

Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon--and the Journey of a Generation

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A groundbreaking and irresistible biography of three of America's most important musical artists-Carole King, Joni Mitchell, and Carly Simon-charts their lives as women at a magical moment in time.

Carole King, Joni Mitchell, and Carly Simon remain among the most enduring and important women in popular music. Each woman is distinct. Carole King is the product of outer-borough, middle-class New York City; Joni Mitchell is a granddaughter of Canadian farmers; and Carly Simon is a child of the Manhattan intellectual upper crust. They collectively represent, in their lives and their songs, a great swath of American girls who came of age in the late 1960s. Their stories trace the arc of the now mythic sixties generation-female version-but in a bracingly specific and deeply recalled way, far from cliché. The history of the women of that generation has never been written-until now, through their resonant lives and emblematic songs.

Filled with the voices of many dozens of these women's intimates, who are speaking in these pages for the first time, this alternating biography reads like a novel-except it's all true, and the heroines are famous and beloved. Sheila Weller captures the character of each woman and gives a balanced portrayal enriched by a wealth of new information.

Girls Like Us is an epic treatment of midcentury women who dared to break tradition and become what none had been before them-confessors in song, rock superstars, and adventurers of heart and soul.

Sheila Weller is a New York Times bestselling author and award-winning magazine journalist. She is the author of five books, most recently her 2003 family memoir, *Dancing at Ciro's*, which *The Washington Post* called "a substantial contribution to American social history." She is the senior contributing editor at *Glamour*, a contributor to *Vanity Fair*, and a former contributing editor of *New York* magazine. To learn more, visit GirlsLikeUstheBook.com.

three women,three moments,one journey

spring 1956: naming herself*

One day after school, fourteen-year-old Carole Klein sat on the edge of her bed in a room wallpapered with pictures of movie stars and the singers who played Alan Freed's rock 'n' roll shows at the Brooklyn Paramount. She was poised to make a decision of grand importance.

Camille Cacciatore, also fourteen, was there to help her. The girls had done many creative things in this tiny room: composed plays, written songs, and practiced signing their names with florid capital C's and curlicuing final e's -- readying themselves for stardom. But today's enterprise was larger. Camille inched Carole's desk chair over to the bed so both could read the small print on the tissue-thin pages of the cardboard-bound volume resting on the bedspread between them. Carole was going to find herself a new last name, and she was going to find it the best way she knew how: in the Brooklyn phone book.

Camille Cacciatore envied her best friend. "Cacciatore is much worse than Klein! I wanna

change my name, too!" Camille had wailed -- gratuitously, since both girls knew Camille's father would blow his stack if his daughter came home with a new appellation. Mr. Cacciatore, a transit authority draftsman, was stricter than Mr. Klein, a New York City fireman who, having retired on disability, now sold insurance.

Not that Sidney Klein still lived with Carole and her schoolteacher mother, Eugenia, whom everyone called Genie, in the downstairs apartment of the small two-story brick house at 2466 East Twenty-fourth Street, between Avenues X and Y, in Sheepshead Bay. Carole's parents had recently divorced -- a virtual first in the neighborhood -- but Sidney came around frequently, and Carole's friends suspected that her parents still loved each other.

So Carole alone could change her name, just as Carole alone was allowed to attend those magical Alan Freed shows (Camille's parents disapproved of "that jungle music"), often making the pilgrimage to the Paramount both weekend nights to soak up the plaintive doo-wop of the Platters, Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, and Queens's very own Cleftones, as well as the dazzling piano banging of Jerry Lee Lewis. Freed had coined the term "rock 'n' roll" three years earlier, when, as a white Ohio deejay affecting a Negro style and calling himself Moondog, he was spinning discs after midnight for a black audience that grew to include a swelling tide of white teenagers starved for the powerful honesty of "race music." Now, in his Brooklyn mecca, Freed drew hordes of fans -- and fans destined to be heirs. Carole was among the latter.

The two girls hunched over the phone book and paged past the front matter -- the sketch of the long-distance operator, in her tight perm and headset, ready to connect a Brooklynite to Detroit or St. Louis or even San Francisco; the Warning! that it was a misdemeanor to fail to relinquish a party line in an emergency. They flipped the book at page 694: where the J section turned into the K section. Carole wanted a name that sounded like Klein: K, one syllable. "We were very systematic," Camille recalls. Line by line, column by column, they looked and considered and eliminated.

Kahn...Kalb...Kamp...: Somewhere between Kearns Funeral Home and Krasilovsky Trucking, there had to be the perfect name (or, failing that, an okay one that didn't sound ethnic) to transport the young tunesmith to her longed-for destiny.

Best friends for two years now, Carole and Camille had walked the four blocks to Shellbank Junior High every day. Now they made the longer trek to James Madison High School, where the sons and daughters of lower-middle-class Jews (Italian families like Camille's were a distinct minority) roiled with creative energy. So did the kids from Madison's rival, Lincoln High, and those from another nearby high school, Erasmus Hall. The cramped houses from which these students tumbled each morning were the fifty-years-later counterparts of the tenements of the Lower East Side, where hardworking parents had sacrificed to give their offspring the tools to make culture -- musical culture, especially. In fact, so alike were the two generations that, today, Camille Cacciatore Savitz's most lasting impression of the interiors of those small houses -- "Every house had a piano! To not have a piano...it was like not having a bed in those houses!" she marvels -- uncannily echoing what a Lower East Side settlement-house worker wrote in a 1906 report: "There is not a house, no matter how

poor it be, where there is not...a piano or a violin, and where the hope of the whole family is not pinned on one of the younger set as a future genius."

But there was a difference: those young Lower East Side pianist-songwriters had romanticized high-society top-hatters and New England white Christmases. Their World War II-born Brooklyn counterparts, Carole and her peers -- with their opposite sense of romance -- would soon be extolling the humanity found within the very kinds of tenements those earlier songwriters had struggled to escape.

The piano in the small Klein living room was always in use, by Carole. The commercial tunes that sprang from her fingers combined the rigor of the classical music she'd studied with the wondrous Negro sounds she was absorbing at the Freed shows and on the radio. Carole's father helped her record them onto "demos," but aiding his daughter's career dream didn't make him any less proprietary toward her. Carole was expected to steer a clear path from high school to college, where she would stay four years, obtain her teaching credential, and get married -- no crazy surprises. In civil-service Jewish families, people were *menschen*: substantial, sensible.

This was 1956. Mr. and Mrs. Ricky Ricardo had separate beds on *I Love Lucy*. Dissemination of information about birth control to married women was a crime in some states. Every word of *Seventeen* magazine was vetted by a pastor. In garment factories, union inspectors checked skirt lengths before job lots were shipped to department stores. Elvis may have been singing, Jack Kerouac writing, and James Dean's movies still being shown even after his fatal car accident, but there were few female analogues. Doris Day pluckily kept wolves at bay; the Chordettes crooned like estrogened Perry Comos. The 1920s had their flappers; the 1930s, their fox-stole-draped society aviatrixes, cheerfully trundling off to Reno for divorces; the 1940s had Rosie the Riveter. But the deep middle of the 1950s had both the most constricted images of women and (until just recently) the worst popular music of all the previous four decades: a double punch that could be considered a privation -- or a springboard.

In 1956 girls weren't agents of their sexuality, much less gamblers with it. No girl would have dared sing about how she'd weighed the physical and emotional (not the moral) drawbacks of sex -- getting pregnant, feeling used -- against the greater pull of the act's transcendent pleasure, or how she'd wondered, in the midst of sex, if the boy would drop her afterward. You couldn't get such a song on the radio, even if one existed. In a few years, however, Carole would write that song, based on events in her own life, and the resulting record would be the casual opening salvo of a revolution.

Karl...Kass...Katz...: Carole and Camille were getting hungry. That meant a trip to Camille's house on Twenty-sixth Street. Genie Klein didn't cook much; sometimes she just laid out a jar of borscht and an entrée of "dairy" (cottage cheese, sour cream, cucumbers, scallions) with rye bread and shav, a bitter drink that made Camille almost puke when she tasted it. Mary Cacciatore, on the other hand, cooked like Mario Lanza sang: passionately. Carole would raid the Cacciatore's icebox for peppers and onions or spaghetti and meatballs.

One bond between Camille and Carole was their self-perceived beauty deficiency. Although she had fetchingly upturned eyes, Carole's narrow face was unremarkable; she rued her too-curly hair, and, as Camille says, "she really didn't like her nose." Carole may have suspected that the boys at Madison did not regard her as a beauty. "She was a plain-looking girl with messy hair and ordinary clothes," says then Madison High upper classman Al Kasha, who also became a songwriter. "But at the piano, in the music room, playing Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky, she was a different person -- she came alive." She had an internal compass, and she hung her self-esteem squarely on her talent.

Though this would be hard to imagine in 1956, when standards of feminine beauty were at their most unforgiving, in fifteen years Carole would represent an inclusive new model of female sensuality: the young "natural" woman, the "earth mother." The album that would afford her this status would, five years after its release, stand as the biggest-selling album in the history of the record industry; would settle out as one of the biggest-selling albums of the 1970s; and then and for years after, would remain the biggest-selling album written and recorded by a woman. It would singularly define its several-years-slice of the young American experience.

Carole's album's historic success would raise the stock of other singer-songwriters (a concept she would help establish) who were women, and it would constitute a Cinderella story with a moral: a behind-the-scenes songwriter and simple borough girl becomes a pop star without changing herself in the slightest. She would have come a long way from those grim negotiations with her teenage mirror. Yet her success was so enormous and early that every subsequent effort would be measured negatively against it. The unpretty girl who'd earned her fortune through hard work and talent would, ironically, find her fate mimicking that of the too-pretty girl who'd dined out a bit too long on early-peaking beauty.

Kaye...Kean...Kehl...: Maybe this weekend the girls would catch a flick at the Sheephead Bay theater: Carole with Joel Zwick, Camille wi...

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