Soundtrack

By Lisa Groen Braner

1968

He sings a Beatles song, “Hey Jude,” when I am just a baby. It plays on the radio. There are four master composers that begin with the letter B, he tells me later: Beethoven, Brahms, Bach, and the Beatles. My dad sings the Beatles.

1974

I listen to Julie Andrews in my bedroom, scratch the needle across the black plastic and turn up the volume. My sister and I dance and sing about spoons of sugar and flying kites. The baby with fuzzy hair bounces and smiles in my mom’s arms—our new sister.

1981

On a spring day after school, I walk home with a boy who plays guitar. He’s an eighth-grader with Jimi Hendrix hands. When he plays “Fire” I feel it, watching him strum, sing, and stir. Electric.

1984

Whenever you get scared up here, Dad says, just sing James Brown. Point your skis downhill and sing “I Feel Good.” So I do. I ski the powder and sing—tips under snow, around the trees and through the clouds—close behind him.

1990

“The Sky Is Crying” in my empty college apartment. In a room of two chairs, a table, my roommate’s stereo, and a glass of wine, my first love shatters. The crack in my heart widens with each blue note B.B. breaks open, spilling Merlot all over the white carpet.

1993

In the workaday world of subway stops and newspapers, I lose myself. One morning, a song rises up in the station. A hidden man sings words that fall on me like raindrops in a desert--“Wade in the Water.” I leave my job and start writing.

1994

My future husband and I walk together through the Tuileries. A love song plays, Billy Joel,

against Paris twilight. It’s a cold June and the crepes warm our hands as we walk past Notre Dame, over the Seine, onto a lamp lit street.

1997

No heartbeat says the doctor. No baby. I didn’t hear much after that. As I drive home from the hospital, Mary Chapin Carpenter sings about trouble, sorrow, and choosing to fly. I pack her words away somewhere to play them back later when I can listen.

1998

My newborn son likes it when I sing rock-a-bye-baby. He locks eyes with me at my breast, smiling at the sudden song. Milk spills from his mouth and rolls down his chin, onto the collar of his clean pajamas. He forgets about the milk when I sing.

2000

I stand in an old pew swaying to a hymn I’ve never heard before while my newborn daughter sleeps on my shoulder. The words stop in my throat. “Precious Lord, take my hand.” I sink into the sound and feel buoyant, helped to stand.

2006

I try to sing “Blue Bayou” for my dad, as I do for my children at night. I know the lyrics, the melody, but my voice won’t carry today, not for him lying there dying. The song wavers flat. He is too tired and polite to protest. I stop and sit next to him. It’s hard to sing when you’re crying, I tell him. Without moving he nods his head yes and understands.

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