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A new way to measure time

Joe Ferullo | Jul. 23, 2013 NCR Today

I recently discovered a new way to calculate how old I am getting. And yes, it's just as much fun as it sounds.

Usually we measure age by increased pains and maladies and the increased time we spend talking about these things with family and friends. It's a commonplace: My parents did it (much to my embarrassment), and my grandparents before them, so it doesn't really jolt you into the reality you're facing.

But then something hits you from left field. I was paging through the weddings section of the Sunday New York *Times* (I'd pored over the sports and automotive sections first, I swear), and there it was: Jackie McLean had gotten married [1] in a simple ceremony at her father's house.

Her father is singer/songwriter Don McLean.

Instantly, I was transported to the first day of my freshman orientation in 1971 at Fordham Prep, a Jesuit high school in the Bronx on the Fordham University campus. My entire class gathered inside the college gym and a group of seniors (looking impossibly adult to me) played a rendition of a song I had never heard before, Don McLean's ode to the diminished dreams of the counterculture, "American Pie."

That song went on to become a career-defining hit and a touchstone tune of the 1970s. But despite its renown, "American Pie" will always, in my mind, take place in a gymnasium filled with 14-year-old kids on the verge of growing up, entering a new chapter of their lives.

So it was stunning to see a photo of Don in the *Times* article: gray-haired, embracing his daughter at the reception as they began the traditional father-daughter dance. I was taken aback because the moment was so special in its ordinariness. It was a clear marker of how things evolve constantly.

I'd become used to seeing music stars struggle to remain preserved in amber: Rod Stewart still manages somehow to wear the same haircut he sported 40 years ago; Paul McCartney looks younger now than in his late "Wings" phase; Mick Jagger at 70 pulls off the same moves he created when he was 25.

But to see a performer from my youth just be his age, holding his daughter at her wedding, free from the trappings of image and illusion, made him and his moment much more real.

Time passes, things change. Daughters grow up and get married. If we are lucky, they are happy and they dance with their dads on the edge of a new path in their lives. At a certain age, life is less about us than about those we have prepared to step into our place.

The frozen-in-time musicians try to get us to forget that, to focus on ourselves and our nostalgia.

But a simple Sunday weddings article snapped a finger in front of my eyes, opened my ears and showed me more. It made me feel old, and for that, I am grateful.

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[1] http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/21/fashion/weddings/starting-a-new-verse-with-i-do.html?ref=weddings&_r=0