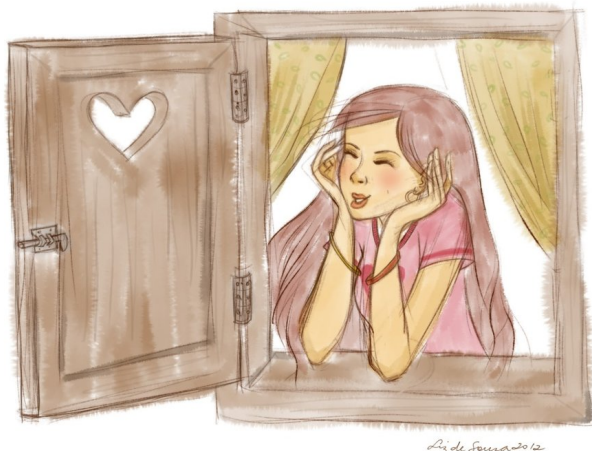


Girl in a Window

Our brain stores memories with a value marker.

Scientists struggle to figure out why some events and especially images occupy such a prominent place in your brain while many others seem to evaporate completely. Forty years ago, I found myself in Aachen Germany at an academic conference, in the fall of 78 as I recall. Aachen is a spa city near Germany's borders with Belgium and the Netherlands. Its gothic Cathedral was founded around 800

A.D. and was the seat of power for Charlemagne, who was buried here in 814 A.D.



I had just left a meeting and was headed back to my hotel on foot. The direct route took me through a modest residential neighborhood with colorful cottage-like stucco houses with brightly painted shutters and doors. It was late in the day and the sun was still shining, but low enough in the sky to cast playful array of sunlight and shadows on buildings and gardens.

As I walked, I heard a young girl singing. I looked up and saw her framed in a window on the second floor of a cottage. She was doing something, perhaps washing dishes, just out of my view, and she sang as she worked. I couldn't judge her age, probably a teen, but she had a beautiful voice and an uninhibited willingness to share her song with all who would hear her. She was singing in German, of course, and I understood not a word, but I was mesmerized by the image and her song. I slowed my pace without thought to prolong the experience, when suddenly she looked up and our eyes met. Without losing a beat in her song she graced me with the loveliest smile and waved to me from her window perch. I returned her wave and went about my way. The whole experience was not more than a few minutes in length, but somehow it touched me in a way that caused my brain to assign a prominent place in the readily accessible library of my mind.

I can still see her, the neighborhood, the street, her house and her smile. I can almost, but not quite, hear her voice and her song. And it still brings me joy after all these years.

Gene Ziegler, Chandler Arizona, November 2018