

CREATIVE NONFICTION / ESSAY   ♦   FEATURED   ♦   MUSIC

## THERE IS NO MAIN MIXTAPE (AFTER MY LIFE)

written by Susanna Donato   April 22, 2016



In those days, the apartment building was a railroad, a locomotive, three stories on an echo-chamber alley, the echo my new adulthood, adolescence a pocket door sliding into the wall. I was an indoor cat and he was an outdoor cat and the desert devoured us both. My friends had a main mixtape. One side was Jnana, knowledge. One side was Bhakti, devotion. He made it for me, at first, and then dubbed versions spread like self-satisfied contagion. Enough love to go around meant not enough for me.

There was a pause, a rose, something on paper. The CD of the week, my silver Schwinn always needing fixing. The broken bicycle my parents had tried to teach me to ride. When the more important writer said, everyone should make their own anthology, just like there is no main mixtape, I interpreted the meaning to be specific to me, or do all things apply to all people? Because I refused to hand over a shopping list for my birthday, my mother did not buy me a gift or even say happy birthday, and I felt neglected, though it was my fault—either my fault or hers. This was when I turned forty-three. This summarizes our relationship.

Back to the tape: Her majesty, stand by your man, in the ghetto. If you see her. Breathing, pressure drop, Kathmandu, America. In 1969, my mother married in dotted Swiss. One experiences a pause, a twenty-one-second suspension before the tape flips. Bhakti, 140bpm: strobe lights, flailing arms, a bridge of euphoria transcending electronic rhythms our minds played inside but not out. How young we were, immersed in 1992, how loose our hips, how sweat released our devotion.

He could imitate my stepfather so authentically I crumpled with relief. We bowed our heads and breathed into music. You feel the cold gasp of loneliness, knowing the song's end will re-isolate you. I was a night person and he was a morning person and the desert light sucked us dry. We thought we could flip friendship to love, forego one, choose the other. Which is clearer? One, or two? Two, or three? I worked, and the file drawers ripped my pantyhose and they ran, they ran, they ran. Jnana, 96bpm: bedclothes, patience, stories you tell one certain person. I thought knowing a person was the knowledge. Now it hurts but it won't later. I'll just keep myself from picking up my iPhone, in order to get some work done.

He did not look at me but misspoke, an allergic erection, and friendship tilted toward the erotic, then shied away, surged again, balked. Instead, I married the boy who flipped through my CDs and nodded instead of dubbing other songs. Mom had been meaning to—I thought apologize for overlooking my birthday—but no, she wanted to thank me for loading the dishwasher, she never apologized for her omission. Muppet mayhem, Jericho, Jesus is just alright. Come talk to me. I like noise.

– end –

Note: "There was a pause, a rose, something on paper" is from Lyn Hejinian, *My Life*.



**SUSANNA DONATO**

Susanna Donato's work has appeared in Okey-Panky, Blue Earth Review and Hippocampus, among others. She is writing a music-driven memoir about coming of age as a gothy, redheaded minister's daughter in Denver and NYC of the 1980s and '90s. Follow her @susannadonato.

