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What Would I Say to My Younger Self

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I recently traveled home to Oregon with my wife. It was an exciting trip, because it was the first time we visited since getting married. We arrived late and went to sleep soon after getting to my parents' house.

Boxes of Memories

In the morning, I woke up before everyone else and wandered into the storage area beside the den. It's a place I like to visit when I'm home, because it contains boxes of memories—my baseball card collection as a kid, mementoes from my time at the White House, and other sentimental pieces of my past.

While looking around, I discovered a container with stacks of old home movies. I recognized their yellow labels, but hadn't seen them for years—I'd assumed they were lost when my parents moved fifteen years earlier.

A Tape With My Name

Curious, I grabbed a tape with my name on it, found a VHS player, and fed it into the machine. Immediately I saw the small, delicate eyes of a four-year old boy. A moment later, I realized they were my eyes.

My parents have always told me I was a well behaved child. Above all else, I wanted to please them and make them happy. Apparently that made me easy to parent. If I ever did anything wrong, it simply took a look to put me back in line.

Over the years I never quite knew what to make of those words. I don't remember much about my childhood, particularly the early years. Like fragments of faded photographs, I only possess scattered memories.

So Incredibly Innocent

But as I sat in my parents' house, watching a four-year old version of myself on an old television, I finally understood what my parents meant. It's not so much that I was a good kid—it's that I was so incredibly innocent.

My Younger Self

I Know His Future

Watching the home movie broke my heart, because deep within I know that little boy. Yet I also know his future. And though there is much joy ahead of him, there is also much pain. More than anything, I want to protect him from it.

I want to kneel beside him, put my hand on his shoulder, and draw him near. Then I want to tell him that despite everything he'll go through—all the hurt, all the failure, all the disappointment—everything will be okay. And not just okay, but very good.

Then I want to tell him to loosen up and have fun, to stop working so hard to please others and make the "right" choices and conform to others' expectations.

I want to tell him to explore his emotions instead of hiding them, to take risks instead of avoiding them, to stick up for himself instead of being the victim.

Finally, I want to tell him not to worry so much about his future, because it'll work out exactly as God intended.

As I write these words, I feel them sinking deep within. Perhaps I do have the opportunity to speak to that little boy. Maybe it's not just an exercise of wishful thinking, but a lifeline to a part of me that still exists—and still needs to hear those words. And maybe by speaking them, I can finally bring healing to the child—and to me.