



By Margaret Evans, Editor

Last issue, I dabbled in nostalgia. This issue, I aim to wallow in it. It's been that kind of month.

2016 got off to a rotten start, don't you think? Not only did January finally bring cold weather – something I really have no truck with after Christmas – but our beloved cultural icons started dropping like flies.

I hesitate to mention names because, dadgummit, there've been so many I'm afraid I'll leave somebody out. Suffice it to say that over the past couple of weeks, I've spent an unseemly portion of each day in my pajamas, clutching a Kleenex, a coffee cup – or wine glass, depending on the hour – and obsessing over YouTube videos. I think I actually broke the world's record for Most Viewings of 'Space Oddity' In One Day. Reveling in self-indulgent melodrama – the agony and the ecstasy! – I played and replayed my favorite stanzas, now loaded with terrible import . . .

*Though I've passed one hundred thousand miles . . . I'm feeling very still . . . and I think my spaceship knows which way to go . . .*

It's been two weeks now, and I still can't fathom planet earth without the wondrous changeling David Bowie. I really don't want to.

My daughter texted me from school a couple of days after the Bowie news – two words, all caps: "SNAPE DIED!" At 14, she doesn't remember a world before Harry Potter. Hogwarts Castle is her cozy-creepy comfort zone – she'd watch all eight Potter movies in one rainy day if

I'd let her – so losing the actor who *was* Severus Snape for her entire young life was a blow. Of course, I was already at the computer when her text arrived, sniffing over clips from *Sense & Sensibility*.

One girl's Snape is another girl's Colonel Brandon. I'll miss you, Alan Rickman. Truly, madly, deeply.

The kid rallied quickly. Not so, her maudlin mom. A few days later, she caught me weeping over a 1977 video of the Eagles doing "New Kid in Town." I was all ear-budded up – lost in reverie – and didn't know she was there 'til she tapped me on the shoulder.

"Mom, what is *wrong* with you? I've been calling and calling. I need your help! I can't find my brush."

(The horror.)

"I'm watching the Eagles," I sniffed. "Glenn Frey died."

"Mom, I know. It was on Twitter. But you're actually *crying*. Tears are, like, streaming down your face. It's almost like you *knew* him or something."

"Yep, it's almost like that," I replied, turning back to my song.

*There's so many things, you should have told her . . .*

How do you explain to a teenager why you're crying over some guy you never knew . . . and never even thought too much about? Somebody who was just . . . always there? Literally the background music of your life? How do you tell a girl whose youth is just blooming that the door to yours has just slammed shut rather abruptly? Again.

□□□□□□□□□□ *There's talk on the street, it's there to remind you . . .*

How do you tell her – really tell her – about that perfect baseball game one starry night in May? Or about your first slow dance at summer camp? About sunbathing in your best friend's backyard, or tasting your first sip of Boone's Farm, or kissing on the hood of your boyfriend's car? How do you explain that it's all there – every bit of it – in the opening bars of a single song by the Eagles?

□□□□□□□□□□ Teenagers are inherently romantic, emotional creatures, but what they aren't – yet – is nostalgic.

But we grown-ups are. And how. The Bernie Sanders campaign is betting on it, I think. Into the midst of our collective mourning last week – that giant wake we threw on social media for our dearly departed pop stars – came the new Sanders ad, one of the most brilliant bits of political messaging I've seen in ages. In short order, it went viral. A Facebook friend commented, "This immediately takes its place alongside Reagan's 'It's Morning In America' as one of the most powerful and instantly captivating political ads of all time."

By now you've surely come across it yourself. A moving montage of American scenes – boat harbors, farms, city skylines – and "regular Americans" going about their business (milking cows, serving up coffee, staring at computers), all culminating in a giant Bernie Sanders rally. It's standard issue imagery, I suppose, but it's set to one of the most beautiful pop songs ever written – Simon and Garfunkel's "America." Recorded in 1968, the song was already an oldie by the time I came to love it as a teenager, and I find it hard to imagine there are many Americans to whom it's unfamiliar.

You hear those first harmonic bars – "*hmmm, hmmm, hmmm*" – and your heart just soars. To that place of youthful optimism, that poetic place of wistful yearning. For those who are old enough, there's a big dash of hippie idealism in there, too. The first line in the song even manages to reference Sanders' much-discussed "socialism" in a way that's not just non-threatening, but actually inspiring.

*Let us be lovers, we'll marry our fortunes together . . .*

Doesn't that sound enticing? Who wouldn't want to be part of that revolution? In a world full of "haters," we have a chance to be lovers!

Of course, it's not that simple. Politics and economics are never that simple. And plenty of my Facebook friends found the Sanders ad terrifying. But that's only because they, too, recognize the seductive power of a great old song.

There's something else going around Facebook, along with the Bernie Sanders "America" ad, and that's the "7 Songs in 7 Days" Challenge. Much like the Ice Bucket Challenge from a couple of years ago, it's almost impossible to avoid this sucker. Unlike the Ice Bucket Challenge, however, it's simple and painless. And though it doesn't raise money for a good cause like ALS, it does have the potential to raise one's spirits.

If tagged for this challenge, you're asked to post a favorite song every day for seven days . . . while also tagging a new person to participate each day. The goal is to flood Facebook with wonderful music in an effort to drown out the rancor and discord of election season.

I've noticed that hardly anybody's posting contemporary tunes. Granted, Facebook is, as my daughter says, "social media for old people," so that may explain the phenomenon. But even my younger FB friends – and those who keep up with current artists – seem to be going the classic route. I've seen "Moon River" and "Danny Boy" and "Leaving on a Jet Plane." As for myself, I posted mostly rock anthems from my childhood and youth – Springsteen's "Thunder Road," Elton John's "Levon" . . . and, of course, "New Kid in Town." I've seen lots of Eagles, in fact, and plenty of David Bowie. "Under Pressure," "Changes," "Hotel California" . . .

It's funny how all this old rock music, once so edgy, so subversive, now feels almost like comfort food . . . like shelter from the storm. In a crazier, meaner-than-usual election season, in a country that's tragically polarized, where a million angry voices scream past each other day and night, music still has the power to bind us. Republicans and Democrats may hate each other's guts, but 'music has charms to soothe the savage breast.' Even the partisan breast.

*They've all come to look for America*, wrote Simon and Garfunkel in 1968. Today, we can't even agree on what kind of America it is we're seeking. Our institutions have failed us, and we no longer trust them. Our values have diverged, and we no longer trust each other.

*Cathy, I'm lost . . .*

If the Sanders campaign really wanted to capture the 2016 zeitgeist, they'd have included the song's most memorable lyric, perhaps more relevant today than ever: *I'm empty and aching and I don't know why*.

□□□□□□□□□□ Or maybe that's just me – my own *personal* zeitgeist. Sorry to be such a downer. Too many dead rock stars.