


**LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF**


## buried treasure

When did the real you stand up?  
Earlier than you think

By Leslie Goldman

**S**o, Mom and Dad are moving. Empty nesters, flying the coop. They're downsizing to a condo just a few miles away, but with the tumult this relocation is causing, you'd think they were emigrating to Siberia. Consider yourself lucky you've grown up and moved out because as they clean house,

I am bearing the brunt of their pitching frenzy and, even at 31, it's a bit hard to take.

It started with the phone calls:

"Do you want your middle school yearbooks?"

"Your Barbie dolls?"

"I can't throw away your bat mitzvah dress. Do you want to save it for your daughter?" (By the way, I have no daughter—this is finely honed passive-

aggression perfected over decades. Remember when you were first allowed to go to the mall with your girlfriends but had to wear a whistle around your neck in case a stranger approached? That never stopped.)

Then items started appearing in my mailbox. Newspaper clippings from kindergarten reading contests, state fair science reports—all topped with a rhetorical yellow sticky note: *Do you want?*

*No, I don't want!* But Mom can't jettison this junk. (Apparently, neither could you. Why on earth did you save every single passed note from some chick named Tiffanie?) So I braved your archeological dig of a bedroom and, judgment call by judgment call, decided what to keep and what to chuck.

### TAKING NOTES

Sitting in our old room—where you stayed up late studying for biology exams so you could become a doctor (ha!); where you spent hundreds of wasted hours dissecting your body in the mirrored closet doors; where you lost your virginity while Mom and Dad were overseas—I had the chance to see the real you

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through adult eyes. And guess what? You haven't changed.

First, you were destined to be a worrier. Sifting through bags of letters saved from summer camp, I'm reminded that you were urged on a daily basis to *Button up! Don't over-heat! Remember your allergy shots! Don't talk to strangers!*



The signs were there all along.

flip through photos of you in seventh, eighth grade, I come to the startling realization that, in fact, you were never fat, as you always believed.

Remember that assignment sophomore year from Mr. Bernstein where you had to analyze your most dominant personality traits?

fitting. I mean, really—I'm the *exact same*? At 31, am I truly no smarter than a fifth grader? Haven't the years of self-talk and meditation and yoga had some impact, perhaps shaping my personality or soothing my neuroses?

But as I stare back at my grown reflection in the glossy pages of your prized sticker book, memories flood in and I realize that comfort can be found in all this *stuff*: The characteristics that made you goofy, quirky, and loud as a younger girl are the same that make me funny, independent, and extroverted as a woman. That little lady who used to blast Janet Jackson's "Nasty" on her boom box and dance in the driveway, aching to catch the attention of the boys across the street, is the same woman who

passing off splatter-painted, rhinestone-encrusted wooden hearts as earrings and barrettes. But even today, I still love a good bedazzling, gluing gems to my carpal-tunnel splint at age 30. And despite protesting in a fifth-grade English class essay, *I hate writing. I'm never going to be a writer. Why do I have to do this report?* you have become a freelance journalist, and thrive on a love of language.

Digging through a shoe box, I find a key chain from your Geo Storm. *Sexy Bitches Carry Red Key Rings*, it proclaims. It is red. You carried it. It now rubs shoulders with my condo key and rape whistle. Sassiness lives eternal.

I also unearth your beloved Archie Andrews nightshirt, worn butter-soft from years of sleep. It used to drape down by your ankles; now it skims my rear. I know because I currently putter around the house with Betty and Veronica decorating my torso in all their Technicolor glory. It makes excellent birth control, apparently. Oh well. You can take the girl out of the fourth grade, but you can't take the fourth grade out of the girl.

By now, your room is long gone, the hand-painted pigs and Madonna posters replaced by a serene nursery for the new owners' baby daughter. The stage is set for another girl to cry, laugh, and ache her way through puberty. I'm thankful I could spend those final few days learning about you before handing off the bedroom baton. Though I wish I'd paid more attention during those formative years. Because as it turns out, while you were busy growing up, I—the real me—was there all along. **WH**

*Leslie Goldman's current bedroom is a sleek mix of Brazilian cherrywood, olive green silk, and the occasional Catwoman accessory. Her book Locker Room Diaries was recently released in paperback by Perseus Books.*

### WHAT MADE YOU QUIRKY AS A GIRL MAKES ME EXTROVERTED AS A WOMAN.

*Wear sunblock! Keep your legs crossed! (uch), and my favorite, Don't worry too much!* I've long suspected we grew up in a Woody Allen film. Now I have tangible proof.

Next, it astounds me how early your preoccupation with weight began. I unclick your Hello Kitty diary to find an entry, dated October 4, 1987: *I lost a pound!* (You were 11 and, admittedly, equally excited about finding a quarter that day.) In a postcard from camp: *Puh-leeze send sugar-free lemon Kool-Aid!* Letters from grandparents during college inquired, *Are you eating enough? Don't get too thin!* Eventually, you will develop anorexia. If only I could convey through those obsession-clouded years the futility of starvation. "Get a therapist!" I'd scream. "It'll be all the rage in a decade!" And, as I

Rereading it is like a bizarre psychological experiment—as if you time-traveled forward, peered into my adult brain, and Myers-Briggsed the crap out of it: *Miss Goldman works hard, but sometimes she allows herself to become overstressed, you pecked out on your old word processor. She worries excessively. She is overly trusting of the outside world. At times she can care too much about what others think of her.* Oh, if you only knew.

#### **SAME, ONLY BETTER**

At first, digging through the piles of schoolwork and memorabilia is more depressing than your pink Calvin Klein training bra still kinda

spent her 20s partying on tabletops. The straight-A report cards and personal graduation card from the dean of your Big Ten university are proof of my lifelong drive to succeed (and phenomenal suck-up ability). The love you received from your parents, so firmly stamped on everything from Duck Duck, your first stuffed animal from Dad, to my wedding dress, practically still wet with his tears, has taught me the true meaning of family.

I crawl across that coral carpet from dresser to desk, continuing to unearth hints of the woman to come. Your budding jewelry company, Dazzle by Leslie. You were quite the entrepreneur,