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Theresa Flynn
SUNY New Paltz

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TERESA FLYNN

Songs of My Youth

Play

“Get This Party Started” –P!nk

My cousin Julie from the ages five to twelve used to come over for play dates. She wore a leopard print jacket and shiny scrunchies in her hair, and she bossed me and my sisters around. She decided we were a band and our name was The Big Gig. We drew posters at her discretion and performed shows for our younger cousins. When there were curses in the song, I worried we would get in trouble—but Jewelz never paid attention to it, so when P!nk said all the boys would be “kissing her ass,” I continued to dance but looked down at the floor, almost waiting for the mighty hand of God or my mother or the good-kid police to point their finger at me and say they were “telling.”

When we weren’t The Big Gig, we played President and of course Jewelz took the title role. Sister Abby was Vice President, and I was the servant.

“Sk8er Boi” –Avril Lavigne

In fifth grade, my sisters and I participated in the talent show. The talent show was special—it wasn’t an every year occurrence, and there was a chance you wouldn’t get in. It was similar to the Dance Festival, when our families reluctantly gathered in the high school gym to watch us perform dances they taught us in gym class, except, because of its rarity, this was an occasion. My sisters, Abby and Bridget, and I auditioned, singing Avril Lavigne’s “Sk8er Boi.” She was popular in the elementary school circuit, and we owned her CD and listened to it every day. The day of the auditions, my mother insisted we listened to it over and over again to practice.

My whole life, my sisters and I received constant attention because, as identical triplets born naturally, we were a one in a million chance. Apparently, one has a larger chance of getting struck by lightning than naturally conceiving identical triplets. People say my mother should play the lottery.

Being a triplet has left me with a plethora of pet peeves that the majority of the human race go without. I've been asked the same questions a million times: "Do you get along?" "Do you share a room?" etc. The questions, without fail, always revolved around us as a group, as a unit, an inseparable chain. Replicas of one another. I don't remember how much this bothered me at a young age, and I don't remember a sudden desire to break free of this chain, to set apart from the group, to establish a separate identity.

My sisters and I got into the talent show. Even then, I knew it was because our routine was cuter because we looked alike.

"Bring Me to Life" –Evanescence

In sixth grade, I wanted to be goth more than anything. I wore black fishnet shirts with sparkly tank-tops underneath, and listened to an Evanescence album on repeat on my portable CD player. After I pestered my mother, she bought me black lace-up combat boots. I look back now, in a more modest pair of shoes, and I wonder why my mother let me dress like a stripper. I had big plastic earrings that were shaped like stars, striped pink and black.

I thought the look would make me cool. When I found this wasn't the case, I quickly exchanged the dark colors and the combat boots for pastel sweaters and Uggs.

"What Time is It?" –High School Musical

Wally's Ice Cream was the cool place to be in middle school. On the last day of eighth grade, my friends and I wore little graduation caps, sweaty, baby fat cheeks, and big smiles. We skipped down Erie Street, our hair whipping around in the June breeze. We kept on screaming, "What time is it? SUMMERTIME!" the chorus of the new *High School Musical* movie. We would've sung more, but we didn't know the words. I looked forward to watching the movie, enjoying the summer and moving on to high school, where I planned to be the best me possible—a me that was beyond Disney Channel fads, baby fat, and my friends.

"That's What You Get" –Paramore

My freshman year of high school, my friends and I would gather in Jenna's basement on weekends. The majority of us wore T-shirts with bands we liked on the front and still had baby fat. We liked a band called Paramore,

and their albums were played more often than not as we sat around playing Apples to Apples and watching movies. When it got warm out, the album played on a portable player and we did cartwheels and jumped on the trampoline. Whether inside or outside, I sat in one of the groups, arms folded uncomfortably always. Paramore was the soundtrack to my misery.

Fourteen-year-old me is watching my ex-boyfriend, my first kiss, jump on the trampoline with his best friend. They are shouting lines from their favorite TV shows, and I am trying very hard to look somewhere else. I am sitting in on a game of Apples to Apples, but I'm not playing. I arrived to the group when the game already started, and I didn't want to make a fool out of myself. I have never played Apples to Apples before.

When I wasn't sitting awkwardly in circles of people who I convinced myself didn't like me on weekends, I was at school slaving over classwork to get better grades than them, and when school was finally over, I would sit at home pondering what would make me better, which equaled being smarter, prettier, and nicer.

In Jenna's backyard, Sharie is hula hooping, with her arms over her head.

"That's what you get when you let your heart win," she's singing along to the song, swaying her hips from side to side.

All I wanted was to be loved and adored by my friends, by my ex-boyfriend from middle school.

Sharie is smart, pretty, and nice. That is why everyone, especially the boy on the trampoline, loved her, in our high school days, our endless weekends at Jenna's. People always say she looks like she could be the fourth triplet, another one of my sisters. I didn't see the resemblance.

"Electric Feel" –MGMT

During the months of sophomore year, I was attractive and wanted and happy. I dressed in bright colored V-necks tucked into shorts with a matching belt. My friends laughed at the things that I said and told me they missed me when I wasn't around. A new boy, Dean, replaced the middle school boy and he had a car and we drove places that were new and exciting.

One summer afternoon in July, we drove around for hours. We went from one place to another, from Panera, to the park, to Dairy Queen. We didn't want to go home and I didn't want to leave him.

When we decided to go to the park, talking and laughing and fooling around, I couldn't stop smiling, couldn't seem to rest my feet on the floor because I was ecstatic that we were finally out together. I was humming along to the radio, a mash-up of two songs, when he tried to get me to sing for him.

"I've never really heard you sing." He turned the radio up louder so I could sing along.

When I declined, he pointed out that I'd heard him sing, so it would only be fair if I sang for him. But he had a nice voice—I believed that, even though I didn't know much about singing back then.

As we walked around in the July twilight, he picked me up and spun me around. He told me he was happy that we were finally on a date. When we sat on a bench, he finally kissed me, tasting like spearmint gum and broccoli cheddar soup. It was the first time I kissed someone passionately.

At Dairy Queen, I ordered what I wanted and Dean paid for it, and we sat in his car and ate it, listening to his CDs. I laughed louder at this point, downed my ice cream in big spoonfuls. A song came on that we both liked, "Electric Feel" by MGMT. I only began to listen to them when I knew he did. I danced funny in my seat, grinning from ear to ear. We sang together in between ice cream kisses. Our voices harmonized nicely. I can still hear it in my head.

Replay

"New Perspective" –Panic at the Disco

Summer was nearly over and all I could think about were my goals for junior year—most importantly, my goal of getting a part in that year's fall play, and staying together with Dean. I woke up every day around nine o'clock, looked for good morning texts from him, and stretched, playing songs on my sister's iPod that inspired me. I ran to a song by Panic at the Disco, their upbeat sound a reminder of the great times I hoped would come. Really, the year was going to start like any other—me hoping that it would be better than the last, and that I would finally be the person I wanted to be. I thought stretching and exercising and texting Dean would get me there.

"The Temporary Blues" –The Features

The only thing I wanted more than to be someone else was to not have to start senior year. The only thing I hated more than my life was the idea of applying to colleges. That summer I liked to watch TV and play dress-up and write stories. I played with metal hairclips and matches, but only when I cried. Only when my ex-best friend texted me to yell at me, when Dean went away to college and posted messages about how much he loved his new, smart, shiny-toothed girlfriend, and when my parents harassed me about schools and scholarships. I made a playlist of songs I liked and fell asleep to them. A song by The Features played over and over again, and they sang about a sense of hope that I didn't really have. The only thing I really hoped for was that the next morning I would suddenly be thirteen again, listening to Fall Out Boy and My Chemical Romance, waiting to go to high school.

“Sometimes I Still Feel the Bruise” –The Mountain Goats

Senior year people started calling me a hipster. I wore the same pair of boots every day and sweaters with patterns on them. My favorite book was *Catcher in the Rye*, and apparently all those things meant I was a hipster. I cut bangs across my forehead for the first time ever and people wouldn't stop telling me how pretty I looked. The sadness of the summer had faded away and what I was left with was a scar on my wrist.

In the winter of that year, the boy with the car came back and he was all that was on my mind again. People called him a hipster too. Dean now wore fancy shoes and sweaters with patterns on them and he liked to take pictures. His winter break was not long enough, and he traveled eight hours away and waited until then to tell me that he was still in love with his shiny-toothed sweetheart. His favorite band was the Mountain Goats. “Sometimes I Still Feel the Bruise” makes him think of her, Andrea, and makes me think of him.

“Wild World” –Cat Stevens

By the end of that year, I wanted nothing more than to be at college around new people. But by August, there was someone who I spent almost all summer with, watching TV and eating pizza and driving around. He loved me too much. I might've loved him too, starting somewhere after I asked him to get ice cream with me because there was no one else to go with, and the time I hugged him goodbye, packed my bags, and left. Maybe it was after we went out for pizza one night, and I talked ecstatically about my newfound love for a 1970 song about a friend leaving.

“This is my favorite part!” I nearly shrieked. I sang each word with feeling and he looked on, laughing.

“T, oh my God,” he jokingly judged me for my singing. He and his mother are the only people whoever call me T. I don't like it when anyone else does.

He smiles at me. We think we look alike—both about the same build, with brown eyes and brown hair, and tiny ears. But we have different smiles. I don't think I had the same feelings behind mine.

I knew he would fall for me, because he was always falling head over heels for girls. He cried when I left for school. I don't think anyone else has ever loved me like that before. Or has ever loved me period. I still play that song sometimes.

“Boyfriend” –Best Coast

At the start of college, I was bursting with excitement and the possibilities of my new life were overflowing. My roommates and new acquaintances were friends I didn't trust yet, people that I didn't share a struggle with or love or know. But they were light years away from my high school friends, the new cast of characters of my life. My roommates listened to bands I had never heard of and had talents I admired. We quickly became obsessed with a song called “Boyfriend” by Best Coast. I had only heard Best Coast once before, but I was happy to be a little acquainted with something they liked.

In September, we do the little work we have with the windows open, music blaring from roommate Robin's computer.

Her hair is piled up high on her head to keep it out of her artist eyes. Maria is sitting on the floor next to Cady, her computer propped up in front of them as they watch episodes of a show they both like.

In those days, we ate peanut butter with everything and Nutella off spoons, and my sisters and their roommates came over and we would sit and talk about our precollege lives. Maria spoke of her past lovers and her hoarding grandmother, Robin talked of her boyfriend and her Rockette team, Cady described Vermont and her sister. Abby and Bridget shared some stories of our youth, but I didn't know what I wanted to reveal.

Maria tells stories as the videos load on the laptop. “She's my best friend from back home and I love her so much. But she has a boyfriend now.”

There was something endearing about their high school lives, their love for their siblings and their TMI. So I gradually told them my past.

“Lava” –The B-52's

When I called my mother one October night and complained about two boys that had screwed me over, she said I was in a rush to find a boyfriend. I didn't believe her, though by the end of the semester there were five boys total.

That night I followed the next boy to his room and we exchanged poetry and danced to the B-52's, shuffling our feet and pointing our index fingers in the air. Fred and Cindy sang about wanting hot lava to love them away and the boy put his lips to mine. I can't say I didn't expect him to.

He didn't last very long. After scribbling messy poetry on neat blue lines, I kissed number four, then number five. I'm happy to say I found a place with him, and have stopped playing seventies pop rock.

“We Are Young” –fun.

The last week before winter break, my converted triple had turned into the family living room; my roommates, my sisters, our few friends, and I sat around our Christmas tree. Though it was Charlie Brown-esque in the way of height and thickness, we had filled it with our own paper ornaments that bore our names and our inside jokes and our love for each other. Our gifts came in varying forms of packaging—Meg’s were the only ones that were parceled in gift bags from Hallmark or Carlton Cards; Maria’s gifts were packaged in green plastic bags from the cafeteria, and my sister Abby’s were wrapped in magazine pages that read of “summer 2011 trends” and “horoscopes.” It was the first holiday season I felt a fierce, undying love for the friends I was surrounded by. I put on fun, because it was the only song on my iTunes that was untainted by other events. I also thought the title was quite fitting.

“Thank you, Ceesa!” Cady exclaimed, holding the leather-bound notebook I got her. She wrapped her arms around me. ‘Ceesa’ was my new nickname—but it is older than anything else. When Abby, Bridget, and I were small, Bridget couldn’t pronounce my name. The plosive *t* was turned into a soft *c*, the rest rolling off the tongue.

When my new friends say my new nickname, it is light. They are smiling. They surround me. My sisters are by my side. I found comfort in an old name. *Ceesa*, *Ceesa*. It is somehow warm, familiar. Maybe like a melody.

Pause