

On Nostalgia

Bella Schilling

I seldom remember moments from my childhood, or even moments from a few years ago, and truly miss the feeling that those moments gifted me. Whether it was the feeling of pride at age 5 after showing my dad how long I could hold my breath underneath the shallow salts of the Puget Sound, or the feeling of strength after picking up my diploma from the high school I once thought would never end, I had never found the benefit in blissfully dwelling over a moment that might not ever be present again.

When I think of the crucial memories of my past, they're usually the ones that have shaped me into the person I am today with the most impact. The tragedy of your childhood pet dying while you're away for college, the bliss of driving alone for the first time after getting your license, the love of a friend whispering "text me when you get home safely" as you leave a party; each memory is slowly building us into who we are now and who we are meant to become. But what memories am I choosing to feel nostalgic over and which am I ignoring completely? Are the memories I associate with nostalgia the ones that didn't impact my present self but wish they had?

I can only compare this feeling to terrible group projects in high school. You have certain group members who are seriously lacking their end of the stick, but you're faced with a moral dilemma. You end up doing the entire project by yourself, without telling the teacher that your classmates did nothing to contribute, yet your classmates still gladly accept the credit. Deep down, you and your classmates know that you're the one who did everything but it's easier for everyone if you just keep the fact unknown. The same goes for memories, anyone outside of our consciousness (mostly our therapists and our parents) can easily tell us what experiences they think have shaped us and say it as if it's fact. My mother told me that growing up with three older brothers is the reason why I have thick skin, but only I can decide if that's true or not. We get to decide who we are and what brought us here. Say it with me: *We get to decide who we are and what brought us here.*

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I met a man on a train last summer while travelling back home from visiting family in Oregon. For his sake, I'll refer to him as "K". The image of his scuffed brown cowboy boots and navy blue Dickie's hat sitting next to me is still imprinted in my brain like an open wound that will never completely close. He offered me his spare Jack Daniel's shooter and showed me the 35mm photographs he had taken of his grandfather's dog "Whiskey" the weekend prior in Medford. I could have sworn K stole every phrase he said to me straight from a Nicholas Sparks novel that I had never heard of.

You look beautiful in the sunset's light...

Let's listen to our wedding songs together...

You're an enigma to me...

Where have you been all my life?

After he got off the train, he stood outside the window we were once staring together out of and yelled "maybe I'll see you again" to which I rebutted: "maybe you won't." The four hours I spent with K were diaphanous, we both knew that we would never see each other again and didn't bother to dwell on it during the time we had together. That was the first time in my life that I had been face to face with my own fantasy, one that I had dreamt about as a girl, and felt so disconnected from the promise that I once thought it held. We both would take the feeling we had given each other and never let it go, we'd let it live in our subconscious forever and remember the infrequent, random romances of life.

There are other moments that my current self is constantly experiencing, that I already *feel* will have an impact on the development of my being later on. These moments are hard to swallow, like when you're a child and you know the bigger pill will take away your headache faster but being faced with the pill itself is terrifyingly new and therefore not ideal. Your mother will reassure you that you won't choke on the pill, but you know that by swallowing this pill you'll have opened a door for many more pills to come. You won't be able to say "I don't want to take this pill, I've never taken a pill before and I'm scared" anymore. You'll still be scared, but for what reason? This

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feeling is the type of growth where you are face to face with its impact while it's still unfolding, a conscious awareness that you can't find anywhere else.

In moments of nostalgia, we're all just breathing remembered air. We're inhaling the feeling we gained from the moment, or the person, and exhaling the expectation of it ever happening again. Nostalgia is a difficult feeling to hold on to, it reminds us that no feeling or memory is promised forever, if at all, and that the subtle tastes we get are worth the loss it comes with.