



By Margaret Evans, Editor

My daughter got a turntable for Christmas.

That's right, a turntable. As in "record player." Like the one you had as a kid. (If you're old like me, that is.) It was at the top of her wish list.

She also asked for albums by current pop artists, and they were easy to come by because – believe it or not – they're making vinyl LPs again. (Seriously!) But her Aunt Callie, on a whim, gave her "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," and that's the record she keeps playing over and over. "Sgt. Pepper's" was my first album, too, and I can't describe how strange and marvelous it is to hear "Being For the Benefit of Mr. Kite" wafting from my baby's bedroom, scratchy-grooves and all.

She got Wallabees for Christmas, too. We called them "earth shoes" in the 70s, remember? They now share closet space with the classic Converse tennis shoes she begged for last summer, and her new Patagonia pullover – also a Christmas must-have – that looks just like the one I had in high school. "All the kids are wearing them," she tells me. About all of it.

What's going on here? If this continues, my daughter will soon be asking for a boxy blazer with shoulder pads and paisley "sateen" lining, a pair of stirrup pants, some blue eye shadow and a really large can of hairspray.

(Noooooooo! The 80s were nightmare enough the *first* time around. I can't go back there.)

It's hard to know if this enthusiasm for all things nostalgic is just a fashion trend or something more meaningful. . . a response to some kind of cultural longing.

If you were alive in the 1970s, you might remember how everybody suddenly became obsessed with the 1950s – inspired by the movie *American Graffiti* and the popular TV show *Happy Days*.

I was just a child, but looking back, I can't imagine our national 50s fetish was based on nothing more than a quirky fondness for poodle skirts, greasy hair and leather jackets. (The Fonz. Swoon.) My guess is that our collective obsession was some kind of backlash against the sex-and-drugs 60s and disco-fueled 70s – and probably the Vietnam war. We were a nation in culture shock, pining away for simpler times.

Little did we know the times would only get wilder, woolier, and more culture-shocking in decades to come. There would be new wars (of a whole new kind), new drugs ("designer," even), and the sexual revolution would cross frontiers people couldn't even imagine back then.

As for disco, we managed to keep that contained. Whew.

Harking back to the "good old days" – whether or not they ever truly existed – seems a natural response when Americans are feeling unsettled by the present. And what's *not* to feel unsettled by lately? Mounting episodes of terrorism, increasing gun violence, ever-deepening partisan hatred, endless social media wars . . .

Good times!

While kids my daughter's age may not be completely tuned in to the myriad forces currently rocking and roiling the world (at least one hopes not), they're bound to sense the general atmosphere of unease.

So let's get them all a turntable and some earth shoes! They'll feel better, and so will we.

We can pretend we're living in the 70s, that gracious era we didn't fully appreciate at the time, since we were too busy doing the Hustle and yearning for the 50s.

Obviously, I'm being silly. And I'm probably reading way too much into this "old-timey teenager" trend. It's not like they're wearing bustles and top hats. This is fairly classic sportswear, and the turntables... well, they're just a novelty, I think. Something "new" and different for kids who're accustomed to downloading music and carrying it around with them on their smart phones . . . like almost everything else in their lives. Eventually, the requirement that they rise from the bed to change the record, the propensity of the needle to scratch the vinyl, their inability to easily skip over songs, and the turntable's stubborn refusal to fit in their back pockets will cause the magic to wear off.

My guess is that it's just a passing fancy.

But what about us grownups? I'm noticing signs that perhaps we, too, are seeking solace – or something? – in the old ways.

One of the most surprising business stories over the past couple of years is the quiet resurrection of the independent bookstore, which had been pronounced all but dead just a few years ago. Nobody saw it coming, especially after 1000 indie bookstores closed between 2000 and 2007. There are plenty of "business-y" reasons for the small bookseller revival, reasons I only sort of understand – large chains like Borders and B&N failed to compete with Amazon, for instance – but the bottom line is that lots of readers just missed the bookstore experience. A book is an emotional purchase, and people missed the up-close-and-personal encounter with booksellers and other book lovers . . . and, especially, with books. As dependent on e-readers as many of us have become – and I'm one of those dependents – the Kindle has never replaced the book, as predicted.

I suppose people once thought that TV would be the end of movies . . . and, before that, that movies would spell the end of plays. Well, Broadway just had its best year ever, and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* just became the highest-grossing film of all time in the domestic market.

Which totally fits my narrative. (Yay!) What better proof that we're all seeking comfort in

nostalgia than our current *Star Wars* mania? I'm not a *Star Wars* fanatic, myself – I didn't catch the fever the first time around – but I'm an American born in the latter half of the 20th

century, and

Star Wars

is just part of the air I breathe. As I sat in the dark at the beginning of *The Force Awakens*

, watching that white text move forward into that black horizon – just like it did all those years ago – I felt a lump rising in my throat. And at the first sight of Harrison Ford on screen – older, craggier, iconic as ever – I caught my breath, felt tears stinging my eyes. I can't remember a time before Han Solo.

On opening day, there were photos all over Facebook of fathers waiting in line with their sons, preparing to usher them in to the sacred tradition. In the beginning was the film. And the film was *Star Wars*. If we have a national religion, surely it is this.

And speaking of (actual) religion . . . lately, I've come across several articles claiming there's a movement among Christians toward more traditional forms of worship. Popular religious blogger Rachel Held Evans left the evangelical community for the Episcopal Church and wrote movingly about the journey. She and others claim that young people are quietly walking away from the rock-bands-and-relevance formula of recent church models, back toward the older worship services, where sacraments and liturgy are the focus. According to the "Church in a Circle" blog, they're seeking authenticity, rootedness, mystery, and the kind of hands-on, multi-sensory, participatory experience that only sacramental worship can offer.

"Hands-on." "Multi-sensory." "Participatory." Sounds a bit like using a turntable. In an ever more chaotic, ever more virtual world, perhaps my daughter, too, is seeking authenticity . . . rootedness . . . mystery . . . meaning. Isn't listening to the Beatles on vinyl – instead of the overproduced, droning pop music she typically downloads to her phone – a bit like ditching the hip, modern mega-church for a dose of old-time religion?

I was pondering this analogy while driving her to school the other day. "So, I've noticed you're playing that "Sgt. Pepper's" album a lot," I ventured, casually. No pressure. "How do you like the Beatles?"

"Oh, I love 'em, Mom," she replied. "I've already put, like, 30 of their songs on my Spotify

list. They kind of remind me of One Direction.”

Maybe I’m overthinking this stuff.

Margaret Evans is the editor of Lowcountry Weekly. Read more of her Rants & Raves [here](#) , or visit her blog at

www.memargaret.com