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THE TAMPA TRIBUNE

Picture-perfect romance



A photographer's work offers a look at a budding relationship and the Tampa Bay area in the 1920s.

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sweet nostalgia

The Candy Kitchen, a tiny shop with simulated icing between the bricks, offers a variety of hard-to-find candies that will take you back to childhood.

By DEBBIE SPEER
Special to the Tribune

MADEIRA BEACH

Squirrel Nut Zippers. French Chews. Chick-O-Sticks. Sugar Daddys. Flying Saucers. Pixy Stix. Wax Bottles. Kits. Sky Bars. Candy Necklaces. Mallo Cups. Slo Pokes. Boston Baked Beans. Rock Candy. Ice Cubes.

If there's a purgatory for nostalgic baby boomer calorie counters, then the Candy Kitchen in Madeira Beach must surely be it.

"There aren't many places around anymore that carry variety like we do," said 27-year-old Brad Holybee, partner in the business that he has owned since 1995 with his dad, Les.

With few exceptions, you won't find the same ordinary candy bars here that you would see at a grocery or convenience store. Surrounding its tiny sales floor - with just enough space for maybe a dozen tightly packed customers - is a paradise of the favorites from the days when an empty soda pop bottle was worth 2 cents and a dime bought a brown paper sack full of treats.

The Candy Kitchen has been selling candy and ice cream at the same location since 1950.

On the roof, a seemingly original yellow sign with faded lettering that says "Home Made Candy & Ice Creme" beckons passers-by to stop at the old reddish-brown building painted to resemble a gingerbread house. Simulated white icing oozes from between the bricks.

Inside, many customers have left handwritten proof of their presence on the walls and ceiling. The tradition of scribbling your name and where you're from is as old as the business itself, the Holybees say.

The graffiti you see today is relatively new, most of it added since the last time the store was repainted in the mid-1990s.

But the real treasures here are stacked up inside the store, packaged in vaguely familiar wrappers. In addition to the 18 flavors of homemade fudge and 26 flavors of homemade ice cream, more than a hundred kinds of hard-to-find, nostalgic candies bombard your senses.

AMAZING CANDY FACTS

► Admiral Byrd carried 5,000 pounds of Neccos to the South Pole in the 1930s for his crew. There were enough so that each man could eat almost a pound of candy a week for the duration of his two years in Antarctica.

► Dum Dums now come in 12 flavors, plus a mystery flavor resulting when the candy-making equipment is switched from producing one flavor to another. These lollipops are a combination of both flavors.

► Many Chupa Chups are available only in limited areas to satisfy regional preferences. If you crave a chili-flavored Chupa Chups, you'll have to go to Mexico to get one.

► In the 1920s, a candy maker came up with a chocolate-covered caramel that was supposed to be round. But because the company was unable to perfect a marble shape, the candies were declared "duds." The name stuck, and thus was born Milk Duds.

- Debbie Speer

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