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.

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MADEIRA BEACH

Squirled Nut Zippers, French Chews, Chick-O-Sticks, Sugar Daddies, Flying Saucers, Pay Sils, Wax Bottles, Kits, Sky Bars, Candy Necklaces, Mallo Cups, Sis Poles, 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 32-year-old Brad Holybee, part owner 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 1956.

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 stuffed 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.

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