

RANDOM SAMPLES

OLD FAVORITES DISAPPEAR, BUT WE REMEMBER

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Now it's personal.

For many months I've read reports of the demise of the U.S. car industry, and I have been saddened at what that means for auto workers everywhere. It didn't seem like it affected me, though, until I started thinking about what wouldn't be at this year's North American International Auto Show in Detroit: Pontiac and Saturn.

Those are the only kinds of cars that I've ever owned, and both are being shut down by General Motors. Looking at things purely as a consumer, it's heartbreaking.

We've all been through situations where a product we loved was taken away, even if it was on a smaller scale. Think back to the days when you drank Crystal Pepsi like it was water. (Or New Coke. It doesn't matter.) You went to the grocery store one gloomy, rainy day and it was gone. Vanished. Finished. Kaput. Never to return.

That's how it feels to me now, only more so. I loved the idea behind my Saturn as much as the car itself. It was an attempt at something new and fresh, from no-haggle pricing to a cooperative environment between labor and management at its small-town Tennessee plant. I was such a Saturn maniac that I almost made the trip to Spring Hill, Tenn., for one of the company's "homecoming" festivals.

My experience with Vic (that's what I call my little Pontiac Vibe) has been just as great. It is classified as a sport wagon, and I once managed to fit my entire bed set - mattress, frame, and all - inside. That said, I prefer to emphasize the "sport" aspect of its name, thank you very much.

It's all so disappointing what's happened to them. What a waste of consumer loyalty. If only we could bring them back like the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park*.

But then, why stop with cars? There are many other beloved products that I'd love to resurrect. Like Planters Cheez Balls, the perfectly crunchy orange snack spheres that used to come in distinctive blue canisters. I'm one of more than 12,000 people to sign an online petition begging for their return. The document complains, in part, that "we have been forced to buy from your competitors, [whose] cheese balls aren't nearly as delicious!" Can you feel the desperation in that exclamation point?

There's also my personal Holy Grail: racecar Popsicle-style treats with candy hubcaps and jokes on the stick that I bought once for a party in 1999 and never have seen since, online or in stores. More than a decade later their deliciousness still haunts me.

Most of the time nothing can be done about such disappearances, no matter how many rabid fans bemoan them. Otherwise I'd be eating Smurf-Berry Crunch cereal every morning and watching *Undeclared*, the hilarious Fox series by Judd Apatow that only aired 16 episodes starting in 2001. (Most critics whine about the demise of another Apatow series, *Freaks and Geeks*, but I'll take this series about college life any day.)

Every once in a while, though, something happens that gives you hope. For me it was the news that Polaroid, which pulled the plug on its instant cameras and film in 2008 due to the rise of digital photography, is bringing its classic products back. As someone who owns an old Polaroid camera but only a couple of boxes of film, that's great news.



Even more, it proves that while good things pass - be it a car company or a Cheez Ball - they can always make a comeback. That's why every time I open a newspaper, I do so wishing there's a headline about saving Saturn, and it's why every time I walk into a supermarket, I take a peek at the freezer aisle hoping that maybe, just maybe, there will be a racecar Popsicle waiting for me.

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