

## **Western Voices 2013, English 100, Third Place, (Professor, Barbara Harroun)**

### *The Soundtrack of My Life*

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“Hush little baby, don’t say a word, mama’s going to buy you a mockingbird.” Those are the lyrics to a lullaby that soothed my daughters when they were babies and made them go to sleep. It told them how much I loved them. It is the music, the magic melody, which touches my heart. I react differently when I listen to one of my favorite pieces of music. Sometimes I see my tears from my eyes dripping, other times I find my feet and body moving, and sometimes I get my chores done without even noticing. Since I am far away from my family and country, I avoid listening to the songs that I used enjoy a long time ago. It changes my mood by transferring me to that period. I hear myself sobbing, sniffing, and sighing. Definitely music taps into my memories, reminding me of people, times, places, or situations in my past. This makes my heart start beating and brings weird feelings that are hard to express to myself like a loss I cannot define. Music is my simple pleasure. When I put on soft music at home, it creates a nice, lovely environment. It encourages my kids to enjoy studying, makes my chores easier, and brings all my family together. Music helps me express myself, which is difficult sometimes to communicate in normal talk. Listening to music after a rough day lifts my spirits, helps me relax, and gives me hope. Music calls out remarkable, strong, emotional memories.

Listening to music can bring unforgettable, significant events from the very past and tie it with people and places. For example, the traditional lyric “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” by Jane Taylor, which has the same tone of one of my preschool songs “Mama, Mama Tie My Shoes,” takes me to 1978. I was four years old; I had to stay in my aunt’s house for two months. My mom was going through a serious surgery. At that time I did not know what surgery meant. The only thing I knew was that something bad was going to happen when I saw my mom and my aunt crying. After a few days my three-year-old brother and I moved into my aunt’s house. My aunt had a big family: three sons and four daughters; none of them were kids. At the beginning, I was very cheerful because they spoiled us. Then, after a while I missed my parents and asked if I could go home. I remember after I asked, every week my aunt would take us to see my mother at my grandparent’s home, which was far away. Every time, I would see my mom on a bed and she could barely walk. The tough part was when my aunt wanted to leave. I remember myself refusing to go with her, crying nonstop until I fell asleep. Going to preschool eight hours a day helped me to forget that I was away from my mom. At preschool, I learned how to sing along with the kids: “Mama, Mama Tie My Shoes,” was the first song I had ever memorized, and I used to sing it with my mom every day before I went to school.

Even now whenever I remember that, I think of how I felt sorry for myself and blamed my mom for leaving us. Now I know that it was impossible for my mom to take care of us, but I also feel she should’ve found another solution. I knew my mom didn’t want my aunt to get tired from coming every day, back and forth between houses to look after me and my brother and continue her daily schedule. As a mom I wouldn’t let my kids to be away from me when they are young and need my care, love, and kindness. Although the event had a negative side, it also had a positive side. Since that period, I have had a very strong relationship with my aunt’s family.

They consider me as one of them. They love me and I love them too. Each and every time I hear “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” my mind flashes episodes of the event. It displays a lot of pictures, such as my aunt sewing a preschool uniform for me and my brother, using a log bathroom, a red tomato on a basket in front of my uncle’s bike, and the delicious baked smells that came out of a clay oven which was dug into the ground.

The emotionally powerful memories that I got from the impact of this music educated me about how to make my kids’ life enjoyable. The “Buffalo Soldier” by Bob Marley has a huge influence in my life. In 1983 my uncle, Arafat, moved to my family’s home during his last year of college. I was ten years old, the oldest child for my parents. At that age, I was starting to compare my family’s lifestyle with other families, due to talking and chatting with my friends and watching TV. I kept complaining to my parents that our lifestyle was classic and boring. We had to go to bed very early, we never went to the movie theater, we didn’t have any fun activities, and we didn’t own a stereo. I thought my family life wasn’t fun at all. After Arafat moved to our home, everything started to change for the better. Arafat was twenty-three years old, in his last year in civil engineering. He was full of life and had a lot of friends; all of them were full of vitality, sociable, and fascinating. At that time I stopped hearing the silence and instead I heard laughs, music and chatting.

Arafat had a big, metal, heavy stereo with lots of knobs and a large CD that was controlled with a metal stick. This kind of stereo, a record player, was designed to play rock music of that era. Bob Marley was Arafat’s favorite singer. Arafat used to listen to his album all the time. Arafat and his friends’ lives were delightful and attractive; all of them were basketball players on the university team. I wished my life was the same. Since that period of time, I began loving Bob Marley and all his songs, especially the “Buffalo Soldier.” I thought my parent’s style was boring because my dad always focused on the living issues, and my mom was usually busy with stuff that my siblings and I didn’t care about. Now as a mom myself I feel sorry for my daughters because I think they feel the same as I did. I have a very tight schedule; I try my best to be involved in their life with listening to their everyday, long stories and enjoying what they like. Although my husband and I try to make our daughters’ lives more exciting, I still feel that they are not satisfied. Our lifestyle is boring in my daughters’ eyes. I wonder if it is a generation difference. Now I realize what my parents went through. I now appreciate their efforts to make our life comfortable. I blame myself for being annoyed and dissatisfied toward my parents. From this experience, I learned that I have to be more engaged in my daughters’ lives and more understandable about the huge differences between these two different generations.

A nice, notable occasion usually pops up in my head when I listen to one of my favorite songs. Albums by Ahmed Barkat, a famous Sudanese singer, take me back twelve years ago. It was a Tuesday night March 14, 2000, and everybody was dancing, jumping up and down, and cheering at my friend’s wedding party. Ahmed Barkat was the singer at the party. I was forty weeks pregnant, three days away from my due date. Then suddenly I felt contractions, one of labor’s signs, and thought, “Oh My God I am not ready.” I talked to my husband; at first he thought that it was a false contraction. He asked me to wait--maybe it would go away. The pain increased, and we were off to Inova Alexandria Hospital in VA. The wedding party took place in a hotel that was located twenty miles away from the hospital. I was in severe pain; I just wanted to go to the hospital. I did not even think about going to my house and taking my clothes and the

baby's clothes that I had already prepared. At the hospital the midwife said, "Yes it is the time to have your baby." Laying my eyes on my beautiful daughter, Fatima, the next day relieved the painful long night I had. Now that serious and untried experience became a joke when my husband and I remember it or listen to any of Ahmed Barkat songs. It has hung on in our memory forever. Since that time I am aware that labor signs can come anywhere and anytime, not just at home like what I thought. Having my first child on March 15<sup>th</sup> was unexpected. As I was three days away from my due date, delivering my daughter on my husband's birthday was a precious present for him.

Unfortunately, some music reminds me of all the valuable wealthy memories that I lost after my last visit to my country. The lyrics of "My Eyes Don't Cry" by Kamal Trbas, a popular Sudanese singer, provide me with sadness for days. In June 2012, my family and I flew to Sudan, Africa, for our summer vacation. Everyone was so excited. Since May, we had started to count down for our dream break. Longing to see my family and my first home was unbelievable. "This is not my home!" That was my first impression when we arrived there. Everything had changed. In the past my parents, my sibling, and I were the only people who lived there. Now my brother, his wife, his kids plus my mom and great aunt all live there. Since I was the oldest child for my parents I used to be the dynamo of my home. Everyone relied on me and consulted me in the face of a problem. Now I am a guest. Feeling like a visitor or stranger was very painful and insulting to me. I didn't find my belongings. Even my room wasn't my room any more; it became occupied by others. I wish now I hadn't gone to my country. I would've rather lived here with my joyful, delightful, and remarkable memories than go and come back with a broken heart. I whispered to myself, "I won't go back anymore." I felt like I had lost my history, my past, and my magnificent meaningful memories. Trying to forget what happened, I avoid listening to "My Eyes Don't Cry" by Kamal Trbas. After I came back from Sudan, I kept thinking a lot and discussed that issue with my husband. I realized that thirteen years away from my country would be more than enough to change people's thinking and feelings. Although people's behavior could be changed over a period of time, I still wonder why my feeling has not changed about what I left back home over the last thirteen years. I have kept it frozen in my heart. However, from the regret I got from going there and facing the reality, I am glad now that I don't have the killing homesickness which I had before the summer break.

Music plays an important role in my life. With some songs my emotion rises up, and with other songs it goes down. Some songs carry good memories, and other carry sad ones. I listen to different type of music for different moods, from country music through classic, pop, Arabic, and jazz. The harmony of the music kicks the stress and relieves the pain of my soul. For me music means love, pain, medicine, healing, laughter, remedy, power, energy, joy, entertainment, relaxation, imagination, and much more. Listening to music and songs related to my past makes me think of how much my life has changed and how lucky I am to have the life that I do.