

WTE column of November 7, 2015. Editor's headline: "Not all music soothes" CST of November 8: "Music helps us retain our bearings"

Driving down the road many years ago, I heard a song on the radio so arresting, I pulled over to give it my full attention. It was Roberta Flack, performing her composition, "The First Time Ever," a paean to erotic love. It seems, the romance has passed—erotic attraction is fleeting, though it can morph into devotion—and the vocalist acknowledges this without regret: "I thought our joy would . . . last 'til the end of time, my love."

Music has exerted a powerful influence on my life, from German folks songs to American pop to symphony, opera, even ballet. When troubled, guitar music, which I perceive as soothing the spirit, helps me retain my bearings. While such fare can be as rousing as any piano concerto—check out the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet's rendition of "Hungarian Rhapsody" on youtube—I play quietly modest pieces, on my own or with a partner.

For the past eighteen months, feeling unmoored, I've also engaged with a variety of CDs by solo guitarists. Some of these compositions strike me as unbearably sad, a musical recasting of the poet's "We live, as we die, alone." Additionally, to weather the storms of change, I find myself returning to good memories of the past.

Last year I had a well drilled on my ex-wheat-farm to determine the feasibility of residing there. (The farm already had a stock well.) When the drilling turned up good quantities of water, I talked with a builder about constructing a house, with a realtor about selling my Cheyenne home. These things require decisions and choices—and decision-making brings conflict.

It began when my son and family decided to leave Wyoming in favor of Texas, for I had moved here from Tennessee on their account. Since my son and daughter-in-law pursued professions that demanded travel, I helped raise their daughter. Even the wheat farm I acquired on my son's prompting, who needed a place to winter his cows.

Memorable moments play on the early years of my marriage, when I learned a great deal from my spouse. We met by chance in Germany; two years later, I was residing in California. Darold was then engaged as engineer with an MBA that cast him on the corporate ladder in a defense-industry conglomerate. He had decided, however, to work toward the practice of law. During his studies I often read case law to him, which acquainted me with the American legal system.

From Darold I also learned to appreciate furniture finished naturally. Over time we acquired two dressers, two nightstands, and a headboard, all of American walnut. We sanded them to a smooth sheen, then applied finishes of Danish ("Watco") oil and satin wax. The process took forever but yielded great satisfaction.

When Darold died in 2003—he was then my ex-husband—the bedroom furniture fell to me, since only our oldest wanted one of the dressers. Two years later I hauled the lot from California to Wyoming. The pieces had taken a beating, from Darold's final years, from storage in a son's garage, and from my hauling; thus, I set about refinishing them.

During my recent move into my farmland home, I decided the bedroom furniture needed retouching. This is a laborious process: first all the handles are removed, then you take superfine wet-and-dry sandpaper to the damaged areas, then apply the Danish oil, which takes days to penetrate, before finishing with the wax. The results are well worth the effort.

Hence it infuriated me when my friends at Guitar Society selected "Norwegian Wood" as group song. Afterwards I complained mightily to my sometime guitar partner, who had nothing to do with picking the fare but said he enjoyed its catchy tune.

The storyline of the song, presented from the point of view of a Neanderthal of a male, is this: A woman invites a man to her place, which is furnished with "fine Norwegian wood." Apparently this

is the first time the two have met face-to-face. Equally apparently, in the course of the evening the woman decides the man is no partnership material and relegates him to sleeping in the bathtub. (At this point, the guy should have cut his losses and gone to a motel, but no, he puts up with the bathtub treatment.) Next morning, the woman leaves—"This bird has flown," he says. He avenges himself by burning her furniture in the fireplace. An artisan woodworker's lovingly-crafted creation goes up in flames.

Here a catchy tune authorizes the idea that anger or disappointment justifies acts of wanton destruction. While we can't expect male lyricists (or guitarists, for that matter) to express themselves with the sensitivity of a Roberta Flack, still, contempt for fine things, and the effort they cost to produce, is a painful thing to behold.