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I was walking Sam the Dog the other day, listening to NPR as usual, and a rather lengthy report came across that Coca-Cola had purchased Moxie. One might ask why this would matter if raised anywhere except New England. It is likely most folks in these parts have never heard of Moxie. If I concentrate, I can still summon the bittersweet taste of sipping a can of Moxie soda.

Moxie is the official soft drink of Maine. The town of Lisbon hosts an annual Moxie Festival. The beverage is produced in New Hampshire, my native state. It tastes somewhat like root beer, but with a bitter, rather wanky aftertaste. The wankiness comes from the gentian root, which is an herb found in both the Alps and Himalayas. Pliny the Elder wrote a few thousand years ago of its medicinal properties. Thanks, Google for that chestnut of information.

Grammy Bourque, my maternal grandmother with a lifelong thick French-Canadian accent, kept Moxie stocked in the fridge, along with Schaefer beer. I still can sing the Schaefer jingle: *Schaefer is the one beer to have, when you’re having more than one*. Of course, I was banned from the beer but allowed the occasional Moxie. I can’t recall the Moxie jingle.

Moxie started as a patent medicine engagingly titled “Moxie Nerve Food,” and was created by Dr. Augustin Thompson in 1885 in Lowell, Massachusetts, according to the Moxie website — slogan: “Distinctively Different.” Thompson claimed all sorts of curative properties, saying it was effective against “paralysis, softening of the brain, nervousness and insomnia.”

I have retired from imbibing soft drinks. About 40 years ago I switched to diet sodas after working a few years at Made-Rite Bottling in Longview after high school. While driving a forklift or manning the bottle washer, I developed a taste for both Diet Mountain Dew and Diet Dr Pepper, later switching to Diet Coke. Three years ago, I quit altogether and switched to flavored mineral water, which contains no unhealthy ingredients. At least I hope so, because I guzzle two or three daily.

While growing up in the Granite State, Moxie was the preferred beverage when allowed to indulge, perhaps once a week. It was certainly an acquired taste with its weird combination of sugary sweetness and bitter root extract. One person online described its taste as “black licorice medicine water.” But famed Boston Red Sox slugger Ted Williams endorsed it, and Mad magazine signed a deal with Moxie for a “Mad About Moxie” ad campaign. I was a big fan of Mad as a kid, and have avidly followed the Red Sox since I was a tyke pretending to be Carl Yastrzemski fielding a shot off the Green Monster and throwing the runner out at second base. So I drank Moxie until we moved to Texas in 1968.

In the course of doing research for this piece, I discovered that several Maine pubs feature Moxie cocktails. The New Englander bar mixes the soda with gin and Worcestershire sauce and tops it off with a slice of lime. The Burnt Trailer cocktail is one part Allen’s Coffee Brandy to two parts Moxie. It is best partaken with a lobster roll and a slice of blueberry pie, according to a piece in the *Bangor Daily News*. It never occurred to me to mix Moxie with spirits. Maybe because I’m not from Maine.

A few decades ago, I was back in New England on a summertime visit. I decided to buy a can of Moxie and relive a piece of my youth. Bleeechh! My taste buds have definitely changed in the past 50 years. Moxie tasted like carbonated cough medicine, the kind where you must hold your nose to choke it down. I have imbibed colonoscopy prep that tasted better. The experience reminded me of when, in about the same time frame, I bought a Moon Pie, recalling how much I loved them as a kid. It tasted like chocolate-flavored cardboard with sweetened Elmer’s glue in the middle.

I realize Moxie is still loved by many New Englanders, and taste is in the eye of the beholder. For me, I guess it proves the adage: When it comes to childhood food and beverage, you can’t go home again. And you probably don’t want to.