

JUST A MEMORY AWAY

When good news is “out to lunch” or you’re under stress, you should take a mini “mind” vacation. For me, my childhood memories serve as those short trips and they are also the most comforting, wholesome memories of all.



the last day of grammar school in June ...

began summer break and an eternity of fun, friends and backyard swimming pools and sprinklers. September and the 1st day of school was a distant future horror that never crept into my mind until that last hot week of August when my Mom started washing and ironing my white cotton blouses for St. Anthony’s grammar school. How sweet those days were when the only fear I had was getting a bad sunburn or a bee sting!

the most delicious strawberry ice cream ...

chock full of strawberries, on a sugar cone ... “Bridget, do you want one scoop or two?” my Mom would ask. “Can I have three?” OK and she would pile it on and I would sit on the front porch with my friends and their cones and enjoy every cool bite. What bliss!

the neighborhood dogs ...

for some reason I remember them. They were never vicious or threatening and we knew them all. Duchess, Rocky, and Duke. They would bark in the houses and backyards, letting themselves be heard. They became a part of the audio landscape along with the other comforting summer sounds.

our dogs ...

during my childhood and teenage years, we first had Princess, a black and white cocker spaniel mix. Then came the “Rexes.”

the first Rex ... My brother Joey was an altar boy at our family parish. My mom, Virginia would walk him to church, stay for Mass and then they would walk back home together. One summer day, a beautiful German Shepherd mixed breed dog was sitting on the sidewalk across from the church, just waiting for something to break. After Mass, my mom inquired about the dog but he was alone. She found a thin rope, gently tied it around his neck and walked him to his new home. This was our first Rex. I remember the vision of my Mom, my brother, and Rex walking towards the house. I was so excited. After drinking and eating enormous amounts of water and food, Rex was home and we all fell in love with him. Rex was with us for about 15 years. What a run!

the second Rex ... Within one month of Rex’s passing, another German Shepherd mixed breed dog was hanging around our neighborhood. He was a clone of our first Rex and we knew we had to have him. So, my Dad, Joe, would place water and biscuits on the porch every day. The dog would drink, grab a biscuits and run down the street to a safe place and eat. This lasted for about



one week. But then we had him eating from our hands. We brought him in house in November. My brother was getting married that year. Me, Mom and Dad named him Rex and kept him. We had him for about 15 years as well.

Another great run!

playing outside from morning until dinner ...

hopscotch or jump rope or going to swimming pools and sprinklers on the lawn. My favorite was the sprinkler on the lawn; the rare combination of running, sliding, laughing and getting wonderfully soaked.

my friend Rosemary ...

we were the same age and went through grammar school together from kindergarten through 8th grade. The summers were especially interesting with Rosemary. She was a very talented piano player. In fact, she was a child prodigy. Each morning, she played classical music like Mozart, Beethoven and so many others for at least 3–4 hours. The neighborhood kids would wait for her to come out and play. However, in the mornings we were treated to mini classical concerts. I didn't realize how special that was, little concerts every day of the summer!

summer family picnics ...

at least once each summer, we would have a picnic with my mother's side of the family. All my cousins from New Jersey and Long Island would come together and we were about 60 strong. There were so many cousins that it was hard to keep track. But it was fun and comforting.

my Mom would make luscious food ...

fried chicken, sausage and peppers, barbecue spareribs and steaks, salads galore, and corn ... watermelon, brownies, lemonade and iced tea ... one dessert that stands out in my memory was baked by my mother's sister — Aunt Maya's — walnut glazed cake ... there was nothing better to end the best family gatherings!

my grandmother Nonnie ...

my grandmother's name was Nettie but we called her Nonnie. We lived in a two-family house with her and my Uncle Nino. She was a really beautiful woman. She came to this country from Sicily with her parents when she was three years old. She raised nine children on her own and cooked, cleaned and sewed clothing to make ends meet. Such love and dedication. I love her and miss her.



I also remember my Nonnie's sisters, my great Aunts Jeannie, Minnie and Lena. To entertain them when they came from Brooklyn to New Jersey to visit, I would imitate Judy Garland singing in the Wizard of Oz. My Aunt Jeannie would pinch me on the cheeks and laugh and laugh at me. I can still hear her laughing and clapping when I would sing "Somewhere Over the Rainbow."

and the dinner call from my Mom ...

sometimes meatloaf, sometimes spaghetti and meatballs, sometimes chicken cutlets ... it didn't matter...it was homemade, delicious and a call for the family to be together.

It is a cliché to "long for the past," but I'm sure I'm not the only one. My memories allow me to reflect on real moments of happiness and take a short respite from 2006. Memories of my college days, or Caribbean or European vacations, don't even come close.

I believe I was luckiest kid in the world. Everything was simple and sweet! I am fortunate to have such wonderful childhood memories. They were precious gifts that I didn't even realize that I was given. These memories and so many others are the foundations of my life. They are also a testament to my Mom and Dad, whom I love so much and miss every day since their passing. I had a rich childhood filled with love. I guess it was all about love, and loving memories of course, are the most important of all.

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