

Rose-Colored Glasses
by Joanne M. Mark

The 70's and 80's tunes were playing on the jukebox at the famous B'ville Diner where a group of us were having a late after-concert meal and discussing favorite bands and music when I innocently asked, "Do any of you remember your first rock concert?"

I tried to contain my emotions as the names began to flow. The response was varied: from Kiss to Bob Seger, from Joni Mitchell to White Snake to Michael Jackson. When I named my first concert, Jimi Hendrix, a hush fell over the room. At first I expected puzzled looks or age-related snickers, but they were all very curious and just wanted to know more. I had quite a story to tell. In fact my story spans over forty years.

When I was sixteen and attending Catholic school on Syracuse's North Side, my best friend, Samantha, and I decided to go to the War Memorial and see a "rock" concert. The tickets were only \$6.00 for reserved seats. I'd never been to a rock concert before so I guess I was considered a "virgin" of sorts. We'd seen a poster of Jimi Hendrix and thought he was "hot" and figured we would not be disappointed. This was the era of granny dresses and I had a purple one covered with paisley flowers. I donned my rose-colored glasses, slipped on my water buffalo sandals, which were all the rage in 1967 and jumped into the Chevy station wagon. Sam's father dropped us off right in front of the place. An usher showed us to our seats in the third row in front of the stage. The rows behind us filled up with a weird group of people with headbands and bluejeans. Nothing could ever describe what I felt that night as Jimi walked across the stage. I was used to listening to the Kingston Trio, but now I was mesmerized. The crowd was small, but the sound of the applause after each song was deafening. Oh, and the aroma of something like a rope burning throughout the arena was new to me. I knew why it was called the Jimi Hendrix Experience since my life as I knew it was never going to be the same again.

I left that night with a whole new outlook. I planned to ditch the folk music album collection and buy some 45s like Purple Haze, Foxy Lady and the Wind Cries Mary. I was going to marry a rock star! Yeah, right, in my dreams. I still had to go to school the next day. So day after day I thought of how I could escape the Gregorian chants, the early morning novenas and replace them with rhythm and blues. Before I knew it I was becoming a "groupie" and I was not sure if I was ever going to show up at church or school again. I went to "gigs," meeting all kinds of people. There were roadies, fans, managers, and club owners with all kinds of personalities, opinions and stories. I have tripped the light fantastic on so many dance floors, made many a misstep, but realized my special gift is being able to document those days.

My mind still keeps replaying that night at the War Memorial, when the man with the white Stratocaster guitar, whose fingers caressed the strings with such tenderness and speed, changed my life.