

THE POWER OF BARBRA

There truly are moments you remember all your life. On a blustery fall day in 1968, for some inexplicable reason, my mom wanted to take me to the movies to see a picture called *Funny Girl*. Me, and not my brothers—this was a first!

We arrived early at the theater and my mom said we should just go inside, even though the previous showing had not ended. As we walked down the aisle of the darkened theater, Barbra stepped into the spotlight to sing “My Man.”

I was an impressionable ten-year-old. I didn’t know anything about the movie or the story. I certainly hadn’t had my heartbroken (unless you count the time my boyfriend Donny had an asthma attack while trying to give me my first kiss in summer camp), and yet here I was, weeping real tears, just from this three-minute performance. Barbra’s ability to express such raw emotion had touched a nerve in me that I didn’t even know I had. From that moment on, I have watched in awe as her talent, passion and determination have made her a truly remarkable woman and a national treasure.

Flash forward forty-one years to the Village Vanguard for a one-night only event promoting Barbra’s new CD *Love is the Answer*. Columbia records created a contest for a handful of the luckiest people in the world to be in the audience. There were over 40,000 entries. I put out the word to everyone I ever met who knew about my love for Barbra to enter. And on the day the winners were announced, I waited and waited, knowing my odds were against me. And then I got a call...

“People, people who need people,” sang my cousin Spencer.

“Spence, that’s not funny,” I said.

“Oh no...people who have tickets, are the luckiest people in the world.”

Spencer won two tickets! And he was going to take me!

We got all dressed up and headed downtown for the big event. The Village Vanguard is tiny. There was room for only 93 people, and the seating was random. We wound up in two seats at table 36. Amazingly, it was right near the stage. We were just eight feet from Barbra. Just for the record, we had better seats than President Clinton and Hillary, then the Secretary of State! As show time neared, you could feel the love in the room. The musicians came on stage, and then there was Barbra ... She looked fabulous, relaxed, and was utterly charming. She was in great voice and did I mention we were only eight feet away? I could hear her voice directly as well as through the speakers.

She's always said she's an actress who sings and she truly tries to "get in the right mood" for each song. For the heartbreakers, she really did have tears in her eyes. I know because I could see them!

Hearing Barbra with a quartet was also incredible. The experience was extremely intimate and personal. I wish I could say it was a dream come true, but in my wildest dreams I could never have imagined such an incredible evening. My friend Janis, who has known me since day one of my Barbra fascination, reminded me of the years gone by; the blue marble egg she gave me after we saw *Funny Girl* for the umpteenth time, my homemade Barbra posters covering the walls of my teenage bedroom. I grew up with Barbra, watching her grow as an artist and as a powerful woman.

As I watched Barbra perform, it was striking how she has now come full circle. When she first auditioned at the Vanguard, she was hungry and determined to be a star. You could hear that in her voice back then; her passion and talent were raw and pure ... almost desperate.

It's something we fans have tapped into. It's all that

vulnerability that we experienced, too. We could connect to Barbra because she felt the things we were feeling. It's clear now that she is a woman who has lived life and learned from it. She seemed comfortable in her own skin and able to enjoy the moment. Her voice was still pure and she could express emotions in each and every song, but she approached them as a mature fully formed person. No longer desperate, but wise. Not afraid to give love, and not afraid to receive it.

Even if Spencer hadn't won the tickets and I didn't attend the performance, I would still feel equally blessed because of all the friends and family that wanted this for me. I'm more than grateful; I'm cognizant of that fact just as Barbra sings, "Love is the answer."

Barbra has influenced me in many ways, and even more than her talents and her unbelievable body of work, I'm impressed by her bravery. Barbra speaks her mind and uses her celebrity to fight the good fight. I like to call it the Power of Barbra, and when I need to fight the good fight, I summon up that power. It's the Barbra inside of me!

So, to you Barbra, for all the years you've spoken to me, and spoken out for others, it's an honor to be able to give something back just to you, some expression of my feelings. So here goes...

Thank you for sharing your talent with us all and thank you for inspiring a young girl to follow her dreams and to hold on tight to her beliefs, because as we all know, "people are their principles."

(This article first appeared in the book, "Barbra Memories: 50th Anniversary Gift for Barbra Streisand," compiled by the late Alison Waldman.)