



SONGS FOR A GOOD MAMA

A COLLECTION OF SONGS

Not many songs speak directly to the relationship between a child and its mother. Here is a recollection of memories with my mother, influenced by the songs that remind me of our relationship.

by DJ Ozog

Good Mother – Jann Arden

<i>I've got money in my pocket I like the colour of my hair I've got a friend who loves me</i>	<i>Feet on ground, heart in hand Facing forward, be yourself I've, I've never wanted anything</i>	<i>Got a house, I've got a car I've got a good mother And her voice is what keeps me here</i>
--	---	---

In the late 70s, two people in Southern Ontario decided to create life. Albeit accidentally, apparently the man in the relationship was supposed to be sterile. Well the Lord, Satan, or bad medical professionals decided that he wasn't – and on July 18th 1980, at 4:41 PM, out popped me - a little boy with a full head of hair. Weighing only 5 pounds, and interrupting an episode of Young and the Restless, little Dennis Jr. was introduced to the world.

Instead of witnessing the birth of his own son, Dennis Sr. decided to get drunk at the Colonial Hotel. Never missing a chance for free OV, Debbie was alone. Well, as alone as she could be – she had been employed at the Welland Hospital for almost two decades by this point. So her co-workers flooded the maternity ward. Gifts, flowers, and greeting cards surrounded her. These people would become our family.

Being a parent immediately changed everything. Debbie was more than happy to have a son. Dennis, on the other hand, absolutely hated it. He expressed the hatred by physically beating us for various reasons. I remember watching him break her arm because she wore too much makeup. I remember him throwing me down a flight of stairs on Alberta St because I was too mouthy. I wasn't even in grade 1 yet. How mouthy could I be?

They say the courts heavily favor women. They say the courts always give the mother the child, but this isn't the always the case. The courts gave full custody to Dennis and ignored all the visible bruising and warning signs simply because the legal system In Welland knew him and favored him for some reason. It took 3 trips to the hospital for malnutrition for custody to finally change. Dennis appeared at the hospital one last time and informed me that I'd be living with my mom, full time going forward, and that was effectively the end of our relationship aside from a handful of events over the next couple of years.

Once awarded custody, Debbie jumped back into being a good mother. Feet on the ground, heart in hand, facing forward – we forged on.

A Song for Mama – Boys II Men

<i>You taught me everything Everything you've given me I'll always keep it inside You're the driving force in my life, yeah</i>	<i>There were so many times Looking back when I was so afraid And then you'd come to me and say to me I can face anything</i>	<i>And no one else can do What you have done for me You'll always be, you will always be The girl in my life</i>
---	---	--

On New Years Eve of 1993, Debbie was driving down the QEW to drop me off at a party somewhere in St. Catharines. The weather wasn't bad, or at least it wasn't a concern as we sped down the highway, listening to overplayed holiday music with me likely getting lectured on drinking. You know the typical warnings. Don't drink too much. Don't get into a vehicle with somebody drunk. You can always call for someone to come get you - no matter what.

She was dropping me off at my friend's place, who was named Adam Walsh. Adam Walsh was a famous name by that time, another Adam was murdered in the early 80s and his father launched a massively successful TV show called Unsolved Mysteries. This connection made us talk about how to deal with stranger-danger, what to look out for, and how to protect myself. This ended up making my mother and I talk about what I would do in certain circumstances and for some reason, she flat out asked me if I was gay.

How could I answer this without destroying everything she wanted for me? I was to make it out, I was to be the first in my family to go to school. I was going to make lots of babies and be really successful. So I answered, "Yes. Yes I am." With this new information, a tear fell down her face and I felt her disappointment. I felt her dreams die off and I remember vividly the look on her face as she continued on. The music still blasting, but the car was shrouded in a loud silence.

But I was wrong. I had misread her. When she told me I could be whomever I wanted in life, she meant it. She wasn't crying because I wouldn't give her grand-children. I could, if I wanted to. It wasn't because I was never going to have a wife, and it wasn't because she'd be embarrassed of me. It was simply that she knew life for me would be more difficult in a way that she wouldn't be able to relate to. She was scared for me. Gay men and women in her life lived hard lives. They died of AIDS, they were rejected by their families, they had to move far away to the big city to live how they wanted. And for that, Debbie was scared. She was scared life would take her son away, either too soon, or too far.

She accepted me immediately. There were so many times looking back, when I was so afraid. And then she'd come to me and say to me, I can face anything.

Mama – Spice Girls

<i>Mama, I love you, Mama, I care Mama, I love you, Mama, my friend You're my friend You're my friend</i>	<i>But now, I'm sure I know why Why you were misunderstood So now, I see through your eyes All I can give you is love</i>	<i>She used to be my only enemy and never let me free Catching me in places that I knew I shouldn't be Every other day, I crossed the line I didn't mean to be so bad</i>
---	---	---

In my late 30s, life changed drastically. I had moved to the big city and it wasn't working out for me for various reasons. Home was no longer in Toronto, and I was under the assumption that you can't take the road untaken, should you find yourself mistaken. However, fate would barrel through our lives and that road opened back up.

My mother found herself living alone, in a nice little apartment complex somewhere in Welland. Surrounded by family and friends - literally. Her 2 neighbours on her floor were life long friends. Her 2 neighbours in the apartment beneath her were family. We celebrated holidays and major life events with these people. Most of them were conservative, so conversation was always lively – I refused to back down.

Her neighbour to the left was the first to go. He died in his sleep one night and she was the one to find him. He was the most conservative of them all, so I had a hard time feeling much sympathy, but my mother was crushed. He tried to get her to worship Trump so many times, it really got to me. His rants on how evil Hillary was, and how evil left-wing people are didn't deter her from offering friendship though.

The next to go was her best friend, Lynne, who lived downstairs from her. My mother was her Maid of Honour at her wedding the year before. Lynne and her husband Larry had been together for decades, but felt like maybe it was time to tie the knot. Her cat Smokey was also in the wedding. After her passing, my mother started going downhill. Living in the same building surrounded by the deaths of two of her friends really took its toll. Lynne left Larry a broken man.

A couple months after Lynne passed, Larry was next to go. My mother found him dead on his couch, with Smokey on his chest. The 911 operator forced my mother to perform CPR on him which flat out broke my mom in half. She still wakes up from nightmares about it. She called it a "kiss of death" and I'm absolutely unqualified to say or do anything but sit there and listen about it.

This sealed it for me. It was time to pay her back. I knew I had to be there for her in a way I hadn't before, and with that, we moved back home. Luck found us a house with two apartments in it, and we've lived together ever since. Now in my 40s, I can see what she gave up for me. And moving to a nice house in a nice neighbourhood is hardly a steep price to pay.

So indeed, when I say Mama, I love you, Mama I care, she's my friend, I mean it. It's one of the best parts of being an adult. You can see through your parents' eyes.

References

Jann Arden - Good Mother. 23 Aug. 1994, www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SOrmtqTVHc.

Boys II Men - A Song for Mama. 11 Nov. 1997, music.youtube.com/watch?v=vdTnuc3ktzo.

Spice Girls - Mama. 3 Mar. 1997, www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsNbhwSXDB8.