

## Identity: *Lifelines* by Carmel McDonald Grahame

### Lifelines

When you were six days didn't end, they collapsed.  
Night happened behind blue floral curtains your mother closed at bedtime.  
Mornings smelled of toast, sometimes bacon, to the tune of the ABC

and the chink and clink of a milkman. School mornings lapped at a wire gate,  
inviting you out in your pleated navy skirt, white shirt, lace-ups.  
You read fairy tales and pretended not to hear your mother until, *The End*.

At twelve, the weeks were spent in grey serge and sixty-denier, but your eye  
was on pointy toes and stiff petticoats. You read Agatha Christie, Georgette Heyer,  
made first attempts at algebra. Sixteen was a string of routines:

homework, piano practice, babysitting, choir, occasional good-girl party thrown in...  
Mornings broke over a study timetable taped under the window by a frothy purple bed,  
insisting on History, Geography, memorising certainties, before school began again.

You sang alto, had to be a boy at dancing lessons, but wore witches britches  
with purple polka-dots and sang along to *Rock My Soul*, with long-lost friends-for-life.  
At eighteen you went to University in an ancient car, in a city wrapped around a river,

harmonised to *Where have all the Flowers Gone*, while young men were sent to Vietnam.  
You fell in love forever in a purple hessian dress with missing bits. You shared a flat,  
skipped lectures, read Castaneda, Khayam, Hesse ... tried to learn everything.

Twenty-four was all summer. You had become, had a nestling son with peach-blond hair.  
You were a brave new teacher of new brave girls reading *Brave New World*  
and meaning every word of it. Home was shared, sometimes with broken-hearted friends.

Together you cooked up lentil curries to Leonard Cohen, Astrid Gilberto, Cleo Laine,  
all that jazz, while a greyhound slept in the vinyl beanbag. You fell off high heels,  
tripped on long skirts, voted for Whitlam, grieved for Janis Joplin, knotted macramé.

Now your evenings are measured in poetry readings, yoga, book club nights,  
or spent on pixellated forms of distraction, your tastes symptomatic of a generation:  
foreign films, authentic pasta, home-grown vegetables, pinot noir...

You haven't seen the Galapagos, finished Proust, learnt the Western Two-Step...yet.  
Now your daughter is a mother of daughters, who wish you'd kept the clothes from then.  
The moon cycling through the back door now lights up *this* season of the present tense.

*Carmel Macdonald Grahame*

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### Age on the Page – Poetry Challenge 2021

All poems were judged anonymously, and poet Anne M Carson awarded poems which combined literary merit with how well the poem addressed any of the 5 categories identified in the competition:

- *What It Means to be an Elder*
- *Independence*
- *Stereotypes*
- *Identity*
- *Wisdom*

### Judge's comments:

A wonderful, evocative poem which celebrates not just an individual identity but the identity of a whole generation through a richly described life retrospective. It describes the incremental building of an identity over a lifetime. The lines are long and generous with detail – the clothes, the music, the meals. Many of us, I think, will identify with the ubiquitous lentil curries! The poet demonstrates a rich lexicon, with particularly thoughtful use of verbs such as the morning 'lapping' at the wire gate. After the narrative, the poem ends on a beautiful imagistic last line "The moon cycling through the back door".