



It's not a Proustian madeleine but a humble scent strip from *O, The Oprah Magazine* that sends me on my journey, time travel back on my toilet seat where I surround myself one more time with my sisters' expansive toiletries: acetone, nail polish, pre and post bath toner and lotion, anything to stay moist and fertile – smooth out rough corners with pumice stones and sand boards, buff and lacquer surfaces with nailpolish – and in those early 1960's, heavy-duty spray to sculpt hair mass to sugar cotton candy bubbles of Sandra Dee proportions. Just how many body parts did my sisters have?

Answer: as many chemicals as you need to define gender femininity; spend, reward and spoil yourself for the sacrifices of diet, bleeding and imminent motherhood – familial sanitary campaign of neatness, ready-to-wear working girls' apparel

Granted, I'm a destructive child of 12, buried in stale conversation about admirers, despairing Sunday circle, toes stuffed with tissues for precise nailpolish application.

They chain-smoke Parliaments and Kents.

My preteen childhood goes nowhere.

Tomorrow is always Monday, butterflies of unfinished homework.

I'm smothered in disaffection, living the role of irritating little brother, tick, chaperone, whipping boy to a family lacking competent parents.

Don't cry for me yet; I delight in the mystery of night tables – mints, gum and fancy chocolates I can't afford. I learn to smoke Parliaments, destroy music boxes in my quest to find out how things can't work – what does it really take to turn Lucero, my oldest sister, homicidal?

When they're not here I play with stockings 10 years B.P. - before pantyhose were invented – my nose flattens in the mirror with a bank robber mug. I work their heels, the svelte art of foot support, reach the conclusion that I couldn't get through a day on these. Cups of brassieres and panties in the bathroom soaking in the bathtub – here and there accidents where a breast pops, "Fernando, look the other way!" Sanitary napkins decay in silence and my poor mom's unsavory yeast infection delivers bad fish to our nostrils.

So what happened to me 40 years later with a house of my own? Scant toiletry products: rubbing alcohol, Noxzema shaving cream and Ivory soap – found poem of uncoordinated jeans, T-shirts and Reeboks; my towels don't match. I cook well but lack utensils; I'm cutlery deficient, no placemats and not enough serving bowls. Am I supposed to raise or lower the toilet seat when I exit? Is it sexist to expect Lucero, Angela and Gloria to arrive with all the necessary accoutrements, housewarm my independence with home comfort? Even if gay men are to live up to queer eye for the straight guy's expectations expect nothing from me, shame on Ikea and Target – just say no to home comforts!

My good friend Sister Eli was here last week to coach me; someday I will make a good housewife. I renounce sleep, watching Oprah go on and on about dieting, cooking and nurturing. This week's inspirational speaker analyzes dreams and proper iron intake. Everyone is well dressed and affluent. This month's issue has a great feature article on tablecloths to be read on my next toilet visit.

How to Stay Moist and Fertile

Fernando D. Castro



FERNANDO D. CASTRO's newest collection *The Nightlife of the Saints*, addresses themes of loss, passion, the *anomie* of the outsider, and the joy of travel. Fernando is also responsible for 25 anthologies of creative writing by youth and adults at various community artist-in-residence programs.