

## **I Love Everything Because I love you**

This journey began with an exploration of nostalgia and, more specifically it's unexpected complexity, and how it can be used to heal from emotional turmoil. Last year, I struggled with deep and prolonged sadness, and found it difficult to articulate my feelings to those around me, especially my mom and sister. It took a long time for me to heal and regain happiness.

This triptych not only portrays my relationship with my mom and sister, it celebrates the fearless childhood joy I regained in my later adolescent years. I painted on sheets of mylar, a material prone to warping and degradation over time, to represent the fragility and fluidity of memory. The usage of primary colors shows that we all separate individuals, but beautiful together. Each portrait contains two main colors and their combined secondary shade. My self-portrait is mainly red to represent my passion, energy, and internal complexity and turmoil. My sister's main color is yellow to reference her bright and happy character, blue to represent her seriousness and contemplative nature, green for her drive and analytical air. My mom's portrait contains blue because she is calming and strong, and red because she is deeply passionate. Purple conveys her originality and unconditional love. The forms surrounding my mom and sister are abstract interpretations of how I see them. I painted a smiling child for my own portrait, infusing it with dynamic color to mimic the surreality of nostalgia. I used graphic brush strokes for the majority of my figure, but flat strokes for my most distinct features—my mouth and eyes. My self-portrait is painted in full detail, but my mom and sister are painted with a linear and organic style. I did this to preserve the transparency of the mylar. The sheets layered on top of one another act as windows to my portrait.

This work celebrates the influence that my mom and sister have had on the person I am today. Through the process of painting, I memorialized their instrumental role in my life and declared admiration for my younger self with the goal to reclaim the childhood joy I once lost.

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# When Happiness Decides to Hide

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## *Nostalgia*

By recalling a memory, one remembers it by how their brain has chosen to distort it, not by the validity of the memory. What is remembered are fragments, the emotions felt, and what an event caused in oneself. For example, a memory of being with your mom in the kitchen may be pleasant and warm, even feeling incredibly vivid. However, you are not remembering a perfect copy of what you experienced, but instead a powerful emotion; being loved. Nostalgia is characterized as a longing for the past, a yearning for better times (Martin, 2014). When we are nostalgic about our own personal history, we remember intense periods of emotion. Our brains fill these in with memory fragments, that are then processed as a single powerful memory. Nostalgia is bittersweet; one can never return to an idealized past because it never really existed, and one's present reality can never be as good as an ideal (Hirsch, 1992). In times of great emotional turmoil, people go through times of deep nostalgia; it can serve as a life-line. It can provide comfort when the present is quite opposite of an ideal. Nostalgia is a strange phenomenon often brought on by personal or emotional upheaval during adolescence. My own personal upheavals brought on intense periods of introspection. By experiencing periods of intense nostalgia, one can analyze these memories, pulling significance out of pleasant emotions. While memories may not be quite as real and vivid as they seem to be, the emotions being craved for, are. When our minds transport us back to better times, this can be a signal that we may be missing something important to our prolonged happiness. Or that something we're searching for to make ourselves happier is not so profound, we may have already experienced it as a young child. Often, it seems that people don't know where to start in their search for personal happiness. It can seem like an odyssey to put together what you need in life, but a very much overlooked step is to look into your past, to look at what made you happy as a child. Because of experiencing prolonged sadness and loneliness, I felt nostalgic for my past when things were seemingly better, when I had stronger connections to my family and to my happiest self. It is like being able to time travel, when I am nostalgic I am transported back to idyllic times. I can see, smell, hear, taste, and touch love and happiness. I am able to wrap myself in my good memories. Without being conscious of it, the nostalgia I felt led me to recreate the feelings I yearned for over time; this allowed me to feel happier, and instead of feeling like I lost what made me happy, I feel like I have found it. Nostalgia isn't being stuck in the past; it is a reminder that our lives have meaning and value. It gives us confidence and motivation to face current and future challenges (Routledge, 2016). When we are unhappy with how our lives are in their current state, we can use nostalgia not as an escape but as a tool.

Do our frustrations with the present urge us to seek answers in our pasts, blind to the joys that lie ahead? The more dissatisfied we grow with the present, the more we long for a past perceived as better (Hirsch, 1992). According to the University of Surrey, and researcher Erica Hepper, there is research to suggest that nostalgia can help counteract depression. Reminiscing has been shown to counteract loneliness and anxiety, promoting personal interactions (Martin, 2014). When

people speak fondly and lovingly of the past, they tend to become more hopeful about the future. “The current findings also suggest that nostalgia has potential use in interventions aimed at increasing physical activity and ultimately health. Abeyta and Routledge (2015) found that, starting around the age of 40, nostalgia decreases subjective age (how old one feels) and increases perceptions of youthfulness. Further, nostalgia-induced youthfulness predicts positive perceptions of physical health, confidence about one’s physical abilities, and optimism regarding one’s future health. These effects may result from nostalgia making middle and older-aged adults feel connected to their younger selves” (Sedikides et al., 2015). Nostalgia is complex in its modern uses, but also in its definition and its history, following a path of a medical disorder to gratifying emotion.

As well as going through a transition from medical term to emotion, nostalgia has evolved from something straightforward, to a complicated phenomenon. From research done at Rutgers University, by researchers William Havlena and Susan Holak, it has been resolved that nostalgia is an intricate and layered phenomenon, with three distinct orders; increasing in value, relevance, and analysis (1991). First order is known as “Simple Nostalgia;” the belief that things were better in the past, yearning for a return, but with an understanding that it is not possible. Second order or “Reflexive Nostalgia” is when individuals question or analyze the past, instead of sentimentalizing it. This is accompanied by a, “Was it really this way?” question. Second order attempts to analyze the past critically, third order analyzes the nostalgic response itself. Third order, “Interpreted Nostalgia,” is when an individual analyzes to a much greater extent his or her experience. They seek to objectify the nostalgia, directing analytical questions at it concerning its sources, character, significance, and purpose. This forms a question of “Why am I feeling Nostalgic?” Everyone experiences the orders of nostalgia differently; mine find home in childhood memories with family, which I will detail later. Living in the twenty-first century, I have only experienced nostalgia as a comforting emotion, not as the *maladie* it was seen as in the past.

Nostalgia was first documented in the seventeenth century, by a Swiss doctor, Johannes Hofer (Routledge, 2016). It was thought as uniquely Swiss, and tied to military service. Being thought of as a disorder, it caused soldiers ailments such as insomnia or night terrors. Really, they were just experiencing intense homesickness. In Hofer's dissertation (1688), he detailed that sufferers “wander about sad,” they were known to experience insomnia, fevers, hunger, thirst, diminished senses, and whole body weakness. “...at the time, Hofer contended that nostalgia resulted from thoughts of home due to animal spirits in the innermost parts of the brain. These spirits caused the blood to thicken and the heart to slow. It was thought that death could result unless the sufferer were somehow transported back to his or her home” (Havlena & Holak, 1991). At the turn of the twentieth century, nostalgia was treated like a mental disorder, a common diagnosis even by the surgeon general until the 1950s (Havlena & Holak, 1991). “All sorts of maladies and behaviors, including pyromania, were diagnosed as resulting from a nostalgic condition”

(Martin, 1954). As Fodor (1950) writes, "Nostalgia is not a mental disease but it may develop into a monomaniacal, obsessive mental state causing intense unhappiness and leading to a complete uprooting of a settled existence. It usually manifests itself in an intense desire to return to the country or town from where we came, or --- on more acute analysis --- to return to the home which we had left behind." Nostalgia was seen as a condition in a similar vein to depression or anxiety, being treated with talk therapy and in what were extreme cases, medications usually used for patients suffering from depression. During subsequent decades, the term underwent a demedicalization, becoming a pleasant and poignant emotion all were susceptible to. As the world became more mobile, nostalgia lost its roots of homesickness, it became a more generalized longing for the past. As more and more people felt nostalgic, and as science focused on empirical evidence instead of conjecture, the idea that nostalgia caused physical symptoms was disproven. Nostalgia has changed further in recent years, according to Erica Hepper, a University of Surrey psychologist. There is a usefulness to nostalgia, and it varies with age. It can promote emotional well-being, helping increase feelings of self-esteem and social belonging. Young adults participate in it the most, followed by a decline in nostalgic thoughts and tendencies towards middle and old age (Martin, 2014). The reason why it varies with age is because nostalgia is proportional to emotional instability--in times of great upheaval, there are times of great nostalgia. "Nostalgia allows humans to maintain their identities in the face of major transitions that can be discontinuities in the life cycle (e.g. puberty, adolescence to adulthood, single to married life, spouse to parent). Nostalgia in adolescence and early adulthood is stronger than any other period" (Havlena & Holak, 1991).

### ***Turmoil***

Beginning around October of 2017, I felt very lonely. I was scared about my future, and that I was making mistakes which would have detrimental effects down the line, further than I could see at the time. I was nervous that I had trouble connecting with people, because except for a select few, I rarely felt comfortable and engaged. I pressured myself to do my best in school, not because I was pressured by my mom or sister, both of them being intelligent and talented women in STEM, but because I pressured myself - I didn't want to disappoint them. I was worried that I wasn't going to make the close connections that I really wanted with people. I was worried I would have trouble being loved, both romantically and platonically. I felt like I wasn't good enough; I was okay at a lot of things, but exceptional in none. I was a good student, but not on track for educational accolades or on track to Ivy League universities. I was creative and artistic, but not a young Picasso or Rembrandt. I was social, but didn't have a gaggle of friends from whom I felt inseparable. I wasn't going to be a gifted engineer, or be able to draw with incredible realism, and I didn't have a trustworthy network of friends to depend on at any hour of the day. The one thing I was very good at, was appearing incredibly happy and excited. I was known as an ebullient person, so I had mastered the art of glittering, even when all I felt was dull. I became very depressed, anxious, and paranoid. I isolated myself from the people who would ultimately

help me. I felt incredibly lonely, and was convinced I was trapped to always feel this way. It was easier to be by myself than pretend to be happy. The sadness inside me had fossilized. I became stationary when I used to spin. I talked only in limited spurts, sentences were struggles, and conversations were painful endeavors to be avoided at all costs. My laughs were forced, smiles empty. I folded into myself and tried to take up as little space as possible, make as little noise, go unnoticed - consume the least oxygen. I became so tired, both physically and emotionally. It was hard to go to school, to entertain people. Even harder to see my mom and sister, for I felt suffocated by their love for me. I loved to sleep, and I couldn't wait to go to bed at night, feeling crushed when I woke up, paralyzed in fear about starting the day. Eventually sleep became a lot more important than most things. I studied less, took shortcuts on my homework, and cancelled plans. I recoiled from invitations from my mom and sister to go out to dinner or watch a movie. I retreated to my room, to my bed, to sleep. This was when my brain was quiet. When I didn't have to think about myself, when I didn't feel inferior. I think because I was pretty good at fooling people, those around me chalked up the changes in me to everyday stresses or just being a teenager. But something much larger was going on. When all I wanted to do was sleep, school took a backburner. Not studying led to worsening grades and more stress. I couldn't deal with it, so I needed to escape. Knowing my mom's email password, I sent dozens of emails a week to the school, posing as her and letting myself leave early or come in late. All combined, I missed eighty-four days of school in a seven month period. When I left early, I walked to the train station close to my school to go into the city. I trekked around with my headphones in for hours. Music so loud those standing next to me could hear it, and with the attention that crowded streets require, my head was kept busy--there wasn't much room for dark thoughts. Instead, I had to focus on weaving through pedestrian traffic, blasting lyrics and melodies, and my aching feet. I craved busy; I was obsessed with it--busy city, busy music, and something to busy myself with doing. If my head was busy, I didn't have time to think about how I felt. There was one day in April when the layers of black fabric I put up to block out the light of people's care for me were violently ripped away. It was painful, but it allowed me to heal. I had a French quiz in third period. I slept instead of studying, and felt a much deeper panic than not preparing enough the night before that other kids in my class felt, when I realized I had a quiz. I saw this quiz leading to terrible things, and there was only one option: to leave and avoid it. I typed out a note from myself disguised as my mom, showed the forged e-mail correspondence to my teacher, left, and got on the train. My teacher had suspected something and told my guidance counselor. Later that afternoon, as I was walking, I checked my phone and saw an email from the Assistant Principal to my mom, questioning the validity of a very long list of absences. I never knew that the stability of ground could be taken for granted nor did I know that feeling unable to breath could creep up so suddenly, for my so carefully crafted escape route had been destroyed. At the time, I was so angry I saw the world not through rose-colored glasses, but a burning red. Now, I am thankful for my teacher's suspicion, for it alerted a small army of people that something was wrong. My mom was shocked, the school was angry, and I was defeated. My guidance counselor saw it as a cry for help and talked to my mom, recommending I see a therapist. My teachers were

alerted that I was going through something, and my friends were smart enough to put things together. I was exposed. My sadness was out there, able to be seen by anyone who cared to look. I'm not exactly sure what I went through was. I saw a therapist for a little over a month, in May. She told me that what I was going through was "garden variety depression" and maybe anxiety. While I do not have a degree qualifying me to give a diagnosis, I feel like what I struggled with was a little more than garden variety. I didn't see her again after this appointment, and was even more scared to talk about my feelings than I had been before.

It was a long road to heal on my own, and I'm not sure if the process is fully complete, but there is a stark difference in who I was in April, and who I am today - in November. It has been a little over a year and, during this year, I couldn't shake feelings of nostalgia--of memories of a simpler and happier time in my life. I missed who my younger self was, and now I understand that my brain was screaming at me to embrace a lot of the things my younger self loved. Throughout the summer, and the fall, I began to. It wasn't sunshine and rainbows. I didn't suddenly have the life of my dreams, but I was happier. Now I talk to the point of annoying those around me, my raucous laugh has returned, and I grin so wide plastic surgeons wince at the smile lines I etch into my face. Again, I spin.

### ***Order I***

I have experienced a lot of First order nostalgia; I had a very happy childhood, so there are a lot of good memories for me to pull from and romanticize. Known as "Simple Nostalgia," first order is a belief that the past was better, but accompanied by an understanding that it is not possible to return. In more recent times, I have not been feeling like my happy child-like self. For many months of the last year, my spectrum settled on very dark colors. I was confused by this, I was typically a very happy person, so carrying these negative emotions with me troubled me and weighed me down. I felt guilty and embarrassed, so I didn't open up to the people around me. I know now I could talk to my mom, my sister, or my friends - but at the time, I was scared. I have a talent for hiding my emotions, so for a long time, the people around me didn't suspect anything. They did notice however, that I was pulling away, distancing myself from people who brought me happiness. I felt numb, and in my loneliness I yearned for a time when I felt things, and more specifically when I felt like myself, my happy self.

I feel great nostalgia for my past, for times of my childhood when life seemed..., like on Fridays after elementary school. When I was in 2nd grade, my sister, four years older, was in middle school. Her school started earlier than mine, and at the end of the school day, her bus came earlier. She always beat me home, but I still sprinted all the way from our bus stop at the top of our neighborhood to our house (a little less than a half a mile) in hopes of beating her home. We got our house cleaned on Fridays, and we both loved the smell of lemon pledge and the original scent of Pine Sol. We gleefully slid on the tile in our kitchen, amused as our steps left prints on

the still slightly wet floor. I was so entertained by the blue toilet-water in all of the bathrooms, even more so when my cat tried to drink from it. Our carpets were perfectly plush, and I took great joy in jumping on them in order to press them down into patterns, even tracing some in with my fingers. In addition to having a clean smelling house, we always got pizza on Fridays. It was the one meal a week we could eat in the family room, and my sister and I were glued to the television set. We counted down the minutes until the pepperoni pizza arrived, excited to sink our teeth into each slice of bliss. Our favorite movies were Wall-E or Ratatouille, we loved the imaginative animated worlds that we disappeared into for an hour or two. We also liked to watch Zoey 101 or an Australian TV show about teen mermaids called H2O. The biggest specialty were the Studio Ghibli films we rented from the library close to our house. Me and my sister loved My Neighbor Totoro; we dreamed of discovering our own forest spirits in the woods by our house. We hoped to catch a glimpse of our very own Totoro along the treetops. For the duration of the film, we were starry eyed in front of the screen. Wishing we could slip into the animation, sneak in between the frames. We willed ourselves into the future in hope that our teenage existence would mirror these shows. This did not turn out to be true. The cold reality of my adolescence is that I never got any special powers, and was not sent to a boarding school where the students rode on Vespas, and never met any furry forest spirits. However, I still cherish these memories. How easily entertained I was! How I worshipped my older sister! I wanted to be just like her. I stole her clothes to look like her, and I always wanted to hang out with her and her friends. I know there's no possible way for me to go back to this time, but I am comforted by my innocence and my sunny disposition towards the world. How could anything be bad when I had the scent of cleaning products, my sister, and pizza to keep me safe?

## ***Order II***

In terms of Second order, I always feel nostalgic about my imagination and how I lived in awe of the world around me. Second order, or “Reflexive Nostalgia” is when individuals question or analyze the past rather than sentimentalizing it. When I was about five years old, I so desperately wanted magical powers. I wanted to read minds, I wanted to bend the elements, but most of all, I wanted to fly. I stared at birds in envy, wishing I was a part of their flock. I was jealous of ballerinas, for they, too, could fly. I even wished I shared the talents of my cat; she could soar through the air. I would trade anything--my prized stuffed animals, every DVD of Avatar the Last Airbender I owned, and even my membership to Club Penguin--to fly. Just for a moment, I wanted to be weightless. I wanted to sail through the air, to swim over air currents.

One evening, my dad had his friends over for Sunday night football. My mom was on her way home from work, and had plans to have dinner with my au pair, her family, and my neighbors at their house. As a kid, I enjoyed sports because of their energy and spirit. I have since been largely turned off to them during my adolescence. Instead, I find comfort in reading, art making, and have fostered a love for fashion. (My transition into gayness was not very subtle.)

While I still thought contact sports were exciting, I watched football games with the adults, imagining. I was particularly enticed by all the chips and dips, but also by the mascot of Philadelphia's professional team, an eagle. How could it be, other than by fate, that my home city's mascot was a creature capable of the amazing act of flight? When it was time for halftime, Swoop the Eagle began his "flight" around the field. While it was really a suited human, my five year old mind was thoroughly entertained. The packed stadiums, along with everyone in my family room, began to sing the team's anthem, "Fly eagles fly!" Feeling excited by the singing, the overall enthusiasm for a sporting event, and the fact that flying was getting as much love as I clearly thought it deserved...I began to fly. I spread my arms out, my childlike wingspan not stretching quite as much as an eagle's, and I began to run around the room, head down, as if I were gearing up for flight. My trip was not very long, for the room was relatively small and the song was not very long. It wasn't the size of the room or the length of the song, however, that stopped my flight. It was one of my mother's favorite furniture pieces, a beveled glass coffee table, set in wood, with patina copper trim and legs. The corners met at sharp ninety degree angles, perfect for gouging my tender skin. My soar ended when my forehead crashed in perfect impact to one of these edges. I was lucky actually, for I hit my brow bone, any lower and there would not be very much humor to this story.

I was rushed to the hospital for stitches. (Sorry dad, for very quickly adjusting your priorities from contact sports to your son's contact injury. My mom's plans got switched too, from a wonderful evening meal, to long hours waiting in the emergency room.) I was as energetic as always, and probably in pain-preventing shock, so I refused to sit still. Not in the waiting room, not in the hospital room, and especially not when the nurses and doctors were trying to do their jobs. My mom describes me as a "royal pain in the ass."

I was a livewire, the nurses asked my mom to hold a compress with a numbing agent over my eye area, so they could then inject it with local anesthetic. My mom sang to me, played games, anything she could do to hold my attention in hopes of stopping my constant movement. When the nurses came to check if I was ready for the numbing agent, not by anyone's fault but my own, and especially not my mother's, I was very much not. The process needed to be repeated again because I was stubborn to keep moving. Eventually, the medical professionals resulted to plan B, using a board with child-sized restraints to immobilize me. I can't imagine this is a typical solution, or procedure for pediatric stitches. I hated being tied down, and fought it as much as my willpower and strength allowed, I squirmed so much I rivaled an earthworm. Eventually I tired myself out, and the doctor could finally do his job. I left with my first set of stitches and my parents left with headaches. I imagine the nurses and doctors left with amused frustration.

I still have the scar, about a quarter of an inch into my left eyebrow, to remind me of my first flight. It doesn't bother me, I don't fixate on it, I don't want to get it removed. While my mom

doesn't remember it as a happy memory, I do. It makes me laugh, at my off the chart energy level, something that has more or less always been a part of me, even in my toddler years. It also makes me think of my imagination, and fascination with the wonders of nature and of the supernatural. While any unassisted human flight typically ends in injury, I got a souvenir to keep of my attempt.

### ***Order III***

When I think about Third order, or the most intense nostalgia, my mom comes to mind. Third order, "Interpreted Nostalgia," is when an individual's experience is greatly analyzed. They seek to understand what the true source of nostalgia is, and its significance. I can pinpoint my mother as a source of happy feelings, when I felt safe and loved. When I felt the most sad, the most lonely, I barely talked to my mom. It wasn't her not reaching out, it was my cold response to her. Not that what I was feeling had anything to do with her, I felt uncomfortable around her. She is the smartest person I know, and I knew she could tell something in me had changed. She tried to talk to me, and I tried my hardest to say as little as I could. I still said, "good morning," "have a good day," "good night," and "I love you," but not much else. My mom and I used to be inseparable; she was (and still is) my superhero.

When I was in elementary school, I loved to play a game with my mom on Saturday mornings. I woke up before seven every Saturday, full of energy, excited to play. I selected a stuffed animal from my collection and put it in a box as if it was a package ready to be shipped. I woke my mom up every weekend at seven, practically bouncing off the walls. She, as an overworked and devoted mother, did not have so much energy, and I'm sure looked forward to sleeping in. Instead of shooing me away the first few times, I invented this game and she indulged me. After waking her, I presented her with the box containing my chosen animal. She hid it under the covers of her bed, which I was careful to not look where, as to avoid ruining the surprise. I then climbed up the spiral staircase leading to the loft adjacent to her bedside table, stopping at what I thought was an appropriate height. I then gleefully jumped from the staircase, landing softly and safely on her bed. Then I burrowed under the covers, searching for the box. Once I found it, I brought it out and presented it to her again. She feigned surprise, and I announced that she had a delivery. We opened up the package together to identify whatever animal was inside. I pretended that I was shipping pets for a large collection of animals. Together, my mom and I, to tame the animal. Then we discussed the animal's ideal setting. We designed elaborate homes for these animals, trying to make them as happy and as comfortable as possible. An ice palace with towering glaciers and arctic waters for penguins. Savannah grasslands with trees just tall enough for giraffes to graze. Dense forests with plenty of food for a bear to hibernate. There was no end to my imagination. The game wasn't over until every detail of the animal's life had been thought out. More often than not, my mom had a way of assuring me the animal was going to be its happiest, so that the game ended just in time for breakfast.

For my mom it was trying to wake up early every Saturday morning. But it was also a time where she could see my imagination and playfulness grow and develop. There are countless other stories of me having large ideas, and it was up to my mom to help me execute them. She never failed, no matter how far my imagination took me. I was always entertained, and never discouraged about fantasizing. I always had my head in the clouds, and my mom didn't pull me down; instead, she tied a rope to me and never let go.

My mom worried about me getting stuck in my imagination, she worried I would have trouble making friends, she worried about me in countless ways as any mother does, and she worried about me from the very beginning. I was born prematurely, and I required an emergency Caesarean section. I was underweight, born at three and a half pounds. I spent the first weeks of my life in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. The first photo of me did not capture me in my mother's arms, but instead of me adorned with wires laying in an incubator. From the beginning, I was a thorn in my mom's side, but one that she never stopped loving, no matter how needy I was.

From the beginning, I was attached to my mother at the hip. Born with respiratory and digestive issues. I needed to be carried frequently, almost 24 hours a day, at risk of choking from acid reflux or having trouble breathing from asthma. I was a puny baby, and to this day my mom calls me her "little man," a nickname that many young boys carry, but for me, it was rooted in my shocking size. Today she jokes that standing at six foot, having a loud voice, and seemingly always taking up the most space I can, I am not so little. I value every minute I get to spend with my mom, and try to be the best son I can be. I try to make her look forward to coming home after a long day, by putting together a picnic outside, setting the tables with candles and flowers, or running a bubble bath when I know she has had a particularly stressful day.

My mom is the reason why I am the person I am today, and I could never thank her enough for raising me with more love than I could ever put into words.

I recognize that it is pretty rare for all a mother to want is for their child to be happy, and when I wasn't, she noticed and tried to help. It was me who pushed back and isolated myself. I felt guilty for feeling the way I did, when she had done so much for me. I now feel guilty for treating her this way, for damaging our once great relationship. I ignored her pleas asking to talk to me, asking to listen, asking to help me. I thought that I could handle it better on my own, that it was better to internalize and try to heal myself. It was a stark contrast not being close to my mom. A process of growing apart so painful I can't believe I allowed it, or rather facilitated, it to happen. I can't imagine what it was like for her, and I regret every day that I made it happen. Today, we have grown closer, but not as close as we once were and not as close as I think either of us hope for. Every day we gain a little bit more of what we once had. It is easy to laugh with her again,

and I look forward to talk and share myself with her--eager to hear what the woman who knows me better than anyone else has to say.

I still have a lot of growing to do, and emotional maturity to gain, but I am much stronger than I was at my darkest point. My struggle was terrifying, and strange, and beautiful. The process of self-reflection and, more specifically, on my childhood, brought me back to who I am, the person I'm proud to be. Nostalgia can reveal what emotions are tied to personal happiness. Nostalgia itself is strongest in major transitions or times of instability. In my personal experience, struggling with feelings of deep sadness made me very nostalgic, and revealed to me what I really missed about myself, and what the negative consequences that my actions created. Defined as intense longing for the past, it can be applied to large groups or individuals. It is a kind of memory for when times were seemingly better. It can be triggered by emotional turmoil, sound, or a smell. My own nostalgia was caused by feelings of sadness and isolation. Through nostalgia, I discovered what I really valued about my childhood. Instead of seeing nostalgia as an insignificant emotion, we should analyze it, categorize it, and interpret meaning from it. Being nostalgic allowed me to foster these again in my adolescence, and regain part of what I used to be. I don't think that I was living in the past; I think that by looking back at when I felt free, I was able to think deeply about what I was missing and what ignited my joy for life. I need to be creative, I need to find all of the little things in life amazing, I need to daydream, and I need to be close to my friends and close to my sister and mom. My eight year old self, looking at the person who I was a year ago, wouldn't understand his behavior. He wasn't who I was, or who I am becoming. Now, my childhood self would be proud, would be excited to grow up into who I am. Nostalgia allows us to put ourselves in a younger mindset. Would that person be happy with their future self? If not, what are you missing?

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