Ah, the smell of Coppertone, lake clams, salmon eggs, fumes from an outboard, warm mud - these aromas are like vintage perfume that I'd recognize in a second.

Back in the early 70s when I was a kid, we didn't have nifty water-shoes like they do today - we wore our old Keds with the toes cut out.

And quick drying shorts or zip off pants? No way, those would be cut off jeans that the knees had long since worn through or no shorts at all over our suits. Bad for girls with "American thighs"; bathing suits back then weren't flattering and high cut - they fully covered your hiney like grandma panties.

Those were the days of summer.

We had a local park with a sandy swim lagoon. I remember it being a hot, dusty and long walk from the parking lot, all of us overloaded with beach paraphernalia. Certainly, the worst thing that could happen was blowing out a cheap flip-flop (my mom called them "zoris" - which is the Japanese style sandals made out of straw; thus none of my friends ever knew what I was referring to) on the hot asphalt.

You wouldn't find bottled waters in our Styrofoam cooler; heck, did we have even plastic bottles back then? If you wanted water, you'd go to the drinking fountain that spurted out warm water. No, we had the aluminum cans with the pull tops that if you stepped on one hidden in the sand, it would slice your foot right open. Tahitian Treat and Dad's Root Beer, bologna and American cheese sandwiches on Wonder White bread with a thick smear of mayo, and handfuls of funnel shape, salty Bugle
snacks. Yeah, it's a wonder that the chubby Motta kids didn't sink from a cramp. Fresca and Tab were the only diet drinks that were available back then; diet sodas didn't become a meal source to me until I was a teenager.

Other weekends, we'd head up to our place at Lake Berryessa, a little less than a two hour drive in our wood paneled station wagon, windows closed, AC going, with my mom and dad chain-smoking their Winston's. Most trips one of us, actually I think it was always me, would throw up, after we were through the windy hills.

We had a single-wide Fleetwood, perched on a hill directly above the lake. The smell of oak trees and hot baked dirt would greet us, as well as the daddy long-legs that liked to gather in our bathtub when we weren't there. All the appliances were avocado colored and there was a huge dark green deck that ran on two sides, protected by an aluminum awning. From this deck we'd watch the patterns of white caps or glistening diamonds on calm days. In the heat of the day, I swear, you could hear the weeds crackling, like they were so hot, they were breaking.

My brother and I were pretty young when we'd leave to fish from the dock on our own, for hours at a time for Crappie and Bluegill that we'd bring back for the nuns at our elementary school. My mom would tell my seven year old brother to watch out for his little sister (which she shudders about now; things were just different back then). Our first stop was the magical bait and tackle shop, where we'd check out the live minnows frantic in the wooden tanks - which we never bought. Instead we'd load up our hooks with live night crawlers with an extra dab of salmon egg on top. We'd for sure pick up a Push-Up or ice cream sandwich for two bits for the dusty walk back home.

There was something magical about fishing, especially if we could sneak onto one of the deep water docks. Feeling that first tug, seeing the initial shiny glimmer at the end of the line, I always wondered, could this be the time that I caught the unknown shark or whale that lurked in the depths? Oh, how big will it be? Could my Popeil Pocket Fisherman handle the weight?

Ah, the smell of Coppertone, lake clams, fumes from an outboard, warm mud in stagnant water (the best place to catch frogs) - these aromas are like vintage perfume that I'd recognize in a second. Oh, and Lifebuoy soap. My dad didn't swim (although that didn't prevent him from going out in our boat). He'd walk down the steep 150 wooden stairs down to the beach; put a couple of cans of Coors in the water, tie a rope around him and float. No kidding, he'd have us toss him a bar of orange Lifebuoy soap and he'd bathe in the lake. My husband says that it must be a Portuguese thing.

I haven't gone fishing with my brother for 20 years, my
dad was gone just when we hit our teens and my 86 year old mom can’t make it to the water or get into our boat. It just means that the smells, the textures, the tastes and sounds changed after the childhood chapter closed - but the thrill of summer, the call of the water, is still as powerful.

Here’s to you Ravers, wishing you a memory-filled summer - make sure you make time to enjoy it.

Wishing you toes in the water,

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PS - If you liked this genre of writing, make sure you haven’t missed my other articles including the 86 Candle Blow-Out and the Mayor of Milpitas and Untold Stories.

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