That Was Then, This is Now

Memories as a kid are priceless; cherish them, because it doesn’t last very long.

It’s 2:25pm all I can here is a ringing in my ear, feet stomping around me, almost like they are running. I’m hustling to the best or worst place imaginable for a kid between the ages of 8-15 years old. I race to get the best seat in the house in the way back. The doors are already open and waiting for us to arrive. The stagnant, stench of sweaty kids fills the bus as we file in after a hot, muggy day in an unairconditioned school. In my eyes, I see a huge, yellow room full of laughter, smiles, and weirdness on wheels with a large number six on the top. In other people’s eyes, it’s just a school bus. The wheels on the bus go round and round and transport us to our homes. As a 10-year-old scrawny, brown boy with a buzz cut wearing a button-up shirt and dark jean shorts, joy emanates from my wide, bright smile. Excitement bellows throughout the bus as kids recap their day, joke, or talk with friends. This is what happiness looks like. I’m sitting in the way back ecstatically jabbering to my best friend, Sean, about what plans were about to ensue when we got off the bus. As the bus top approaches our stop, we stand up and are jostled around while the bus is still moving. We’re ready to exit like puppies in a cage. We grab our homework-filled backpacks, sling them on our shoulders, and scamper towards the front door. The bus does a jerking stop, the brakes squeak like a mouse, the doors open with a quick jolt, and the red blinking stop sign is protruding from the bus. As we exit, we politely say, “Bye, Mrs. Tammy” and cross safely, looking both ways, to the other side of the street. It is here where a large chunk of my childhood was spent and memories made. Sean and I had reached our destination, our safe haven, his home.

 The gray and peeling painted mailbox read 244 Danesmoor Road, but it was more than an address. It was paradise to me, to us. As we approached the mailbox, we quickly ran past as bees trickled and swarmed out of the wooden box. The color handprints on the white exterior of the house and the dilapidated shed to the left of the house greeted us as we approached. A nasty, scum lined creek behind Sean’s house also was an eyesore as we approached. We walked up the creaky, splintered stairs and opened the front door to the same greeting every day: Casey and Ruby obnoxiously barking at us as if we are intruders, but when they recognize our sweaty scent, Ruby, a large mutt, and Casey, the black, white, and brown Beagle, change from vicious guard dogs to cuddling canines in an instant.

 After the welcome wagon went to lay down, we always headed into the black and brown kitchen where we would throw some Totino’s Pepperoni Pizza Rolls into the sauce splattered and crusted over microwave or pour a big, plastic bowl of Cinnamon Toast Crunch to fill our empty gas tanks. With fuel in our bodies, we would head downstairs to a dark, musty basement where our mess from the night before lie waiting for us. The giant 36-inch box television on a huge, brown, wooden, entertainment center waited for our return, and we were glad to see our old friend again. My Xbox 360 was a permanent resident in Sean’s basement, but so was I, since I always returned after school every day. Although Sean’s mom saw the empty Mountain Dew cans, dirty, crusty plates, disheveled blankets, wrappers and containers as a pig sty, we saw it as our island oasis where we had marked our territory with a flag. She knew we had been there, but we knew we would return to our territory. It was where 10 year old boys made forts, played hide-and-seek in the dark with no flashlights, played endless hours of videos games, and made lifelong memories. It’s where boys were boys and friends were friends.

 When we needed a break from our island oasis, the basement, we would take our antics outside. Prank wars often filled out days with other neighborhood friends in the warmer months. Everyone from around the tiny, cul-de-sac would come over, and we’d run some type of game like dodgeball, kick ball, football, or baseball. Any sport was fair game. If winter showed its snowy face, we would go to the hill in the middle of the cul-de-sac and play “King of the Hill.” Everyone would try and push their way to the top of the hill and whoever was on top was the king until someone pushed them off. Other days we would walk to Sean’s grandma’s house down the street with his older brother, Cole, and his twin brother, Alex, and jump like circus entertainers on the trampoline. Sean’s other grandma lived the opposite way down the street, and we would venture to her house for the snacks and treats only she seemed to have. However, they were only earned by pulling weeds in her overgrown backyard. The memories that belonged to 244 Danesmoor Road and Sean’s neighborhood are priceless, but that was then.

Now as an 18-year-old man in a plaid shirt and khaki shorts, I pull up to the house in my 2017 black, Jeep Compass. I no longer feel a sense of excitement or welcome I did as a 10 year old boy. Now it just seems to be an ordinary, white house, sitting in a cul-de-sac. The vicious guard dogs have now been replaced with a little, black, yapping dog named Lucio. The smell of Totino’s Pizza Rolls or Cinnamon Toast Crunch are now replaced with a cloud of cigarette smoke masked by a fruity air freshener. The once dark, brown couches are now worn, stained, beige, and bland. There is no mom living in the house nagging about the mess we claimed as our island oasis; just seven adults all under the roof of a small house. The sense of friendship and the bond between friends who shared a bus ride, pizza rolls, games on the Xbox, games in the cul-de-sac, and days of making memories with childhood friends are fading. The friendship is slowly dying a slow death holding on by the memories made as 10 year old boys. Life is evolving for each of us in our own way, priorities are changing. For Sean it’s a girl, and for me it’s soccer and school. I’ve gone from wanting to spend every moment with my friend Sean at his house to counting every minute until I can leave early from his house. There is a fine line between life as it was and life as I know it. This is now.