

# Childhood Memories

I can remember the garden, the grass wrinkled and yellow from lack of water, even though the sprinklers came on every morning at 3am. In bare feet, it tickled my toes and sometimes, if I fell over, would leave me grazed, flecks of red seeping through torn skin. I remember the lizards, daily and without fail they would do their press-ups on the veranda, the hot concrete warming up their little green bodies. Sometimes, in summer, they would take refuge from the fiery heat of the sun, high in the sky, under the humming-bird bush. I never knew its real name, but the childish nickname seemed appropriate. Having grown up with humming-birds at the window when I woke, suckling at the sweet nectar of pale yellow flowers, I fully appreciate nature in its fullness. I recall spending sunny afternoons after school with my pre-school aged brother, chalking out the track for snail races! The white chalk would stick to the snails and as they moved, a line of viscous slime would trail after them, dotted here and there with the remains of the white powder. I've always liked small creatures, and so when had to do a project at school, I chose snails as my subject. Using a watch that I was given when I moved to America, I proceeded to time snails of different sizes as they climbed the wall separating our front garden from the road, how they stalled upon reaching the edge of a grey breeze-block, their four tentacles waving in the cool breeze, not sure whether to proceed or to retreat.

Sometimes I would go to my friend's house after school, the classic Californian bungalow standing proudly at the end of the street. Sometimes my brother and I would stay overnight and I marvelled at how they only used thin blankets, rather than the thick duvets I was used to. In the mornings we would wake early and watch programmes on the Nickelodeon channel and my brother would most seriously announce that we would all get square-eyes from watching more than an hour of TV, his chubby cheeks turning down as he made this important declaration. They also had a swimming pool, which was the main attraction. It wasn't very deep, but the reflections of the azure sky, made it gleam like the surface was wrinkled cloth encrusted with cerulean beads, sending patterns of light in all directions. We would change into swimming costumes and my friend would invite her neighbour, Chandler, to join us. The chlorine scent would stick to me all day, like dust to old books, but it was worth it. Their dog, Buster was half an Alsatian, with a russet coat and a bark that would send shivers down my spine, but eyes loyal and playful and I hated the way it was treated. With a shock collar round its neck, it would give a sharp bark, then a whine of pain, which insinuated a kick from any member of the family.

Of course, living by the sea meant visits to the beach at least once a week, and it was followed with long soaks in the bath, with me and my brother in the bath and sand everywhere. I was always sat on the plug end, a term which in my family between children was almost used as an expletive. The metal was an odd texture against the smooth white plastic of the bath and was nearly always several degrees colder than the rest of the bath. I always thought that it was a gateway to some other world where something beastly would send its tendrils through the holes in the drain and try to engulf me.

The bathroom holds memories of other horrors for me too. When I was on my journey through losing my old milk teeth, several of them refused to come out. Holding on to a thread of my gum, one particular tooth was determined to stay in my mouth, no matter what happened. My mother,

convinced that this tooth would claim my juvenile life by choking me in the night, sat me down on the toilet lid one day and proceeded to yank it out. Looking back, I don't know how she did it, I screamed so much! The piercing yells rang out and alerted my father whose eyebrows crinkled into a frown when he understood that it was only my mother pulling out a tooth.

The branches of our orange tree used to weave in through the bathroom window, as if trying to be part of our family. The oranges themselves were delicious, their flesh slightly translucent and each mouthful making you want to eat more and more. They grew plump, each day swelling more and more until fit to burst. Only then did we know they were ripe. Their waxy, tough skin made it difficult for birds to penetrate them, so we got a large batch each year.

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