

bomb pops

In Davenport, Iowa, in the late 1970s, kickball got interrupted but for two things — darkness and an electronic song. The former brought but grumbles, but the latter carried the promise of icy refreshments and sticky fingers.

The ice-cream truck back then drove about two miles an hour, roaming the street with its sirens, bringing behind it a trail of kids that would rival the Pied Piper. Variations on ice cream — drumsticks, sandwiches and sherbet in paper cones — were all fine and good, but nothing rivaled the three-color sugarfest that was the Bomb Pop. At an even buck, it seriously dented the allowance, but the frozen rocket with six fins that sported colors of the flag seemed somehow more substantial, maybe even more patriotic — through the eyes of third-graders — than something sprinkled with chopped nuts or wrapped in a flimsy chocolate wafer.

The freezer in the ice-cream truck must have been fueled by liquid nitrogen, as the pops were so frozen that one risked one's tongue on those first few licks. After the brain freeze that accompanies many frozen treats, and several wipes of the hands on the shorts, the game would resume, and everyone seemed to have a little more energy ... at least for a while.

Those memories of youth, and hearing the bleat of my local ice-cream truck

SOME FACETS OF SUMMER

NEVER REALLY CHANGE

IF YOU'RE A KID AT HEART

BY MARK LUCE

through the neighborhood — got me rather itching for a Bomb Pop. In addition, Blue Bunny, the manufacturer, now makes an insane number of spin-offs: the Bubble Yum Bomb Pop, Daffy Duck Taffy Bomb Pop, Jolly Rancher Bomb Pop and Watermelon Bomb Pop (with candy seeds). However, in checking out all these mutant varieties, I was struck by the fact that they all seemed upside down. Rather than a sleek rocket that tapers at the top, it's now seemingly upside down. However, the popsicle named Bomb Pop Jr. looks more like the one I used to eat. Vaguely troubled, I wondered if that wispy nostalgia of being a big enough kid to buy my own grown-up treat was somehow now tainted by the realization that I always bought the pint-sized version.

While my investigation into the origins of the Bomb Pop Jr. were fruitless, I was thrilled to discover the origin of my youthful obsession was in my current backyard. Back in 1955, James S. Merritt and D.S.



“Doc Abernathy” plied frozen wares down on Independence Avenue in Kansas City (about eight miles from my house) when they hit upon the Bomb Pop. Abernathy, come to find out, not only helped with the bomb pop, but was considered a visionary in the frozen treat field, coming up with such products as the Dole frozen juice bar, treats based on the Pink Panther, Ghostbusters and everyone's favorite Renaissance artists/crime fighters Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. The TMNT pops featured gumball eyes, sure to stain your tongue a royal blue.

To bring this walk down Popsicle lane full-circle — last week I bought my first pinball machine, a dream I have had since I was about 5 years old. The machine that now plays in my basement? Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

Bomb Pops and pinball — even after 30 years, the things I love haven't really changed all that much.

Mark Luce lives in Kansas City, Mo., the home of a really bad baseball team.

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