

## *More Stories!*

**Forum**

**Number 14**

**October 2007**

# Life Force

**By Kelly Reale**

In the past year, my daughter has started to do two things that bring me back to my childhood. She's discovered semi-popular music and she's started riding a bike. The bike has training wheels. I guess the music does too. She's perfectly willing to listen to modern, soft rock if I play it in the car, but when given a vote her choices run more towards Disney sound-tracks. She's 5, so I'm betting (okay, hoping) that this will change someday. And, although I'm pretty current with my musical tastes, I think it might be nature's law that I'll someday hate some of the bands that she loves.

Music was a big part of my own family life growing up – most of us played

some kind of instrument. My father played piano in a band in college and later learned guitar, so it's no surprise that he was the driving force behind my earliest musical influences. James Taylor, Billy Joel and the Eagles were the soundtrack of my childhood (as I remember it, anyway). One of my favorite things to do on a Friday night when I was about 5 was to hang out in Dad's den while he played records on the hi-fi. He had a director's chair that I loved – it was right next to the stereo. I'd sit high up in that chair, wearing my pajamas and stare at the album covers. I remember trying to divine some meaning from the looks on the band-members' faces and the pictures. I'm sure my father thought I was a pest, asking to listen to my favorite songs over and over again and singing off-key while I tried to learn the words. But, I couldn't get enough of it. Maybe that's why I indulge my daughter when she pleads, "Play it again, Mommy!"

Later, in a different house, when I was about 9, there were speakers on either side of the stereo cabinet in the living room. My brother and I would line ourselves up on the floor, each of us with a head shoved right up against one of the speakers. We probably kicked each other's feet and fought over who got which speaker, but when the music started, I know for sure that I drifted off into a land of rhythm and beat that took over my whole soul. If you love music, you know exactly what I mean. I still feel that way about great music.

Not all of the musical moments in our house were of the Partridge Family variety. In the early eighties my mother



was convinced that we were being brainwashed by “backward masking” messages hidden in rock music recordings. I was at an age when pissing off my parents was my primary goal. I quickly enlisted my brother’s help in getting my hands on all the demonic records we could scrounge up and tried to make his stereo play them backwards. He had Playboy magazines hidden under the floorboards, so I had lots of leverage! I never heard anything interesting on those records, but if it was all true then, as my friend Mark jokes, the bands must have been programming messages like “Drink more milk.” or “Stay in school.”, because, well, I turned out fine.

Every major (and many minor) moments in my life are associated with at least one song. Although not consciously cultivated, all of my best friends have been music-focused. And, I don’t think I ever dated a man for very long with whom I couldn’t find a musical connection. So, it came as no surprise to me that I fell head over heels for a guitar player and married him. We have a steady, suburban life now that probably seems fairly unremarkable on the surface - except for the guitar collection that threatens to take over every closet in the house. I complain, but it’s mostly for effect.

Recently, a close girlfriend and I were talking about some concerts we’d gone to over the summer. We lamented (but maybe we were both a little proud of this too) that we are a rare breed – or so it seemed to us. Neither of us knows too many other professionally-employed, married mothers of two, living in desirable neighborhoods that still think music is one of the great forces that make life worth living. So what if our lives don’t allow us to still go to every show, camp out for front-row seats, and stay until the end of the very last encore? We feel lucky to be able to pass on the legacy of the love of great music.

Rock on.

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*The Windswept Press*

Saugerties, NY

davidgriffin@hvc.rr.com