**A la recherche du sweets perdu: An obit for Fantales**

**June 2023**

A piece of my childhood was stolen from me on June 20, 2023. Nestlé Oceania Confectionery announced that it would cease making Fantales in July 2023.

Fantales – hard sticky caramel toffee coated in chocolate and wrapped in the lives of movie stars. I should explain that: each wrapper had a short bio of a film star (in my generation, I understand they also now have musicians)hence the clever catchy name Fantales (kudos to the marketing whizz that came up with that).

Fantales were one of the three movie going treats of my childhood, the others being Minties – a white toffee with a minty flavour, and Jaffas – little balls of orange flavoured chocolate snug inside a red sugar shell. I was never a big popcorn fan and ice cream cones just got soggy and dribbled down my best-dressed shirt and spotted my shorts embarrassingly. Fantales, Minties and Jaffas could be popped whole in the mouth: no mess. Fantales and Minties had the benefit of being a long-lasting chew, producing floods of chocolate or minty saliva that sloshed around in your mouth. Gross I know but I plead my age in my defence. The downside of both was that sometimes – well, more often than not - they clung a tad too well to your teeth necessitating their unbeautiful extraction of the sticky mass by a finger – which was somewhat compensated for by being able to lick a caramel covered finger. I asked Facebook friends to recount their experiences with Fantales, and dental fillings was reported by a number of them – well, two to be honest.

Fantales had an extra attraction – those bios. Never in my childhood years at the cinema on my own, they provided me and my companions - usually my brothers but the occasional play mate also - with something to do before the film started. (I was never that fond of rolling Jaffas down the aisle – you just got carpet thread stuck on a perfectly good sweet.) We’d take it in turn to unwrap the Fantale, pop it in our mouth as we read out the bio on the wrapper without saying the name of the person bioed. The others in the party had to guess whose bio it was. It was rarely that anyone guessed correctly but that didn’t matter; the fun was in the trying. I did not like some I knew, however, collect the wrappers and stick them in an exercise book to be pondered on over and over.

According to the [Nestlé General Manager](https://bit.ly/46mbBzN) the decision was taken because the investment needed to upgrade the machinery for making Fantales could not be justified while sales were falling. Instead they apparently will prioritise their ‘other *Allen’s*lollies, including fan favourites such as Snakes Alive, Party Mix and Minties’. [Snakes Alive](https://www.bigw.com.au/product/allen-s-snakes-alive-1kg/p/867433) are described as deliciously soft and juicy. ‘Stretch one, twist one or tie your two favourite flavours together then bite their squishy heads off and enjoy the burst of juicy flavours.’ I can see some fun in that but after all it’s just suspiciously coloured jelly. [The Party Mix](https://allenslollies.com.au/products/our-classics-party-mix) is described as ‘perfect for sharing, with a popular favourite candy for everyone. Join in this fun lolly mix and get the party started with cool banana, creamy milk bottles, stretchy snakes, tangy peaches and cream and more!’. But these are just soft and sugary one-bite-one-hit items and besides Fantales were always shared anyway.

It was reported that in scenes not seen since the last floods, [fans of Fantales were panic buying. emptying shelves](https://bit.ly/46mbBzN) and hoarding what they managed to lay their hands on. Certainly there were none in the days after the announcement on the shelves of my IGAs or 7/11s, though as I don’t usually go cruising the sweetie aisles therein those shelves may well have been bereft of Fantales for some time.

As for the [conspiracy theory](https://bit.ly/46mbBzN) that hit online soon after the announcement was made, only the most cynical capitalist would make the announcement of their withdrawal as some kind of threat for we Fantale fanatics to go and buy more Fantales.

Woolworths tried to capitalize on the decision by releasing online a ‘speedy, family-friendly recipe inspired by the iconic Australian lolly’ which they had the audacity to call [Iconic Chewy Chocolate-caramel Lollies.](https://www.woolworths.com.au/shop/recipes/iconic-chewy-chocolate-caramel-lollies) The recipe was for making 100 of the sweets. Now, I don’t know how many Fantales there were - I mean ARE - in a packet, but I can’t picture anyone no matter how die-hard a fan making 100 of an inferior version of Fantales: some things should not be home-made. Woollies claimed it would only take 25 minutes to make the caramel toffee, but failed to say how long it would take to cut the slab of toffee into one hundred lozenges and coat them individually in chocolate. And as a sometime jam maker I know how agonisingly long it can be to get syrups to that just right setting stage. Also the ad was a shameless plug for Woollies condensed milk.

But here’s the thing. Fantales were not just another lump of chocolate coated caramel toffee. In Woollies’ online picture of their ‘simple, speedy’ toffees said toffees are naked (one looking like it’s had an accident that’s crushed it’s skin – a Fantale would never crack like that) or wrapped in a flimsy tissue. Woollies has missed the point with fans like me. Fantales were as much about unwrapping them and reading the bios as they were about the toffee. As proof that I am not some isolated film tragic, here’s [Tallarook General Store Owner Vicky Parry](https://bit.ly/46iOrdH): "The kids come in after school and love them … they all sit around the table after school and work out what movie it is [on the wrapper].” And here is [Hetty Lui McKinnon](https://bit.ly/44eqDWl), [cookbook author](https://www.broadsheet.com.au/national/food-and-drink/article/recipe-hetty-mckinnons-cucumber-and-cabbage-noodle-salad-black-bean-sauce), New York City: ‘They are my fave. I am devastated. I used to collect those wrappers and on car trips we read out clues to see who could guess the celeb first’. And also [Natalie Paull](https://bit.ly/44eqDWl), of [Beatrix](https://www.broadsheet.com.au/melbourne/north-melbourne/cafes/beatrix-cafe), Melbourne: As soon as I heard the news about Fantales I was unfazed. The best thing about Fantales was really only the wrapper and reading out the “Who am I?” question on those interminable family car trips down the coast every holiday. The Fantale itself was an ordinary sweetie. Minties are far superior in the car lolly hierarchy.’

I won’t buy into a debate about Minties v Fantales – not today any way. Too soon, as they say. I wish now I had collected the wrappers and stuck them in a book so in the absence of the Fantale itself I could run my fingers over them and like Proust and his madeleine summon up temps perdu.