



♪ Put Your Head on my Shoulder ... ♪

Was it necessary for me to put the musical note symbols into that title? If I hadn't put them in, would that phrase still have brought to mind the giant Paul Anka hit from the early 60s? I suppose it all depends on your age. Popular songs that we hear at a certain impressionable age - the early teen years for one - can bring heavy waves of nostalgia when heard again in later years.

That song is certainly one such for me, as are "Johnny Angel" and "It's all in the Game" (the Cliff Richard version), although I'm not exactly sure why my remembrances of them should be so strong, or why it should be the slower more 'romantic' numbers that I remember. I myself bought no 45s, I had no personal transistor radio at that time (I got my first radio a couple of years later, while in high school), and had no apparent interest in music at all in those days.

The only possible place I could have been exposed to such music was on the occasions of the school 'hops' held a couple of times a year, and these I do remember. The elementary/middle school I attended at the time (this was Grade 7 for me) was quite small, and couldn't have afforded live music for such events. The music was provided by students bringing their own 45s, which were then played on a scratchy turntable plugged into the 'sound system' of the school gymnasium. The sound quality must have been nothing short of god-awful, but I doubt that any of us noticed.

These little dances were not major affairs like a high school prom, where fancy clothes are necessary, and where the question of 'who to invite' hangs heavy in the air for weeks in advance. They were very casual, held after the last class of the day, and were attended by pretty much all the students.

Most of the shy types - myself certainly among them - spent most of the time hanging around the edge of the room, or sitting in the chairs, while the more energetic and outgoing kids tried dancing to the music. I'd kill to see a video of the scene now, because it must have been hilarious - 12 or 13 year old kids, trying to imitate what they had seen in movies or on TV, shaking around to that new-fangled rock and roll music.

My single most vivid memory of those events is not from one of the hops itself, but of a walk home from one. Somehow - I have no idea how this came about - I was required to 'walk home' a certain young classmate after the dance had ended. I must have been 'paying attention' to her for some time, because I knew her name and where she lived.

In my daily life, my time was spent together with my brother and other male friends, rough-housing, reading comic books, or just hanging out, and there was simply never any occasion to be alone together with a girl. So this short walk together with that young lady was a very special event indeed. I think that I can still recall the tightness in my chest as we walked, and I can't imagine that I offered up much in the way of intelligent conversation.

That next summer, during the school break, our family moved to a different town, and I can remember being in the back seat of the car as we drove past her home for what would be the last time.

And I can still remember my mother looking back at me, and saying, "Oh, you'll make plenty of new friends in the new place; wipe your eyes and cheer up ..."

But look at the strange place this story has gone! I originally sat down to write about an episode that took place on the train yesterday evening - which is why I chose that title - but my typing fingers seem to have had other ideas. Well, perhaps we'll hear about 'shoulders on the train' next week ...

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