

***Morgan Gold, WRII, Instructor: Hilary Sarat-St. Peter***

***Hi Bob,***

***I just had a student turn in a spectacular interview with her dad about the Grateful Dead (student and dad are both Deadheads).***

***Are you reviewing submissions for the PWR anthology this year? Did we miss the deadline, or can she still submit it? Would this submission be appropriate?***

***Hilary (Sarat-St. Peter)***

***It's definitely not too late, Hilary.***

***She should submit it here or at [rsimoncini@comcast.net](mailto:rsimoncini@comcast.net).***

***You may also submit it on her behalf, with her concurrence.***

***Thanks,***

***Bob***

## Daughter of a Deadhead

*“When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.” –Mark Twain*

I've recently come to find that each time I get off the phone with my father, Eric Gold, there's a newly developed connection and understanding between the two of us. I began to question if there was a change in his behavior. The conclusion was simple-I've grown older. I have always admired my dad for his unconditional love and positive mental attitude. Even though we lived separately, our love for each other was always as strong as ever. But as most kids do, I frequently failed to see things from a parent's perspective.

One of my earliest memories of my father was him singing Phish's "Dog-Faced Boy" as I fell asleep in my bed. Eventually, he had me memorize the lyrics with him. Even at the young age of five, I was confused by the lyrics and abnormal arrangements of music that strayed away from Disney Channel's pop hits. At the same time, dad was equally as bothered by the early-2000 bubblegum pop that shaped my brain into a mainstream machine. You can bet that if I were to be in the car with him, the Ally&AJ or Cheetah Girl CD's (depending on the season) wouldn't last for more than twenty minutes before he lost his mind. Around the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I had developed a huge appreciation for music and song development. I was given my first guitar, and stocked up on lyric journals, hoping to become the next John Lennon. Dad was ecstatic to see me flourish in my interests, and often showed me off to his friends and family. He obsessively requested that I take his suggestions for new songs to learn. The problem was, I hated the music he listened to at the time. I wasn't interested in Phish, the Grateful Dead, or any of that weird folk rock shit. Dad once told me that I needed to be more open to the art around me. Those words never resonated with me until now.

Dad had made it clear that his favorite band was the Grateful Dead. He talked about them as if they were gods. Considering that I was in my Disney pop stages, I didn't think much of it. Like a typical kid, I never bothered to look at things from my dad's perspective. I ignored the content in his eyes whenever he sang "Ramble On Rose" or "Brokedown Palace" in the car. I had my headphones ready to go. Now that I'm older, I can't help but think about

those moments that could've happened if I had just stopped to listen to dad singing along to *his* favorite band. I never stopped to look at how happy the Dead's music had made him. I never bothered to learn their songs. I didn't even have the decency to ask why he loved the Grateful Dead so much. It's a silly regret to have, and it's a lot for a pre-mature kid to grasp, but I will forever regret not taking the time to appreciate the Dead and my dad's music with him.

I finally got into the Grateful Dead about a year ago after being influenced by both my dad, and my best friend, Cleator. I was immediately hooked after one proper listen with her. When I asked my dad to borrow his Dead CD's, his face lit up like a Christmas tree. With more listens and a proper education about the band's history, I was ready for my first Dead show. We saw them as Dead and Company in Alpine Valley last July. The experience that came with it not only inspired me to choose the Dead as a topic of interest, but also led me to choosing my dad as the rightful interviewee. The Deadhead community took me in, and treated me like family. Dad introduced me to a lifestyle that shows nothing but compassion, understanding and joy towards one another-a lifestyle that embodied everything that dad had taught me as a kid (minus the drugs). His cooperative and forgiving nature was undeniably visible within each Deadhead that I encountered. Connecting the community and his parental teachings, I now realize that I was raised to be a Deadhead. I wish I knew how to properly apologize to my dad for taking so long to expand my horizons, and give his music a chance. But then again, those special bonds blossom in due time as we grow up. And I only pray that as I grow older, I continue to trust my dad's musical instincts. He didn't grow wise; he waited for me to catch up.

**MG: So when were you first exposed to the Grateful Dead and the Deadhead community?**

EG: Probably around 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade. You know, it's funny, back then we called them (Deadheads) burnouts. They either liked metal, or the Dead, and that was about it. They all drank, used drugs, and listened to the Dead. So we just assumed it was typical burnout music. They all had the various logos and stickers associated with the band, so you could quickly put two-and-two together, and match burnouts with the Dead. I didn't really want to be a part of it at first glance.

**MG: Oh, so that wasn't when you actually *became* a Deadhead.**

EG: No, I didn't really start getting into their music until late high school. I was 17, maybe?

**MG: If you knew about them since the 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> grade, why did you wait so long to listen?**

EG: I don't know. To be completely honest, I couldn't tell you exactly why. You know, when you're younger, you kind of just get your music from what's on mainstream radio. And anything that Dead had on the radio like Touch Of Grey or Truckin', it just never really spoke to me. Once you get older, and start to have your own money to buy records and music on your own, you have more opportunities to open up your mind, and expose yourself to music and ideas that you didn't have prior access to.

**MG: So when it comes to the Grateful Dead's music, how would you describe it to people who have never listened to them before?**

EG: The way that I describe it is poetic and beautiful. The problem is, people fucking hate poetry. But when you think about the Dead and artists like Bob Dylan, you notice that they don't rhyme for the sake of rhyme. They have this amazing ability to tell a crazy story and elicit emotion through the music they create.

**MG: It seems that music has lost that poetic element based off the shit we hear on the charts. How has music changed through the decades from your prospective?**

EG: Nowadays, there are so many outlets for music. You've got Youtube, Soundcloud, etc. I hate to sound old, but nowadays you have satellite radio, containing well over 1000 channels. Back in my day, you were lucky to get four or five stations that weren't religious material, social commentary, or news sources. Through technology advances, we can hear music everywhere nowadays. People are inspired by what they hear, and people like to copy what's popular. Making music these days doesn't even require a studio, I've seen you mess around with beats on the Garageband app on your laptop. You don't need a studio now. I think that artists have lost the drive to sit and create with their bare hands, and get straight to the final product. Half of these artists don't even sing live, they lip-sync! Dead

shows are the ultimate opportunity to hear creation and raw musical experimentation right there in front of you.

**MG: That brings me to a specific subject I really wanted to talk about; you took me to my first Dead show over the summer. It was without a doubt one of the most profound, eye-opening experiences I've ever come across in my lifetime. (They're currently touring as Dead and Company-featuring new additional band members including John Mayer.) What was it like to pass that experience onto someone from a younger generation that aren't as connected to the Dead scene?**

EG: I've been to, about, twenty Dead shows. The experience is so special to me. It's always new and exciting, and I continue to go when I can. Taking someone who I love more than anyone in the world, and to have them feel the same special way I did, it was just unbelievable. You connect with people, making these weird bonds through music and dancing, and the entire time I was with you, I kept going, "Is Morgan feeling the same way as I am? Is she experiencing this in the same way that I am?" It's honestly incredible to just enjoy everything without having to overanalyze the music or the atmosphere. Nothing requires a clear explanation, and you either get it or you don't.

**MG: To me, it felt like I was time travelling. Perhaps not even back to the 70's, but to a whole new dimension. The positivity and acceptance was overwhelming, and I don't think any concert can really recreate that.**

EG: I couldn't agree with you more. I love it.

**MG: I'm curious; what words would you use, or what experiences would you draw from, in order to persuade a skeptic who has opposing thoughts about the band? Would you try to convert them?**

EG: No.

**MG: Really?**

EG: No, I wouldn't. First off, I don't want to sell it, considering that the following is already too big. Second, I don't feel that my love for these guys needs validation, so why would I feel the need to recruit somebody? You're a different story. I want to share this music and these experiences with you because you're my daughter, and I want us to continue to bond over good music that we both love. The music, the lifestyle, the beauty-it's all very personal to me. I don't need an outside eye to validate my love for something that I deeply care about.

**MG: I know this is a tough question, but what are your favorite Grateful Dead tracks?**

EG: Ripple got me hooked. The funny thing is, Jane's Addiction's cover of it is what really got me hooked. There was a whole collection of musicians covering Dead songs, and once I heard Ripple, I just got it. Something about Jane's Addiction's take on it really spoke to me. On the flip side, Me And My Uncle drives me crazy. The song is just so funny; I love it. Bob's energy is awesome, and it never fails to make me happy.

**MG: You know, when I first presented this as my topic of research to the class, there were a few students who flashed some weird looks. We're obviously from a younger generation who only develop an appreciation for the Dead if we're lucky, but some of my friends said a lot of shit about how the Dead's music is just an excuse to use drugs, and trip on acid in our "little groups". What are your thoughts on that kind of judgment?**

EG: When these guys performed, that's what was going on. The psychedelic era was real, the notorious Acid Tests were real, and Grateful Dead were right in the middle of it. They're not the only ones, either. The Doors' whole thing was "a door to another dimension". How do you think you get through that door? The point is that the music came out of an era of experimentation. But it's unfair to say that that's it. Sure, that's part of it, but a lot of people who go will always note the musical experience before the drugs. The drugs do not define the music.

**MG: The Grateful Dead have been around for about 50 years now. What made the Deadheads stick around?**

EG: What it comes down to is a community where you don't need to live with it everyday. But it's tough to get out. I know stiff people who know everything about the Dead. I know doctors, lawyers, and engineers, even NBA players who all share this love for the community. The first time you experience a show, you see people who are so friendly, I mean you don't even see fights. I think there's something to be said where you're not worrying about Trump, the government, bombings-it's all-around happiness. It's tough to not want to be a part of it.

**MG: I remember going to a concert, I think it was Black Eyed Peas, and a few guys got into a fistfight right behind me! There was good music playing, everyone was dancing, and then you just got these guys who're pissed off? I didn't get it. I will never understand why an environment for music and positivity could trigger any kind of anger, sober or not sober.**

EG: There's a message in their (The Dead) music that defines the community. Not everyone there is a great person. I've gone to shows and ran into people who I didn't like at all. But it's just not a place where that kind of stuff is accepted. It's never okay to be violent at a Dead show, it doesn't happen. It's a very special community, and it's hard not to feel good.

**MG: Do you think that artists today should work to embody that same positive community through their music and fan base?**

EG: Artists should just be who they are. Another band I love, Phish, created a community full of great artists, granted a lot of them were influenced by some hardcore drugs. But they create a community that's nothing close to violent. They're mellow, and they all enjoy themselves. Artists should never try to copy another band's behavior, but rather use their music and their messages to build their community how they choose.

**MG: Why do you think the Grateful Dead and the Deadhead community are so important today? Not just to you, but, I guess, to today's society?**

EG: You know, it's not easy for me to watch the news. I quit Facebook because I was tired of the bullshit, the opinionated fuckers, and everything else. I don't like living my life waiting

to see terrible news on the TV or my phone. It's such a drain, and frankly, it makes my life a lot more stressful. The Deadhead community is a genuine escape from all the sadness. It's so important to have something like this. The environment has always been safe and beautiful. In a way, I look at the fan base as a wonder of the world. We need to protect it. You know, the band members are all going to die inevitably. They'll then probably be replaced by Jerry Garcia and Grateful Dead tribute members. I can only hope that they maintain the spirit and integrity of what this meant to all of us.

**MG: So you see this community maintaining relevance for more decades to come? Which would be great, considering I just became a Deadhead myself.**

EG: We're definitely glad to have you become a part of it. But relevance doesn't matter, I don't think. There's no desperate need to *stay* relevant. You either like it or you don't. You got to realize that Deadheads come from all over the world. They travel thousands of miles from their homes, quit their jobs, and sell grilled cheeses just so they can be with the community and see these guys. Deadheads dedicate their lives to the Dead, so their devotion will never be questioned. Their music and presence will always be relevant to us. We've been fine for fifty years, so we don't need anybody telling us the music isn't important. We don't need people bringing in negativity, because we don't have any time for it. You want to bitch? Cool. We don't need you.