

# An Ode To My Teenage Make-up Bag



by SARA POLLOCK

You never forget your first one. Lipstick, that is. Mine was by Revlon – a warm-toned cinnamon-brown hue. It was the mid-1990s, and I was a pre-teen who, admittedly, already owned a pretty impressive collection of Estee Lauder GWP items from my Grandmother, a makeup enthusiast herself.

However, I was determined to purchase a lip product for myself. So, with my allowance, Toast Of New York found its way into my collection. I mainly only wore it while playing pretend makeovers by myself, but it was a defining point of my adolescence—the zeitgeist of coming of age in the 90s, if you will. The gold inlay packaging felt infinitely superior to the other (probably more age-appropriate) items I owned. With Cindy Crawford at the helm of their editorials, Revlon seemed like the height of sophistication to me.

Four years later, Urban Decay's red metallic Gash eyeshadow entered my makeup bag. Aspirations of glamour and beauty exited the door, and self-expression and all-black-everything replaced it. Being fourteen years old is hard as hell, but clutching onto a subculture as a means of navigation can be somewhat comforting. I paired Gash with a thick liquid line (sans wing) and smudged, smoky kohl on my under eyes until the early 2000s. Cheek color was abandoned (because I blushed too easily anyway). Not the most flattering of looks, but I digress. Darkness was in, and it was evident by the products used on my face and my short, stumpy black painted fingernails.

Beauty has always been a form of escapism for me. Perhaps it's the interchangeable element of it or the transformational power. Or maybe it's just the pure unabashed joy I get from building a covetable collection of unique items that bring such delight. I'm sure that I sit somewhere in the middle.

Last week I picked up a tube of [Toast Of New York](#). Little has changed apart from a slightly more minimalist approach to the packaging. The formula still smells very faintly of vanilla cake batter. A scent that has somewhat mentally transported me back to a warm, fuzzy feeling reminiscent of fall 1996. An emotion that instantly calms me. It's understandable how scent and memory are so closely intertwined. Research has revealed that not only do smells have this power to unlock memories, but they can also trigger older memories than memories cued by other sensory modalities such as words and pictures.

While being an unabashed beauty obsessive with all the height of new concoctions at my disposal, I've found myself drawn to the products that transport me back in recent years. I'd be inclined to think of it as a comfort blanket.

Sometimes, all we want is to bask in the nostalgia of a [Bonne Bell Lip Lix](#) (as I typed this, I have already found one on eBay, selling for \$30. Nostalgia shopping is wild!) I'm not the only one with an intense fondness for the past. In recent years, brands have been taking note. Enter the Makeup Revolution with their frequent collaborations, which have included: The Powerpuff Girls, with [a squeeze tube of transparent lip gloss](#) reminiscent of Lancôme's iconic Juicy Tubes. Bratz, complete with [fluffy purple makeup bags](#) for your inner Cher Horowitz. More recently, [Ariana Grande's R.E.M beauty](#), while geared towards a more Gen Z audience, has sparked the interest of many millennials (myself included) with its space-age, chrome, futuristic but in-a-90s-way aesthetic. It seems like we're not alone in the desire to replicate old memories. After all, fashion revivalism is not a new concept, so there's no reason this would not also apply to our makeup choices. Essentially, the 20-year cycle rule as it is commonly referred to in the industry. This explains why something as simple as NYX releasing [a clear version of their best-selling Butter Gloss](#) has generated optimum excitement from the Instagram beauty community.

So, why are we all vicariously living out our teenage years and trying to source the shiniest lip gloss on the market? While the 20-year rule is a definite factor in all of this, it's also worth noting that a two-plus-year pandemic and general worldwide political unrest can strongly influence our intense pining for the past comforts.

A 2006 study connected nostalgia to negative mood and the discrete affective state of loneliness. Still, in contrast, it fosters social bonding and positive self-regard, so it's not all bad news.

When you're helpless against a world in turmoil, small comforts are an act of escapism. Sometimes those small comforts can be as simple as a whiff of CK One in a department store or reintroducing the [claw clip](#) back into your life. But, whatever you do, just don't reach for the bottle of Sun-In.

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