

# Nostalgia is a *beautiful word*



If I close my eyes and listen to any good song by Simple Minds, Depeche Mode, or Talking Heads, immediately my mind time-travels to the 1980s, when I was a teenager. I experience a feeling of pleasure and also slight sadness thinking about that wonderful time in my life. If you are younger than me, I have to say sorry, because you missed an amazing decade! However, you probably feel the same listening to songs from the good times in your life.

That feeling of pleasure tinged with sadness that we experience about a past event or time is what we call nostalgia. I think it is a beautiful word, and the same word is used in a few languages other than English. Reading about nostalgia, I discovered that the word itself was first associated with soldiers who, when they were sent far away to fight a war, kept reliving in their minds the great moments they had when they were at home.

Obviously, nostalgia is a common feeling that all of us experience in our lives, especially when we have lived a good number of years. It seems the older we get the more nostalgic we are. But I am starting to wonder something; did this horrible pandemic make us more nostalgic?

I believe the answer is, without a doubt, yes. And I would go further by saying that probably young people and even children are now experiencing this feeling, although they may not put that name to it.

We often feel truly nostalgic when we are going through a big change in our lives. This might be caused by a positive event like celebrating a milestone birthday or getting a job in another country, for example. Equally, it can be in reaction to a crisis like the death of a loved one or a marriage breakdown. The pandemic we are experiencing can make us reminisce about those moments in our lives when everything was wonderful, or at least we remember them as wonderful when we look at them from the present.

Let's talk about this pandemic that we have coped with for two years. Doesn't it seem that it has been longer than that? Do we even remember how life was before wearing a mask or constantly putting sanitizer on our hands? Until the pandemic, the only time I saw a mask was when I went to the dentist. Now, I have masks in the pockets of my coats, in the car, everywhere.

Many of us have become used to these changes, which now seem almost normal,

although they should not. Sometimes I think about older people who have experienced so many events, good and bad, throughout the course of their lives. They used to go out without the fear of getting sick, but now their lives have changed again. Covid has given them yet another reason to be nostalgic.

In a way, it is normal to feel nostalgia when we are going through a crisis. Sometimes, if we are dealing with problems in our lives and the solutions are eluding us, nostalgia will come to the rescue. A song, a smell, a movie, an expression, a photo, or a comment can bring back happy memories and take us, at least briefly, away from our current troubles. For me, references to the 1980s remind me of the time when I was young, carefree, and at university in Madrid. Sure, I had the typical problems we all experience at that time of our lives, perhaps that the girl or boy you like does not return your affection. Other than that, life was great.

But is nostalgia good or bad? Like everything in life, it depends on how we deal with it. On the one hand, relishing the good memories can be a healthy thing. It is fantastic that hearing a song can remind us of a wonderful time in our life and put



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a smile on our face. But it can become a problem if our longing for the past interferes with or even prevents us from enjoying the present. This problem can be compounded if we also are worried about the uncertainty of the future at the same time. If we spend too much time looking backwards, we might miss the beauty of the present and the opportunities that await us in the future.

Nostalgia should help us to enjoy the present. How will we look back on this period of our life in years to come? The key is in our mind. How lucky we are to have had those happy, contented moments in the past with the special people who were an important part of our life at that time. But even as we appreciate the past, it is equally important to understand that we have ahead of us many more memories to build and many more people to meet.

Nostalgia – that beautiful word that can also be a beautiful feeling – should make

us stop for a moment to recall and appreciate that amazing memory, and then go on living our life in the present.

I mentioned before that nostalgia can be caused by a positive event like moving country for professional reasons. It is very normal, when we move away from the home and the people with whom we are familiar, to be nostalgic for the life we are leaving behind. We may find ourselves thinking that everything in our former country is better than what we are finding in the new one. But this is surely not true.

Every country has its enchantment, and it is up to us to seek it out and take advantage of it. Normally, our ‘old’ country will always be there for us to visit and enjoy those familiar things that we miss in our new destination. But life is giving you the chance to explore a new country, enjoy a new culture, and meet new people. So, try not to get caught up in too much expat nostalgia.

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