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THE OPRAH
MAGAZINE

LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

Why is this woman smiling?

Because she followed
our easy make-ahead
THANKSGIVING plan
(and you can, too!)

PG. 114

★ YOU NEVER FORGET YOUR FIRST TIME ★
— THE THRILL—AND POWER!—OF CASTING YOUR VOTE —

THE ROAD TO REAL RICHES

Why giving back
is so good for
your wallet

**5 Simple
Ways
to Boost
Your Health**
IN 2 MINUTES
OR LESS!

DO YOU ENJOY A FINE WHINE?

How to stop
wallowing—
for good



Feeling Good

HEALTH HACKS • LIFE STRIDES • WINTER WELLNESS

THE *Reflection* EFFECT

Once considered a form of depression, nostalgia is getting a second look from psychologists, who increasingly see it as a source of strength. Allison Gilbert investigates.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Riki Blanco*

IN THE PHOTOGRAPH, my mother and I are sitting on the stone lip of a large circular fountain in Paris. Shoulder to shoulder, we're leaning into each other, fingers interlaced, my head tilted toward her cheek. It's Saturday, August 31, 1985, and I'm 15 years old. We are in the Tuileries Garden, giddy tourists on a mother-daughter adventure that began just that morning when we landed in France from New York.

Studying the photo now, I see not just that moment, but so many other joyous times I shared with my mother: horseback riding in Central Park, the raucous annual holiday parties she hosted. Those images and the feelings they bring—bliss, love, the sensation of being fully safe—have become more important to me with each passing year. A decade after the Paris photo was taken, my mother died of ovarian cancer. She didn't get to come to my wedding, and she never met my children. Memories are what I have left, and I relish them. They help me feel whole.

The Paris picture hasn't always made me happy, though. For a long time, I kept it tucked away in an album, a reminder of what I'd lost. But as I began taking out photos and talking to my children about their grandmother, I discovered that looking back was helpful. Finding ways to stay connected brought me peace.

Though the kind of longing I felt is nothing new—Homer and the Bible reference the concept—the word *nostalgia* once described a disease. In 1688, Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer coined the term to describe the persistent sadness and sometimes irregular heartbeats experienced by young people abroad. Their emotional and physical ailments, he wrote, were stirred by “continuous vibration of animal spirits through those fibers of

the middle brain.” Later, military physicians treating Swiss mercenaries, a group seen as particularly vulnerable to the ailment, theorized that it resulted from damage to their eardrums and brains from the incessant clanging of cowbells in the Alps.

Since then, nostalgia has been variously classified as a compulsive disorder and a form of depression, but these days it's simply defined as a sentimental longing for the past. And now researchers believe that being nostalgic may actually make us happier and healthier. According to a recent article in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, nostalgia may be a dynamic motivational force. Coauthor Constantine Sedikides, PhD, of the University of Southampton in England, a psychologist who has extensively researched the effects of nostalgia, says fond memories can generate feelings of engagement and self-esteem that leave us more optimistic, inspired, and creative. His research also suggests another upside that's especially important for the bereaved: Nostalgia may assuage loneliness. Now considered a social emotion like empathy, it can draw us closer to others—the idea being that when we feel an intense bond with loved ones from our past, we're more likely to feel similar bonds with those around us in the present.

This profound sense of connection can lead nostalgic individuals to believe life is more meaningful, Sedikides and others have found, which may ease the pain of grief. Henry Louis Gates Jr., PhD, the Harvard professor who created the genealogy show *Finding Your Roots*, told me nostalgia is a way of “testifying to our loved ones' continuing existence.” When we understand its power, Gates says, we recognize that “they haven't passed on—they've passed into us.”



Of course, we inherit more than just memories, and there's emerging evidence that giving a loved one's cherished possessions a new purpose may be another way nostalgia can help us heal. Researchers are studying people who lost family and friends on 9/11 and chose to donate objects in their memory to the National September 11 Memorial & Museum; the goal is to discover whether contributing precious relics—ID cards, phone messages, even shoes—made moving forward easier. So far, that seems to be the case, according to Brenda Cowan, associate professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY, who launched the project. “For many, the opportunity to carefully sort through a beloved person's belongings—with the knowledge that those belongings will forever be in the hands of preservationists—left them feeling relieved and satisfied,” she says. The nostalgic reverence attached to the objects affirms that the past is worth honoring and celebrating. →

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Kathy Rambo, whose son Jason died in a car crash at 19, says his possessions have helped her keep his memory alive. A year after the accident, Rambo began making teddy bears out of his jeans and shirts. When she completed 30 bears, she invited Jason's brother, sister, best friend, grandmother, aunts, uncles, and cousins over for an afternoon of sharing stories about him. When they left, each chose a teddy bear to take home. She found that sewing gave her uninterrupted time to think about Jason, and parting with his clothing in this way reassured her that he'd always be loved. "It helped me remember and look forward at the same time," Rambo says.

"Nostalgia is where the healing happens," explains Alan Pedersen, executive director of the Compassionate Friends, an organization that offers support to nearly one million bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents across the United States. "We used to think it best to keep memories at bay because they were too painful. This is old thinking. We now say reminisce to the hilt."

Thirty years after that unforgettable mother-daughter trip, my husband and I took our kids to Paris. The first afternoon, we made a beeline to the Tuileries and found the fountain from my photo. My daughter and I bounded into place—mom on the left, daughter on the right. We would have gotten the identical shot, but I encouraged my husband and son to join us. In the moment that we posed for the friendly passerby who took our picture, I felt a rush of euphoria. We can all live our fullest lives when we accept that absence and presence can coexist. The new picture of my family is now framed on our piano alongside the old one of my mother and me. And I'm beaming in both. **Q**

THE DIABETES Danger Zone

» How to know if you're in it, and what to do to get out.

YOU MIGHT THINK a prediabetes diagnosis is a harbinger of certain doom, but it doesn't have to be. It's really a wake-up call, warning you that it's time to make some lifestyle changes if you want to stave off a full-blown chronic disease. The biggest problem with prediabetes? Many people don't know they have it: Of the 86 million Americans living with the condition, nine out of ten aren't even aware of it, either because they haven't been screened or their health care provider hasn't diagnosed or counseled them properly. In a recent University of Florida study, only 23 percent of patients whose blood tests came back positive for prediabetes received treatment—this despite the fact that without intervention, the condition is likely to develop into type 2 diabetes within ten years.

The good news is that in this case, forewarned really is forearmed. Prediabetes means your blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not yet high enough to be considered diabetes. Those levels rise slowly over time—so you have the chance to get them under control before it's too late. And the best ways to do that are relatively simple: diet, weight control, and exercise.

Here's what you need to know and do—consider it your diabetes prevention plan.

WATCH FOR WARNING SIGNS

Prediabetes often has no symptoms, but it may present some of the same, sometimes under-the-radar ones as diabetes, including increased thirst or hunger, frequent urination, blurry vision, fatigue, and tingling in your hands or feet. If you've noticed any of these, talk to a medical professional as soon as possible.

GET TESTED

Tests your doctor may give you include the hemoglobin A1C test, which shows your average blood glucose levels over the past 12 weeks (5.7 to 6.4 percent is a red flag), and the fasting glucose test, which measures the glucose in your blood. Normal levels are less than 100 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL), and the prediabetes hot zone is 100 to 125 mg/dL.



SLIM DOWN STRATEGICALLY

Extra fat cells can make your body more resistant to insulin, the hormone that delivers glucose to your cells—which helps explain why you're at an increased risk for developing diabetes if you have a body mass index higher than 25. But you don't have to get down to your fantasy size. Reducing your body weight by just 5 to 7 percent through diet and regular exercise can cut your risk of developing diabetes by more than half, according to a landmark study called the Diabetes Prevention Program. For someone who weighs 200 pounds, that's a loss of only 10 to 14 pounds.

PRIORITIZE PROTEIN AND VEGETABLES

Though carbohydrates cause blood sugar and insulin levels to rise, there's no need to cut them out of your diet cold turkey. Instead, start off your meals with protein (like fish, lean meat, tofu) and salad before sampling a bit of pasta or bread. A study out of Weill Cornell Medical College in New York found that eating protein and vegetables before carbohydrates resulted in lower glucose and insulin levels in obese patients with type 2 diabetes.

GET ON THE MEAL-PLANNING BANDWAGON

You already know you shouldn't shop for food when you're famished, but research has found that when people ordered or planned their meals even just hours in advance, they subconsciously made lower-calorie choices instead of giving in to cravings. Download a meal-planning app (try MealBoard) or sign up for a grocery delivery service (we like Farmbox Direct) to help you stay ahead of the game. You can also plan your meals using good old pen and paper. That's a recipe for success. —JOY PAPE