

Where Do You See Yourself in Ten Years' Time?

I hate this question. I hate it because after living my short life of 21 years, I know the future isn't moulded by strategic planning or incessant praying. Throughout my life, thoughts of my future have always been something I have either been eager to experience or completely dreaded. I dreamt of a life better than my past and present and I was terrified I would grow up and life would remain as comfortless as ever. But this isn't an essay where I just whine about the woes of my past, like every cliché line in a cheesy movie, Life really does have a way of surprising you. My experiences throughout my childhood, my formative years and eventually the early years of my adult life helped me reflect on my relationship with the future and they are complicit with the conclusion of this essay.

Up until the age of 13, I had an incredibly unstable life. I had no real primary education due to the fact I'd moved school around 17 times and my only friendships were my siblings, my father had a debilitating gambling addiction, it meant that no birthday was ever a day to look forward to, it meant that strange, scary men would force their way into our house and intimidate us because my dad owed them money (to this day, I still get incredibly nervous opening the front door). There were times we were even kicked out from our homes, we were lucky because we were young kids so the council were legally required to put our family in hotels, but don't be fooled into thinking these hotels were anything adequate. Most of the time, they were in rough shape, with rock hard beds, showers that didn't work and no way to eat healthy meals, leaving us without the proper nutrition our family needed to live fulfilling lives.

My siblings and I tried to stay optimistic for our parents, especially our Mum. Mum tried to return the favour, trying to keep us happy and occupied throughout everything. In the end, we were just a family that wore masks in public and even with each other, but we were all falling apart in private. The future was scary. I didn't want it to come if it meant we were always gonna be living this way. From house to house, school to school, hotel to hotel. I couldn't talk to anyone about it, Mum and Dad wanted us to keep up the appearance that we were fine, it didn't help that I felt completely isolated, it didn't help that the other kids said I stank and needed a wash, it didn't help that a creepy old man told my dad disgusting things he would do to his 12 year old daughter knowing that my dad wouldn't risk us having no place to live. If this was my future, I didn't want it, God could have it back for all I cared.

After waiting my whole life. The Kurtolli's had a home, Drovers Walk was finally, our forever home. The future was starting to brighten up a bit. I finally had the stability I desperately craved and it was bliss, waking up in a room that was actually mine (and my little sisters too, hey you win some, you lose some right?) a shower that worked perfectly and the creepy old man at the hotel was swapped out for the sweetest neighbour I have ever known, his nickname: 'Irish Grandad.'

Yeah, things were finally looking up for us, the only issue left to work on, was myself. With no real, consistent friendships and absolutely no direction in my academics. No brand new home could make this loneliness go away. I had a group I hung out with in school, but I was too different to be considered their friend, that was made abundantly clear as I grew up alongside them. I eventually broke away though, I eventually chose my own peace, that day was the last official day of year 11, also known as Muck up day.

We had all dressed up in costumes, there was a bouncy castle, a barbeque and a photobooth. I was quite self-conscious of my appearance at the time, but my friends wanted to go in the photobooth, they wanted photos to commemorate the end of school, so I bucked up the courage and I got in with them. However, one of the girls started humming in protest when I got in, this confused me but she dropped it when the camera started counting down. I hated most of the photos as anticipated. Except one, one photo where I looked at myself and thought "I look pretty" I felt elated that I finally had a photo of me that I liked, but I wasn't the only one that wanted it. Normally, being the absolute pushover I am, I would've handed it over immediately. But this one meant too much to me. So I said no, I told her she looked beautiful in all the photos, couldn't she pick another one? Then I heard something that solidified all the concerns and emotions that I had been harbouring for years. "For fuck's sake Mona, you were never even meant to be in our photos!" Wow. Okay, cool. This was it; these girls weren't my friends and it was time to put myself first. I left school, went home, and burnt the photo. And for the first time in my life, the light of my future burnt as brilliantly as the flame I sat before.

September 2018, I'm 16 years old and I've just enrolled as a media student at college. I walked in on my first day, a new girl. No friends, still no academic direction yet a sense of optimism I hadn't felt before. The first few weeks were uneventful, I met a few people in my class, started learning the ins and outs of the media industry and life was peaceful. There was still something missing though, a friend. But remember the cheesy movie line guys! That piece wouldn't be missing for long.

It was some random Tuesday, and lessons had just finished. I was made my way out of class, on my way to the bus station. Walking down the corridor, minding my business, I hear my name being called with urgency, I turn to see a girl with crazy bright hair, dressed head to toe in pink running towards me like her life depended on reaching me. She tells me she has to show me something important. I stopped to see what it was, thinking it was something for class, now I can't exactly tell you what it was she showed me because my professor is reading this, let's just say it was a video of an object coming out of a place it had no business being in. I looked up from the phone to see the cheeky, giggling face walking away from me. I hadn't realised it then, but the universe answered the prayer yearning in my heart, that girl would become my best friend, my platonic soulmate.

Fast forward to now, I'm the university student I never thought I would be. My best friend still by my side, still showing me weird, gross videos because my reactions make her die with laughter. Drovers Walk is still my home, even if I don't live there anymore, and I finally found my footing in school. My future looks brighter than ever before. Yet, it no longer lingers at the forefront of my mind. I no longer dread it's arrival and I don't wait for it to come any quicker. My life went from bleak to hopeful to happy. I don't feel curious about the life my 32 year old self lives, I don't want to know if I get to work my dream job, I don't want to know if I find the love of my life and start a family, somehow those things don't matter anymore. All I know is that the plans I make now may never turn out the way I think they will, maybe I'll end up in the same place I was before. Maybe I'll reach new heights and turn out better than I expected. Maybe 10 years' time isn't enough to complete the things I want to do! Maybe that's 42 year old me or 52 year old me's job! My point is that this arbitrary question means nothing because our futures are fluid, sometimes it's amazing and we can't wait to be there and sometimes it's grim and all we want to hide. But we all have to live it at some point. So why worry about what's coming when we can just live in the now?

"There may be decisions to make and surprises in store. Life takes us to unexpected places sometimes. The future is never set in stone, remember that." – The Night Circus by Erin Morgenstern