is pretty sure she was a sea lion in a past life. Her work has previously been published in *Bridges: A Lithuanian American Journal* and *Hot Metal Bridge*.

Kevin D. Woodall is a Californian expatriate living in Calgary, Alberta with his well-dressed wife and strange-looking pug. You probably haven't read anything else by him because he's mostly a professional hermit. He's the co-curator/editor for *Memoir Mixtapes*, which he sincerely hopes you've heard of if you're reading this now. You can find him on Instagram as @KDWoodall and Twitter as @Kevin_D_Woodall. He's trying to do his best.

Ingrid Calderon is a Salvadoran refugee that scribbles nonsense and makes it into verse. She hopes it resonates. Her goal is to be an anonymous voice that cuddles the masses. You can find her on Twitter @BrujaLamatepec

Naomi (Noams) Loud is a writer from Montreal, Canada. She is currently working on her first memoir *Hello from Bordeaux*. If not writing or thinking about writing, Naomi spends the rest of her time buying too many books and daydreaming about the ocean.

Nick Hartman plays bass for *Ghosts in Pocket*. He loves diner coffee, omelettes, and futurism.

Jon Johnson, for the most part, has no clue what is going on. Time not spent scratching his head is typically spent writing, eating, and trying to figure himself out. He enjoys creation and expression in all forms, and finds his personal expression best through whichever medium pops out at the moment. Jon has a personal weakness for the smell of old books and questions that make you go "hmmm". Check out Jon's other adventures at <https://johnsonism.me/other-adventures/>, or visit him in Mallorca.

Alexis-Rueal is a Columbus, Ohio poet whose work has appeared in both print and online publications throughout the US and in Europe. She has performed in festivals and venues throughout Ohio and Kentucky, and was a 2016-17 member of the *Women of Appalachia: Women Speak* project. Her first full-length book, *I Speak Hick*, was published by *Writing Knights Press* in 2016.

Joseph S. Pete is an award-winning journalist, an Iraq War veteran, an Indiana University graduate, a book reviewer, and a frequent guest on *Lakeshore Public Radio* in Indiana. He was named the poet laureate of *Chicago BaconFest 2016*, a feat that *Geoffrey Chaucer chump* never accomplished. His literary work and photography have appeared or is forthcoming in *The High Window*, *Synesthesia Literary Journal*, *Steep Street Journal*, *Beautiful Losers*, *New Pop Lit*, *The Grief Diaries*, *Gravel*, *The Perch Magazine*, *Rising Phoenix Review*, *Chicago Literati*, *Dogzplot*, *Bull Men's Fiction*, *shufPoetry*, *The Roaring Muse*, *Prairie Winds*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Lumpen*, *The Rat's Ass Review*, *Stoneboat*, *The Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Euphemism*, *Jenny Magazine*, *Vending Machine Press* and elsewhere. He once wrote an author bio that would have put *James Boswell* to shame, but accidentally deleted it and attached this rubbish instead.

Ryan Peckinpugh is a stand-up comic and budding screenwriter living in Pasadena, CA. You should follow his movie blog at bigpeckcineflex.blogspot.com. You can also follow him on Facebook or Instagram.

Marcus Civin is Associate Dean in Graduate Studies at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). He has taught curatorial practice, drawing, performance, writing, contemporary art, and art history. He is a founder of New Urban Arts, a twenty-year-old non-profit art after school program in Providence, Rhode Island. At MICA, he is part of the group that started the critical journal Full Bleed. His writing appears semi-regularly in Art Papers and on Artforum.com. He has also written for Afterimage, Aufgabe, Urbanite, The Courtland Review, The Capilano Review, Nerve Lantern, Post-Office Arts Journal, Recaps Magazine, [out of nothing], kadar koli, Nerve Lantern, and the books: Incident Report (from Publication Studio) and (from Litmus Press) No Gender: Reflections on the Life and Work of kari edwards. His text Megaphone! was published by Press Press. He has exhibited at School 33 in Baltimore, Angels Gate Cultural Center in San Pedro, Boston Center for the Arts, and Recess Art in New York, among other places. He has performed in fields, basements, garages, classrooms, at The Kitchen in New York, LAXART and The Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, Transmodern in Baltimore and The Supernova Performance Art Festival in Rosslyn, Virginia. He is working on his first book, a collection of fictions sharing the kinds of lives lived by the kinds of artists and art people he has known. He is also working on a performance using two very heavy bronze top hats. Check out: marcuscivinwriting.com and marcuscivin.com. Or, skip right to the heart of the matter: <https://vimeo.com/144291489>.

Justin Karcher is the author of Tailgating at the Gates of Hell from Ghost City Press, <https://ghostcitypress.com/books/tailgating-at-the-gates-of-hell>, the chapbook When Severed Ears Sing You Songs from CWP Collective Press, <https://www.cwp-press.com/#/when-severed-ears-sing-you-songs/>, and the micro-chapbook Just Because You've Been Hospitalized for Depression Doesn't Mean You're Kanye West from Ghost City Press, <https://gumroad.com/l/karcher2017>, as part of their 2017 summer micro-chapbook series. He is the editor of Ghost City Review. He tweets @Justin_Karcher.

Gavin Lakin is a writer of fiction and creative non-fiction, most prominently in the areas of historical fiction, pop culture, music, and the mercurial 1970s. His writings, musings and hazy remembrances are featured on his blog spot.seventiesology.com. In the capacity of contributing writer, his works have been published and featured at boomercafe.com, a site dedicated to archiving the Baby Boom generation. Gavin has authored a series of novels and is seeking acquisition and representation. With a songwriting background, Gavin is a twenty-five-year published member of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), the Historical Novel Society (HNS), and the American Writers & Artists, Inc. (AWAI). Gavin originated, designed, and manages his online collectibles business Late Blue Highway, with a tagline "we make it our business to remember". A native Californian, Gavin lives in the San Francisco Bay Area without a dog, which makes him somewhat of an anomaly.

Joyanna M. resides in Seattle and creates fiction, poetry, art, and music. Her 'Self Portrait' painting was selected as cover art for Wicked Banshee Press, The Devil's Doorbell: Vagina Edition. Other works have been chosen for Moonchild Magazine, Bombus Press, and Five:2:One. She produces music under the moniker 'Aquamarine Space Unicorns.' You can follow her on Twitter at @joyanna1985, Facebook/Instagram @joyannam1985, and read selected works online at www.joyannam.com.

Rory Porter was born in Felixstowe, Suffolk and lives in Andalucia. He listens to mainly Jamaican music and eats mainly Indian food. His Christian socialism, vegetarianism and insatiable desire to watch football make relationships with others all but impossible. He sometimes puts stuff up on his blog at www.seaisnotfull.blogspot.com.

Leesa Cross-Smith is a homemaker and has been a finalist for both the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction and the Iowa Short Fiction Award. She is the author of *Every Kiss A War* (Mojave River Press, 2014) and the forthcoming novel *Whiskey & Ribbons* (Hub City Press, March 2018). She lives and writes in Kentucky. You can find her website at: LeesaCrossSmith.com.

Brianna Rae Olsen is a writer, editor, and photographer from the swampy woods of Central Florida. She now resides in San Diego where she's currently working on a collection of DIY literary art ranging from broadsides to chapbooks to zines. In addition to writing, you can also expect Brianna to show up with home-cooked Southern food and a detailed report of your horoscope.

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