The rhythm of many of Social Distortion’s songs is, compared to punk Pioneers like the Ramones and the Sex Pistols, positively glacial. Even compared to seminal California punk bands like the Dead Kennedys and X, their songs seem to move, both lyrically and musically, at a much slower pace. While other punk bands explode, Social Distortion seethes lyrically and musically, and nowhere is this clearer than in one of their early songs, “Story of my Life” off their self-titled 1990 album *Social Distortion*. This song has three chords (C, F, and G if you want to know), and a typical chorus/verse structure. However, the song almost feels vaguely like a slower folk tune rather than a punk song. It is the sort of song that you could, if you were so inclined, play around a burning bonfire with your friends, with no one feeling rushed to make it through the song. A good part of this is due to the rhythm and tempo; however, a lot of it is also due to the slow, retrospective movement of the lyrics. The song starts with the verse:

High school seemed like such a blur,
I didn’t have much interest in sports or school elections.
And in class I dreamed all day,
Of a rock ‘n roll weekend. (*Social Distortion*)

The song moves, if you scan the meter, iambically—with lengthy breaks thrown in between what is roughly, very roughly, an iambic meter. In fact the lines “And in class I dreamed all day/Of a rock ‘n roll weekend” comes off, as sung by Ness, as “And in class . . . I dreamed . . . all day/ Of a rock’nroll weekend (*Social Distortion.*)” This sort of leisurely variance in rhythm creates a sort of retrospective quality to Ness’ musings about the subject of “Story of my Life”: Ness’ exploration of his teen years and early twenties. He can casually, and forlornly, talk about his “silly schoolboy crush” and the fact that
“the pool hall I loved as a kid/Is now a Seven Eleven” (Social Distortion). This slow, if powerful, semi-iambic rhythm allows for a sadder, darker tone to come through in the lyrics and music to “Story of my Life.” If this song were played at 180 beats per minute, rather than its slower pace, the lyrics (which are central to the feel and emotional heft of the song) would be lost.