

Baby Boomers Discover the Cost of Nostalgia

By Bruce A. Love

Baby boomers are beginning to discover that there is a price to be paid for living in the past. Collectors and retailers already know this. Nostalgia Sells!

The older I get, the more fondly I think about things I had in my youth, and the more compelled I am to revisit some childhood memories. Recently, my sister and I reminisced about some of the toys we had as kids in the 1960s. Evidently, Sis enjoyed my toys almost as much as I did. We lamented our decisions to give away many of the best toys when we had reached our teen years. Two weeks ago, motivated by our nostalgic talk, my sister decided it was time to reclaim our toys and share them with her own young children. It was time to visit eBay, where almost anything that ever existed is available (for a price) online!

My sister enlisted my help in this quest. We set our sites on the Topper Strange Change Machine from 1967. This was one of my favorite toys! It contained a "Time Machine" chamber into which kids would place plastic "time capsules." The chamber heated to finger-searing temperatures and creatures emerged from the cubes. After letting them cool and harden, kids would play with the creatures for a while. Then it was time to place them back into the chamber to heat to a rubbery state so that kids, in the roles of mad scientists, could yank them out of the chamber and crush them back into cubes using the attached vice-like device!

Our first attempt to get the toy on eBay failed as the bidding soared above what was our limit. After reassessing priorities, my sister increased her limit on another Strange Change toy on eBay. Ruthlessly, a bidder beat us in the final seconds of the auction. This taught us some strategy for the next time! I was on the road when the close of the next auction approached. Hundreds of miles from my computer and the high-speed connection we needed to implement our new strategy, I recruited my daughter's help at home. We set up our maximum bid ahead of time, but my daughter waited until the final seconds to confirm this amount.

This effectively eliminated any possibility for other bidders to reconsider their limits. It worked! Sis finally would get a retro toy her kids would love, and that would most likely cause minor burns in the process!

It isn't surprising that in today's litigious society, toys like the Strange Change Machine are no longer manufactured due to the concern of lawsuits over such "dangerous" products. Honestly, I do not know how I survived childhood! Caps had more gunpowder; many toys had small removable parts that could fit into my sister's mouth, and then there was Skittle-Bowl. Ok, THAT was one toy that truly did present grave risk to kids. The wooden ball hung from a chain on a stick had a tendency to be used as a mace by that annoying kid that every neighborhood seemed to have.

Nostalgic memories (and therefore business opportunities) go beyond toys and games. As we consider our youth, we remember fashions, services, and food items that no longer exist. We recall these with a longing to experience them once more, and to share these experiences with our children and grandchildren.

Many of us have sweet memories that we would like to revisit, but often are hard to find. If you had a sweet tooth for candy cigarettes, bubble gum cigars, Necco wafers, or Pop Rocks, you can still get them online at www.candyfavorites.com. Other favorites like Rootbeer Barrels, Pixy Sticks, and Jaw Breakers can be found at www.groovycandies.com. Do you remember a hard candy with a fizzy sour center called Zotz? Get these and other favorites at www.oldtimecandy.com. This store also sells French Chew Taffy, which duplicates one of my favorites, Bonomo Turkish Taffy (now extinct). Just put the taffy in the freezer overnight, and then slam it down on the counter and eat the pieces. If you have any loose fillings or crowns, you may want to avoid these!

Ok Sis, what's next? Suzy Homemaker? Johnny Astro? Golferino? How about trying to find some of those Nickel Nips?

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