

Good memories can last a lifetime

Every time I celebrate a birthday, like I did in the latter part of September, a state of melancholy comes over me when I think back to what life was like growing up and reaching this ripe old age.

Lo and behold, my cousin must have been reading my mind this year because she sent me an e-mail that listed a whole bunch of items that stirred so many memories that I thought I'd share them with you so you could reminisce too. Now some of you may not remember all of these items, but for all those readers who are close to or over 50, I hope they will bring a smile to your face.

Let's start with Bazooka bubble gum. Remember the comic that was wrapped around this hot pink slab of gum featuring Bazooka Joe? We'd stuff a few pieces in our mouth so our cheeks would look like a chipmunk and trade comics back and forth and of course the joke and "words of wisdom" were about as general as a fortune cookie.

And speaking of gum, do any of you ladies out there remember teaberry gum? This was not a boy's gum like Blackjack that left your tongue and the rim of your mouth black, but rather a young lady's gum because it was wrapped in a dainty package, smelled heavenly and left a sweet, hard to duplicate taste on your tongue.

Keeping on the candy aisle, remember when stationary stores sold BIG candy bars for a nickel such as Fifth Avenue, Payday, Mary Jane, Hollywood, Necco and Chunky. No...I take that back. Chunky was the "rich kid's" candy because it cost a whole quarter. I'm sure some of you recall candy cigarettes that hung out of the corner of your best buddy's mouth as he tried to imitate James Dean. How about those wax Coke-shaped bottles with colored sugar water inside? I guess wax never hurt anybody because we wound up swallowing a lot of it.

Jumping off the candy aisle, remember the local pizza parlor where you'd congregate after school and watch the cool guys and gals? Not too long though, because American Bandstand (in black and white of course and on a 13-inch Dumont television) was on at four o'clock and those poodle skirts and saddle shoes were the latest rage. If you were sick and stayed home from school, you might catch an episode of Mickey Mouse Club and spot a very young and beautiful Annette Funicello before she became a pioneer for multiple sclerosis.

Saturday mornings, you'd probably retrieve milk for your mother from your doorstep in glass bottles with cardboard stoppers. Saturday night at home with the family consisted of two popular shows, "Have Gun Will Travel" and "Gunsmoke" — maybe a little Lawrence Welk thrown in for good measure. If a good movie was playing at the local theater (that only showed one movie because of only one screen), you might head out for the night such as my girlfriends and I used to do. I remember watching "West Side Story" 12 times and crying every single time at the end.

As far as sports, nothing beat going to a stadium and watching a baseball game as we did in New York to watch Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris duel it out for home guns. We al-



*As I
see it*

Peg
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so collected baseball cards that came with the same pink gum as Bazooka, only skin-nier, and if you got Mickey's card in your package, you were on top of the world because you could trade him for a whole bunch of cards.

We didn't watch much television during the day because ... well, nothing was on, so we played a lot of softball in the street. I usually wound up the pitcher and everyone seemed to want my brother, George, on his or her team because he could easily swing the bat, connect with every good pitch, and hit the ball so far you couldn't see it drop way down the street in some undeveloped farmland.

One summer, my father supervised all the kids, even the smaller children that longed to be part of the gang, and we cleaned out a portion of the land and made a baseball diamond. It's gone now, replaced with a whole development of homes.

For my 16th birthday, my parents gifted me with a hi-fi — not a big one, but my very own record player that every teenager longed to have. Pretty soon, I had stacks of 33-1/3 and 45 records — collections of Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Beatle records that are probably worth their weight in gold today.

We didn't have cell phones in those days, but rather party lines. Our telephone numbers had a word prefix, such as Floral Park 5 — XXXX. There was no voice mail so if you missed your party ... well, you just had to call again.

Kids played for hours with Lincoln Logs, Tinkertoys, Erector sets, hula hoops, cork pop guns, Slinky, patsy and hide and seek.

Your first car was probably a clunker, like mine, that refused to go into any gear except reverse in the middle of a busy intersection. Gasoline was 35 cents a gallon and drive-ins were popular, especially when you were young and the intermission advertisement song signaled that it was time to move. You'd struggle to stay awake for that silly song and then trudge off in your pajamas to the snack bar to get a box of popcorn or a hot dog.

I suppose kids in my generation were hidden from the ills of the world, but in a way, I'm glad we were. To us, war was a card game, taking drugs meant chewing on an orange-flavored aspirin, and water balloons were the ultimate weapon, except maybe for a slingshot. School dress required a skirt below the knees (my French teacher took a ruler to our knees to make sure) and if makeup was spotted, you had to visit the bathroom and wash it off.

Lastly, decisions were made by going "eeny-meeny-miney-moe" and mistakes were corrected by simply exclaiming, "Do over." Perhaps that's where we failed with the next generation and the one after that — we did away with those two alternatives and started to take ourselves too seriously.

PEG DEMARCO is a local columnist for The News Herald.