

Middle-aged Tippy Toeing:

Recalling a taunting moment of adolescence while reconciling with a once-despised country western song (2000):

On the drive home today, I listened to the playlist of country western music of the 1960s that old buddy, SK, included in the packet of CDs of music downloads he generously sent from Korea.

In our communications over the years, we have fondly recalled the country ‘story songs’ popular in our childhood (e.g. ‘El Paso’, ‘The Wall’, ‘Long Black Veil’) as well as country artists such as George Jones and Merle Haggard whom we would never have admitted listening to in our 60s’ counter-culture conformity.

So thoughtfully enough, his playlist gift included many country-folk favourites of that era along with some Hank Williams and Blue Grass classics from the 1950s.

An odd inclusion on the CD was a song from mid-1960s called ‘*Tippy Toein’*’—a cutesy tribute to the joys of early parenthood. As recorded by the Hardin Trio (the forgotten name appearing in SK’s hand-written song listings on the CD sleeve), I remembered bolting to snap off the radio whenever it played.

*Well mama go a tippy tippy toein' through the house
Gotta see what's the matter with the babah...*

I could only guess that SK had included that silly song as a joke: that he was making light of our very different trajectories over the last decade and half. An unattached guy enjoying expat life was maybe poking a little fun at a domesticated old comrade in middle age still in the midst of raising *babahs*.

At first tempted to skip ahead to the next number, I gritted teeth, gripped the wheel and listened:

*It's been a bawlin' and a squallin' and a kickin' on the wall
Well I guess it's dropped its little bottle maybe...*

Just before the Hardin trio’s harmonizing gave way to the steel guitar break, I remembered the torment of hearing those lyrics repeatedly booming out from the jukebox of the village diner. A particular incident sprung to mind, *circa* 1966-’67:

A plump girl with a bee-hive hairdo (a couple of years older than me) was standing over the jukebox. Squeezed into one of the three booths drinking Cokes along with a few long-haired buddies, I was bracing for the country western songs she was sure to play. As if ‘*I love you, drops*’ or ‘*Put your sweet lips a little closer to the phone*’ weren’t dreary enough—she played the dreaded ‘*Tippy-toein’*’.

In the opening notes of the steel guitar, the girl turned her heavy chest around and grinned toward her two ‘greasy’ (our pejorative for her adolescent tribe) girlfriends in the adjacent booth. Then with twitching rear, she lip-synched along with the lyrics:

*Oh, daddy come a runnin' with the water and a rag
Gonna need another little diaper maybe
No need a hesitatin' or a wonderin' and a waitin'
I know what's the matter with the babah...*

Meanwhile, every twang of the steel— every phrase in the lyrics— set my teeth on edge.

*Oh, mama rock a baby daddy rock a babah too
It's a yawnin' and a gettin' sleepy maybe...*

When the torture was finally over, the beehive girl jounced back to her friends.

“That’s so-oo cute,” said one of the greasy girls, “You gotta play it again!” Toward our booth she gave a disdainful glance.

As all three girls dug in vain for change, I fished into my pocket, jumped up and momentarily commandeered the jukebox. Inserting my only dime, I punched in the Rolling Stones’: ‘Paint it Black’.

With a sullen shake of hair, I glared over at the girls then hopped back into the booth. Through the three minutes in which Mick Jagger’s growl bounced off the greasy walls, the beehive girls scowled. When the drum-throb faded out and the jukebox whirred into silence, there followed a tense interlude.

Yet moments later the beehive girl was to have her victory. It was to come in the arrival of one of her friends, a pulp trunk driver in standard gamma-green uniform. While he stood with hands in pockets by the counter, the beehive girl rushed up and grabbed his arm.

“Com’on, you can lend us a quarter.”

Shrugging, the shy lad dug into his belt-chained wallet. With a saucy wink, the beehive girl was back at the jukebox. There was no mistaking— this time the taunting of the ‘hippies’ was deliberate:

*So mama keep a rockin' daddy rock a little too
and at last it's a sleepin' little babah...*

I couldn’t recall if I fled into the cold or bore the agony in the hope that her other two plays would be more bearable.

Unforgettable, though, was the conflicted bitterness felt around the girls of her ‘greasy’ tribe. Despite their love of country western— not to mention a tendency to poor dental hygiene—they

exuded a sensuality entirely absent in the ‘straight’ (the term not used then as today) girls of the village.

However much the beehive girl and her friends exuded ready-ripeness—it was plain that they (that is, their bodies) wanted rugged boys with steady jobs—not skinny ‘hippies’. While that preference was obviously not understood at the time as the iron will of natural selection—there was something of a sting in it. Still, even at sixteen, a more miserable fate could not be imagined than being trapped in the village amid dirty diaper pails...

I then recalled seeing the same girl along the village main street a couple of years thereafter. She was walking with another woman who was holding the hand of a toddler. *Sans* beehive and already Pentecostal dour, she was herself pushing a carriage. Today that first *bahah* would be nearly thirty and she probably a grandmother. If her man had stayed away from demon drink and was ‘born again’—her family would be blessed with the Lord’s bounty: a tidy home, a driveway jammed with recreational vehicles and a lakeside cottage...

Meanwhile, 6000 kms. away, heavily mortgaged and with kids a quarter century younger than hers—retirement seems even more distant than the natal village...

Yet for the moment, on the car CD player, the Hardin Trio was launching into their final verse:

*Well mama tippy toein' daddy tippy toein' too
gonna try to do a little sleepin' maybe
Whether it'll be a minute or an hour or two
is depending entirely on the babah...*

Chuckling, I could not but be reminded of innumerable nights my wife and I were awoken by the cries of our precious *babahs*. So it was that by the fade out—the ancient resistance to the tune’s catchiness had collapsed...

2000, May

