

MY VIEW

Joni Mitchell's music distills the circle of life

I was cruising to Sirius XM's Billy Joel channel, drumming the steering wheel, and regretting that I hadn't learned to play the piano as a child. Billy reflected on some of his favorite tunes and offered Joni Mitchell's "The Circle Game" as being near the top of the list.

I hadn't thought about the song since I sang it with classmates at my high school graduation. The poignant words were lost on my 17-year-old self, but not on the woman behind the wheel that autumn afternoon.

Its haunting melody accompanies lyrics that speak to the unavoidable progression of life – the passage of seasons, and the events that accompany them. We're passengers on these journeys; gathering experience and memories along the way but fixed to the

While the passage of time is inevitable, the journey forward offers joy as well as sorrow.

course and unable to return to earlier times.

Fortunately, I was near my destination. I pulled over and sat in the parking lot listening intently to each of the vaguely familiar lines. I sang along haltingly, and found the words, while simple, to be so true. As children, we often rush through life, wishing we were older – languishing in days that seem eternal.

While elders shake their heads at the impatience of successive generations, and often say among themselves that youth is wasted on the young, the lessons are usually unheeded, and the race to adulthood goes on.

I continued to sit long after the song had ended and turned off the engine and radio to be alone with my thoughts. It didn't seem possible that so many decades had been compressed into what now felt like the briefest of interludes.

I reflected on pivotal moments, and decisions that had been made impulsively. Some had



Selene Kranz has looked at Joni Mitchell's music from both sides now.

put me on an alternate course. I couldn't help wondering where the other choices might have led.

I recalled unplanned encounters that had forged deep friendships and reactive words or actions that unraveled relationships that had once seemed so secure. The kaleidoscopic images that danced in my head were distinct yet intermingling. And collectively, they had woven the fabric of my life.

I remembered having heard that Mitchell wrote "The Circle Game" in response to Neil Young's "Sugar Mountain." Not being familiar with it, I pulled the lyrics up on my phone.

I learned that it was penned on Neil's 19th birthday as a lament for what he saw as the end of his carefree adolescence.

Joni couldn't bear the thought that this early milestone marked the end of the road. She said that she wrote "The Circle Game" for Neil, and for herself – as a more hopeful acknowledgement that while the passage of time is inevitable, the journey forward offers joy as well as sorrow.

Glancing at my watch, it was hard to believe that almost an hour had passed. I savored the unexpected memories, and the tender reminder of how fleeting life is. But a quick glance in the rearview mirror confirmed that there was more mascara under my eyes than on them.

After an unsuccessful touch-up, I decided it really didn't matter. Isn't it amazing how things that once seemed so important have been progressively relegated ever farther down the list?

I exited the car and ambled through the parking lot and into the store, grateful for the opportunity to embrace the circles yet to come.

• • •

My View is a first-person column open to all Western New Yorkers. If your article is selected for publication, a photo of you is required. Email submissions to editpage@buffnews.com.