

Music Boxes

by Joey Delgado

Mom would dig through one of her music boxes to pick out Saturday morning's cleaning jams. Tattered, battered Payless shoeboxes with lids ripped to shit, filled to capacity with piles of cassettes; greatest hits albums, mostly, or Time Life compilations of mid-to-late seventies bops from her roller disco days at Skate Junction. Even just nine or ten years removed from those feathered hair glory years, it was tough to imagine her twirling across the rink, flirting with the boys who couldn't keep up, waving as she passed them, sometimes backwards, laughing at some catfish whiskered teen white-knuckling the rail. Maybe he'd lift his hand to wave back, but just for a second before grabbing the rail again, sacrificing cool acknowledgment for an upright position.

I can imagine it now, easy, but not then, not during a Saturday morning cleaning sesh.

No, no. Marriage happened, motherhood happened, not to mention being sifted through a sieve of Reagan era conservatism followed by the early years of the Satanic Panic, the first black and red wave that crashed only on trailer parks and low rent apartment complexes, especially those situated—sitch-ee-ated—near unaffiliated big box churches.

In those days, mom wore a worldview that was as ill-fitting as the billowy blouses she scooped up from the TJMax bargain-bin. Thinking back, it was clear that mom wanted Jesus to be The Man of the house, but she worked graveyards and swing-shifts and for some reason her Sunday morning alarm rang well past any second service I knew of. Jesus never was The Man of the house. At most he was a special friend of the family who would bring me comic books and take mom out to the Sizzler.

Saturday morning the music would play. And not just disco, but anything from her own bygone era before, dare I fucking say it, capital S Society (I said it!) buttoned her up to the collar, that last throat pinching tippy-top button. She'd spray the coffee table with

409 to the beat of 'Staying Alive'. She'd wash the dishes along with Prince's 'Wann Be Your Lover', sponge strokes punctuating the phrase 'all night long make you shout'.

She'd often sit me down next to the stereo and say, "Listen to this song." It would be the final song of the morning, usually a ballad. A few times it was Bobbie Gentry's 'Ode to Billy Joe'. I watched her as it played. She'd close her eyes, smile a little, nod her head to Bobbie's strumming, and wiggle her fingers whenever the strings would swell. She loved it. Honestly, the song scared the shit out of me. I always thought Billy Joe and the narrator chucked a body off the Tallahatchie Bridge. When I asked mom what she thought was thrown, she'd sigh—her eyes looking right through me, right on through the walls—and say, "Oh God, honey, it coulda been anything."

