

Letters from the



project



Telling stories
Touching lives

In summer 2023 Touch Network hit a major milestone – we had run 100 storytelling events in Southampton!

That's 100 magical gatherings where speakers share their own true stories of overcoming adversity. It's thousands of people uplifted and encouraged, and so many lives changed.

To celebrate, we set out to collect 100 letters from our community telling your own stories of resilience.



Touch Network began with a letter. In 2015, Debs Carter wrote down her own story of overcoming severe depression, and sent it through the post to her friends, contacts and even some celebrities. She was amazed by the response, and invited others to also share their stories at a one-off event in a small coffee shop in Southampton.



Eight years and 100 events later, Touch has helped more than 260 people share their stories of getting through tough times.

Everyone has a story of overcoming a challenge in their life, whether it's big or small.

We asked our community: What do you wish your younger self knew about who you are now, and what you've overcome?

This is a selection of the letters we were sent in response.

Some names have been changed at the writer's request.

1 Sophie

Dear younger self,

You really hate exercise right now – but I promise that will change!

I grew up feeling very alienated from my body, and for a long time I believed I just wasn't the sort of person who exercised. Then I discovered that I could do it at my own pace, in my own way and on my own terms.

Right now, I know you're the kind of indoorsy child who would rather hide in the school library with a book than go outside and run around! You hate PE lessons with a passion and feel a lot of shame about being asthmatic, unfit and uncoordinated. You're so self-conscious about looking stupid that you never run or dance in front of anyone.

In my twenties I experienced a lot of stress that manifested as chronic pain, including constant migraines. I had a lot of anxiety around my health and spent almost all of my time in front of my laptop or TV. I knew that exercise would probably help but I always felt too exhausted, and embarrassed about starting from a fitness level of below zero.



I've learned that I can change my habits if I choose to, and that's really empowering.



In my mid-twenties I started doing Pilates to help with my pain, and it turned out to be a gateway into a different kind of exercise. I went to a gentle class that was focused on building strength and moving in the right way. I learned about the tight muscles that were causing my pain, and which stretches could help. This led into doing YouTube yoga at home (years before the lockdown trend!) and eventually feeling brave enough to go for a run with a friend.

My first 'run' (run is too strong a word for what happened) was an absolute disaster. I was out of breath pretty much as soon as I got out of my front door, and I ended up walking most of the way round. But it didn't matter, because I'd got over my mental barrier around going out for the first time.

I realised that most people are too busy going about their day to actually care what anybody else is doing. If someone sees you puffing and panting down the street in your running gear, they don't know you've only just left the house - they probably think you've run five miles already!

Now yoga classes are a regular part of my routine, and I love going to the gym during less busy periods of life. I run every week too because it's good for my mental health. It gets the nervous energy out of my body, and helps with my headaches and sleep. I never go very far or very fast; I always let myself stop to walk if I need to; and I focus on how good I feel afterwards.

I've learned that for me personally, being gentle with myself is the absolute best way to get motivated. I would cry if a personal trainer tried to make me do squats, I hate competitiveness, and I've never had any fitness goals! I still don't exercise as much as I probably should, but I do something, and that's better than nothing. Going at my own pace makes sure I actually enjoy it, and that's what makes it sustainable for me.



I've learned that I can change my habits if I choose to, and that's really empowering. Ten years ago I never would have imagined that I could keep up a good habit like running. I've also learned that if I push my mind and body a bit, they can rise to the challenge - I don't have to be scared of falling apart. I haven't run any marathons or even half-marathons (or 10ks!), but for my 30th birthday I was able to walk the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, a tough three-day trek at altitude! I know you'll find it hard to believe that's possible.

Knowing that I was able to make a change in this one small area makes me more hopeful about the bigger changes I'd like to see in my life. I'm less likely to believe that 'I'm just not the kind of person who does X' (running, dancing, adventurous travel, wearing that outfit, public speaking...) and more likely to give it a go in my imperfect way.

I'm still learning how to take care of myself, but now I know that being at home in my body is a big part of that.

**Love, your older
self x**





2 *Emily*

Dear younger self,

Grieving as an adult is tough... really tough, but I'm here to tell you that you can get through it. And that you're stronger than you think.

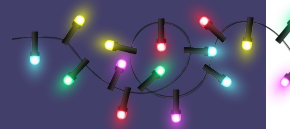
Losing Dad unexpectedly turned things upside down. Our relationship with him was at times a challenging one, especially as you were so close to him when you were younger. But after some big upheavals in his life things become more complicated, and his dependence on alcohol added to this. I want you to know that you did all you could to help him, that you and Sophie made him so happy and that he felt he could tell his daughters anything.

That December evening will be stuck in your mind forever, the smell of the chilli you were cooking as you spoke to Sophie, and realised neither of you had spoken to Dad in a couple of weeks. The Christmas tree lights twinkling as she told you that she had called the police to come and break into his flat as there was no answer at the door. The sound of the sobs you shared as she called to tell you what the police had found.

It felt like we became 'proper' adults that night, something about losing a parent seems to take away a bit of the child in you I think. We were both determined to give him the best send off, and to pay tribute to how much he influenced both of us.

We were all he had, so we were the ones that needed to organise the funeral, clear out his flat and do all of the other stuff that nobody really talks about... closing bank accounts, cancelling phone bills... someone needs to write a guide on what to do when someone dies!

“Something about losing a parent seems to take away a bit of the child in you.”



The time between dad dying and the funeral whizzed by, I think we were both running on autopilot and threw ourselves into getting everything that we needed to sorted (and it was December, so there was Christmas too). It was after the funeral that I started to process what had happened, there were many tears and a physical pain that he was gone. In time that pain grew less and less and now when I hear a song that reminds me of Dad, or smell his favourite aftershave I smile rather than cry.



**You know that you can do hard things,
and that there's strength inside you
that will help you through.**



I can look at photos and talk about past holidays and other memories with a smile on my face, and laugh at his shorter-than-short shorts and patterned shirts with a genuine feeling of warmth and happiness. Its only now that I'm realising my love of loud, patterned shirts has come from Dad!

I think I will always find it odd that so much has happened in the last six years that he wasn't here for, but I like to think that he's cheering us on from wherever he is now. And I know he'd be proud of who we are now. I love seeing robins when I'm out on a run or a cycle, they always make me feel close to Dad.

Why am I writing you this? To let you know that you can do hard things, and that there's strength inside you that will help you through it. And that it's fine to laugh too, you're not letting anyone down by finding joy in things. Keep going, lean on the people you have around you cheering you on, and know that you're made of strong stuff, even if sometimes it doesn't feel like it.



From, Emily



Dear 18-year-old me,

For starters I just want to say how proud of you I am we are now 20 and I know we never imagined we would make it this far but we have and we are happier than ever.

I wanted to give you a major update on what's going to happen, because you are about to go through something really tough, something I know we've already been planning to do for a while, and there will be times where you will think you have done the wrong thing or you are a bad person but I promise you what you are about to do will be for the best and the people who are important will understand that.

I'm going to stop beating around the bush and just say it, we finally cut dad out of our life completely. 6 months after we turned 18, we finally get the guts to do it and we send him a letter in the post telling him everything he has done to hurt us and telling him never to contact us again. I'm not going to lie to you, there is some backlash from this, he will contact mum and try and blame her and he will keep sending you money for Christmas and birthdays, but don't let this make you cave you are so much better without him; our mental health is slowly healing day by day.



We never imagined we would make it this far but we have and we are happier than ever.



The last time you will see him before you go no contact is the August after we turn 18. And I must ask something of you, hug grandad a little tighter when you visit him because its will be the last time you ever see him. He unfortunately will loose his battle with cancer in January 2023. You will feel a deep sense of regret and guilt that you weren't able to see him before he died but I believe he is still with me, and he understands that it is not because of him we don't visit.

Your biggest supporter through all of this will be Skye you guys start dating a month after we turn 18 and she will be there with you through all the pain, because I'll be honest while this is the best thing, we could have done the grief is no joke. You will be mourning the loss of someone who is still alive as well as later mourning the loss of grandad, but we are also healing. I don't want you to be scared of taking this step so here are some of the good things that have happened after going no contact : we are 7 months clean of SH, we are in a committed relationship (its our 2 year anniversary next week super exciting), we completed first year of university with good grades, we get 2 tattoos, we feel more confident in ourselves generally, we get some amazing photography opportunities including events for this amazing charity, and probably the one I am most proud of- we celebrated our 20th birthday, we actually made it to our 20s!



Never stop believing in yourself, what you are about to go through is tough, but it is necessary, and I am now a better person having done it. Never forget, I am proud of you, you are amazing, and I love you!

From, 20-year-old Roxy



Never stop believing in yourself, what you are about to go through is tough, but it is necessary



4 *Kate*

Dear younger self,



I'm struggling with this exercise. I don't want to give away spoilers because the adventure and the unknown are wonderful, wonderful things. You are the person you are because of your willingness to give things a go and to grab life and its wonders. I'll tell you a little about your children though. I don't feel like that's too much of a spoiler because with your youthful confidence, dare I say arrogance, you are pretty sure children are on the cards for you.

Let's start at the beginning. Pregnancy is tough. You won't glow. You will get massive. Perhaps now is a good time to advise you to re-think the stomach tattoo. People are so amazingly kind, though. Strangers will give you a little smile of love and encouragement as you heave yourself up from your chair. Colleagues will work harder so you can take it a little easier. Friends will bring you care packages because they're thinking of you. Imagine that. I suppose you do glow – in the love and support that pregnancy seems to create. It's magical.

Childbirth is the most surreal experience. Tom—that's your husband—is great. He sneaks gas and air when the midwife isn't looking. He doesn't tell you off when you're sick on his feet. He is reassuring and kind and practical. He washes your hair tenderly. He does that for you, despite being tired and frightened. You are very lucky. Don't worry about pooing yourself. You don't.



People are so amazingly kind.

**Strangers will give you a little smile of
love and encouragement.**





Breastfeeding makes you feel like a superhero. It is wonderous and you are very good at it. Second time round it more difficult and painful. That pesky confidence again made you assume it would go just as well. You stick with it though – you amazing woman. You breastfeed for ages. It seems to go on forever, and not long enough. Lap it up. Gaze at their beautiful cheeks as they feed sleepily or ferociously from you. It's magical.



Your achievements get smaller, but so much more important. That's ok. That's magical.



You're not as good at parenting as you assumed you would be. It's tough: you will snap at them and immediately regret it. Forget that idea that your children won't ever watch telly. They watch loads of it. One summer your eldest adopts an American accent because he watches so much PowerRangers. That's ok. Time does something strange. It goes so quickly, and yet stalls and skips. It gets stuck when you're trying to get them to put their shoes on to leave the house.

Your boys are amazing. They are kind and funny and creative. They love your dog and all animals. Your house looks like you are losing a game of Jumanji, every day. Once you could recite Shakespearean speeches and hold your own in political debates. Now you know the names of the Teletubbies. You feel smug if you get the bins out on the right day. Your achievements get smaller, but so much more important. That's ok. That's magical.

The cliches are true. You do need a village and yours is special.

**From,
Older, exhausted and full of love, Kate**

Dear younger self,

I know that you are experiencing the ups and downs of being a female chess player, and this will continue. However you will continue to have amazing experiences because of the chess world.

As a child I played chess alongside mostly boys, having been inspired to play by my talented dad and brothers. To this day I am still grateful for my experiences in chess such as friendships, relationships, family bonding and travel. But there have been hardships too.

In junior chess there were subtle moments of exclusion or sexism around other junior players & adults that I might not have noticed until now. Like most children who played chess competitively at an advanced level I experienced the pressures of training, expectations & the thoughts and anxieties of having to tell those around me when I had made a silly mistake in a game or felt I had failed. As a girl, difficulties presented themselves as being left out of chitchat, playground games or Nintendo DS sessions between rounds in chess tournaments as well as feeling ignored, overlooked or as if my ideas did not matter as much as male counterparts.

A move that I suggested when analyzing a game often felt less impressive than if one of the boys suggested it. Occasionally I might suggest a move that went unheard, only for another child to suggest the same move and for it to be a great, highly praised suggestion. I often feared suggesting something stupid and losing respect.

5

Helen



“

I know that you are experiencing the ups and downs of being a female chess player

”

A particular experience that I recall as a child which I can confirm was certainly gender bias, was a male chess organiser's inability to speak to me or my mother. My mum, who would often drive me, my dad, & my brothers, has described to me how he would speak to men at a chess event but not to her; similarly I cannot recall anything he had said to me across years of playing at local chess events. Perhaps he felt awkward around women, or he only wished to discuss chess & was unable to think of what to say to myself or my mum.

As a teenager and young adult I have experienced more obvious and varied sexism within chess from subtle flirtatious behaviour to sexist comments and jokes. While the comments are more explicit and inappropriate when playing chess online, I have experienced comments in person too. In addition to comments about how I can be good at chess when I have specific learning difficulties, I have also overheard sexist jokes or comments assuming that less women play chess because women are naturally less logical or intelligent; disregarding how women have historically been barred from many educational and intellectual activities. Women are just as capable of being triumphant chess players but to get to the top a woman must overcome both the damage of historical suppression and deal with the hardships of the subtle discouragement still present for young women pursuing chess.

Despite this, I still have passion and drive for playing chess due to my love of the game and the amazing people I have bonded with. I appreciate that my dad always treated me like my brothers in regard to chess, he never behaved as if it was any different teaching his daughter to play as his sons. He comforted me after bad experiences or disappointing tournaments and cheered me on during my victories. I have had the pleasure of arbiting tournaments alongside my dad as well, running chess tournaments together which has been a great bonding experience.

I am grateful for my university chess society. Despite being the only girl on the team, my teammates are lovely and respect me as a strong player. Many of the guys at the society are open to ideas about encouraging more women to join; I know that there will be more women involved in the future even if it takes time. At chess society I have had great successes and met brilliant people who encourage my chess and challenge me to be better, including my boyfriend who I am lucky enough to have met at a chess society quiz night over a year ago and who has truly made so many aspects of my life happier.

So to my younger self who sometimes felt the passion for chess starting to fade away, I will reassure you that this passion will reignite and you will persevere because so many wonderful experiences and great people will come into your life as a result.



**From,
your
older self**

6 Marta



Dear early-twenties self,

How are you? Yeah, probably not great, uh? I remember what's like to be you. You are a complete mess. You don't know who you are, let alone what are you doing with your life. You don't even know whether you're attracted to boys or girls, but you don't even allow yourself to question that. You only date boys because no way you can be queer, that's not acceptable for a golden child like you. Still, you can't help having big crushes on girls, that you try hard to suppress. You always feel so lonely, even when you're surrounded by people.

You are doing this degree in molecular biology but you're not sure that stuff it's for you; you keep thinking about quitting, but you're too scared of what is everyone going to think about you. You think you'll disappoint everyone, especially your parents, and make a fool of yourself.

I have to thank you though, younger self. Thank you for bringing us to therapy. Spoiler alert: it's not going to be easy. It's going to be the best and hardest thing you've done in your life so far. Sometimes it will be painful, and it will take lots of time and patience. But you won't believe where you are now: you're discovered and accepted your true purpose in life, that is understanding and helping others. You've had the courage to quit a job that made you deeply unhappy, and to go back to university to study psychology. You are so passionate about that subject, that you can't stop reading about that even on your free time!

“ You only date boys because no way you can be queer, that's not acceptable for a golden child like you. ”



Since then, you started working in mental health, and you simply love it. Of course, it's not always all sunshine and rainbows, but that's your element. Now, you fulfilled your dream to work for a mental health charity, while keeping studying.

“ I know right now you're really struggling, dear younger self. You feel out of place, like a jigsaw piece that someone placed in the wrong box. ”



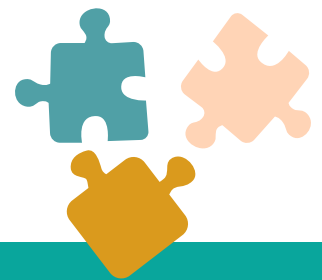
Discovering your true self and doing what you love will lead you to encounter people you really like and that appreciate you for who you truly are. You've made some lovely new friends, and you've met this amazing guy, kind, sensitive and open minded. You've been together almost 2 years now, most of which in long distance, but your bond was stronger than miles, and now you finally live together, and it couldn't be better. Together you have so much fun, you can just be yourselves, and you share a lot of wonderful experiences.

I know right now you're really struggling, dear younger self. You feel out of place, like a jigsaw piece that someone placed in the wrong box. You're convinced there must be something wrong with you, that you're not normal, but let me tell you, nobody is. I promise you, things will be better. You're braver and more resourceful than you think.

Still, I don't know what the future will look like for us; the truth is, nobody really knows. There's so much more you can learn and improve about yourself, but now you have the tools to live an authentic, fulfilling life. Keep holding on, embrace your uniqueness, and never stop dreaming.

With love,

Your 29-years-old self



“ I promise you, things will be better. You're braver and more resourceful than you think. ”

7 Jillian

My dearest child and adoptive family,

I have wanted to reach out to you for some time now and finally, I have found the courage to do so. As I sit down to write this letter, my heart is heavy with emotions of joy, love, and nostalgia. I know this may come as a surprise to you, but I want to tell you the story of how your father and I met, and how you came into this world.

Less than a year out of college, I was living in the bustling city of Leeds when I met your father. He was older, with a wealth of experience, and had already started his own family. I remember feeling intimidated by him, but something about him made my heart flutter, and I knew deep down that we were meant to be together.

As our relationship grew, we faced our fair share of challenges. People doubted us, but we were much in love, and he supported me throughout the pregnancy. He stood by my side through the sleepless nights, the endless doctor appointments, and the overwhelming moments of fear and uncertainty. He made me feel like the luckiest woman in the world, and I knew that we were building a life together that was strong and meaningful.

When you were born, it was like a ray of sunshine had entered my life. You were so precious, so innocent, and I knew from that moment on that I would love you unconditionally. You brought a new light into my life, and even though the journey was not always easy, it was worth it because you were with us.

It has been a long time since we last spoke or saw each other, but please know that I have always carried you in my heart. I hope that this letter finds you happy, healthy, and surrounded by love. Always remember that no matter where life takes you, you have a special place in my heart.

With love always



8 Alex

Dear younger self,



You didn't know how it would turn out... but if you had known, maybe it would have helped.

I still appreciate all those times you didn't give in, give up, check out of life. It was close - you tried to end it all, but something kept you going through the pain and despair. The years of confusion.

And you never knew why... but now I can look back stronger and more compassionately, and I hope, I truly hope, we have a better world where boys who fall in love with boys survive, with nothing more than the usual teenage traumas, and children whose parents cannot understand how to love them, get help.

Well, that went deep, fast!



Be strong and love yourself instead of those things which are sad substitutes for our authentic self



It really matters to me now, to acknowledge that it was tough... so tough for you. There were so many tears, for so many missing pieces. But eventually, we found family; even including some of our birth family. The fact that not everyone "gets you" is OK too. It doesn't matter that they don't - you have your own power and you love yourself now.

But oh my god - what a journey! Be strong and love yourself instead of those things which are sad substitutes for our authentic self - work, religion, money, success, alcohol.

It really does get better!

From, Alex

9

Jude

Dear younger self,



I'm going to start this letter with a difference, not by telling you that it's ok, everything worked out in the end, because that wouldn't be true. In fact, I'll take that further and say I want to encourage you to let go of what 'things working out' might even look like. These societal pressures and expectations at a young age, that I know feel important to you now, are far from helpful, and at worst, paralyzing.

I know you have already experienced considerable loss, more than the majority of your friends at this time. I understand this makes you feel 'different' because your life is overshadowed by shock and loss with bereavement and how this has destabilised your trust of life. I see how you hold uncertainty close to your heart because of how your life changed so suddenly. I wish I could reassure you more, that we can survive such events, however this can only be learned by time passing. We grow alongside our experiences and they shape us and we still have our precious lives to live.



You are magnificently, and individually, you, and you don't realise it now, but you continue to show serious tenacity and ability to believe in yourself and your values in life. I know how hard it is for you to imagine an 'older you' and that you feel afraid and even wonder if you will make it. Well let me tell you that you do make it. You become a very empathic, creative and strong woman and are never short of friends. Your core support network stays with you so don't worry, there are always people you can turn to. Some friends who know you now are still in your life years later and the friendships you make over the years get more honest.

Life feels so sad right now, however you learn to laugh again

This upheaval and stress does make you resilient, and although you feel now that the world can seem dark, this makes you more determined to strike for the light. You become someone who is not afraid of change, you learn to listen to your instincts with many life decisions and you find a dance with life, choose to see it as your own personal adventure and meet so many great people along the way. I know life feels so sad right now, however you learn to laugh again, and you laugh, a lot, you really do. You're funny, you never lose your humour and your ability to be real about life somehow becomes a gift.

I never do fathom what ‘things working out’ looks like by the way. I’ve realised it’s far from the most important thing

I can already see the wisdom in your eyes, when you hear others who appear to have their life planned out, because you know that sometimes life has other plans. This ability to see the bigger picture serves you well. You will always go that extra mile for someone, say the things you want to say, tell those you love and admire just that and this ability to connect with what really matters, makes your life rich and meaningful.

The rug being pulled from under you in these teenage years, actually helps to make you appreciate everything around you and to love everyone you care about a little bit more, and you never put off acts of love or take for granted that we have all the time in the world. It’s such a beautiful way to be, the older me is proud of how you turn the vulnerability you feel now into a way to show up in life.

I never do fathom what ‘things working out’ looks like by the way. I’ve realised it’s far from the most important thing. What matters isn’t the boxes you tick but the experiences that enrich you and how content you feel on the inside. There’s no such thing as fitting in; self acceptance may be a new concept for you right now but this one has the power girl. Surround yourself with those who get you and your outlook on life, it will help you to discover more about yourself. Your happiest days will be when you feel happy just being you and knowing what you need and being ok with that. I promise you do learn to trust life again. I’m still looking after you now, after all these years, so just let me know when you need me to listen and I’ll do my best to remind you that you are safe, you’re doing great and we’re in this together, older and wiser but still learning.

Love older Jude



Dear

younger
self,

You didn't speak much
And when you did
Your dad would always have to lean down
But he never said anything

At school, if you were asked,
You froze and lost the thread
Even when you knew the answer
Because you always listened

Your best friend would weave
worlds with words at breaktime
And you didn't suggest otherwise
Although inside you burned

Perhaps that's where it started
The louding silence fermenting into forms
And lines and starbursts on paper
That someone told you were good

So even though you struggled to say
How you felt to boys or what you believed
In class or why it was wrong to speak
About that girl in green or yellow tones

You could always put pen to paper.

But I want you to know that whilst
That is perhaps still the strongest tool in your box
You have learnt that even your mumbled
Stumbling words spoken out matter

That Your voice has something to say
That people who count want to hear
That years bring wisdom worth sharing
And life brings wonder worth holding out

With your words, you love
With your words, you mother
With your words, you build up
With your words, you tear down
With your words, you hold space
With your words, you hold boundaries
With your words, you change views
With your words, you change endings
With your words
With your words
With yours.



From

**Your more
confident and
proudly still
introvert older
self**



11 Billie

Dear younger self,



“ I’m not sure the learning gets any easier, but you get stronger and are able to cope better. ”

Just to let you know that I’m here. I’m so sorry for all the things you are going through and how you’re having to do that with no-one to help you. I know its really hard and I understand why. I wish I could spare you some of the painful times you have still got to go through.

I know sometimes it will seem like there’s absolutely no point, I do get that, but the first steps really are the hardest and they will seem like they make little difference.

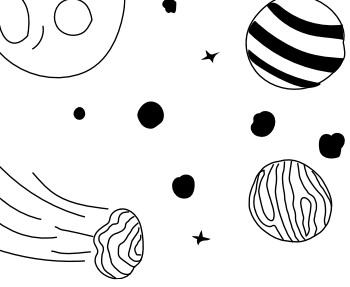
Keep going, though. I’m not sure the learning gets any easier, but you get stronger and are able to cope better. When your feet are a little less shaky on the ground and your heart has healed a bit, be brave and actively look for opportunities and you’ll be so surprised at what you can do, I promise.

So keep going on your journey, lovely person. I look back at where you are now and its so funny that in some ways I have travelled a million miles and in other ways, I have travelled no way at all: I still love the birds in the trees and a stirring love song from Julio 😊

So I guess what I’m saying is don’t try to change who you are intrinsically, just grow strong and wise and I’ll see you when you get here.



With lots of love from your older self xx



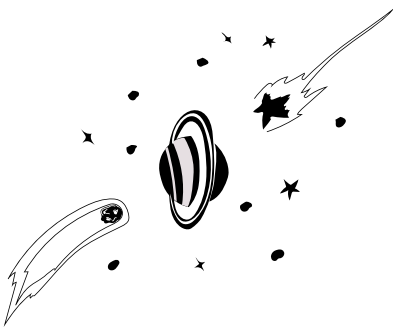
To my younger self from your older self,

12 Kirk

This is a bit strange to be writing a letter to my younger self, but we share the name and experiences and we will "explore strange new worlds, seek out life and civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before", as quoted by Star Trek's Captain James T. Kirk.

It would be unfair of me to hint at the experiences we will share.

What I can do is give you some knowledge to help guide you through the many trials and tribulations that life will bring, in the hope that this will better prepare you for anything you find difficult.



As a child-

1. Be a child, get out in the world, play with other children and try to make friends, don't be afraid to get dirty, run around, ride bikes/ scooters & skateboards. Play at being pirates, knights, doctors, cops & robbers, build dens, listen to music and do silly dances, and do everything a kid should do in play.
2. Be kind to animals, your family, friends and people you meet, its nice to be nice.
3. Be open minded and you'll find what your genuine interests and gifts are. These are what will help you distract from the things that make you sad, these interests and god given gifts can turn into hobbies that could change your life for the better and inspire others, at the very least they will teach you self taught practical, mindfulness skills & patience. Having hobbies and interests is just a child holding onto his/ her's dreams into adulthood.

4. If you need help, ask for help. If somebody asks you to do something that does not seem right, tell an adult you trust as soon as you can.
5. Know you are loved, that you have value and worth in this world. You have a voice and deserve for your concerns and thoughts to be listened to just as much as anybody else.

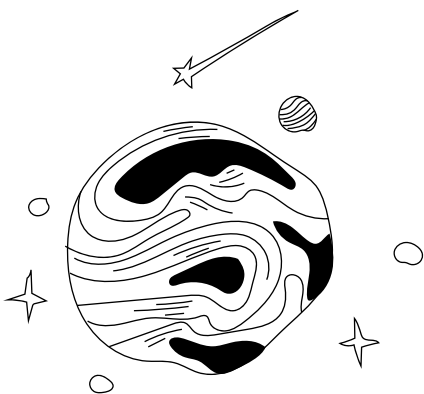
Be open minded and you'll find what your genuine
interests and gifts are



In school and with friends



1. Be open to learning, try to enjoy it and again ask if you don't understand or have questions.
2. You will surely come across things in education that go against your character (your authentic self), if these types of teaching methods really are difficult for you to go along with, take great comfort in knowing that it does not benefit every child to learn in ways that are set out in the normal curriculum, you don't have to learn in specific ways to be successful and happy.
3. Surround yourself with good friends.
4. Find a balance between spending time with your friends and time alone, being comfortable in your own company will aid you immensely, just as knowing when you need to spend time out with mates and making the effort to do so.
5. Don't give in to peer pressure, you don't have to bow to, or impress anyone who calls you friend or classmate. There is a quote from Star Wars that suits this advice- "Who's the more foolish? The fool or the fool who follows him?"

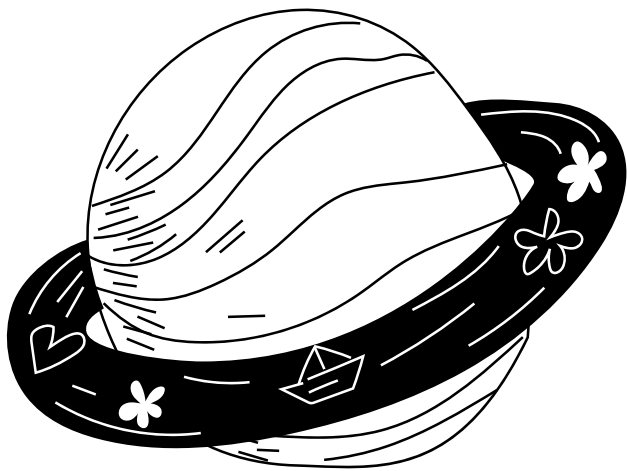


In employment

1. Remember you do not own your job, you were given an opportunity by your company/ boss. It is then up to you to make this opportunity mutually beneficial, give them the best version of yourself, be kind, polite, professional & courteous and be willing to work hard, the clue is in the title "work", anything worth having will be hard work.
2. If in doubt ask questions, any employer would prefer that you may ask what might seem a silly question, so you " get things right", rather than not ask and get things wrong, which isn't looked good upon if it has cost them time and money. Do your best even in the most shitty of jobs.
3. Judge people on character, not on age, race, gender, sexuality, disabilities, religion, culture or looks. Don't be drawn into others arguments and focus on what you are doing.
4. Learn your rights and stand up for yourself when you have to, if you come from the stand point of having valid concerns that are damaging to yourself and a company they should listen. Don't take an employers word as gospel on things, do your own research to ensure that if you have to stick your neck out, you are doing it in a way that is backed up by the law and in the least confrontational way unless absolutely necessary.
5. A company or boss do not own you, if the job is making you unhappy, realise you have choices and the power to make these even in the most difficult of situations. If you are unhappy leave or come up with an exit strategy.

In relationships

1. Know that just because you have family members, that being a member of a clan does not give any individual the right to treat you in unacceptable ways, and carry out acts that cause physical or emotional harm. This reflects on them. Do not accept these acts and stand up to it as long as it does not put you in danger.
2. Don't try to live up to others high expectations of what you should be like. Don't be a people pleaser, you aren't a source for others entertainment, there is a big difference between people laughing with you, or laughing at you. You deserve more than crumbs of affection or friendship.
3. In a partnership, show love, don't just say it. Communicate & compromise, make eye contact, cuddle and talk, this has to be genuine and not forced, love and affection can't be bought, it has to be given freely. Don't become complacent, keep doing nice things for your lover and give them your time with no distractions and no expectations other than to build a connection and a stronger union. Sex is important- communicate and explore each others likes/dislikes and fantasies.
4. Don't hold grudges and carry over arguments, this breeds resentment and will eventually end a relationship. Be ready to listen to what may be very hard things to discuss. These can be the positive interactions that can save relationships and become lifelong unions.
5. This is the hardest thing to experience, rejection or break ups. Try to accept that sometimes relationships do run their course and come to an end. It can be extremely painful to break up. At the time it is hard to see, but this is just as much a new beginning as it is an end, and everything happens for a reason.

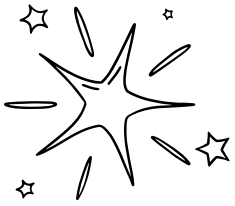


“
Don't try to live up to
others high
expectations of what
you should be like.
Don't be a
people pleaser
”

General rules for life.



1. Don't dwell on the past & what you can't change, try not to predict the future & set goals that are unachievable. The best way to predict the future is to be in the present and make the future. Take the time to learn to enjoy small joys.
2. Treat people with kindness, compassion, empathy & non judgement. Practice "unconditional positive regard", this where you take people as they are, leaving any of your preconceived beliefs or ideals at the door, you can then build on relationships & have honest conversations that are mutually beneficial, this builds trust and will allow thoughts to be explored to gain understandings on solutions to problems.
3. Be honest with yourself & others, but be mindful who you share your fears or negative experiences with. Try to not give all your energy to people at the expense of your physical or mental health. You have to look after you first to be able to look after anyone else.
4. Learn to listen to your intuition, if things seem off, they generally are. Face your fears a bit at a time or all at once, if you don't, they feed from you, grow & rule your life.
5. Know that everyone likes to try new mind-expanding experiences, be aware- everything in moderation and experienced for all the right reasons. Any substances that aid these experiences come with good and bad points, giving yourself too more than an occasional dipping of the toes can lead to addictions, these become bigger & additional problems. Addictions replace things that are missing in your life, find what is missing & work on these.



Lastly the only real advice i can give is- people of all kinds & races aren't so different, we all have the same base bodily functions, hopes, fears & universally shared emotions & similar experiences, this is how we relate.

Live, laugh, love.

**From
your older,
balder self**

Kirk



13 Trisha

Dear younger self,

It makes me sad when I think of you as a teenager. You so believed you were awful, doing it all wrong, you were a terrible person. Well thankfully, I can tell you now, it's not true! You are all around okay!

Sometimes you lose your temper, sometimes you're not as kind as you should be or could be, sometimes you get irritated.

But sometimes you ARE kind, sometimes you ARE fun sometimes you ARE clever.

You are basically all round okay, and so is everyone else, you don't need to beat yourself up for every little mistake.

Be kind to yourself it's okay and you are okay. Life is much easier as a grown up, honestly younger self, you'll get through this.

Postcard



.....
.....
Love, me
.....

xx
.....

14 Hayley



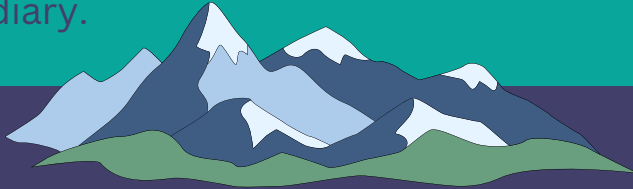
Dear younger self,

Check us out, still being alive and fabulously in our 50's!

Now, done get me wrong kiddo, life for you is a very mixed bag for sure. I am not here to give you any concrete spoilers, because you are a bit rubbish at being patient when it comes to surprises – let alone what you know will be happening!

Life will not give you all you want; it will give you what you need – and it will take a long time to learn that this is going to be okay.

If you were a Dungeons and Dragons character – this is the Race and Class, you will be (this will totally make sense I promise!) Halfling Cleric or Paladin. You, like these classes, have a strong sense of guidance! Whether it be religious or from others, you look to other sources for guidance when you're facing hardships. It never hurts to ask someone for help! Keywords: bond, intermediary.



“ Times will be tough, really really tough – but also miraculous in many little ways. ”

You're likely an empath, caring for those close to you and those in your community. Community will be your sanctuary and strength. You have a set of ideals you believe in and strive to represent them out in the world. They are not going to be easily defined, because your ideals will forever be evolving. You're a team player, putting the success of the group over individual success. You are the glue that holds your friend group together, doing what you can to help, whether that's a shoulder to cry on or a wingman in a social setting. You're likely the one your friends confide in and the most trusted.

You will find you can hold onto a grudge forever. However, you will have a strong support network, and it's good for you to release your pain in constructive ways like just having a good, long cry. Times will be tough, really really tough - but also miraculous in many little ways.

Your mantra is that you are a sore loser and a cheat and will tell anyone who wants to know about this. You will hate to admit defeat, this sometimes will be a problem, and sometimes it will save the day.

What you need to be happy is to thrive on deep emotional connections—and often, you will value quality over quantity when it comes to relationships. Just as important to you will be honesty and transparency. Open and honest communication is critical to your satisfaction. Not everyone will be able to make you happy and this is all part of the journey.



Take comfort in your keen intuition and profound sensitivity to the energy of others and embrace your own spiritual tendencies by way of energy healing. This is a holistic approach that you will use without even realising, to channel what the universe has to offer to help balance and heal. This may not make sense to you today, and at times you are going to feel lost. Keep these words close to your soul and they will guide you even in your darkest hours.

My fear for you is that we will get dementia and lose the memories of the loved ones in our life and richness of our journey. I guess this is why, in your own unique way, you stomp about trying to make a legacy out of life. I am delighted to say, so far, you have succeeded! You are enough. I am truly proud of you and the world is going to be lucky to have you, even if the world confuses you completely!

Thank you for being stupidly brave and wonderfully stubborn, it has been worth it! Now relax and enjoy the bumpy ride, no-one said it is going to be easy. It is going to be worth it though...

Liberate the bad and appreciate the good xx

“ Keep these words close to your soul and they will guide you even in your darkest hours. ”

Dear younger self,



15 Carly

You have ADHD and that's okay.

I know you're probably not entirely sure how that can be possible. You can't have ADHD because you're a girl. You love school and you're obsessed with reading, and teachers and parents like you. You try really hard to be good. But, also, somewhere in the back of your mind I know this will make sense.

You've always been called hyper, crazy, loud. You can't sit still, you lose everything you touch, and you rattle through emotions at a lightning speed. This isn't going to change. It's part of a diagnosis that's going to take you until you're 25 to get.

I want you to know that it's okay that you regularly lose pens inside your sofa and forget your headphones at your friends' houses. You're not broken because you actually don't know how to whisper and struggle not to fidget. Realistically, as you get older you can text instead of whispering, and no-one minds if you need to doodle while listening to them talk. Things are easier.

Missing and broken stuff can be replaced and your friends and the people you work with appreciate your creativity. You can work sitting cross legged on the floor. You don't have to wear itchy clothes or eat food that has weird textures anymore. Now you're older you can make the rules. I know you're young now and everyone's telling you that you need to be different and you're trying so hard. Thank you and well done for trying, but I promise that one day you won't need to as much.

You don't need to be perfect, quiet, still. You can be clumsy and eager and enthusiastic, and people will still love you.

You're doing so well. One day you'll be 26 and living in your own flat and things will be so much brighter.

Until then, I love you.



16 Valerie

Dear younger self,



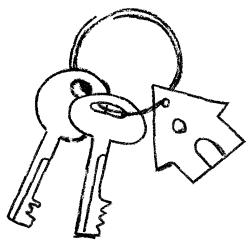
When you were 14 years old, and had your first major depressive episode, and were suicidal you were very frightened. Getting diagnosed at the age of 29, was a real turning point. You were relieved and happy to start treatment.

I know though that you were deeply unhappy in your marriage, and to leave that marriage was also a relief, because he pushed and pushed you to do things that were simply overwhelming – and you kept relapsing.

It was a relief to go back on the ward – and then into a 24 hour care hostel. It was a relief to be divorced.

When your divorce settlement came through you took the brave step of moving out of the hostel and into a flat of your own. You wanted your independence, and that is totally understandable.

During the time you were living in 24 hour care you had a close relationship with another man. In the end you fell in love with him but it wasn't reciprocated, so you had your heart broken. You stopped looking after yourself and your surroundings, and gave up. You struggled with religion, and your sexuality was an issue – you knew you were bisexual but found it hard to live with it, and reconcile it with your religion. Eventually you found a church that accepts people who are in that situation, and you are happy and settled there, and feel accepted.



After many years in and out of hospital, and living in different places, you have been in the same flat for almost five years, which is incredible. Yes – your flat is a mess and yes at times you struggle to look after yourself- but you haven't had a hospital admission for over 9 years. Which is an amazing achievement.

5 years ago you ran into A by chance and started seeing him as a friend, and then in September 2020 you got together as partners. After a year he died from cancer which was devastating. But you carried on and with support made the journey of grief, and although it's very painful – you survive each day with courage and faith and hope.

With love, your older self



Dear younger self,

POSTCARD

You smile and pretend that all is alright

You hide what you know, pretend you're not bright

You constantly try to please others you see

No time to be selfish no time to be me

While actually who you are is pretty good

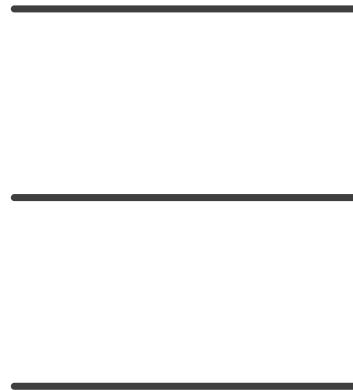
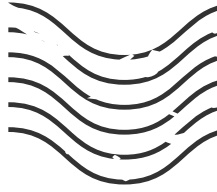
You don't understand that, though really you
should

You're loved and you're cherished and you'll learn
to be strong

So believe in yourself and don't worry you're
wrong

Though words may still hurt you, they won't break
your soul

Stand tall and believe that you will reach your goal.



17 Lara





Dear younger self,

19 Jac

Oh, sweetheart. You wanted love for so long. To feel cherished, beautiful enough. And when you found it, it swept you away like a wave: a heady dream come true. At last! With all those stars in your eyes, you didn't see your mis-step. You didn't know you were falling into a trap, of years of abuse.



And now, though you don't know it yet, you are terrified to love again. You will walk through the next years on high alert - trying to be hypervigilant to keep yourself safe.

But you must love again, my darling. All that armour is not keeping you safe. It is holding you back from true connection. And you will. You will love again. I can't say when, but a soul like you has too much love in your heart not to share it.

Know that everything is working out in your favour - just as it always has been, just as it always will be.

**From, your older, growing
and currently in therapy**

Self xxx



**“ But you must love
again, my darling ”**

20 Charlie



**Dear
younger
self,**



You don't realise this at the moment but what you're going through and learning is going to serve you well in years to come. You'll understand how others feel while also knowing that you can rely on yourself to cope and dig deep, even when you are feeling isolated and alienated by everyone around you.

The names they call you are not your fault. They don't realise the cuts they cause when they land and you will heal. You cannot change who you are for them and you should not hide or be ashamed. You are wonderful just as you are and it is the people who don't recognise that who are missing out on the joys of life, not you.

Remember to look for the worth in others too and strive to prevent others feeling isolated like you do now. Self worth and strength are the greatest gifts the bullies are giving you without even realising that their intentions have the opposite effect,

Stand proud, stay strong and keep believing. You will get through this.



“ **Self worth and strength are the greatest gifts the bullies are giving you without even realising** ”

To : Me at 21 years old
cc: Me at 42 years old
From: Me today, 77 years old next month

21 Sheila



Tomorrow is my younger daughter's 50th birthday. I've bought her a card that asks 'So when does 'Old enough to know better' kick in?' Here's my answer.. NEVER! You'd think that would be bad news but it's not necessarily that at all.

Remember how you were going to be a modern mum, Age 21? Dr Miriam Stoppard would be your guru of choice, mainly because you won her book in a competitive quiz on motherhood before your first daughter was born.

Remember your Mum telling you how, when she was expecting your youngest brother, she was going to be a modern Mum and had told you older ones that the new baby was in Mummy's tummy? That worked right up until a neighbour in the village asked us "So, there's going to be a new baby in your house soon, isn't there?" and my brother responded "No, Mummy's eaten it!" We assume he'd been confused by Granddad telling us not to disturb the pig when she'd farrowed or, and I quote, '..she'll eat her young'uns!' It didn't stop you from declining your Mum's advice and saying "yeah, but the book says..." giving Mother the opportunity to reply "Lovely! Has the baby read the book?"

I'm better at both picking my battles and conceding defeat these days and, even at the time, you laughed and confessed your clever Mum had outsmarted Dr Miriam, who was many things but definitely not funny!



**I'm better at both
picking my battles and
conceding defeat
these days**



Hello, Age 42! It's me...Nearly 77.

Remember that March when you were in the Far East getting ready to leave the ship to fly home because your Mum had died? You got a letter from daughter announcing her baby, due in July and making you a Granny. Remember how, on the one hand, it was a beam of light in the darkness of sorrow but, on the other, terrifying because you only knew how to ask Mum for her advice and now it was you who'd be expected to have answers.



Luckily, daughter was also going to be an enlightened modern Mum, starting with clothes! Sophisticated black and white only. Nothing traditional. OK, you started knitting an all in one pram suit in white with black spots and a hat with Dalmatian ears. Eventually in July, you got a brief call from home to say baby had arrived. You raced off the ship in Gibraltar and made a call to the hospital. Apparently, this was the most exquisite baby girl ever and she was dainty, beautiful ...a veritable princess!

Hmmmm, so maybe not exclusively black and white utilitarian wardrobe, then? Remember going into the local wool shop and the kind lady there producing the most delicate shell pink 4ply wool and a traditional lace knit layette pattern. Your daughter changed her child into it and out of her Great-Granny's christening gown, after the baptism. Do you remember too how one of the baby's aunts, a dedicated mother of five and a practicing GP, offered to take baby from your Dad when she fretted. She was absolutely astounded to see this 70plus year old man manage to feed rusk to a baby in an antique silk gown without getting a spot on either the dress or himself. Heh! There's stuff only oldies know.



Well, you two ...here's where we are! I hope I haven't given you too hard a journey. Being a single Mum wasn't easy but you both did the best you could at the time. You kept a roof over the heads of the children who were always warm, clothed and well fed. You learned (and continue to learn) life lessons from your family and friends; some from handed down wisdom but other things new and modern. You've always tried to be optimistic and open to new experiences. I appreciate the children and grandchildren, who've turned out just fine! By and large, you've had good health so, although I should perhaps have taken more care of you, we're pretty well now!

“ **Being a single Mum wasn't easy but you both did the best you could at the time.** ”



22 Teri



Dear younger self,

This was meant to be a hand-written letter on the special paper that Touch Network gave me, but your future self accidentally wrote a To-Do List on the back of it.

So, in the spirit of lists, here is one for you.



- 1 Use your voice in all the ways, and listen more
- 2 Embrace technology, and then hold it at arms length
- 3 Read as many books as you can
- 4 Look where you're going, and look up often. But stop first. You might walk into some lampposts.
- 5 Ask more questions, and answer some questions with 'No'
- 6 What people say about you says more about them
- 7 Don't get a credit card
- 8 You can never have too many hobbies or take too many holidays, but please see Number 7 again
- 9 Nothing stays the same, enjoy it all
- 10 You have plenty of time, so ignore this list, and do what you were going to do anyway

