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SCHEER: Hail, hail rock n' roll

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JAMES NEISS



Thursday wasn't such a great day at work.

The pressures of the job and the ongoing pressures of our industry can be tough to take sometimes.

I had two tickets to the Skid Row concert sitting in a basket that rests on top of our microwave oven in the kitchen.

My middle stepdaughter, Krystal, bought them for me for my birthday back in September, figuring a middle-aged guy who is old enough to remember the '70s must like an '80s hair band throwback.

She was absolutely right, of course.

Sadly, a last minute scheduling change at her job ruined our plans to go together.

My wife, still recovering from a bout of the flu, wasn't feeling up for it and, frankly, these days she covets the peace and quiet of her comfy lounge, television and remote control pretty much more than anything else in the world.

My backup "date," Niagara Gazette reporter Philip Gambini, bowed out gracefully, I think, in part, because we fight like caged animals in the office too much and in part because his musical tastes lean more toward Percy Faith, Dinah Shore and Count Basie.

So there I am, sitting on my couch as I so often do, thinking about whether I should get up with 15 minutes to spare until the start of the concert or just stay home and watch the Carolina Panthers and the Pittsburgh Steelers go at it on Thursday Night Football.

At that moment, the inner teenager in me told me to grab those tickets and get to that show.

Such a good call!

Some of you out there may remember Skid Row.

They had a bunch of hits in the late '80s and early '90s, an era when big hair, guitars and searing vocals dominated all things music until the plaid-shirt wearing grunge bands starting popping up from Seattle.

Their playlist was filled with familiar jams - "18 and Life," "Youth Gone Wild," "Monkey Business," "Slave to the Grind" and, of course, "I Remember You."

On the ride down the Robert Moses Parkway I thought about all those times I went to concerts featuring bands like Skid Row during my high school years in the late '80s.

I distinctly remember one trip down to Buffalo's now-demolished Memorial Auditorium after scoring some beer from someone who knew someone who knew someone who was old enough to buy beer.

I can't be sure because the night's a bit hazy, but I think that particular night - pounding cold ones in the back of my buddy's car - the only one any of us owned - as we were heading downtown to see Motley Crue for the first time live.

Concerts were life back then and it seems like I saw them all.

Aerosmith. David Lee Roth. Van Halen without David Lee Roth and with Sammy Hagar. Kiss. Poison. Dokken. Scorpions. Guns n' Roses. Metallica..

We were teenage kids with some money to burn from mowing lawns and running paper routes.

If we weren't at a show, we are making plans to go to the next show.

We had access to a mid-'70s primer blue Chevy Nova, which meant we could drive downtown, occasionally with beer.

Things change.

Responsibilities creep in.

People go their separate ways.

Best friends like Joel the Nova owner and Jared the Cadillac kid are exchanged for different friends come college.

Then it's jobs and girlfriends and kids of your own and, in a blink, you are 45, standing in an intimate venue at a nearby casino watching a band from your youth and wishing your middle stepdaughter who bought you the tickets could have been there with you to make it all that much better.

It was all good though.

I met a guy at the gate who was from Rochester who came to the show with his wife.

I rocked out while the bassist - in a big surprise for me personally - played a rendition of The Ramones "Psychotherapy," the perfect song for my mood at that very moment.

I texted a couple of concert photos to my boss, Publisher John Celestino, and told him any problems with the newspaper pale in comparison to enjoying late '80s hard rock.

He ignored me at first until I prompted him to get with the program, at which point he said he said he loved my photos, although I'm pretty sure he was just trying to placate me.

No matter.

I was having a good time.

The outside was, thankfully, on hold.

I'll never be a teenager again.

My hair is short and respectable now. Black concert T-shirts are under my button-down, long-sleeved shirts.

My waistline is considerably larger.

I go to bed before midnight and find it hard to sleep in past 6 a.m. most days.

I've got a wife and kids and grandkids and a mortgage and a job.

If young me saw old me he'd probably call me a sell out.

Old me would probably want to swat that kid and tell him to study more and go to concerts less.

But, then, I'm pretty sure we are all basically who we are all the time.

For one night, on a Thursday, when I could have stayed home and watched another Thursday Night Football game, I went to a Skid Row concert and jammed and yelled and screamed and sang.

No matter your age - is what you make it.

Sometimes you've got to grab those Skid Row concert tickets and go.

Thanks to a gift from my middle stepdaughter, I got to tell all the rigors of my adult life where to go with a series of hearty fist pumps, while felt pretty great.

To quote the late, great Chuck Berry: "Hail, Hail Rock n' Roll."

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