

You Never Forget Your First

by Roz Warren

There is nothing like your first time, and by that I am referring of course to the first time you purchased a 45.

Going to a record store and buying a 45 is a uniquely Boomer experience. Because, alas, there are no more 45s. Or, for that matter, record stores.

The phrase “buying a 45” means nothing to the Millennial. (Unless, of course, you're in a red state and they assume you're talking about acquiring a handgun.) But most of us Boomers remember the first time we heard a song on the radio and thought: “I have to own that.”

These days, it's all about “information wants to be free.” But back then, it was “this song -- ‘Love Me Do’ or ‘Happy Together’ - wants to be MINE.”

So you'd walk to the local record store, or get your mom to drive you, put down your dollar, buy your first single, then bring it home and play it on whatever device you had.

Usually, it was a device you shared with the rest of your family.

Which meant that an integral part of this experience was inflicting your song on others. You didn't just quietly groove to the tune through ear buds. You put it on the turntable (remember turntables?) and played it.

And then you played it again.

And again.

And again.

Until your sister stormed out of her bedroom to say that if you played "I'm A Believer" one more time she was going to take it off the turntable and jump on it.

(Which was exactly the way you'd respond two months later when she sought to play "Kentucky Woman" to death.)

Experiencing a song this way defines our generation, just as helping oneself to an illegal download and enjoying it on an IPOD characterizes our children's.

The music we blasted at age 12 defined who we were.

Not only that, but I believe that your first 45 suggests something about who you still are, or at the very least contains important clues to your character, in a way that's every bit as significant as your birth order, Zodiac sign, response to a Rorschach or Scientology Personality Test score.

I recently asked a number of Boomer pals, "What was your first?"

Isabella, still a rebel at heart, danced to the Beatle's "Revolution" on a portable turntable. Stephanie, now a syndicated cartoonist, was drawn to a silly novelty song, "The Purple People Eater." At age 12, my sweet-natured pal Peter fell for the blissful vibe of The Carpenter's "Sing Sing A Song," while my edgier friend Liz went for Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Are Made for Walking," drawn, she says, to the singer's "aggressive confidence." Jan's pick, the unrequited love classic "Johnny Angel," foretold, she says, "many angst-filled years to come." Whereas Steve and Richard, who both

married early and well, went for the happy, upbeat everything-will-be alright message of "Red Rubber Ball."

My pal Caroline's first 45 was "Stop in the Name of Love." Now she practices family law.

They all thanked me for bringing up such a fun topic. Thinking about the music you loved at age 12 is unlikely to make you feel glum. Even if, like me, your first 45 was Barry McGuire's 1965 hit "Eve of Destruction" a despairing little rant about how messed up the world was. Basically, it was racism, war, hypocrisy and nuclear annihilation, with a back beat, featuring cheery lyrics like "They'll be no one to save/with the world in a grave."

Barely 13, and I was already fretting about civilization and its discontents. Decades later, although a wise-cracker on the surface, I'm still a worrier at heart.

And Mark, the man in my life? His first single was the Rolling Stone's "Get Off of My Cloud." To this day, he's a man who hates a buzz kill.

"Eve of Destruction" and "Get off of My Cloud." Could this be the clearest case ever that opposites attract?

Luckily, we both love music. The two of us were browsing an indy music store recently when I noticed a large section devoted to newly released vinyl 33s.

"Turntables are making a comeback," enthused the record store clerk when I asked him about it.

Maybe so. But I'm pretty sure the 45 is gone for good.

And that's okay. After all, "to every thing, there is a season." Which may be from the Book of Ecclesiastes, but we all know it from the single the Byrds cut in 1965.

Perhaps it was your first.

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