

# GPR April Feature

## Rock N Roll Kids to Rock N Roll Parents-Our Stories...

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It never once crossed my mind when I was pregnant for the first time what role music would play in my child's life. Sure, I'd read articles on how hearing classical music in utero could positively effect your baby's intelligence. So, yeah, I bought some Beethoven, strapped some headphones around my burgeoning belly, and pushed play.

But that was really more about bettering the odds for my child in the smarts department than trying to influence his musical taste.

No, my thoughts at the time were more something like:

"I'm hungry. Oh My God, this baby has to come out of me! What if my baby is ugly??!! I want a bucket of fries so big I can jump into it. NOW! I can't possibly have to throw up again? Uhhhhhh...scratch those fries."

Once Desmond (It's a boy!) was here, despite the classical music, I didn't give him much credit for knowing anything. After all, newborns are completely dependent on their parents, so it's easy to see them, at least for a while, as an extension of yourself. The reality of him becoming an individual hadn't dawned on me yet, so most things I did around the baby were based solely on my preferences.

Before Desmond was 2, my brother gave me a copy of **Kiss Unplugged** on CD. An album, which amazingly I'd never heard. At the time I'd been a Kiss fan for 26 years, but I must admit, I was also juggling the new priorities of a newborn and my own wants and needs and had yet to find a middle ground.

Here, my brother was handing me not only an indication that the music industry had carried on without me (What?!), but a portal back into my own childhood. A portal that opened right on October 26, 1976: The night **The Paul Lynde Halloween Special** aired; Kiss' first television appearance.

When Kiss finally took the stage, my mom pleaded with someone to turn off the television before I got scared. Her worry was well-founded.



Just a few months before, I slept with the light on for weeks because I heard Cliff Richard's *Devil Woman*. I envisioned a woman with red eyes and horns and sharp teeth and long black fingernails and a tail who was "gonna get (me) from behind." (I still can't listen to that song today without a terrifying cold chill going up my spine, into my shoulders, and ending in a shudder.)

And that was just an auditory nightmare. With Kiss performing on TV, I was getting a visual too.

As the band was lip-syncing *Detroit Rock City*, I sat inches away from the screen and begged for it to stay on.

I won. And, unbeknownst to me, a lineage was born.

Not understanding the concept of image at age 4, I took Kiss quite literally. Listening to *God of Thunder*, I would imagine a 20-foot tall Gene Simmons, stalking around a garbage dump in full make-up, complete with demon boots. When I found out Gene was the news anchor's voice at the beginning of *Detroit Rock City*, I saw him sitting behind the desk fully dressed as the demon. When they originally put out ***Kiss Meets the Phantom of the Park*** I just knew it wasn't all lines spit out by rote. This was who they were.

Walking back through the time warp, away from the enigmatic, otherworldly, superhuman Kiss of my childhood, I must admit I still found the normal guy/super hero duality of the band fascinating. As an adult, I could more fully appreciate how either playing or listening to music could morph a person into something above human. And when they wore their make-up, Kiss was the tangible metaphor for this catharsis. The CD in my hands was a way to get back in touch with the magic.

I immediately put ***Unplugged*** in the stereo, and ultimately moved it to the car, where I had more time to listen to it. Over and over I played it marveling at how beautiful a voice Gene Simmons really has on *Going Blind*, the excellent acoustic version of *2,000 Man*, Paul Stanley's amazing range of vocals on *I Still Love You*.

I was ripped away from my own nostalgia after a few weeks when ***Unplugged*** was on for the millionth time and Desmond uttered, "Here Plastic Castle, Mommy."  
"Plastic Castle?"  
"Kiss. Plastic Castle."  
Hmhmhmhmhmhm...

Not understanding, I started fast forwarding through the songs. When I landed on *Plaster Caster*, Desmond nodded in delight. "Plastic Castle!" he exclaimed gleefully from the back seat. A few days later, he was talking to his new imaginary friend, Gene.

Déjà vu, man.

From there, Desmond requested the entire band be at his 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday party. I had to address and pretend to send an invitation to each member, while telling my son they would want to come, but most likely wouldn't be able to attend.



I marveled at how he jumped over the entire enigma of Kiss and just wanted them to play *Pin the Tail on the Donkey* and eat birthday cake with him. But, then it dawned on me that his introduction to KISS, visually, was the polar opposite of mine. His visual was the ***Unplugged*** album cover: the no make-up Kiss, and, wow, I even think Gene Simmons is smiling(?!

On the day of Desmond's birthday, he asked about each member separately:

"Is Gene here?"

"Is Paul here?"

"Is Ace here?"

"Is Peter here?"

When I told him no, he decided to just pretend they were at the table. That was good enough.

Watching him blow out his two blue candles, it occurred to me how evident it is that he is my son. For, though I brought Kiss into his life initially, I had nothing to do with him taking them beyond the music and into his everyday world, just as I had taken them into mine.

No, this wasn't nurture. It's simply in the genes. No pun intended, Mr. Simmons.