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Back in the Day

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FIRST PLACE

Back in the Day

By Raquelle Newman

My grandparents seldom speak of what it was like
...back in the day.

When the smoke was smoggier,
And when cigarettes were still cool.

They've never mentioned what it was like to raise up 5 kids in the city
...back in the day.

One boy and 4 girls, during the 60's; during the King's time...
During our time, that pivotal time in history.

We never talk about what it was like to witness the whites put up "For Sale Signs"
At first sight of the new "colored family" in the neighborhood
...back in the day.

When candy cost a dime and when shoulder pads were still fashionable.
I'm sure they could recall

The gall people had:

Making them live in constant fear,
Sheltering their family from the blatant hate,
The irate people, the blind ignorance
...back in the day.

They would not dare mention the pain and betrayal that they must have felt,
To see all those indications of the bigotry that they would have preferred to ignore.

Now my grandma looks white, she's quite fair actually,
but she couldn't pass as "accepted" because she married a carpenter Cuban.
That was a double whammy

...back in the day.

And her oldest daughter would never conform or perform how the racists wanted her to...
She's fair, too.

She chose to identify with her family,
To take the low road, if you will.

She protested on the streets alongside some of the greatest
...back in the day.

Progressive she was, but my grandparents rarely talk about their oldest son.

A good looking man, of course, coming from a good looking family.

But the streets and the hard times took hold of him,

A halfway house consumed his teenage years

...back in the day.

But regardless, my grandparents always tell me to look forward,

And help avoid a repeat of history,

The struggle that we never talk about because

"It was so long ago" as they say,

It was,

...back in the day.