

Felix + Dzintra + Queensrÿche

by Felix Jung

I was an Asian guy with long hair who was into Heavy Metal; she was a Latvian dancer who liked to chain-smoke Camels. We met in Mr. Dennis' Orchestra class at North Central High School. We both played violin, and we both had unusual names: Felix and Dzintra.

The two of us lived fairly close to one another, in neighborhoods off of Spring Mill Road, on the North side of Indianapolis. Between our houses, at the bottom of a steep hill, there was a favorite graffiti spot everyone called "The Wall." Kids would tag this stretch of wall mercilessly, and every so often some adult would get fed up and cover the entire thing in a coat of white paint.

One day in the spring of 1990, I drove by and saw that the entire wall had been wiped clean. While I wasn't a serious troublemaker, I knew an opportunity when I saw one. A few phone calls and a few nights later, under cover of darkness, my friends and I let loose on what was, essentially, a blank canvas.

In the movies, couples would take a knife and carve their initials into a tree to declare their love to the world. To me, I was doing the same, using spray paint and stone. I wrote out our names with large strokes: Felix + Dzin, encircling everything within the sloppy outline of a heart. And then, in the blank square right next to our names, I spray painted the name of my favorite heavy metal band: Queensrÿche.

Like me, I knew that Dzintra had to drive past that wall on Spring Mill at least once or twice a day. The thing I forgot about was that, like me, she had parents who would also have to drive past that wall at least once or twice a day. At the time, there weren't a whole lot of couples named Felix and Dzin in the greater Indianapolis region. Or a whole lot of guys named Felix, for that matter. I doubt I won any points with the parents that year... hers or mine.

A few months later, in the summer of 1990, she went away for several weeks to a Latvian Summer Camp in Three Rivers, Wisconsin. We made promises to one another to send letters, and she left me with two things: her address and a mix tape.

During the days, I'd read the letters she sent and while away the time, keeping an eye out for the mailman. She told me stories about how hard it was to sneak cigarettes, and how she plotted with the other students to buy beer and wine coolers. The camp held a dance, she wrote me, but it was lame because she had no one to slow dance with.

One of my favorite letters was signed with a bit of her lipstick, where she had kissed a space on the paper next to her name. Whenever I felt overcome with loneliness, I'd break

out that letter and kiss the spot that she had kissed. By the end of that summer, it was a small miracle there was any lipstick left on the thing.

During the nights, I'd listen to her mix tape incessantly. In bed, with the kind of sadness and yearning that comes from being sixteen years old, I'd play each side in the pitch black and miss my girlfriend. When the tape stopped, I'd flip it over and play the other side. I'd repeat this over and over - play, flip, play, flip - until I fell asleep.

While the songs played, I imagined her in a dimly lit auditorium, sitting alone against a wall. And in the quiet spaces between the songs, I tried very hard not to imagine the many Latvian boys who lurked in the shadows nearby, waiting to ask her to slow dance.

After her return from camp, things weren't quite the same between us. The extended absence had made things unfamiliar, had made us strangers to one another. A few weeks after she got back, she broke up with me.

The mix tape I had been given that summer stayed at my bedside, and my nightly ritual stayed the same. It would have been easier to burn the tape, or to throw the thing away. But listening to the songs, all I cared about was wallowing in my unhappiness. All I cared about was seeing how low I could get, to try sinking to the very depths of my sadness and to stay there as long as possible.

I spent the next year feeling heartbroken and sorry for myself. I filled an entire green notebook (complete with a Queensrÿche bumper sticker on the cover) with a volume of terrible poetry. Many of my poems were about love and loss. All of my poems rhymed.

It's been 18 years since Dzintra gave me that tape. And though I no longer live in Indianapolis, I still visit my parents, who still live in the same house I grew up in, off Spring Mill Road. From time to time, I'll find myself driving along that stretch of hill, and always slow by "The Wall" out of necessity and nostalgia.

Rounding the curves, I remember the adrenalin of that night with my friends - the scruff of pavement underfoot, the headlights of oncoming cars cresting the hill, the smell and stain of the aerosol cans.

If you were to cut through that wall, you would see a small map of time, the handiwork of countless authors and signatures. Somewhere, underneath the rings of paint and names of couples long past, there's a thin layer that I helped create. Somewhere, for a brief moment of time, I made our names visible to the world.

To this day, "The Wall" is still sometimes clean, sometimes covered in tags. It is still victim to the whims of adolescents and adults. It's still standing in the same spot, near the bottom of a steep hill on Spring Mill Road, as permanent and as fleeting as any tree.



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