

Aftertaste

Matthew Davis

Rum raisin ice cream turned out to be unexpectedly delicious, with its creamy custard, soft raisins, and warm whiskey-like aftertaste. It also reminded me that flavors can linger and wander beyond the tongue. Sometimes they unlock an entire network of memories.

Recently, I'd bought a pint of Häagen-Dazs rum raisin ice cream because it was on sale and because my husband had been saying we needed some new flavors in our rotation. We opened the pint one evening while watching *My Fair Lady*. My husband belongs to a monthly film club, and this was the month's selection. The movie didn't impress me nearly as much as the ice cream.

Before long, the ice cream had both of us talking about childhood.

My husband started talking about the time when he begged his mother to buy eggnog-flavored ice cream, only to discover he didn't like it. She made him eat it anyway. He said that incident was still better parenting than the time his father took everyone else out for ice cream after a flag football game and left my husband sitting alone in the car, watching everyone else eat ice cream because my husband hadn't managed to pull a single flag. Parenting in the 1960s could be cruel.

The whiskey notes carried me somewhere else entirely.

I was immediately transported back to my childhood. I was in my old kitchen, looking at the lower corner cabinet where my mother kept an open bottle of Seagram's 7. Every few months while I was growing up, I'd uncap that bottle, inhale, stick in my index finger, tip it just enough to wet my fingertip, then lick it clean.

Rum raisin ice cream tasted exactly like that.

That bottle of whiskey was left over from the only cocktail party I remember my parents ever hosting. Every now and then, my mother brought that bottle out for

medicinal purposes. Grandma Marie, my dad's mom, would tell my mother to mix the whiskey with Coke and honey to create a slurry to treat coughs and chest congestion. In our house, Vick's Vapor Rub and a whiskey-and-Coke concoction meant someone was taking care of you.

But that whiskey was used sparingly. By the time I left for college twenty years later, that bottle seemed like something of a family science experiment. How long could an open bottle of liquor last?

One spoonful of rum raisin ice cream somehow contained all of this—the forbidden taste of Seagram's 7 on my fingertip, Grandma Marie's whiskey remedy for coughs, a mother insisting a little boy finish an ice cream he hated, and a father leaving him alone in the car while everyone else went for ice cream.

Strange that an ice cream with the lingering taste of whiskey should remind us that childhood has an aftertaste, too.

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