

BLESSED OR CURSED? **Childhood Memories**

2011

This morning during my daily walk, the light morning breeze carried the fresh scent of fabric softener from one of my neighbors' dryer. Most people would have probably missed it, but I didn't. As far as I can remember, I always possessed a keen sense of smell which resulted in me being 'blessed' or 'cursed'. Throughout my childhood I hung out with my two brothers and their friends, so after a day spent in the heat of a summer day, I can definitely say that I was 'cursed'!

Back then, none of those boys seemed to pick up the smells that would normally tickle my nostrils!.. When I'd ask: "Hey guys! Did you smell this?.." "Smell what?.." they would answer. "This...." But they would just stare at me with that 'what-are-you-talking-about- kinda-look'. They could care less.

Whether it was the musty smell of our old barn, fresh grass clippings left behind by my dad's gasoline lawn mower, laundry drying on a clothesline outside on a sunny day or the fresh fragrance after the rain, none of those scents would pass by me unnoticed.

I must confess that the 'blessing'...or 'curse' followed me well into adulthood. My husband and our three boys could certainly vouch for that having lived with me long enough to have witnessed my habit of 'sniffing'. I was oftentimes teased by my sons while they were living with us, and still today by my husband. The typical scenario in our household went something like this... You're not sure if a t-shirt has been washed or not? "Ask mom. She'll sniff it and tell you to wear it or not!" Or do you have any doubt about the freshness of food in the refrigerator? "Ask my wife, she'll sniff it and let you know if it's still good or not!"

Kidding aside, our sense of smell, and all our senses for that matter, are part of what make the human body such a marvelous machine. God in his infinite wisdom made it perfect. He equipped us with our five senses so we may connect with people, we can explore the universe around us and learn to appreciate it. Taste, sight, touch, smell and hearing are all miracles, and I wouldn't want to take them for granted. The aroma of our favorite foods or the fragrance of flowers is certainly something to live for. It could also be a warning sign, an alert to danger. The soothing sound of a babbling brook, the beauty of a landscape, the taste of our favorite food or the gentle touch of someone we love add beauty to our lives. As for our sense of smell, it could also very well trigger good or bad memories in us.

The scent of dried leaves brings me back to my childhood. Born and raised in the mountainous region of the Province of Quebec, Canada where deciduous trees abound, I always looked forward to fall. The leaves fallen on the ground around our property were a great opportunity for my brothers and me to use our imagination. We would rake the leaves in huge piles and take turn jumping in them or hide under them as we played hide-and-seek. Sporadically and when no adults were around, we would use corn pipes and smoke the dried leaves. Such mischievous kids we were!

The smell of freshly baked bread reminds me of my younger days. My friends and I were avid skiers back then. During winter, we would spend most of our weekends on the snowy slopes near a little village where the bakery attracted the majority of its shoppers with its bread. At the end of the day, we would oftentimes stop by to buy a loaf or two. As soon as we would open the door, we were greeted by the amazing smell of freshly baked bread just out of the oven. Yummy!..

I still make my own strawberry preserves and the unbeatable aroma of strawberries cooking on the stove always reminds me of Aunt Cécile, my dad's sister, who took care of our family after my mom passed away. As I got older, every year I would help her wash and hull a couple of crates of the sweet berries. After the fruits had boiled for thirty minutes or so in a good amount of sugar, we would fill jars after jars which were then sterilized. Our preserves would last till the next season. We loved to eat them on toasts or on plain bread with butter. And I still do.

Some bad memories could also be triggered by certain smells, and rotten meat is one of them for me. My father used to own a grocery store in the little village where I spent my childhood and most of my adolescence. The store occupied half of the bottom floor of our property and was the ideal place for rodents to hang out. Dad would sometimes find boxes and bags of food all chewed up by them, so when that happened he used drastic measures to solve the problem. I would then witness what I thought was his most cunning plan.

He would prepare a mixture of peanut butter and rat poison and spread it heavily on slices of bread. He would then cut them into small pieces and hide them strategically throughout the entire store and warehouse. After having been lured by the smell, the rodents would eat them and die usually not too long after. The only drawback was that we never knew where they would lay to rest. So, the putrid smell of decaying bodies of mice and rats would linger throughout the house for weeks. The traps dad sometimes used were better in that he could discard the rodents soon after they had been caught. However, it was not as effective. Some of the critters were smart enough to stay away from the trap or if they had been trapped, they would somehow escape. Every now and then this scenario would repeat itself at our house; the memory of which I do not seem to forget.

How fortunate I am for being able to see, hear, talk, smell and touch. But the blessings God gives me are so much more, and it is with a grateful heart that every day I thank Him for being so generous toward me.

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