

Bourne toWrite... creative writing workshops

Singles

by Victoria Watson

I am driving my baby-sick beige Ford Fiesta also known as the Mobile Ashtray much too fast. It is the early nineties and my mother has sent me to collect my just deceased great aunt's belongings from the nursing home. I am young, scared and high on death. The images that appear before my eyes as I navigate the narrow lanes are a hand limply hanging from the bed, a dry slack mouth, eyes staring blankly back at me. I am terrified at the thought of seeing my warm loving aunt, now dead and cold. If you had been my passenger you would have sensed my fear immediately, not just from my slightly manic intent stare, my face pushed up into the windscreen or the glowing end of my low tar cigarette hanging clumsily out of my mouth, but because I had put on the Cranberries' 'Zombie' so loud I could feel the drumming through the floor and Dolores O'Riordan's yearning anguish vibrating through my speakers in the doors.

I knew I should feel grief but did not know where to start, only that music could take me there. Sure enough once she had risen her voice to a scream I was soon driving through tears and cigarette smoke feeling utterly wretched and miserable. The power of music tapping into the right senses and emotions, when real life needs a Haynes manual.

That power had reached out long before that drive though. It started with stealing my brother's Elvis Costello's 'Good Year For The Roses', and playing it incessantly on the family record player until my father banned its existence, forever. I was 8 years old and clearly knew very little about matters of the heart but I deeply felt the pain of Elvis's heartbreak and his description of her lip-print on the half filled cup of coffee that she poured but didn't drink made me break down each time.

I had no idea what I was feeling but music had poured tragedy into my veins and it became a life long condition.

There is no denying that I was obsessional with music; each Sunday evening I would be glued to the hifi, my fingers hovering over the pause and record buttons waiting for the Top 40 to play that single. I would just hope that the exuberant DJ did not talk over the opening chords: *people are always ruining things for you*. Once was never enough though. I am the reason the repeat button was invented. I recorded Chaka Khan's 'Ain't Nobody' over and over an entire side of a 90 minute cassette, just so I would not waste my batteries rewinding it on my Walkman. I would play it on my bed staring at the ceiling imagining I was dancing on a yacht in Duran Duran's 'Rio' video; I had braces and greasy hair but Chaka Khan's infectious melody made me feel like a super model.

Music moves us, and while books, art and films do it too, there is something about the beat, the rhythm and the groove that makes music intravenous. Nobody could, nor should listen to Marvin Gaye's 'Let's Get it On' without feeling somehow "moved". Marvin's velvet voice breaking with lust was my first experience of hearing someone getting the horn. Sexual Healing was banned in my catholic all girls boarding school, I am not sure what the nuns thought they were stopping, but the track was passed from boarder to boarder like some black market commodity, that only the people in the know, nose tapping essential, could get you.

School was a miserable place for me but music kept me moderately sane. Memories of music are intrinsically wrapped inside each of the sash-windowed drafts of my school dormitories. Each one was obligatorily named after a religious person or place. So it was exhilarating and life affirming to make up dance routines to Five Star's 'System Addict in Lourdes' or make up rude alternatives to clever Carly Simon's fantastic rhyming verse 'Coming around again in Notre-Dame'.

Sixth form put an end to Carly sadly. I turned to Heavy Metal's hairy tattooed monsters who wore eye make up better than I did. MTV gave me a backdrop at my fingertips to re-imagine the angry world I wanted to live in; no more yachts with Simon Le Bon dad dancing but misspent hours in the common room studying Axel Rose's snake hips grind to 'Sweet Child O' Mine'.

Everyone has a soundtrack of their years. Music that makes them feel things, remember people, places, take them back to somewhere where they can escape inside their head. Music does more than that though, it teaches a language of feelings which no dictionary could translate.

It gives something to the listener that is more than just 8 beats to the bar, more than just beautiful lyrics that speak directly to your heart, more than a riff which sticks in your head giving an ear-worm to dance the conga to, while your fingers subconsciously tap it out. Music emotes, it moves you, body, soul and mind, and more often than not you simply move with it, powerless to do anything else. I am not religious but music is spiritual to me, divinely and true.

So I got to that nursing home, slammed the door of the Mobile Ashtray shut behind me, and prayed hard the wing mirror didn't fall off (again). I pulled myself together just enough to have the appropriate mixture of repose and upset to speak to the Matron in charge and collect my Great Aunt's collection of Mills & Boon, an enormous weight of a magnifying glass and a Roberts radio that had been her companion to the end.

The Cranberries were turfed out for the journey home, and it was Camera Obscura's 'Hey Lloyd I'm ready to be heartbroken' that brought me back. I knew I had some work to do, and grieving needs more work than you think.