

POSSIBILITIES

unleash your imagination

Banner photos by Brandon Doke

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THIS IS ALL I CAN REMEMBER

The first thing I want to say is that this isn't about getting older and forgetting what one had for dinner whilst still sitting at the dinner table. Nor is it a trip down memory lane to revisit the good old days. I say these things at the outset because by the time you have finished reading this blurb, you will undoubtedly think it is one of those things, or more likely, both.

I'm working on my autobiography. And by that, I mean that it's on my to-do list. Well, it's a little farther along than that. I have started a collection of photos that I intend to include. And I have the title for the first chapter, which will cover my early childhood. That title is "This is All I Can Remember." See, you're now trying to remember how old I am and whether I might be losing my marbles.

When my mom was in the later stages of dementia, she couldn't remember anything that happened earlier today, yesterday, or backwards for a growing number of years. I made a photo book of her life, with photos placed in chronological order, and we looked at it together often. At first, she could remember all the way up to the point at which she had grandchildren. But, her memory quickly regressed to the stage where she couldn't name any of her own children. She was clearly surprised when I told her that she in fact had children, and even more surprised when I told her that I was one of them. But always, even to the end, she could identify her own siblings, her friends, and her parents from the oldest photos in the book. Her earliest memories were intact.

I seem to be the opposite. I know all my children's names and would recognize them anywhere. I can, on most days, name most of my own grandchildren as well. I vividly remember the first day I met my wife, Ellen, and that was 44 years ago. But ask me about anything that happened prior to say age 13 and I mostly draw a blank.

I'm not sure I even went to grade school. I remember high school (I was age 13 when I started), but grade school memories are elusive. I

recently drove past Bradford Public School where I apparently spent a good chunk of my formative years, wondering if it might spark a flood of emotions. In my defence, the school has been significantly renovated and looks a lot different, but the only emotion it sparked was fear. Fear that perhaps I am an alien who landed here in 1971 and assumed the body that I now occupy.



In case you are already googling "reasons why you might forget your childhood" let me save you the trouble. The number one reason is childhood trauma. It's not that, I assure you. Based on stories from my siblings, I had a very good childhood. The countless photos I have suggest the same. I was a A+ student, star of the hockey team, an all-round athlete, and had a girlfriend as early as grade 6, apparently. Ok, I think a little visit to the good old days is warranted here.

My best friend lived across from the school and for most of grade-school we were inseparable. He was a year older and our "separation" when he went to high school without me turned out to be permanent. I did see him a few years ago and he confirmed that we were

indeed great friends, and we shared some stories from the good old days. Well, he did most of the talking and I nodded and smiled.

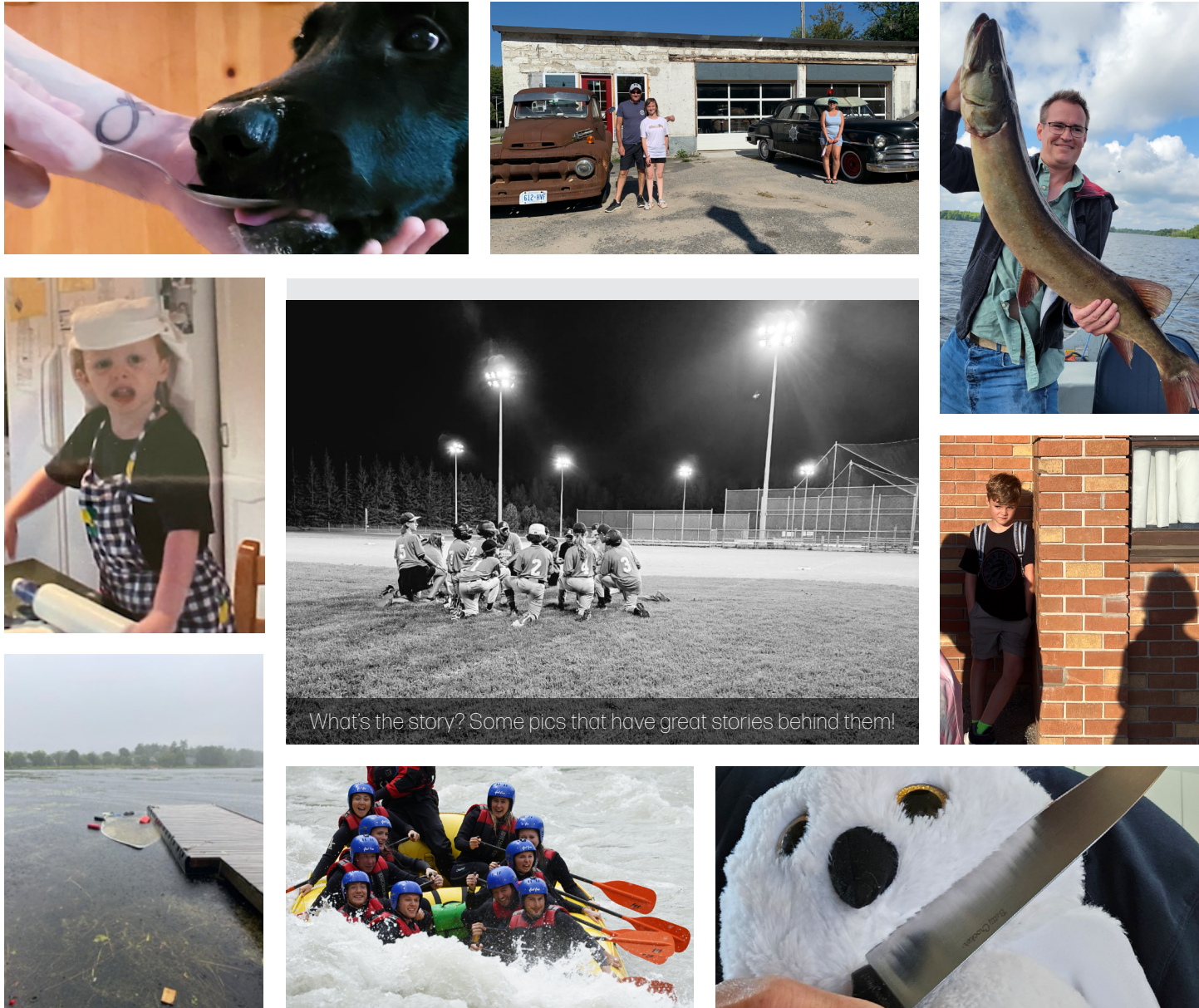
I think the reason that my memories are so faded from my early years is simple. Capacity. My brain has simply decided that those memories are not as important as say remembering the passcode to sign onto my computer, or the thing that Ellen asked me to pick up at the store. Our brain is constantly looking for shortcuts - it's a kind of fuel preservation thing. And with respect to my distant memories, my brain is well-aware that I have places to go to get the information I might need.

Like my siblings who seem to remember my younger years with a certain glee. And the hundreds of photos that I am so grateful my mother took - and preserved.

I have been sorting and scanning these photos for some time now, and recently I came across a batch from my grade-school years. And, I have noticed that the scanning process will occasionally grind to a halt when I find myself leaping from a photo to a loosely related memory.

A picture of my hockey team from the mid-sixties sparks a movie in my mind of my father (who sponsored the team) coming into the dressing room after a win with hot dogs and sodas for every player. A feeling of pride washes over me.

A picture of me in a costume for the annual Skating Carnival fires up a memory of standing on the ice behind the curtains looking out into the darkened arena where a large crowd waited for me to wow them with my talent on the ice and then I leap to a memory of falling flat on my face just a year later when I stepped onto the ice wearing hockey skates for the first time. Joe Gordon, whose wife was my Kindergarten teacher helped me up and got me skating sans pick. And then I remember the same Joe Gordon putting his hands on my shoulders many years later as I was confirmed into the church. I hadn't thought about Joe for a long



What's the story? Some pics that have great stories behind them!

THIS IS ALL... CONTINUED

time and I wonder if I every thanked him. All that from a picture of me in a squirrel costume and figure skates.

A picture of my brother and I laughing as we sit together in the big rocking chair in our living room takes me to a memory of him and I listening to an old bread-box sized radio in our room, far past our bedtime, hoping to hear "Dizzy" by Tommy Roe. Hearing that song triggers the same memory. So does talking about it with my brother.

It turns out that I haven't forgotten my childhood. I have simply put those memories into safe keeping with passcodes in the form of photographs, old songs, and my sisters and

brother. With several boxes of my Mom's photos to sort through, I have a lot of 'new' old memories to unlock.

Regarding my autobiography, I may have to tweak that opening chapter title just a bit. "This is All I Can Remember - It's a Lot."

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Time is a constant. It never stops, it doesn't even slow down. So why doesn't it feel that way?

When you are young, 'grown ups' like to tell you that the time between being young and getting old is short. Which is impossible to understand as a kid. Every week feels like a decade and every second of waiting is agonizing. Now that I'm an adult I am in a perpetual state of happenings. Something big is always about to happen, happening or has just happened. Where did the in-between go? When I was younger, I felt like the in-between stretched on forever. I would lay on the floor of my bedroom for hours thinking about the 'what ifs' of my life. Linger in whimsical day-dreams like what it would be like to be older, or to live somewhere else in the world, or be cast as the love interest to Anakin Skywalker in the prequels. If life is a series of mere moments that turn into memories, then why did even the mundane moments once feel so deep that I could dive in and explore them and now they feel like just tiny drips from your sink.

Time itself doesn't change, but our percep-

tion of time stretches and contracts like a giant elastic band. Anyone who's tried to soak up a newborn baby in their arms or bask in the light of a special day can agree that the present is a hard thing to hang on to. Each of these precious moments becomes a memory in the flash of a camera. As you collect these memories, they alter how you experience time. These moments, the ones you'd die to dawdle in, these are filled with feelings like love, success, joy, and sometimes sorrow. They are the human experience, and I believe, the point of all this.

As a young person most of your time is ahead of you. As we age, the time we have lived

begins to outweigh the time we have left. This brings an unanswerable question to mind. How long do we have left? So, we get busy. I'm 38 and busy has become my mantra. Time has made me feel like a rock skipping between the occasions that matter most to me. From the warmth of the sun on my skin, to the smell of fresh fallen snow, what used to seem like ages is now the flip of a channel. I am planning for Christmas, far too early, but low and behold it is at my doorstep and hurried off again before I can settle into my festive glass of sherry. But this doesn't mean that my Christmas's are any shorter than the ones I had in the 90s. It's the value I've attached to each special memory that makes them feel so fleeting. At the end of a long week driving my sons to their various ac-




activities, what sticks to me isn't the fourth dinner we had in the car, but the goal my son scored in hockey, and the joy we as a family shared with him. The more of these magical moments I get to have,

the faster the time in-between seems to go.

Time isn't changing, we are. By filling our lives with the memories that matter most we unintentionally skip through the other stuff. You can't hold on tighter, or slow down time, but we can just keep living each moment as they come, and at whatever speed, try to gather more magnificent memories every day.

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The pictures above show Jon and I in 2009 on our first vacation together and then us this summer on vacation in Prince Edward County. The moments feel seconds apart to me.



GLORIA'S LENTIL TURKEY CHILI

INGREDIENTS

- 1lb Extra Lean Ground Turkey
- 1 Yellow Onion
- 1 Red Bell Pepper
- 1 Carrot
- 3 Garlic Cloves
- 1 cup Dry Red Lentils (rinsed)
- 1 tbsp Chili Powder
- 1 tsp Cumin
- 1 tsp Smoked Paprika
- 3 1/2 cups Diced Tomatoes
- 2 tbsps. Tomato Paste
- 2 cups Veg Broth
- Salt and Pepper to taste
- 1 3/4 cups Red Kidney Beans
- 1 Avocado (Sliced)
- 1/4 cup Cilantro (Chopped)

DIRECTIONS

Start by browning the ground turkey and then set it aside.

In the same pot satay, the onion, bell pepper, carrot, garlic using your choice of cooking oil for 5 min. Then add back the turkey and add the lentils, chili powder, cumin, paprika, tomatoes, tomato paste, vegetable broth, salt, and pepper. Stir well, cover, and cook on low for 45 min.

Once it's cooked add the kidney beans and stir to combine. Cook for additional 5 min.

Serve in a bowl and garnish with avocado, and cilantro if you dare!

MEMORIES PERCEIVED AND REAL

A couple of months ago I received an invitation to my high school reunion. The timing of this reunion was curious since the anniversary of our graduating class - 1977 - would make it 46 years since we last were at school together; hardly a milestone. There wasn't any reason given for the decision to reunite and reminisce now, rather than say, at our 50th anniversary, which would have been a more logical choice. Still, there was much hoopla around the event to be held in late-October in my hometown of Montreal, and gradually the list of attendees began to swell.

The aging process can erode memories of people, places and events that once formed the foundation of our youth. While I've not been immune to this phenomenon, in truth my recollection of the early years growing up in Montreal has never been strong. This is especially true of my high school years. I can recall only small vignettes of my four years attending Wagar High, and they were blurry at best. The idea of sharing an evening with people I only vaguely remembered and listening to stories that didn't resonate wasn't appealing. I couldn't recall joining any clubs or teams, nothing that might have formed a more tangible connection to that time and place. I pictured myself as a shy, awkward teenager who remained on the periphery of the social and scholastic scene. I was a late bloomer; for me, lasting, positive memories were made years later, when I was well into my 20s.

Was there really any point to attending my reunion? Even though I had all but decided to decline the invitation, the possibility of going never completely vanished. The trip down memory lane, such as it was, brought back an artifact I had unearthed from 1977 while moving houses several years ago. I searched in a desk drawer and recovered it. It was my first attempt at journaling: I was 17 years old, and my friend Martin and I had travelled to Palm Springs, California, to stay with my grandparents during the Christmas break. I had no memory of having chronicled our holiday, but there it was, in a small ringed notepad. As I re-read my daily entries, the events came flooding back, and with surprising clarity. The one entry that transported me most vividly to that time was the Fried Chicken Dinner Fiasco.

In honour of our visit, my grandmother wanted to treat us to a special dinner of anything we wanted. We struggled with our final decision but eventually settled on fried chicken, something neither of our mothers had ever made for us. We were shoed outside until dinner was ready. When we were called into the dining room, smoke from fryer in the kitchen travelled along the ceiling and an enor-

mous mound of chicken sat at the centre of the table, my grandmother standing proudly to the side. We wondered who else was invited to dinner to help eat all this chicken; no one else, just you, my grandmother replied. We greedily grabbed the first piece and tucked in. After the fourth, our enthusiasm for anything fried dropped precipitously. We couldn't eat another bite, yet there were still so much chicken remaining on the platter. My grandmother was clearly upset and mentioned something about how hard she had worked to give us what we had asked for. Racked with guilt, we grabbed another piece and struggled to swallow.

Since re-reading my journal, I haven't been able to think of fried chicken without the memory of that fateful dinner coming up (I use that phrase deliberately). This past weekend, I received yet another reminder of the high school reunion that was quickly approaching: the organizers needed a final tally of attendees. Again, I recalled the detailed entries in my journal, written over a ten-day period during my final year at Wagar. Despite my hazy recollections as a kid out of place, my journal painted a wholly different picture. I wrote with confidence and humour, and seemed to genuinely enjoy my holiday, dinner fiasco notwithstanding. My 17-year-old self was refreshingly self-assured, even happy. The real portrait of my life at that time was anything but dull; it seemed alive with vivid colours and bold brushstrokes, so incongruent with who I had thought I was.

The stark contrast between that perceived and real teenager in 1977 caused me to question everything I thought about my time in high school. Maybe it wasn't nearly as gloomy and uneventful as I believed it to be. Maybe reuniting with a few of my closer friends from that time would trigger memories long since lost in the fog of 46 years. I'd like to think that I was the person who grabbed a pen and notebook back then and wrote about what he saw and how he felt about it. I kind of liked him.

Two months after the initial invitation, the deadline to decide one way or the other is today; I've left it to the last-minute. Weeks ago, my answer would have been no. Since then, I've come to accept that there may be a past that's worth reliving after all, even if it's just for one evening. Maybe fried chicken will be on the menu.

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GREAT MINDS, GREAT
Thoughts

Time turns flames to embers
You'll have new Septembers.

Taylor Swift
Innocent

The trouble with the present
is that it's always
in a state of vanishing.

Billy Collins
Poet

If you don't stop and look around once in a
while, you could miss it.

Ferris
Ferris Bueller's Day Off

I just try to live every day as if I've
deliberately come back to this one day, to
enjoy it, as if it was the full final day of my
extraordinary, ordinary life.

Tim
About Time

It is the time you have wasted for your
rose that makes your rose so important.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
The Little Prince

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