

For Davy – Thanks for the Memories

It's the summer of '94 and I'm visiting New York City with my family. My two sons, aged nine and twelve, venture to the top of the World Trade Center with me while my husband stays below. Though an architect by trade, he has never quite overcome his aversion to heights.

It is a bit overcast but I still enjoy that magical, surreal feeling of being suspended among the clouds, looking down on one of my favorite cities and the place I was born. Back on the ground a short while later, the kids search for their dad on the plaza surrounding the Center. Some workers stand around the entrance on a smoking break. Others are enjoying an early lunch on one of the benches in the garden-like setting.

From a far corner of the plaza come the chords of a guitar and a voice that seems to call from the distant past. As though drawn by the Pied Piper, I gravitate toward the music. Uncharacteristically, so strong is the pull, I shout for my kids to follow me without checking to see if they're really behind me.

I freeze momentarily. I do know the song as well as the group that made it famous! I round the bend to find two of my teenage idols – Mickey Dolenz and Davy Jones – belting out their anthem, “Hey, Hey, We’re the Monkees.” No sign of Peter Tork or Mike Nesmith, but there’s Davy, shaking his tambourine and crooning to the microphone along with Mickey. Davy’s hair is much shorter than I remember, though a pony tail hangs from Mickey’s signature hat. I stand mesmerized, a few feet from the person I adored in my teens. Davy was always my favorite. Short as he was, it was easy to imagine him at my side.

The years fall away and, a little older than my sons, I’m one of the “young generation” with “somethin’ to say.” I watch the new television show, “The Monkees,” religiously every Monday night. Right after the show I telephone my best friend and we analyze each tantalizing moment: “Did you see the way Davy smiled? Isn’t he just the cutest? And that new song...”

In 1967, the impossible happens. Our parents relent and let us get tickets to see the Monkees at Forest Hills Stadium. We have to be chaperoned, of course, by someone old enough to drive into The City from The Island. The girlfriend of a friend’s older brother steps up and we’re set. We are four friends plus the chaperone. For weeks we plan for the big day: the outfits we’ll wear; the way we’ll fix our hair. When we’re finally seated in the stands on July 14, surrounded by thousands of other (mostly) teenage girls, I can hardly believe I’m really here. After what seems like forever, an announcer comes on stage. It’s impossible to hear what he’s saying for all the screaming. A group – definitely not The Monkees – appears: The Jimi Hendrix Experience. This only adds to the unreal quality of the moment. Hard rock as a warm-up for pop rock – what were they thinking? I happen to love Jimi Hendrix, even own an album. But the girls screaming all around me sourly disapprove of what he’s doing to our National Anthem. At the end of the next

song, Jimi walks off stage disgustedly. After another interminable wait, our heroes appear. Is it really them? Yes, we recognize all their moves and traits, the ones we've memorized on screen. When Davy sings "A Little Bit You, a Little Bit Me," I'm afraid I'll faint. Some in the crowd probably do.

The concert is certainly the high point of my Monkee-mania. Nothing can compare to that moment of pure joy at being so "close" to my dream. Still, in the years that follow, my love of the group does not wane. Even when it's revealed that they don't always play their own instruments; when they are called imitation Beatles and derided by former fans. I never lose faith; continue to buy their albums and learn their songs by heart; songs that grow more mature and poignant over time. And then the group breaks up. I move overseas and lose track. I'm totally unaware of their reuniting years later and of the new cartoon on television that spurs the rebirth of Monkee-mania for a whole new generation. My kids, either because they're boys or because they've grown up abroad, hang posters of other groups in their rooms.

"Hey, mom, snap out of it!" my older son shouts over the music, waking me from my trance. I see my kids have meanwhile found their father and are waiting impatiently for me to get some lunch. I look back at the stage and linger until the end of "Last Train to Clarksville." I want so badly to rush up to Davy and tell him how much the Monkees have meant to my friends and me. How they indeed gave a voice to our generation, torn apart by war and struggling with a nebulous gap.

I feel silly, though, exposing my girlhood idolatry to my husband and boys. With a final wave to Davy and Mickey, I turn away. I hope that somehow they'll catch that wave and all the love and gratitude it bears.

In fond memory of Davy Jones, 30 December 1945 – 29 February 2012