

*Siddhartha listened. He was now listening intently, completely absorbed, quite empty, taking in everything. He felt that he had now completely learned the art of listening. He had often heard all this before, all these numerous voices in the river, but today they sounded different. He could no longer distinguish the different voices – the merry voice from the weeping voice, the childish voice from the manly voice. They all belonged to each other: the lament of those who yearn, the laughter of the wise, the cry of indignation and the groan of the dying. They were all interwoven and interlocked, entwined in a thousand ways. And all the voices, all the goals, all the yearnings, all the sorrows, all the pleasures, all the good and evil, all of them together was the world. All of them together was the stream of events, the music of life. When Siddhartha listened attentively to this river, to this song of a thousand voices; when he did not listen to the sorrow or laughter, when he did not bind his soul to any one particular voice and absorb it in his Self, but heard them all, the whole, the unity; then the great song of a thousand voices consisted of one word: Om – perfection.*

## ***Is This Where I End, or Is This Where I Begin?***

*Making the decision to have a child – it's momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body.*

*Go into the forest and be a Samana. If you find bliss in the forest, come and teach it to me.*

*It's life, Jake...and you can miss it if you don't open your eyes.*

## 1. I See Only Traces of Things to Come

One Saturday night in January 2013, I drove to LAX to pick up an old friend. As payment, he suggested we head to Buffalo Wild Wings to watch some basketball, and said he'd foot the bill – an offer he knew I'd never refuse.

By the time we sat down, my beloved Golden State Warriors – a still hapless franchise at the time – were already suffering a blowout at the hands of the Los Angeles Clippers. I don't like to watch scenes of carnage while I'm trying to eat, so I shifted my attention from basketball to conversational matters, stories from our respective winter adventures and the like, as the game continued to unfold / unravel.

At some point, one of the many Blake Griffin Kia commercials flashed across the dozens of screens lining the restaurant's walls, and our conversation tailed off while we watched Griffin travel back in time to 1999 to talk to his younger self. As he woodenly exchanged dialogue with a child actor (who looks distinctly unimpressed with Griffin), encouraging the boy to play the basketball video game instead of the racing video game, I realized that I was substantially older than Griffin, and would never again be younger than an NBA rookie. While I sat there, mute and horrified, my friend asked me, "So...what **would** you have told your younger self if you went back to 1999?"

The question brought me up short. I was fourteen years old in 1999, less than half my current age. I was a high-school freshman. Are there things I wish I could tell him? Sure – he worried about a bunch of stuff that never came to pass. Are there things I wish I could warn him about? Sure – a bunch of stuff he never worried about *did* come to pass.

I've long assumed that, were I given the chance to see the future, I *would* look. This may surprise some of you, but it's fairly consistent with my character. I wouldn't worry about damaging the timeline – whatever I'm seeing takes place in a future following my looking into it anyway – and it's not like I'm upset when something I expect to happen occurs. I know that there's something compelling about a positive surprise, but I've come to simply appreciate positive things, surprising or not. Take all of that, combine it with my insatiable curiosity, and the philosophy makes sense.

But I didn't reply to my friend's question. Not at first. I realized, quite to my surprise, that I didn't want to spoil things outright for the child I used to be. I hemmed and hawed for a while, eventually changed the topic, and watched the Warriors fall further behind as my friend picked up the tab. Afterwards, I dropped him off, headed home, powered up my computer, and opened Word.

*To the past version of myself, from the land of tomorrow: Don't delete this. It isn't spam.*

*I've written you a ten-part list about what lies ahead. No spoilers, just hints – enough to make you smile in recognition when you realize, at each future point in your life, why I included each item.*

*Are you ready? Are you steady?*

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What would **you** have written to your younger self?

What would you have written from your childhood's end?

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## 2. This is All I've Ever Wanted from Life

During the *World Around You* poster assignment, I asked you to think about where you could be in a year. I was less interested in where you thought you'd end up than how you'd get there; I wanted you to start thinking about what the rest of senior year had in store for you.

Part of this thread's purpose is to serve as a bookend assignment to that original reflective piece – to come full circle, so to speak – by encouraging you to consider what you want to do during your whole lifetime. Something of a Bucket List.

When I first designed the assignment's parameters, however, I tried reverting back to my 18-year-old mindset in order to make a sample list. And it was easy. Too easy.

I feel like trying to remember what I wanted to do as a teenager – what I hadn't done by then – should have been harder. Instead, my “teenaged” list looks disturbingly similar to one that I would have written last Saturday. Very little, it seems, has been crossed off. My life's not without accomplishments or experiences, but I think my adolescent self would have expected more. (I still haven't touched a whale. So many frustrations.)

What does that say about me, other than indicating that I probably spend a little too much time either working or at work?

I think I need to heed the advice I routinely give you – to feel a greater sense of urgency and enthusiasm about living. It's easy to settle into routines, especially for someone who's actually pretty fond of them (*I am me, you are here...*), and I *don't* think it's wise to try to avoid routines altogether. Honestly, getting to pick roles for yourself is one of the best aspects of aging.

But a Bucket List helps you evaluate when to sustain a routine and when to temporarily abandon it...and sometimes, that's the key to keeping life interesting.

Life happens to you fast, and when parts of it end, you wonder where they went.

After all...you can miss it if you don't open your eyes.

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Your assignment, then, comes in two parts. Don't worry: they're in the same entry. **(And for the love of all that is holy, keep these school-appropriate. If you think there's a chance I'm going to have to go in and fix something, don't post it.)**

**Part 1:** Please write a letter to either of the following:

- a) One to the person(s) who raised you, or to the person(s) who profoundly shaped you for the better (like the math teacher from my story last month);
- b) One to the future Children of Yours.

If you choose b), I need you to include two specific things:

- a) A list of the things you plan to preserve from your own childhood and share with them – a children's book you loved, a special toy, a specific song to use as a lullaby, etc.

- b) A list of the things you plan to preserve from their childhoods (a la *Dear Sophie*). What are you looking forward to teaching them? What are you looking forward to witnessing? Which milestones are you looking forward to sharing with them?

**Part 2:** Craft your Bucket List! Your list design can – should – be creative. Make one that looks distinctly *individual*, for this is a fairly personal assignment. **(It also needs to be a school-appropriate one – that’s my only restriction. Exercise good judgment here.)**

You can categorize the items on your list by any number of factors – age (when do I want to do these things?), by “genre” (travel goal, career goal, family goal, etc.), type (accomplishment, discovery, witness, touch, etc.), or some other organizational criteria. You can even make it seem like less of a list, if you like. Make it a narrative, make it rhyme, play with the language – it’s your call.

That's it. One letter. One list. (If you want to do more, knock yourself out!)

For this thread, I do not care about the “length” of your work; I just want it to be a substantial effort, since it’s the last real thing I’m asking from you. That means spending time on it. **Don’t do it all in one shot!** Work on it in bits and pieces. Talk to your friends about it. Talk to your classmates about it. Talk to your parents about it. Take suggestions. Ruminant. Ponder. Draft it. Be proud of it! **Just make sure it means something.**

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Your future’s unfolding. Spread the map. Stick some pins in it. Then celebrate!

You’re seniors, and even if this is where I leave you...the best is yet to come.

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Blog Title: “Near Life Experience,” Lifehouse, *Smoke and Mirrors*

1. “Til I Can Walk,” From Indian Lakes, *Able Bodies*

2. “Lifening,” Snow Patrol, *Fallen Empires*  
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