

SMELLS AND MEMORIES



Look at the words from the article. Connect them to their definitions.

Be brimming with	the last in a series of unpleasant events that finally makes you feel that you cannot continue to accept a bad situation
To remind you of	having no home, or lost
stinky	to make someone remember someone that they know or something that happened in the past
to hum	to be very noticeable
the last/final straw	something that causes growth, activity, or reaction
(get/catch) a whiff of	smelling unpleasant (SYN: smelly)
(adj. - of an animal) stray	to cause something to start
To jolt back	to sing a tune by making a continuous sound with your lips closed
nostrils	to have a lot of a particular thing, quality, or emotion
to trigger	not done by choice; done unwillingly, or without the decision or intention of the person involved
stimuli (pl.)	a slight smell, carried on a current of air
olfactory	move suddenly
to stand out	to make an unpleasantly loud noise
to blare	having two opposing feelings at the same time, or being uncertain about how you feel
ambivalent	either of the two openings in the nose through which air moves when you breathe
involuntary	connected with the ability to smell

The article is taken from The NY Times – the task is done by Ekaterina Semina - Feanaara

5 paragraphs have been cut out of the article. Read the article and choose which letter (A-E) will best fit each gap (1-5). Click the paragraph and scroll up the page to put it into the chosen gap.

When I was 5, the night before we left Yugoslavia and a few years before that country embarked on the Balkan wars and eventually dissolved, my mother put me to bed. Before starting on the hour of lullabies I demanded, out of nowhere she said, “The smells of your childhood will always stay with you and will make you remember home.”

“But what if you were born in a garbage bin?” I said.

“Then the smell of garbage will always remind you of home,” she said, and her eyes filled with tears, making me (incorrectly) assume that she’d been born in a garbage bin herself and was getting emotional about it.

1)

To me, the Belgrade of my childhood smelled like the Marlboro cigarettes my mother smoked — even while I was in utero (it was the '80s) — and the perfume my aunt wore and chestnuts roasting in the winter, which sellers scooped into a paper cone and we ate on our way to my grandma’s place.

2)

It’s only now, as an adult living in New York, that I have my own Proustian moments. On a cold day smelling of snow, I sometimes get a whiff of urine in a doorway, and that olfactory cocktail reminds me of our building on the Boulevard of Revolution, with its green door, where my family lived when I was small. Men used to relieve themselves in the doorways there, just as they do here.

3)

All those memories from a stinky doorway.

For me, the Belgrade of today is not home. We left there a long time ago, and I rarely visit. When I do, I often get lost, and the slang of young people is unfamiliar. It is not the home I remember when my senses are triggered (like when I try the Israeli peanut snack Bamba, which is uncannily similar to the Yugo Smoki I grew up on). The more time I spend with my memories, the more I augment them, my fantasy Belgrade becoming more beautiful than it ever was.

The United States is a nation of immigrants (still), and New York City is brimming with them. People who have been parted from the smells and tastes of their homes, who I assume are, like me, jolted back when a long-forgotten piece of music blares from a passing car, or a childhood spice enters their nostrils on a windy street in Queens. Do their memories make them feel nostalgia, or love, or are they ambivalent, terrified, heartbroken?

4)

If we go back to Australia (I'm not sure what the final straw will be — health care, education, immigration policy, gun laws), my son will be left with memories waiting to be sparked like a match. And then, the sound of a siren might take him back to our East Village block, where I pushed him in a stroller, picking up dog poop and balancing a coffee that I spilled on myself, and then cursed over and over. Maybe the smell of a dog's breath will remind him of the couch he had to share with poodles while his parents shouted at the news, or the dog run with its squirrels and cobbles.

As stimuli fly at my baby — I watch him turn his head when he hears someone shouting, at the smell of laundry coming from a grating — I wonder what version of home he's creating for himself. Which memories will my son carry of the city where he lived when he was born? And will he be like me, and many others who have moved, carrying certain baggage wherever he goes?

5)

A

But I didn't think about those smells as being special, because I had never *not* smelled them. We hadn't yet moved to Australia, with its clean air, eucalyptus trees and suburban lawns, where the Southern Cross constellation hung above us, far from our family and the small gray sky of my hometown. I didn't know that I would miss the smells, or rather, that I wouldn't realize I missed the smells, and their associated memories, until I experienced them again.

B

My son was born in New York City a few months ago. Based on the sensations of our block, he may well feel at home smelling a garbage bin. He might also remember the smell of the cinema near our apartment: popcorn and synthetic butter. The sound of his mother humming a Yugo-rock tune. Will these sensations, of the only home he has known, ever stand out to him as something to be missed?

C

Behind the green door was an old foyer, and if you were walking down the stairs, you had to push a button each time you arrived on a new floor because the light was on a timer that went out. Out the back of that building I played with other kids. Stray kittens would appear near the caretaker's toolshed and we'd argue over them, tugging them out of one another's grasps, except when it was snowing and the kittens huddled under the shed and we'd make snowmen instead.

D

I remember my mother's comment about how the smells of my childhood would remind me of home, and home, I now know, is a place that exists not on a map but in my mind, ready to appear in its full, smelly glory at any moment.

E

Though I didn't think much of it at the time, my mother was right about the smells. It is well documented that our senses can cause an involuntary flooding of memory. Some call it the "Proust phenomenon," after the scene in "In Search of Lost Time" when a character's childhood comes back to him simply from tasting a madeleine biscuit soaked in tea.