

A Note to Self: Revisited

by BROCK WEIR

Nearly seven years ago, photographer Angela Durante, was kind enough to invite me to participate in a project she was spearheading alongside fellow community creatives.

Entitled 'The Note to Self Project,' more than 50 individuals were invited to quite literally write a note with advice to their younger selves. Each response was to be accompanied by a professional portrait taken by participating photographers, with the prose left up to the subjects.

I was taken aback, at first, to get the invitation, but the idea was certainly interesting and I was eager to take on the challenge. Getting a professional headshot in the process was just a bonus!

'Step away from the mothballs. You might not know it now, but the seeds have already been sewn,' I wrote to myself. 'You will find out soon enough that you're just a little bit different from other people. Some might call you an 'old soul,' that horrible term you will come to mildly detest over time as it implies you're living in the past or, at worst, inching closer and closer to your 'sell by' date. Despite your best efforts, you're not going to give a damn about most of the things your peers will obsess over.

'In private, you acknowledge the fact you're an old soul. You're not living in the past or cocooning yourself in a false wave of nostalgia, but you appreciate what's come before you, how it defines where you're going and, moreover, you appreciate quality. Rather than coming home from school or flipping on the TV to watch something like *Saved By The Bell*, you'd rather take in that episode of *I Love Lucy* you recorded earlier in the day'. You might prefer to stand on the edge of what's going on, taking in the scene, and tucking your observations away in the event it might become useful. It's a great skill to hone, of course, and will help your job prospects later on, but the longer you keep your freak flag under wraps, the worse off you'll be. Everyone invariably feels the desire for conformity, but it will always give way for an insatiable need for individuality. The earlier you unfurl the flag and fly it up your proverbial pole, the further ahead you will be. Fly it high and fly it proud. You will learn that there are a bunch of other people just like you waiting for someone to make the first move. They will have the same interests, the same life experiences, and will lead you to finding the closest, longest, and most fulfilling friendships of your life. The sooner you embrace everything that makes you unique, the better off you will be.'

This past Thanksgiving, my mind went back to these words I wrote in 2016 more than a few times. A good portion of the weekend was spent in the basement combing through what I thought was nearly 20 years of accumulated 'life' - those things that were collected in one way or another over the years, packed away, lost, or otherwise forgotten. I thought the boxes covered the years since I first left home for university in 2003, but that turned out to be a gross understatement.

Apparently, after I left for Carleton and we had cause to move, a neighbour helped out with the packing. While grateful for her help, it appears they felt it prudent to simply throw items willy-nilly into plastic totes where, over the last few days, I've found heirloom sterling silver and family photographs going back to the 1940s packed alongside diner packets of grape jelly that expired long before the lid was replaced and old chestnuts - not those metaphorical 'hoary old chestnuts,' mind you, but the real, withered, tree-grown variety!

Her packing methods might remain a mystery, but if there is a lining - silver or otherwise - to be had in sifting through more than 15 boxes of total chaos, it's the process of rediscovery.

A few weeks ago, I wrote of my early ambitions to be an archeologist. Now I am getting my chance. Instead of Ancient Greece, Egypt or Rome, however, I'm sifting through my own life and making discoveries along the way.

It seems there were some things I'd either forgot, blocked out, or sent to the recesses of my brain - and, with this newfound

information, the note I wrote to myself all those years ago, seems to have lost a bit of heft.

There were hand-written letters squirreled away, evidently once important, but without any context now to shed light on why that was. There were hundreds of unlabelled VHS tapes that were probably notable at the time, but now essentially obsolete. There was seemingly every single spelling and math test I completed during my entire academic career ? the middling results in both subjects, however, escaped being erased from my brain. Thanksgiving-themed turkeys made out of hand-tracings, Bristol board projects for a number of classes (a French class project on Vivian Vance made me smile, as it is reliably on brand for me), essays, short stories, report cards? and some rather insightful letters home from my teachers. As I read these letters, maybe they were missives I was never privy to in the first place, it felt like I was reading about a person who was foreign to me. The picture painted through my respective teachers' prose painted the K to 4 me as moody kid, prone to outbursts and acting out, someone who was apparently occasionally hard to get along with, who needed coaxing to participate, and whose classroom daydreams sometimes got in the way of the lesson.

If we scratch the surface, I think we'd find that our respective childhoods were never as easy as we'd imagine or like to think, but sometimes it's startling to see it all spelled out before you in black and white.

While my mind's eye preserved my ?being a little different? from the crowd in terms interests and ways of thinking as a positive ? and, don't get me wrong, it's always a positive ? it did not preserve the ways I apparently struggled with it, along with what read to be my desire to fit in? despite not really wanting to in the first place?

It will take some time to process all the findings of this particular archeological dig into the self. While I am thankful for the opportunity for a bit more introspection, I couldn't help but look back to that Note I Wrote to my younger self and think it all sounded a bit cavalier. Back to the drawing board!

Some might feel that an archeological dive into the self is, at best, a waste of time or, at worst, an exercise in ego-stroking, but I now realize it never hurts to get reacquainted with who you were because it's very insightful on who you are.

Which leads me to my question ? How many of you have done archeological dives into the self? What do you want to leave behind for others to paint a picture of who you are? Send your thoughts to brock@lpcmedia.ca.