

Penny Lane

By Carla Sarett (*appeared in The Woolfer*)

My niece is a Beatles fan.

By her age – she has turned 23 – I no longer listened to the Beatles. My college boyfriend played jazz, and we listened to Miles Davis, Bill Evans, Ahmad Jamal; and later, I fell under the spell of Chopin, and slowly started to buy classical music for myself (not much, I had little money.) Yes, I occasionally went to clubs downtown Manhattan to see Patti Smith; but I'd more or less forgotten my innocent teen loves.

I forgot about the Beatles. They were behind me.

And yet, maybe not. Maybe in the process of being, wanting, living, remembering, we all keep a stash of musical memories. They're all in there, ready to be retrieved at one sound of chord, lyrics on a page.

Because – and why this should be so is opaque to me – when my niece started talking about the Beatles, a memory returned to me. A perfect cloudless day in upstate New York, in the Adirondacks, where I'd been attending a summer arts camp. I had played the ingenue in Moliere's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*—a play which, at the time, meant nothing to me. The performance had come and gone.

I had not flubbed my lines, but it hadn't gone as well as I'd hoped. Some element (or all) of Moliere's refined wit had escaped me; my comic timing had been adequate, but not precise enough to get laughs; it had been flat. And the day after, I had my first nagging doubts that theater might not work out for me, after all. Faint doubts, but they were there.

I wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone about it. I wasn't sure what to say.

That afternoon was a lazy one. Rehearsals and theater exercises were over, the summer was ending. Nothing much planned except for a late afternoon swim at the lake, and even that was voluntary. There had been a desultory picnic-style lunch outside, benches and wooden tables. And afterward, someone played the radio, and I heard "Penny Lane."

Not the first time I'd heard "Penny Lane" by any means. I'd heard it many times. Everyone had.

But that afternoon, for two or three minutes, however long the song lasts, I felt a shocking blast of calm and joy. A secret thrill. The lyrics *in my ears and in my eyes, here beneath the blue suburban skies, we sit and meanwhile back* branded themselves, wherever happy thoughts are stored. It felt like an announcement of childhood: ending and beginning, everyday, over and over. Part of me – I can't tell you exactly how much – wanted that single moment, the sun shining on my face, and the late August heat and stillness, the tangy scent of mountain pines, and the sweetness of the Beatles' harmonies, to go on and on and on.

Don't end, I thought, *just keep going, just like this*.

Yet, another part of me was wondering how I would think of that very moment, decades later, when I was no longer young, and life's sense had changed me. That part of me thought, *remember this, it doesn't happen often*. I squeezed my eyes tightly, to make sure of it.

So now my niece is starting her own adventure, only this time the Beatles aren't behind her, they're along for the ride. Whatever sense she will make of life, in her ears and in her eyes, "Penny Lane" is part of it. It doesn't end, it just keeps going.