



Whitesnake

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Whitesnake Saved my Life

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It hasn't even started yet but already 2018 has handed me a huge gift in the form of Whitesnake tickets. Yeah I know, either you love them, hate them or you're totally indifferent. But what you don't know is that David Coverdale quite literally saved my life. We go way back, even if he doesn't realize it yet. Back to when my Jehovah's Witness mother dragged me to church three times a week and I'd play hair bands in my head just to survive the two hour sentence. Back to when I rushed to my after school job at Arthur Treacher's, where I mopped up the baked potato bar and ran the register for hours. Having to strategically place the fast food joint's hat over my big hair was totally worth it to get away from my bible thumping mom.

I wasn't actually allowed to watch MTV because it was filled with "demonic groups and debasing music" according to mom. That didn't stop me from sneaking videos whenever possible. After tons of research by way of her church's "literature" mom had decided that red and black colors in conjunction with rock music were the devil's calling card. Just try to find an 80's video that didn't feature a skin tight red dress or black leather pants and if you somehow managed to do that then the inevitable "harlot makeup" would send mom off the deep end. I mean she had spent years listening to her church elders insist that everyone not following the rules would ultimately die in the worst Armageddon imaginable. My wanting to watch KISS sing a 4 minute song while wearing Spandex and face paint was to her, the equivalent of suicide by hell fire. She was trying to save my life by killing my love for just about everything and to me, music was my everything.

When I was younger I used to fear not following the rules. The church scare tactics totally worked on me. The first time I broke a rule and called my "worldly" friend you would have thought that I stole money from the church contribution box to go and buy myself a Golden Dream Barbie (or worse, purple eye shadow). After nearly an hour of discussing what to do with me the consensus was that I should let the experience be a lesson to me and to never break the rules again. The next time that I did it I wouldn't be so lucky. I might die in Armageddon and never get to experience the paradise earth that all Jo Ho's muddle through this world to get to. It's a place full of blue skies, fruit trees, beautiful flowers and animals roaming freely according to the drawings in church books. Even then it seemed like a far-fetched fantasy to me, but my mom lived her life on eggshells in order to be pure enough to deserve to live in this paradise on earth.

The fear of an unforgivable sin festered and gradually shifted to anger as I crept into my teens. The logical side of my brain knew that the things that I was forced to learn didn't add up. To me, MTV and videos were a magical extension of the music. My friends and I were all devouring liner notes and so a video was the next step in learning about the artists' that were in heavy radio rotation. They were all basically playing dress up in the hopes of leaving a lasting impression. Big hair, black leather and red stilettos could only help. So I, like every teenager on the planet in 1987, wanted my MTV. I wanted to be Madonna, I adored every breath that Prince took on camera and I hoped to eventually have as much fun as the ladies of Exposé` did. I loved anything with a beat that I could dance to, but hair bands? They were everything to me. Absolutely everything.

In high school I aligned myself with a group of friends that also couldn't get enough of Ratt or Motley Crue. I had decided to split up my academic school days and spend three

hours at a trade school learning how to do hair for real. It wasn't that I thought cosmetology was really going to be my career

path but being a student got me into the beauty supply stores. I was able to buy salon strength perms and hair color for three bucks and I had friends that could make the magic happen on top of my head- during school hours! It seemed perfect, at least until the first day when I stepped onto the school bus that would take us to the vocational school twenty minutes away. I walked down the aisle totally intimidated because I was surrounded by headbanging kids known as burnouts. It was like a legit Breakfast Club moment because this was a group of kids that my mom would likely want me to steer clear of. I sat down in the back where everyone was, next to the one girl that I knew. Oh, the thoughts. Maybe this beauty school thing is a bad idea. Maybe I'm going to get my ass kicked by Mary Ann. She lived in flannel shirts, Wrangler jeans and work boots years before grunge became a thing. A big guy named Gunther lit up a blunt and started smoking it once we left our high school property and I figured we all would be suspended before the first day of eleventh grade let out. I was an absolute wreck and dreaded having to take the bus home again in a few hours with this motley crew.

Sarcasm has always been my secret weapon and so my daring to speak up made me instantly cool with this group. Within a few short weeks they were all some of my best friends on earth. What you wore, who you loved and how awkward you thought you looked never mattered with this group. There was a place for anyone and everyone was treated equally. They became my comfort zone. There was a unity and acceptance on that bus that I felt nowhere else. We spent every single school day together for two years and there was never a cat fight or bad blood, We had all been fucked up by our life circumstances by the time that we met and there was a bond in that. Our teenage lives didn't revolve around new Esprit sweaters, football games and dating the right person just for show. Instead we were already getting an education from the school of hard knocks.

Dana was the clumsy girl with the biggest heart I'd ever seen. Her father had just died and she was completely broken. Kim was emancipated at fifteen and living with her grandmother because her junkie mom wanted nothing to do with her. Karen was being raised by her father and refused to say anything more than that about her home life. Gunther, well he smoked every single day on the bus for the next two years. He usually shared his weed with Tom, the son of a cop. Tom's parents had booze-fueled brawls that made the newspaper at least once a year. Everyone had a story to tell and so we listened.

We were all screwed up and our home lives were complicated. We shared music, hair spray, food and most importantly, we shared our truths. How ironic that the kids with the biggest hair, tightest ripped jeans and blackest eyeliner (and that was just the boys) were also the nicest and most accepting. The bus became a haven five days a week. I knew that I could be myself, whatever that meant. Visually my friends were absolutely everything that my mom per-judged and black-balled, yet they were far more "Christian" than anyone I'd ever met at church. I could count on Dana, Kim, Gunther and the rest without having to conform. They became the life raft that kept me afloat in a sea of religious sharks waiting for me at home.

Starting my first job two weeks after I turned sixteen was the best unexpected gift that I could have ever given myself. Sure, I didn't love working in a fast food place and having my hair smell like a mix of Aqua Net and hush puppies but it was the justified escape from home that I needed. Coming home from work after Mom fell asleep did wonders for my love of music even if it did leave me tired as hell the next morning. I was always exhausted after a full day at school, plus eight hours of work afterward.

I hated the busy dinner hours but after about 8 pm. no one was rolling into the parking lot to pick up a fish and chip platter for a snack. I was able to take my time cleaning the lobby and by the time we locked the doors I had little left to do.

Once home after work I had my routine down. I'd crawled out of my work uniform- the khaki pants and white polo shirt, threw them into the hamper and changed into my Esleep pajamas. It was about midnight when I crept downstairs and I always took a deep breath as I turned on the small kitchen light. I'd quietly make myself a bowl of Ramen noodles on the stove and just bask in the silence. My dad's work stuff was out and ready for the next morning and mom had her church magazines everywhere, just in case I wanted "spiritual food". What I actually wanted was my MTV. I would take my bowl of noodles and a drink into the living room. I would plop myself down on the floor right in front of the TV. My parents knew that I'd be up because I needed to eat something but mom had no clue that watching MTV was also part of my nightly ritual.

I vividly remember turning the dial, making sure that the sound was completely off at first and once I was sure that there were no footsteps on the stairs, a sense of relief would swallow me whole. This was my only hour at home that nothing and no one could invade. MTV always premiered new videos at the top of the hour and on one memorable night there was a song by Whitesnake called "*Still Of The Night*" coming up next. The song was brand new, off of the band's self-titled album, a record that would eventually go on to sell over eight million copies in the states alone. I can honestly say that I had zero advance thoughts about this band that I had never heard of before but within two minutes about a million half sentences were flooding my brain.

The band's lead singer hit his opening pose and I swear the world spun a little faster for just a second or two. A few minutes in and my jaw was on my lap. I realized that I had goosebumps all over and it was the singer's fault. This guy clearly has IT, whatever that IT is. Maybe it was the way he ran his left hand through his hair or the way that he rocks back on his feet when he danced with a big grin on his face. Or it could be how graceful he actually is or the fact that my head rushed and I felt like Jello every time that he mumbled "Oh baby" with a clear British accent.

I knew nothing about any of these guys but one thing was for sure, the lead singer was smokin' hot.

He had a presence that made me forget about how unattractive blonde guys usually are to me. Maybe it was the muscles, or the leather pants or just the way that he stood there and blinked with his hair looking oh so perfect. I don't know but whatever it was, it made me forget about every other band out there. My brain knew that this six minute song was a metal musical masterpiece but that was kind of secondary to the physical meltdown that I was having. It's amazing how one little song can change your life. You know the feeling I'm talking about. Just like that, this band was the center of my world, my new obsession. Everything felt a little different in spite of my life looking exactly the same.

The day after Whitesnake changed my life my mom asked me to go shopping with her at Kmart. My younger sister needed new baby stuff. As she looked for things for my sister directly next to that infamous flashing blue light, I claimed that I had to pee and excused myself. But rather than looking for the restroom I actually snuck over to the opposite side of the store. I had eyes all over my head watching for Mom to appear out of nowhere to bust me in the music department. This was a scenario that often played out; I would easily come up with a little white lie to escape and then fear for my life while trying to buy an album that I knew mom wouldn't approve of.

As I stood at the counter I tried to act all kinds of cool but my eyes kept darting from the cashier to the entrance of the music section. The kid seemed to be moving super slow, probably because he had the word "trainee" on his Kmart name tag. I found myself doing something that I never really did-praying.

"No blue light. No blue light. Oh my god please hurry. Don't call a manager." ran through my mind until he finally completed the transaction and I was holding a Whitesnake cassette safely in my hands.

I had even convinced him to cut it out of its large packaging so that I could toss it into my purse as if it were no big deal whatsoever. Truth be told, it was a huge deal, the kind that made my month. This wasn't the first time that I had bought what amounted to contraband while right under mom's nose and I was pretty positive that it wasn't going to be the last either. By the time I rejoined my mom my mood had radically improved and I couldn't wait to get home to listen to the whole album. I knew that she needed to make dinner which meant that I'd be able to listen to quite a bit right away.

In the safety of my room I cracked open the plastic case of *Whitesnake* and carefully put the tape into my Walkman. I found my usual spot on the floor and settled in. If I knew that I was listening to something that would get me in trouble I'd sit leaning up against my bedroom door. Then I could fall into the music but if anyone was coming I had time to hide the evidence before letting them in. This tape was far too precious to risk having it stolen away so from the moment I bought it, I guarded this it with my life.

The front cover art was nothing like what I was used to. Instead of red and black, a hot car or an even hotter chick this was simple. Just the Whitesnake logo on what looked like a background of cracked stone. There was nothing obviously debasing about it but I kept it hidden away just in case because my mother had a way of looking at a rainbow sideways and finding the devil in it. I poured over every single word of the liner notes but found little more than song lyrics. It was in that spot propped up against my door that I learned one very valuable piece of information. I learned that my future rock star husband's name was David Coverdale.

At sixteen it's pretty hard to imagine what life will be like when you're officially old - at like thirty. Not marrying your very first love is unfathomable and rock stars seem like husband material just because they are insanely good looking. So if my best friends were arguing over Def Leppard's Joe Elliot then I was easily claiming Mr. Coverdale, even if it was a one-way love affair. I wasn't allowed to hang photos of any celebrities in my room because mom thought that idolatry of any kind was a fast track to hell but my locker, well within a week that was covered in Whitesnake photos. I ran across the street to the drug store during one of my breaks at work and bought every issue of RIP, Metal Edge and Circus Magazine- just for the pictures of course. I carefully buried David Coverdale's photos in my back pack beneath my school clothes and smuggled them into the house. The next morning I got to school early and rather than hanging out at Exit D with the rest of the headbanging crew, I turned my gray metal locker into Whitesnake utopia. It became sacred ground that couldn't be destroyed by religious paranoia or paraphernalia.

My husband, David Coverdale and the boys went to church with me on Sunday. It was in a brand new building with rows upon rows of mauve chairs perfectly lined up. The sage colored walls were supposed to give it a peaceful feeling and the lack of windows was intentional. God's light was all that was needed here and the elders didn't want even a hint of daylight to distract people from what was being preached. The stage itself was empty with the exception of a podium, microphone and a poster board on a stand with some random scripture on it. I always sat in my chair hoping to blend in with the other

Stepford teens. I sat with friends, our dresses were below our knees and our makeup was minimal. Blush, neutral eye shadow and a hint of mascara. We always stuffed our purses with Nerds and Fireballs to help get us through the next one hundred and twenty minutes of preaching. I stared at the heads of the teenagers in front of me with huge hair bows and scrunchie pony tails sprayed into place. Everyone was on their own to survive in this environment and we all got the message loud and clear that if an elder laid one inappropriate finger on you the worst thing that you could do was speak up. Here I sat for six hours every week surrounded by liars, frauds and people that I knew were leading double lives.

It was the only place on earth that I hoped that I would be forgotten and ignored. I settled into my seat and picked stray fuzz off of my black skirt. My own hair was pulled back with a big banana clip, teased so big that everyone assumed I had inherited my mom's naturally curly hair. I looked the part of the perfectly disciplined church girl but my mind was always elsewhere. I couldn't attentively listen to what I had already determined was bullshit and I had to stay awake, so song lyrics it was. David whispered in my ear when I needed him most.

*"I don't know where I'm going
But, I sure know where I've been*

*Hanging on the promises
In songs of yesterday
An' I've made up my mind,
I ain't wasting no more time
But, here I go again
Here I go again."*

I stared at my light gray dress with white little paisley designs on it. Don't laugh. I dared not glance at anyone at all sitting near me because I knew if I did we would both crack up. One moment of knowing eye contact in this hopeless situation always resulted in laughter because, well, what else could we really do?

So much of what transpired while sitting in this church was fake, so it was easy for me to lose touch with reality here. Especially when everyone around me seemed so happy to let it slip away. Maybe the only way to survive sitting here for two hours was to space out. I sat staring straight ahead at the preacher on the stage in his gray suit with his pink tie. I heard words like "Jehovah" and "the truth" falling from his lips but I quickly drifted off. The music in my head was always far more real than anything going on in this building.

*"Tho' I keep searching for an answer,
I never seem to find what I'm looking for*

*Oh Lord, I pray
You give me strength to carry on,
'Cause I know what it means*

To walk along the lonely street of dreams."

I quite literally took David to church with me. I heard the entirety of Whitesnake's album in my head. His lyrics saved me from becoming an overachieving clone of my mother and also spared me her wrath. God forbid I actually fall asleep during one more message about how only 144,000 people would go to heaven while the rest of us would play with lions and tigers on a music-free paradise earth instead.

*"Get ready for judgment day
An' the final curtain call,
Don't lie when you testify*

*'Cos the Good Lord know you're all
Saints an' sinners, priests an' thieves."*

David Coverdale understood what it was like to feel completely alone while surrounded by hundreds of people. I would worship at his feet long before I would buy into the surreal church life that I was born in to. He really did help to save my sanity, if not my life. Nothing around me made much sense, but his lyrics did. Somewhere along the way David went from being another hot rock star to an adult that actually "gets it" and I didn't have very many of those to look up to.

Whitesnake brought me weekly salvation from a religion that cared more about controlling my every move than it did about the condition of my head or heart. My mom's world was black and white, filled with right and wrong or good and bad. She did as she was told, believed what was fed to her and left no room for discussion on anything. I wasn't sure what scared her so much that she decided that it was better to be controlled rather than to live a quality life of her own making but I knew that I couldn't do the same. I would go through the motions and sit for hours at a time wearing what was dictated, talking to whomever I was allowed to but my mind, they would never get that. I used music, lyrics and Whitesnake as a protective mental shield, one that worked quite well.

Whatever it is that David Coverdale had back in 1987, it's still palpable today. This guy's eye contact and real connection with his audience is something I've experienced firsthand and from just a few feet from the stage. Everything that first sucked me in, it's all still there, except that now it's different. Sure Coverdale still knows exactly how to carry himself. I'm pretty sure he is one of the best front men of all time. But now I honestly feel an enormous amount of gratitude to this man who will likely never know that he helped occupy my mind. David Coverdale really did save my life all of those years ago and that directly contributed to the life that I've chosen to lead as an adult. I mean, what do you say to a complete stranger that saved you from a long life filled with black and white decisions and emotional death? A simple thank you doesn't seem to be nearly enough.