



THE MAGICAL MIX OF *Then & Now*

WORDS BY JENNIFER TRITLE

Not all of us have pleasant childhood memories from which to draw, but we all have moments of grace in our lives from someone, somewhere, at some time. If we are mindful of these moments — if we search for them in our daily lives — we can embrace the best of our pasts, presents, and futures all at once in but a short second or two, adding extra layers of authenticity, meaning, and presence to our existence.

1. MY SIMPLE LACE BEDROOM CURTAINS BLOWING IN THE SPRING OR AUTUMN BREEZES.

I remember my mom's crisp white linen curtains (Ohio, c. 1968) on all the windows of our apartment blowing in the May breezes after her April spring-cleaning or in the autumn breezes after her September fall-cleaning. She put us down for naps at noontime. The floaty curtains lulled me to sleep on my clean, crisp, cool cotton sheets. I just hated napping, but I loved feeling so safe as I drifted off to the flapping of her curtain panels.

2. THE ICE CREAM TRUCK APPROACHING

I ignore the irritating music blaring from the modern-day rickety truck that cranks through our neighborhood and choose instead to remember the snowy-white truck of my childhood in a city now far away from where I live. I could hear its pleasant, chime-like, calliope tune as it approached our apartment complex from miles away. Excited neighborhood children and I balanced ourselves, barefooted, on sparkly clean, white cement curbs ("Don't go into the street!"), anticipating special treats not sold elsewhere. Summer splendor at its best.

A LOVELY WAFT FROM MY GARDEN OF MY DEEP PURPLE WAVE PETUNIAS.

I remember that same spicy fragrance in my great-grandma Fazioli's cement-block-bordered yard in West Virginia in the 1970s. She planted the seeds that she'd saved herself from her prior year's petunias. Heat and humidity only further pressed out that fragrance as summer wore on, filling my nose as I ran atop those cement blocks. I remember thinking that her petunias looked like delicate crepe-paper horns. Petunias cascaded from all the flower window boxes of Italy when I visited there a few summers ago. No wonder Great-Grandma loved hers so. They were what she knew from the Old Country. I plant them now beside my front-entry sidewalk specifically so I can remember those images as I approach my front door on a hot summer day and so I remember that I am Italian and passionate and tied to my past. »

3. A HERSHEY BAR IN MY FREEZER BESIDE A HALF-GALLON OF NATURAL VANILLA ICE CREAM.

I remember this same great-grandmother who had these special treats waiting for my little brother and me when we visited her, because she so loved my father, her only grandson. Italian and petite but fiercely strong, she greeted my dad with her beautiful, one-toothed smile, a smile as lovely as her shimmery silver bunned hair. He would grab her hand firmly and kiss her on her cheek as if she were his lifeline (something I learned later in my adulthood was actually true). She'd then head over to her vintage Frigidaire and pull from the small freezer on top a rectangular foil package, carefully wrapped. In it was always a Hershey Bar in its wrapper (they seemed huge back then) layered with a five-dollar bill. Delighted with our thankfulness, she'd then quietly serve up the purest-tasting vanilla ice cream in her avocado-green Melmac Melamine vintage kitchenware bowls. Clinky plastic perfection of a time past. I store vanilla ice cream and a Hershey Bar or two together in my freezer to this very day.

4. A QUICK CAR RIDE AT AROUND 8 P.M. TO DO A FORGOTTEN ERRAND.

The evening breeze that blows into my open car windows with its slight bite of chill suddenly transports me to rides in a tan two-door 1967 Pontiac Bonneville on June nights so many years ago (I was about 6). My dad would appear from seemingly nowhere when I was playing outside (usually jacks), swoop me up, and proclaim, "Jenno, let's go for a ride." Windows were wide open (no a/c in that old, nine-mile-per-gallon vehicle), and I relished the chill of the blowing night air on my arms and face, especially in late summer. He quietly talked to me about life and family, and the event invariably ended up with a 10-cent soft-serve chocolate cone in my little hands, often draped in chocolate dip. I'm not sure, but now, as an adult, I think that this was something he sometimes did while my mother bathed my little brother after his boyhood play day. They were actually working together at parenting their children. A pleasant thought now.





5. A SCREEN DOOR SLAMS.

This is my all-time favorite sound of summer. Wooden screen doors slam with a bit of a crack, and I love it. It is the sound of some fun event about to happen. In my childhood, it meant I was running outside after a fast water break to rejoin an urgent game of hide-and-seek with neighborhood kids. Slam! At a grandparent's house, that sound meant opportunity to sit out on a porch glider or hanging porch swing (items I did not have at my own childhood home). Slam! Now, it can mean that I have just stepped out onto my deck to read or enjoy a drink, or that I just poured a stockpot full of water on my parched hydrangea and am returning to my sink with a sense of accomplishment. My modern screen door's technology prevents it from actually slamming. But sometimes it does not shut entirely on its own. When that happens, and the door is still open an inch or so, I do a tiny slam of it myself. In the sound and feel of that moment, I am 10 years old again and about to enjoy some youthful treat. Somehow, now in my own porch swing, that "crack" makes my diet soda taste a bit better or my magazine seem a little more interesting or the dusk sounds echo slightly louder. Somehow it makes me feel like I am the country farm girl I always dreamed of being.

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