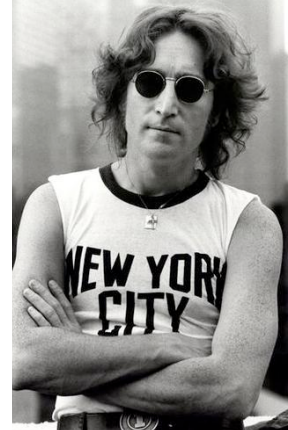


### *Nowhere Man*

Most children spend their childhood watching age appropriate shows. They listen to songs from *Barney* and *Sesame Street*. I didn't learn who Bert and Ernie were until my third year of elementary school, when my teacher showed us a multiplication video. Instead of singing along to "I love you, you love me," I spent my time digging through stacks of vintage records and label-less mixed tapes.

*Help!* This was the first song I remember. It was on a black mixed tape, with a yellow sticker that said "The Beatles." CD's weren't around yet, so winding the thin tape inside the cassette was often necessary to begin the songs over again. My fingers were thin enough that I could fit my pointer inside the spool and twist it, making the semi-transparent, magnetic tape wind and loop inside the plastic container. The case itself was cracked, worn down after years of usage. I collected pictures of John Lennon, and shared them with my father. We danced around the living room to *Octopus' Garden* and pretended we were under the sea.



### *Strawberry Fields Forever*

**1966. It wasn't until years later that John Lennon admitted to being high on LSD when he wrote this song. Its lyrics are about the past, the title referring to a Salvation Army Children's Home that the songwriter lived next to during his childhood. "Living is easy with eyes closed/Misunderstanding all you see... but you know I know when it's a dream."**

*Shit. I feel like I can't even breathe right now. Breakfast, school, dance class, dinner, bath, sleep, repeat. Jesus, it's the same cycle everyday. Where the hell do I fit my life into all this repetition? When did I become an adult? When did I stop caring about myself? I want to get drunk, I want to listen to Come Together while I get high. I don't want to have to read another fucking Dr. Suess book. I don't even know where I'm at right now. I'm nowhere.*

I remember so many figments from my past. I remember the shows that I watched on television, my favorite type of gum (it was the rainbow colored Fruit Stripe), the color of the vitamins I took every morning, the Kansas state bird whose name I had to memorize for a presentation in second grade, the color of the dress I wore for my brother's baptism, the first time I tasted black licorice, and what happened on the finale of the second season of *Boy Meets World*. But none of these things are important anymore. I have a shoebox full of ticket stubs from the last fifteen years of my life. And it wouldn't matter to a single person, other than myself, if this box was thrown away.

“Living is easy with eyes closed... but you know I know when it’s a dream.” Living is easier when you’re dreaming. I’m just not so sure that everyone knows that it’s a dream.

When we drove in the car, when he was in a good mood, we would put all the windows down and listen to *Hey Jude*. During the “na na na na” parts, we would always sing as loud as we could. Our tune was off, the rhythm was terrible, and neither of us cared.

I used to brush my hair three times a day because I was scared of it getting tangled. This was just the beginning of an obsessive-compulsive disorder, which I would be diagnosed with in my teenage years. But the wind that poured through the car windows never bothered me then. No matter how messy my hair was after the song ended.

Destruction cometh; and they shall seek peace, and there shall be none. Ezekiel 7:25

*Happiness is a Warm Gun*

**1968. “I need a fix cause I’m going down.” Lennon wrote the lyrics to this song when he was allegedly on an acid trip with a friend. He saw the cover of a gun magazine, which inspired the title.**

When I was in sixth grade, we learned about Greek mythology. My teacher explained that “back then, we thought that Zeus was God, but we know better than that now.”

*I think I might be going crazy. I’m yelling things, and I’m not sure where they come from. I remember saying them hours later, and then I regret them. I can’t tell when I’m high and when I’m not. I know my daughter hates me. I think I hate her too. I think by the time she turns eighteen, she will just leave.*

They were round imprints, as if someone had stamped the wall. But I only ever saw the marks once, when the large oak bookcases were pushed aside.

I remember my father talking about what happened on December 8, 1980. He said it was the end of an era, and the most depressing day of his life. The ex-Beatle was shot in the back four times. The Beatles had broken up in 1970, but it was those four shots that ended it all. Lennon spent his life preaching love and peace, but it ended in violence.

*From Me to You*

**1963. Lennon writes and performs “From Me to You” on Val Parnell’s *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*. It is at this event that Lennon makes the comment, “Will the people in the cheaper seats clap their hands? All the rest of you, if you’ll just rattle your jewelry.” Lennon was constantly labeled “the witty Beatle.”**

*I'm a good person. I believe in God. I used to go to church every Sunday. I'm a Christian. I'm good.*

I had already bought my dress. It was turquoise satin; to go with my eyes... at least that's what my mother said. I was going with a friend, his name was Paul and he rented a white suit and a vest to match my fabric. May 4<sup>th</sup>. My aunt had sent me a necklace that she wore to her senior prom. I had the date, the shoes, the jewelry, the dress, and the fifty-dollar ticket.

Lennon's father only showed up a few times in his life. Once in a small custody battle with Lennon's mother, and again in 1965, presumably after realizing that the son he abandoned twenty-five years ago was one of the most famous songwriters in history. The two met again before Lennon's father died. According to his biographer, during this conversation the songwriter confronted his father: "Have you any idea what I've been through because of you? Day after day in therapy, screaming for my daddy, sobbing for you to come home. What did you care?"

If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son ... Then shall his father and his mother ... [a]nd all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die. Deuteronomy 21:18-21

I think God has anger issues, but if this is true, then doesn't this make him just as flawed as the average human being? I know I'm blaspheming here, but I haven't gotten swallowed into hell yet.

*Revolution*

**1968. This song was written by Lennon in reference to China's communist revolution. The Beatles recorded the song as a single, and eventually made three versions of it, the last one was titled *Revolution # 9*. Charles Manson would later call attention to this song, citing the similarity between Revelations 9 in the Bible, which speaks of the apocalypse. He would say that the lyrics spoke directly to him. In a 1971 interview with *Rolling Stone* about the song, Lennon said, "You know, I really thought that love would save us all."**

*Thou shall honor thy mother and father. I am your father. You will not disrespect me in my own house.*

Relationships are messy. Sometimes, they leave scars. It's impossible to erase someone from your mind completely. We don't have that kind of control over our brains. But sometimes, I think it would be better to forget. Nerves run through our entire body. They connect our heads to our fingers, and with an electrical impulse sent and delivered in an instant, we can use our pointer to press a key, dial a phone, signal someone to wait, test the temperature of a bowl of soup, wipe the sweat from a forehead, or touch the needle to a record. So why can't we send an impulse, and erase a memory? It would be, as Alexander Pope would say, "eternal sunshine of the spotless mind."

Objects, unlike memories, are neat. They are easy to store, easy to understand, easy to find.

Aaron, Moses' brother, took gold earrings from his Israelite followers: "He took the gold from them, formed it into a mold, and cast an image of a calf." Exodus 32:4

Believing in objects is so much easier than putting faith in what's not there. Even the Israelites thought so.

*Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*

**1967. Julian Lennon drew a picture of a girl flying in the sky, inspiring Lennon to write a song for the Beatles' album, *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The girl in the picture, one of Julian's classmates, was named Lucy. Thus, giving the song its name. It wasn't until after the record was released that fans noticed that the title, at least the first letters of each word, spelled out LSD. Lennon was presumed to be taking acid. He denied it.**

*I swear to God she smiled at me. She has no teeth, but she did it anyway. She has yellowed skin and my blonde hair. She's fucking beautiful. Jan, isn't she fucking beautiful? When can we take her home? I can't believe it, born on her great grandmother's birthday, August second, 1990. I'm so glad she's healthy. I hope she lives to be one hundred. I feel infinite right now. I don't think anything could hurt me.*

When I was in sixth grade, I bought my father a framed picture of John Lennon for Christmas. It cost fifty dollars, but I saved up the money.

He left it in the garage, where rain water from the leaky roof slipped into the crevice of the frame. John Lennon was a soggy mess.

"[T]angerine trees and marmalade skies... Cellophane flowers of yellow and green....a girl with kaleidoscope eyes" When I listened to this song, recorded on the flimsy, beat-up cassette tape, I always thought that that must have been what heaven looked like, described by John Lennon himself. Maybe LSD is the closest any of us can get to heaven.

Objects, unlike memories, are tangible. They can be touched. They are proof, and they never let you down.

Then the Lord sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf—the one that Aaron made. Exodus 32:35

*Day Tripper*

**1965. John Lennon penned a song, along side Paul McCartney, called *Day Tripper*. It's a witty idea. A day tripper is someone who takes a trip for just a single day, only to return home after the short getaway. In an interview with David Sheff, Lennon explains that the song is about a "weekend hippie."**

*Call everyone. Tell them to bring their own booze and their own drugs. The address is 658 Hefton Rd. The last time we took a hit of acid, I swear to God I thought I was flying into this giant wall of music, just straight riffs of rock and roll. Tonight should be a good time. I'm thinking I invited like fifty people or something. Jan bought a new record player last night, and she's hooking it up right now. All I'm saying is that we will be playing Magical Mystery Tour until I can't fucking stand to hear it anymore.*

When I was seventeen, I moved out of my father's house. I packed up my things in self-bought storage containers and left. I thought to myself, if I don't leave, I might actually kill him. I honestly might smother him with a pillow or strangle him with the new University of Pittsburgh lanyard I just received in the mail. It's not that I was a violent person, it's that I was human. I couldn't tell what he was thinking, or if he was thinking of anything other than getting high, but I knew I couldn't stand another night of macaroni and cheese. He wanted it to be 1977 again. I just wanted to get the hell out.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful. 1 Corinthians 13:4

She's not beautiful. But she's pretty. Her long hair floats behind her and sweeps over her face, partially covering her eyes, revealing only dark blue irises that match the tapestry behind her. She's not actually floating through diamonds. Instead her surroundings shimmer as the reflected light passes over the tiny specks. They project on her alabaster skin. This was my Lucy. I always had this same picture of her in my head.

My mother loved my father. Sometimes she would stand up for me, and sometimes she would stand up for him, but even when she admitted he had done something wrong, she always pointed out his good qualities. "He gets frustrated and angry, but he loves you. He would do anything for you. I know he is difficult to live with. Believe me, I've been doing it for twenty-five years. He doesn't ever say he's sorry, but he I know he is." I still to this day don't know if she was only trying to make me feel better, or if she really believed what she said.

God sent his only son to Earth so that he could be nailed to a cross and tortured to death. He could have easily struck down Pontius Pilate with a twelfth plague, but he chose not to. And I thought *I* had daddy issues.

*You've Got to Hide Your Love Away*

**1965. Lennon and McCartney wrote this song for HELP!, and the self-explanatory lyrics chronicle a story about a man that is in love with a woman: "Here I stand head in hand/Turn my face to the wall/If she's gone I can't go on/Feeling two-foot small." The song appeared in the movie, HELP!, but never made it to number one.**

*You want to hear a good joke? Oh this one's so good. I used to tell it to my college buddies, they used to get such a kick out of it. How do you make a hormone? Don't pay her!*

Humor. Sarcasm. Jokes. They were all necessary in my family. My dad's stories were inappropriate. But, admittedly, funny as hell. His charisma was a strange mixture of captivating, contagious, and somewhat unbecoming. It was passed to me, whether through genetics or learned repetition, I don't know. But now I use humor as a deflection, sarcasm as a verbal weapon, and jokes as icebreakers. My dad is hilarious, but humor doesn't trump anger. Sarcasm quickly becomes offensive. And jokes, well, they don't cure every situation.

There is very little humor in the Bible. God pretty much switches between wrath and love. There's not much middle ground. The text itself is filled with sacrifice, rape, death, and the ultimate desire to be pure.

*Across the Universe*

**1968. Lennon wrote these lyrics in the middle of the night. He was "irritated" with his wife, who was "going on and on about something." The song is one of his most poetic: "Limitless undying love which shines around me like a million suns. It calls me on and one across the universe... Nothing's gonna change my world."**

*I hate her. I hate myself around her. I just need to get out of here. I need to smoke. I love her, but she just forces me to yell at her. The things she does—she just doesn't get it. She needs this from me, and then she needs more from me. It's always something. And when it doesn't work out, and it never works out, I get nagged. I get blamed. I get pressured. I have no choice but to yell. It's better than beating her into the ground.*

I need to remember that I had a childhood. I need to remember that I was happy. My father used to listen to The Beatles constantly. That's why I listened to them. He listened to them when he was twenty-five, hosting parties filled with tablets of acid, marijuana, and so much alcohol that it would rival the parties I go to at Pitt. But, he never stopped listening to them. Who could blame him? No one wants their world to change.

He holds the scraped up record in his hand, and flashes back to the first moment he heard the single in 1970. He doesn't realize it, but he is humming "Let it Be" to himself.

Maybe if he knew I kept ticket stubs, he wouldn't think it was so weird.

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. James 1:26

I think the most beautiful thing in the entire world is watching a candle go out. The flame, that was once so powerful, withers away so quickly, suffocated by the air

around it, until it becomes overpowered, extinguishes, and leaves only a trail of smoke behind.

Believing in nothing is difficult. You constantly have to look inward. When you look outward, you're looking nowhere. Your point of view doesn't mean much.

*I am the Walrus*

**1967. "I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together/See how they run like pigs from a gun, see how they fly...Sitting on a cornflake, waiting for the van to come." Lennon explained in an interview in *Playboy* magazine that this song was inspired by Lewis Carroll's narrative poem, "The Walrus and the Carpenter." Many believe that the Walrus represents Hinduism, while the Carpenter represents Christianity. At the end of the poem, the Walrus and the Carpenter devour oysters that invite them for a walk on the beach.**

*I'm meeting with a lawyer on May 4<sup>th</sup>. I will need her to be there. She'll need to testify for me.*



On December 7, 2000, the twentieth anniversary of his father's death, Julian Lennon released the following statement to *Rolling Stone* magazine: "I had a great deal of anger towards Dad because of his negligence and his attitude to peace and love. That peace and love never came home to me."

Sometimes I think that if I lived in 1977, my dad and I would have been friends. I would be captivated by his charisma, and I would have been the first arrival at his parties. I would probably describe him the way he is described in his old yearbooks, "adorable" and "a hell of a cool guy." Unfortunately, I wasn't placed in the right time. I didn't need a friend when I was growing up. I needed someone to pick me up from soccer practice.

I remember telling my mother that I never wanted to speak to my father again. She stood in the kitchen and stared down at me. She said, in a hollow voice, that he was my father. There was nothing I could do about it. Deep down, he loved me, and I would need to accept his flaws. Two years later, she decided she could not accept his flaws. I left the house two weeks after her.

My father doesn't believe in wars. He always said that John Lennon's *Imagine* was his mantra, that he didn't understand why no one was "living life in peace." A part of the hippie movement, he had such peaceful aspirations. But as an individual, he had so much anger.

"[F]or I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers" Deuteronomy 5:9

*Eleanor Rigby*

**1966. "Ahh look at all the lonely people." A collaboration between all of the members of the band, Eleanor Rigby was written for the album *Revolver*. The same year on March 4, Lennon was quoted in a British newspaper as saying, "We're more popular than Jesus now; I don't know which will go first - rock 'n' roll or Christianity." American radio stations stopped playing Beatles music until the controversial statements stopped being so important.**

*I want this. I promise I want this, Jan. But, I just don't know if I know how to be a father. I mean, I spent the last twenty years just learning how to take care of myself. It's just that a baby means no more loud music, no more shots of Absolut, no more house parties. I'm not sure I really know myself without that kind of life. It just means things have to change. But I'll love her, Jan. I promise, I will.*

I can't remember when he stopped telling me that he loved me. It used to be a regular occurrence. I think it takes some time before you notice change. It's like it happens a little bit each day, and only when you look back do you realize how different everything is, how strange it is to not have count the grooves of the record or wind the spool of the tape with your pointer.

For years, there were two bookshelves that stood against a wooden wall in my house. They cover up three bullet holes. My mother always said that, before I was born, someone broke into our house and fired the shots. It was not until several weeks ago that she told me the truth. In actuality, I had been born. My father had gotten into an argument with her and, in a fog of rage, pulled out a gun. She quickly gathered my sister and I, and left. When she returned, she found the marks in the wall. I can understand why she wanted to protect me from this story.

God loves all his children. Until they sacrifice the wrong lamb. Then God's wrath is kindled, and then, well, his children suddenly have leprosy.

Inside the frame, blurred silhouettes of tall buildings loomed over his head. His sleeveless shirt, marked with the name of the city he stood in, was tucked into the top of his jeans, giving a slimming form to his body. His eyes were covered with the signature round glasses, which rested at the top of his cheekbones, perched on the contours of his face. His arms were folded nonchalantly, and around his neck, a crucifix.

The etymology of the word atheist is Greek. It comes from *atheos*, meaning "godless" or "without a god." I didn't even know there was a word for it until a classmate from high school brought it up during lunch. He used it in a tone of disgust.



*Penny Lane*

**1967. One of *Rolling Stone's* top 500 songs of all time, *Penny Lane* is about Liverpool, the hometown of The Beatles. The street that the song describes is in a simple British town. It was recorded for the album *Magical Mystery Tour*.**

*Her middle name should be Layne. Like Penny Lane. But my daughter is not a street. That's why we'll leave the y in. It's beautiful. Just like her.*

Nostalgia. I think it helps me get through the day. But the thing about remembering the past is if you want to get pleasure from it, your mind has to do some weeding. I don't want to relive my father telling me that he wants to kill me. But I never want to forget my first kiss, or when I first picked up that mixed tape with ten of the greatest Beatles songs ever made. It kind of makes you wonder why you can't just drain upsetting memories from your brain, why you have to monitor each thought. I wish my head could be filled with my father's corny jokes (Does your face hurt? No? It's killing me!), instead of his self-medication and bouts of severe anger. But that's not possible. All memories, good and bad, are hidden in the wavy tissues that make up the brain. Perhaps editing memories is a power that distinguishes humans from God, a trait that he just really didn't feel like passing down to all his sons and daughters.

Objects, unlike memories, are controllable. Look at them when you want to. Ignore them or throw them away. When I go to a concert, I place my ticket directly in my pocket, unfolded, uncreased, untouched. As perfect as the memory itself, the crisper the cardstock, the crisper the recollection.

In an interview after The Beatles broke up, and the 1960's had become just a memory, John Lennon said that he "still believed all you need is love." My father thought that way too. As long as he had a record player and a joint, he would have been satisfied. And he could make do without the record player.

"All you need is love..." what a massive load of bullshit.

*I remember taking this picture with an old beat up Polaroid camera. You were crying so much. Your sister had just shoved mud down the front of your brand new bathing suit. But you looked up for the camera. You always did. It takes less than sixty seconds for a Polaroid picture to develop. You stopped crying before the image started to appear.*

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**“Nowhere Man” by Dana Edmunds won first prize in the University of Pittsburgh’s  
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**Judges’ Commentary on “Nowhere Man”**