

Producing Radio Documentaries and Podcasts: Nostalgia Script

(Opens with theme song from popular 90s cartoon show “Doug,” crossfading out)

I’m Keri Ann Flacomio, and I’m Elyse Toribio, WRPR News.

For students in college, it’s all about facing responsibilities and making plans for the future. So when an old cartoon comes on TV late at night, or when a pop song from years past plays on the radio, we jump at the chance to go back and remember the way our lives used to be ... at least for a little while.

To quote an article in Entertainment Weekly, “Mention an old Nickelodeon show, and soon enough, nostalgia [will] begin flowing like green slime.” In early March, rumors started spreading on the Internet about old Nickelodeon shows returning to the network. Facebook quickly went abuzz with postings by twenty-somethings who were excited by the possibility of their favorite childhood shows making a comeback.

(“Rocko’s Modern Life,” theme song fades in and out)

So, just what is it about looking back on the things that defined our younger years that’s so appealing to Generation Y?

I sat down with Steve Payson, a Ramapo alumnus, as he watched reruns of “Hey Arnold” and reflected on the reason why he thinks college students enjoy popular culture from their youth so much.

Tape: Toribio (0:25-0:32)

Runs: 7 secs

Outcue: “they listen to”

“Why do you think people, especially college students from our generation, like to be so nostalgic in terms of what they watch and what music they listen to?”

Tape: Payson (0:33-0:35 ... 0:40-0:51)

Runs: 13 secs

Outcue: “until we fell asleep”

“It’s good to go back to that ‘cause...nowadays we’re, you know, we’re in school, we’re working, we’ve got a lot on our plates. Back then it was went to class for a couple of hours, went home and watched, you know, “Rugrats” or “Doug” until we fell asleep.”

Tape: Toribio (0:04-0:07)

Runs: 3 secs

Outcue: “in the day”

“What sorts of DVDs do you own, or paraphernalia from back in the day?”

Tape: Payson (0:08-0:24 ... 1:25-1:37)

Runs: 16 secs

Outcue: "thing, I suppose"

"Aw jeez, on DVD I have "Dexter's Lab," I have "Doug," I have "Johnny Bravo," "Ren & Stimpy," "The Adventures of Pete & Pete," I got a whole bunch of things. It's, it's good to just sit down and watch and remember what it was like from back then ... 'cause, you know, nowadays you don't see "Rugrats" or "Rocko's Modern Life" on television anymore, so it's good to, when we do get a chance to see them it's kind of like, hey, you know, 'you don't know what you got 'til it's gone' kind of thing, I suppose."

The Student Activities Office at Ramapo seems to share that same mentality. Danielle Mascio, one of the staff's program coordinators, helped design a weekend-long event revolving around the movies, shows, music and food from a past that we can all relate to.

Tape: Mascio (3:43-3:46 ... 3:55-4:11)

Runs: 19 secs

Outcue: "be a kid"

"I wouldn't run an event that I, myself, wouldn't want to go to ... you know, I wasn't even working half of these events and I went to them anyway, just because, you know, I love going back, I love watching the "Rocko's Modern Life," the "Rugrats" episodes, eating the Fruit Roll-Ups and, kind of remembering what it was like to be able to sit on the couch and be a kid."

Other organizations on campus, such as fraternities and sororities, have caught on to the popularity of engaging college students by allowing them to revisit their childhoods, and have used this to their advantage in planning charity events. Keri had the chance to talk with a sorority sister about an event that was held early in the spring semester. Keri?

Tape: Flacomio (0:01-0:20)

Runs: 19 secs

Outcue: "with the audience"

I'm here outside Friends Hall. Right now it's calm and quiet, but last month it was packed with members of Greek life and other students who attended Theta Phi Alpha's "Say What Karaoke" fundraiser night. The theme of the event was 90s music, something that Mandy Saffer, a member of the sorority who's here with me today, thought would be popular with the audience.

(Natural sound from the karaoke event fades in and continues throughout the interview)

Tape: Saffer (0:43-0:52)

Runs: 9 secs

Outcue: "and care about"

“We just thought that it was something that everyone would, would know, and everyone had, you know, if we did something like 70s music not everyone would know it, but 90s is something that we all know and care about.”

If Theta Phi Alpha thought this theme would be a hit, the sorority sisters were right. Over 250 people attended the event — helping to raise more than \$1,500 for charity — and by the end of the night, the house was packed, leaving only standing room for those who showed up after the performances had begun.

Tape: Saffer (1:37-1:54)

Runs: 17 secs

Outcue: “and our youth” (*laughs*)

“It was such a positive reaction from the audience. Everybody was up in their seats and dancing and, you know, swaying back and forth and singing along, and it just, it brought back memories and automatically everyone remembered the words to the songs and it just made everyone smile, kind of bringing back the memories and, like, reliving our childhood and our youth (*laughs*).”

Tape: Flacomio (3:04-3:10)

Runs: 6 secs

Outcue: “a common identity”

“So do you think this sense of nostalgia kind of brings people that might be very different, together with a common identity?”

Tape: Saffer (3:10-3:29)

Runs: 19 secs

Outcue: “I loved it”

“Oh, totally, because, I mean, college, majority of the people haven’t known each other since we were younger and, you know, the songs bring back different memories for everyone, but if everyone’s reliving a memory and, you know, you’re all together, you just kind of feed off everyone else’s energy and just, everyone was in a really great mood, everyone had a really great time, it was great. I loved it.”

Tape: Flacomio (0:52-0:55)

Runs: 3 secs

Outcue: “of the night”

“What were some of the most popular songs and performances of the night?”

Tape: Saffer (0:56-1:23)

Runs: 27 secs

Outcue: “in the performances”

“Of course a lot of *NSYNC and Backstreet Boys, some Britney Spears. One of my favorites was someone did Smash Mouth’s “All Star,” and that was great, and just, you know, songs that you kind of forget about and others that just never go away so it was, there was a lot of contestants so we had a like a wide range of different ones going on. And also, you know, some of, like, the old school, like, hip hop and R&B songs they did too, so it was really good to hear, like, a whole different list of genres in the performances.”

(Natural sound of “All Star” from the karaoke event fades in and out)

This idea of combining different types of music from various eras has inspired mash-up culture: a new genre of music that has become popular with the wistful 18-24 set, taking over the airwaves and the Internet, and making once-underground DJs like Girl Talk into superstars.

Sejour Stephens, a junior at The College of New Jersey, and an avid fan of this new style of music, explains what makes the genre so appealing to people her age.

Tape: Stephens (0:34-1:02)

Runs: 28 secs

Outcue: “once in awhile”

“It combines, you know, that feeling of hearing something that’s a little bit newer to you, that you already enjoy, and making it all the more fun to listen to. It’s always good to reconnect with songs and even TV shows and stuff like that that you thought you forgot about from your childhood or, you know, hearing a song for the first time again in six years and remembering all the lyrics that you knew when you were in sixth grade and being a senior in high school gives you, you know, kind of that feeling of, you know, nostalgia that I feel like is important to get back every once in awhile.”

Tape: Toribio (1:05-1:11)

Runs: 6 secs

Outcue: “that you do”

“Do you find comfort in the fact that you can kind of connect with other people that remember the same things that you do?”

Tape: Stephens (1:13-1:33)

Runs: 20 secs

Outcue: “to connect through”

“Yeah, I mean I think that, you know, people are always talking about how music, you know, brings everyone together and I think that’s the perfect example of that where, you know, my friends and I might not necessarily like the same *type* of music, but what we were saying with mash-ups, it’s like, you know, like, the newer *type* of music along with something old that gives us something to connect through.”

Tape: “Mad Men” (0:00-0:40)

Runs: 40 secs

Outcue: “to go again (*slide projector*)”

“Nostalgia, it’s delicate, but potent (*slide projector*). Teddy told me that, in Greek, nostalgia literally means ‘the pain from an old wound’ (*slide projector*). It’s a twinge, in your heart, far more powerful than memory alone (*slide projector*). It takes us to a place, where we ache to go again (*slide projector*).”

Michael Scherb, adjunct professor of Creative Advertising and Public Relations, expands on how the advertising world, exemplified in the hit show *Mad Men*, targets and appeals to the consumer’s connection to nostalgia.

Tape: Scherb (0:10-0:56)

Runs: 46 sec

Outcue: “in some way”

“Nostalgia is really memories, and memories are part of what we are and who we are, and they’re really remembrances of important parts of our life, okay, so advertisers need to know their consumers, and if they can tap into those memories, it’ll work better for them. As we know, there are two ways you can do a sale in advertising — there’s the heart sale and the head sale. The head sale is based on reasoning and logical things, but the heart sale is based on emotions, and memories are emotions. So very often in advertising, you use the tapping of some emotion to help send a point home, change somebody’s behavior in some way.”

Tape: Flacomio (2:11-2:17)

Runs: 6 secs

Outcue: “their past years)

“Why do you think college students, especially, enjoy going back and reliving their past years?”

Tape: Scherb (2:20-2:31)

Runs: 11 secs

Outcue: “perhaps that’s why”

“You know, if you think about it, we all often, I think, go back to our memories when we’re stressed and I think college students are stressed very often, so perhaps that’s why.”

It’s not just advertising that targets the human tendency to be nostalgic. Professor Christina Smith, who teaches Persuasion Theory and Practice as well as Topics in Media and Popular Culture at Ramapo College, talked with us about how the media influence the memories of the American public.

Tape: Smith (1:02-1:54)

Runs: 52 secs

Outcue: “why it’s successful”

“We all have at least one happy memory from childhood, and it usually is connected in some way to some consumer product, whether it’s television or Frosted Flakes cereal. And so if you can remember the slogan of Tony the Tiger, 20 years later, which I guarantee you can... — what is it? (*Elyse and Keri: “It’s GRRREAT!”*) — Yes! They’re GRRREAT! Right! It shows that you were that you were happily, you know, you were successfully indoctrinated into uh, into that consumer culture. And that’s nostalgia as well, you can remember when you watched Saturday morning cartoons, eating your Frosted Flakes, being advertised to go buy *more* Frosted Flakes, and you have that happy feeling of watching cartoons on Saturday morning for Frosted Flakes and so, um, you know, fast forward 10, 20, 30 years and it’s still connecting those same things, so I think that’s why it’s successful.”

Tape: Flacomio (5:12-5:18)
Runs: 6 secs
Outcue: “sense of nostalgia”

“In your opinion, why do college students, especially, respond so strongly to a sense of nostalgia?”

Tape: Smith (5:18-5:51)
Runs: 33 secs
Outcue: “a young adult”

“Well, because I think they’re forming their own unique identity. You know they, they’re just getting out into the world, and so you have to have some sort of foundation to come back to in order to make sense of those current experiences. And so, I think we always want to go back to when we were growing up, when we were younger, and bring in those things to, to make sense of all this craziness that we’re encountering as a young adult.”

Tape: Toribio (6:01-6:07)
Runs: 6 secs
Outcue: “they do that”

“Do you think the media exploits or manipulates this vulnerability in college students and how do they do that?”

Tape: Smith (6:07-6:24)
Runs: 17 secs
Outcue: “ultimately a consumer”

“Well, yes I do think they exploit that vulnerable influence in, in college students in order to sell them stuff that they probably don’t need. Remember, all college students, just like every other member of the public, are ultimately a consumer.”

Tape: Toribio (7:26-7:31)
Runs: 5 secs
Outcue: “a good thing”

“Even the media, I mean, might do this to make money. Do you think that’s ultimately a good thing?”

Tape: Smith (7:46-8:01)

Runs: 15 secs

Outcue: “can be good”

“Oh, I think it, it can *potentially* be if it ultimately produces good results to get you to think about those happy things that occurred when you were a kid and the outcome is positive in the contemporary sense, then yeah, it can be good.”

Smith also described that what is most impactful to consumers is not the product itself, but the moment that they experienced *with* the product. For many looking back on fond memories, traditions and rituals are everything.

Tape: Smith (6:58-7:24)

Runs: 26 secs

Outcue: “nostalgia as well”

“What do you do with you’re family when you’re little? You sit around the TV and you watch shows together. Our Friday night ritual was watching “The Golden Girls,” so when a “Golden Girls” marathon comes on Tuesday night, where do you think I am? I’m watching those shows, ‘cause that’s what we used to do when I was a kid, you know, that was our ritual. And so it’s also the act of watching television together, not necessarily a particular show, but that invokes nostalgia as well.”

Though it may bring back fond memories, falling into a state of nostalgia may not always be a choice. Cory Rosenkranz, a psychological counselor in Ramapo’s Center for Health and Counseling, said that nostalgia has a lot to do with the needs of the mind and body.

Tape: Flacomio (0:01-0:08)

Runs: 7 secs

Outcue: “a person’s mind”

“So what does the childhood sense of nostalgia, or the tendency to look back on childhood memories, do for a person’s mind?”

Tape: Rosenkranz (0:08-0:20 ... 0:36-0:48)

Runs: 24 secs

Outcue: “times, fun times”

“I think, for the entire person, when they’ve got fond memories from the past, it puts them in a very warm, comfortable, safe spot ... so, for many people, it’s just this retreat. They don’t have to go up north to Vermont. They can just go into their mind, and think back to quiet times, fun times.”

Tape: Flaccomio (1:20-1:26)
Runs: 6 secs
Outcue: "through this process"

"Psychologically, is there any sort of positive release a person experiences when they're going through this process?"

Tape: Rosenkranz (1:27-1:58)
Runs: 31 secs
Outcue: "to your toes"

"Sometimes it's a stress release. If they're feeling tense and they think about the past, they can actually relax their body. Sometimes reflexologists, hypnotists will have you think back to pleasant times, and then just by increments relax the tension in all of your body from your head to your toes."

Genuine or embellished, cheesy or not, the moments that define our childhood and the ways we look back on them are things that we can all identify with. And building such a collective identity can lead to pleasant surprises.

(Theme songs from popular 90s cartoon shows "Hey Arnold," "Rugrats" fade in and out)

Nickelodeon recently responded to the overwhelming demand for its old programming with an announcement that the network will soon re-air popular shows from the 90s on a late-night schedule, no doubt targeting its faithful, now-college-age viewers. The block, which will be called "The 90s are All That," will feature Nickelodeon favorites such as "Rugrats," "Kenan & Kel," "The Adventures of Pete & Pete," "The Amanda Show," "All That" and "Clarissa Explains it All," which just goes to show the great lengths we'll go to to keep being big kids at heart."

I'm Keri Ann Flaccomio, and I'm Elyse Toribio, WRPR News.

(Closes with Nickelodeon music fading in and out)