



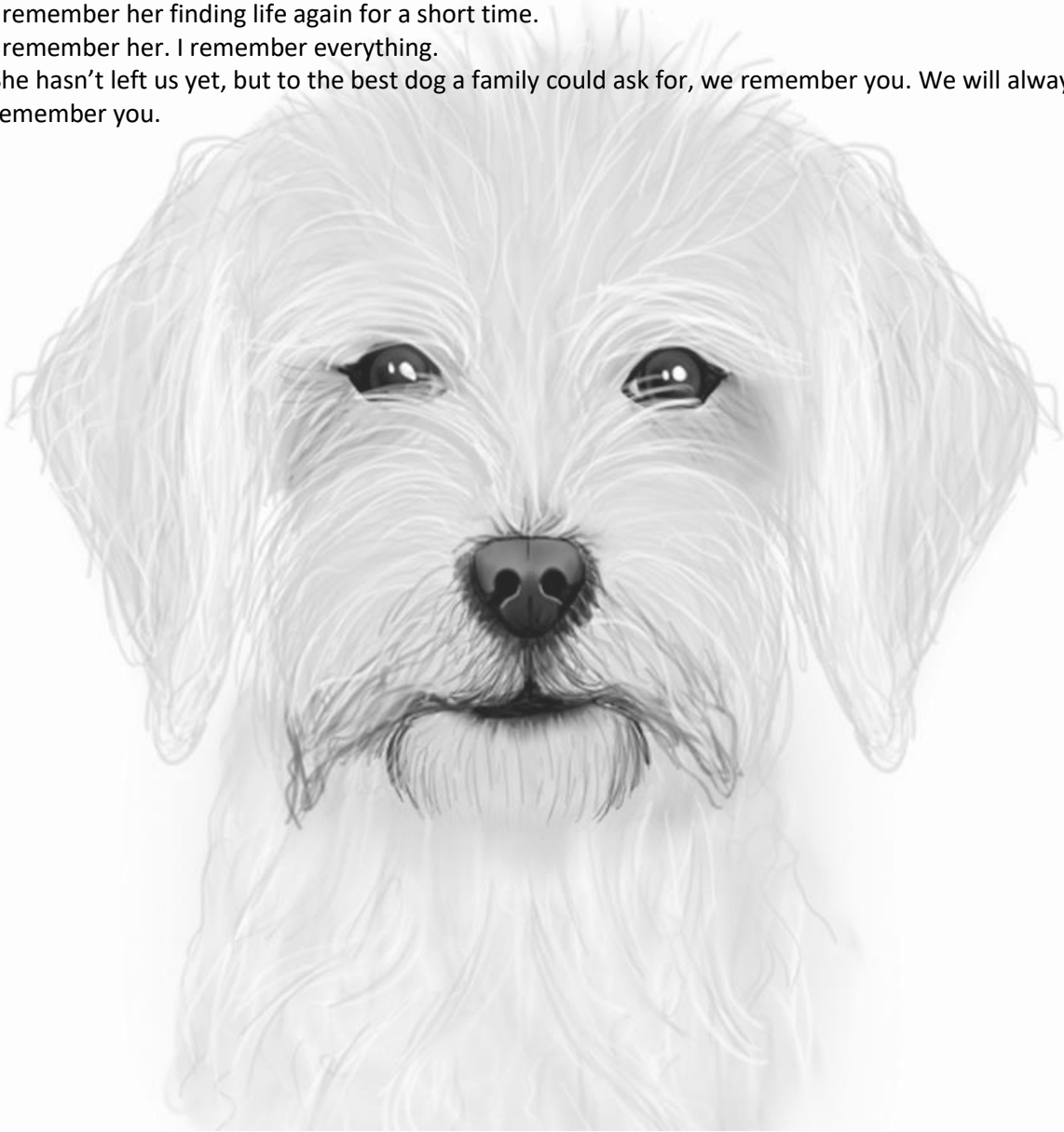
Dear Future Me

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Dear Future Me, I Remember

I remember arriving home from school and discovering a puppy playing in the yard.
I remember the puppy was naughty as she pulled, barked, and occasionally bit.
I remember my dad becoming angry day after day.
I remember my dad threatening to send her back.
I remember her slowly growing up and out of her puppy phase.
I remember taking her on long walks, hikes, and runs.
I remember how she quickly became my dad's best friend.
I remember her and her puppy cousins playing at the cabin every weekend.
I remember her freaking out in the best way every time she encountered my uncle.
I remember her energy.
I remember witnessing that energy slowly slip away.
I remember bringing her into the vet after discovering a lump on her side. Cancer? I try to block this memory out.
I remember coming home for Thanksgiving and seeing her lay on her bed struggling to greet me at the door.
I remember thinking she doesn't have much time left.
I remember putting her on medication.
I remember her finding life again for a short time.
I remember her. I remember everything.
She hasn't left us yet, but to the best dog a family could ask for, we remember you. We will always remember you.



Dear Future Me, A Year in the Life

The clock strikes 6am: alarm(s) sound
Peeking out my window looking at the bright moon against the dark sky
I can feel the negative temperatures seep through the windowsill
Dreading the moment I'll have to walk outside.
Morning after morning, the same routine
The same frigid air that keeps me inside.
Until the sun starts to rise,
Just a little earlier each day as spring starts to arrive.

The ground still covered in snow
But it is no longer white snow
I see kids running around outside
Looking as if they haven't been able to in years
The warm spring weather enhances moods
There are smiles on faces and laughs coming from within.
And everyone knows that summer is just around the corner.

As a kid, summer meant no school.
I forgot what day it was, what time it was.
As an adult, summer means still working
But weekends spent at the cabin
The sun beating down on me as I lay on the pontoon
Listening to country music, watching other boats pass.
Kids piled on another boat; surfing, putting on a show.
The only worry in the world at that exact moment
is if my beer is staying cold enough.
Ahh summer, please come sooner and stay longer.
I beg of you.

The breeze becomes a bit cooler and crisper
As fall rolls around.
Kids go back to school, everything seems calm.
Driving down the roads, all I can focus on are the vibrant colors surrounding me.
The leaves have changed,
And given the countryside a new meaning: beauty.
But how long will this last?
Until the negative temperatures return
And I dread the outdoors once again.

Year after year,
Increasing in age, maturity.
Current becomes past,
but past becomes memories.

Dear Future Me, A Moment of Confusion

As I sit here in this spacious, comfortable coffee shop surrounded by a handful of people working intensely, I begin to let my thoughts overcrowd my mind. My music is playing loudly into my ears and I find it very satisfying that it puts me in my own little bubble; one that no one else is allowed into. I can only describe it as isolation without actually being isolated.

My bubble consists of myself and the small table I am sitting at. The table looks like this: my computer placed in the center with a stack of folders and notebooks to the right. And of course, a medium blond roast with steamed almond milk and my water bottle sitting off to the left far enough so my computer would be safe from spillage but close enough not to be neglected. I look down and see the crowded table and it keeps me in the zone. It is when I look up and peer out of my bubble that I zone out and become distracted by the ideas and the possibilities the outside world brings me. And in this very moment, I can't help but become mesmerized by the outside world.

The music would usually drown out my thoughts and allow me to focus on what is in front of me, but that isn't the case at the moment. All my thoughts seem to have one commonality between them: my life. Where am I at right now? Where do I want to go? How do I get there? I could go on and on with the questions, but I think you get the point. Some days I think I have my shit together. I feel unstoppable, like I am on top of the world and no one and nothing can change that. Other days I feel like a mess. I feel like I don't have a handle on school, like I am drowning in life's responsibilities and I cannot seem to catch a break. Today is one of those days I feel on top of the world (thank god). So all these questions that are running through my mind aren't necessarily bad or scary, rather exhilarating and quite fun to attempt to answer if I do say so myself.

The biggest question on my mind right now is where I am going to end up this summer. It is quite a common question I have been asking myself lately, especially as internship application deadlines slowly creep forward. The fact that I cannot answer that question yet, being only a few months away from summer, is unsettling. So, on a day like today, where I feel on top of the world, it is time to put this unknown to rest.

My Brother, now 23 and diving into the world of commercial real estate, my cousin, also 23 and emerged in sales, and a countless number of my close friends from high school all live in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Why mention that? Because they all mean the world to me. Blood related or not, they are all my family and the best one at that. I also must mention that Minneapolis is only a 2-and-a-half-hour drive to Duluth: home of memories, love, comfort, and of course, my dog. So why was it so difficult for me to admit to myself that is where I want to be this summer? Maybe now that I said it aloud, it won't be so hard to admit, rather I will take pride in loving my roots. Only time will tell.



Dear Future Me, 21 Going on 41

All was silent as I laid in bed and looked out my window into the darkness of the night. The only light was coming from a streetlamp straight across from my window view and the handful of stars that are visible to the naked eye. As my eyelids began to close and I could no longer hold my head up, my last thoughts as I drifted off to sleep went something like this: I can only hope the stars align for me one day.

The sun's rays peeked through the window as they do every morning waking me up ever so slightly. My eyelids were no longer closing, rather now they were opening up on their own and there was nothing I could do to prevent it. I reached towards my phone only to find it wasn't where I had left it charging the night before. A blink here and there followed by a gentle rub of my tired and dazed eyes allowed me to see clearly after what I would call a very deep and undisturbed sleep. It was one of those sleeps where you wake up the next morning with pillow lines all over your face.

As I forced myself to lift my head off my warm, comfy pillow and place my feet on the floor, I noticed yet another difference. My feet fell upon a cold surface. It sure as hell wasn't my usual warm carpet. That's when it all hit me. Everything was different. My sheets, my pillows, my bed, all of my surroundings were wildly different than what they were when I went to bed the night before. My window was no longer right above my bedframe. Instead, directly across from the foot of my bed, there was a beautiful glass wall with a sliding door and a large balcony. My heart started racing, I started pacing back and forth looking for any clues as to where I was, but more importantly, who I was. I was dreading the moment I had to look in the mirror and see who I was, so naturally I put it off.

I stepped onto the balcony to find myself looking into the heart of a big city and listening to the not so peaceful sounds of a big city. Which city I was looking into, I wasn't sure, but I did know I had to have been in an apartment building of some sort. My phone gave me little information as to what could have happened, but I did have a shit ton of emails, all of which were addressed to Ms. McKenna. Well, I guess that was a good sign. I had the same name. That must have meant I was myself and didn't wake up as someone else like I was in some weird movie. I sat there and gave myself quite the pep talk preparing to look in the mirror and discover what I looked like and possibly start to piece everything together.

The time came. As I stepped in front of the mirror and ever so slightly lifted my head up, I gazed into the mirror at the reflection of myself. I let out a sigh of relief as I saw myself, but something was different. I looked a bit older, a bit aged. My skin wasn't as vibrant and tight as the previous night. As I continued to observe every aspect of myself, a phone began to ring. Assume it was mine, I wasn't sure if I should have answered it, but I decided it was probably for the best. "Hello?" I answered.

"Hello Ms. McKenna, I am outside waiting for you whenever you are ready" a deep, manly voice said into the phone.

"Ummm, okay I will be down soon. But can I ask, where are we going?"

"To the office, I assume. Like every morning, Ms. McKenna". And then the voice vanished. Ms. McKenna, I had seen that somewhere before. Oh, yes!! The emails! I thought to myself. I began the stressful race against time to get ready and become presentable as I knew I was about to be on my way to work. While running around frantically trying to find the perfect outfit within my unfamiliar closet, I couldn't help but wonder where work was or even what it had in store for me. But I was about to find out.

After I got dressed and looked at myself in the mirror making sure I looked up to par, it was time to see what this day had in store for me. My heart began racing for the third time this morning as the elevator brought me down to the lobby. A black town car was awaiting my arrival. I got in and the drive seemed very short before stopping in front of a very large building. As I got out, I thanked the driver and

headed towards the front door. I thought to myself, “well, here we go. Here’s to piecing everything together”. I reached for the front door and began to pull my arm back slowly as the door opened. I forced my left foot in the door, and then my right following. Before I knew it, my eyes popped open and I was awake. I was a bit sweaty and out of breath as I looked around to find myself laying in my own bed. I let out a sigh of relief. Everything was how I had left it, how I remembered it. Everything was normal and I had never been more thankful for normalcy.