

# 2020

When Hindsight Becomes Foresight

Amy Joy

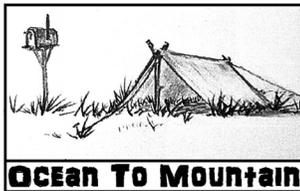




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**2020: When Hindsight Becomes Foresight**

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To all the children,  
old and young,  
who long for a devoted family



# Chapter 1

I noticed the doorknob first. You'd think the carpet would have warned me, the soft shag carpet beneath my bare feet instead of smooth hard wood. That should have registered something. But the pain in my bladder bothered me more than the creepy fact that my flooring had changed overnight. When I reached the door, I had to pay attention, because it felt like – it *felt* like – the ancient brass knob jumped up and flung itself at my face. It stuck out all, “Hello!” right at my eye level and knocked me back against the bed.

I browsed my room in the dim morning light, eyes half open. The ceiling had pulled away from me. The walls had shrunk backward, and an unfamiliar bookshelf loomed high above me like the Times Square Jumbotron.

I finally reached up to flip on the light, then I gazed around at the peculiar changes to my bedroom. I stood there and stared. You'd think I'd have felt shock or fear, but I didn't; a mild confusion merely fuzzed around the edges of my brain. How had a teenager moved into my room while I slept? Posters of Foreigner and AC/DC and Lynyrd Skynyrd patched the walls. Another bookshelf climbed upward by the window – but no books. Just a lava lamp. A gooey green lava lamp. And sports trophies and board games. A series of Star Wars action figures stood in game-on poses across the top shelf.

I gripped a wad of my sweatpants in my fist; they had grown ten sizes too big and threatened to fall off me. As I glanced down, I saw I'd walked up into the legs, so I dropped the wad and stepped out of them. My gray t-shirt hung to my knees and sort of draped over one shoulder, leaving the other shoulder exposed to the cold morning air.

My bladder whined at me, so I trudged from the room that was no longer my bedroom and down the hall into my bathroom, which was clearly no longer my bathroom. Brown and gold linoleum. Geez. Orange Formica swamped the sink. The blue curtain that guarded my bathtub had replaced itself with one of those opaque sliding glass doors - the plastic and metal kind that always get stuck in the metal

runner when you try to slide them. Whatever giants had invaded my house had super tacky taste. They'd taken the whole 1970s retro thing a bit too seriously.

And their toilet was so huge I almost fell into the bowl. But, they had ultra-soft toilet paper, so that was nice.

I might have made a bigger fuss, but I had just woken up. My brain hadn't warmed to an ambient temperature. The morning dew hadn't evaporated from between my ears yet. As I went to scrub my hands, I noticed that I had to stand on my tiptoes to reach the faucet, and I made the decision to investigate. I climbed up on the toilet and increased my height by 18 inches so that my chest and face appeared in the mirror above the sink. I stood on the toilet and stared at a version of the little kid me, chubby cheeks and all. My blonde hair fell past my shoulders, and my bangs stuck up all cockeyed because of my cowlicks. I stuck out my tongue, and the little girl in the mirror responded in kind.

I laughed. I laughed out loud, and little kid laughter bounced around the bathroom.

"Oh, that's fun," I said.

Then I worried. Because if I'd shrunk back into the form of a small child, that meant I'd entered a super lucid dream, and I had just peed in a dream-toilet. And that meant that I had wet my bed.

I had to wake myself up.

I hopped down from the toilet and walked down the hall. How? How to wake up? It didn't feel like a dream; I could move freely, and I could see every single detail of this 1970s version of my living room. I dragged my feet through the red shag carpet, and the rough fibers caught between my toes. I climbed onto the couch with its green leafy upholstery and bounced up and down a few times. I had forgotten how light 40 pounds felt. I grabbed my face with all ten fingers and dug the tips into my cheeks. That smarted. My small, thin fingernails did a good job gouging.

I tried to levitate, to rise through the ceiling – not a problem in dreams. Nothing. I couldn't levitate. I catapulted off the couch in an attempt to fly, but I just crashed onto the carpet on all fours, banging my knees.

I sat in that fuzzy field of ugly red shag, genuinely puzzled. I looked at my knees, and legitimate rug burns peered back up at me. Rug burns. That hurt.

A shout bounced out from behind Hudson's bedroom door, right

off the living room.

“Dammit, Shane! It’s Saturday! Go back to bed!”

I stared at the door. A man’s voice had barked at me, not the voice of my 12-year-old son. “It’s supposed to be Sunday,” part of my brain said, and I wondered if that mattered.

My knees burned, and I examined them, amazed at the distinct discomfort and the high definition of the raw, damp marks. I studied my knees, and the pain of reality started to poke and shove its way into my understanding. I refused to accept it, because people don’t randomly fall asleep in their perfectly good beds and wake up in shag-carpet-land as a little kid.

I hopped up and hunted around this living room that was no longer my living room, seeking out the object I knew would tell me what was up. A newspaper. Didn’t these people own a newspaper? No. No they didn’t. The fireplace sat cold and empty. No papers piled on the brick hearth, ready for kindling fires. A small gray TV perched on a stand across from the couches, but I couldn’t click the knob to find the news, because the guy behind Hudson’s door would yell again.

“I’m trespassing,” I shook my head. “This is somebody else’s house.”

Well, I couldn’t leave, because I wore only a baggy t-shirt. I pushed aside the drapes and peeked out the living room window, where snow piled high on both sides of the driveway. Heat emanated from the hot water radiator under the window, and I briefly rested my chest and arms against its lovely warmth. We always used the wood stove downstairs, because the gas furnace stabbed us in the bank account, but Shane’s dad obviously didn’t care. I stood and rotated slowly in that living room and took in its details. Couches. Coffee table. Family photos on the walls – two parents and three boys.

“They don’t own a single book.”

I had to find something that would tell me the date! I wanted a phone, a day planner. Something.

I trotted through the dining room into the kitchen. The clock on the wall read 6:48. No wonder Shane’s dad had yelled at my failed flight efforts. The weekend morning had barely rubbed the sleep out of its eyes. But, geez. What was it with the ugly linoleum and the obsession with avocado green? I sighed and searched the walls for the item that absolutely had to be in a 1970’s kitchen.

There! Haha! A yellow phone had been mounted on the wall like a big banana, and next to it a wall calendar smiled down at me! The page hung open to February. February of 1980.

Amy The Joy

I shook my head. I had landed in 1980 as a four-year-old child.  
And this wasn't a dream.

# Chapter 2

I stared at that calendar without moving. I felt no anger or horror. I didn't panic or collapse in tears. I just stood there.

1980? I hadn't done a single thing to get myself shot back in time, reverse-aged. I held my baby hand in front of my eyes and twisted it slowly back and forth. I turned it over and examined my palm, my soft, perfect little palm. The deep white scar from my ice accident on Diamond Lake had disappeared. I hadn't reached age 11. I hadn't fallen through the ice and gashed open my hand, so that scar didn't exist. The purple nitric acid burn had vanished from my wrist. I'm a chemist, and I'd dripped nitric acid above my glove line in December, but that burn mark had disappeared. The multitude of white nicks that had long populated my fingers had moved their family elsewhere, to older hands.

Had I stolen my childhood body? Were my parents going to wake up in Everett, Washington and wonder where I'd gone?

"Do I still know things?"

I expected to have a brain filled with things like Oscar the Grouch and Little Bo Peep, to have lost my decades of learning. It was this thought that stabbed the first real shock of adrenaline through my gut. No no no! All those years of school!

Filled with dread, I sang the Preamble to the Constitution: "We the people in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility..." Oh, thank God.

I pictured the entire world in my head, all the continents, all the countries. What about Africa? Yep. The Earth rotated in my mind and Africa spun into view. I could see Chad, like a face with a flat hat on top, and there sat Cameroon, looking like a deformed kangaroo.

I travelled through different subjects: the periodic table and the history of Rome. Phew. My body had gone back in time, but the filing cabinets in my head hadn't emptied. I thought about all those years of living, of study and reading. I dropped my face into my hands in relief that it hadn't all vanished. I was still me. In a four-year-old's body.

“I’m four-years-old!” I muttered into my palms. “How do I handle being four-years-old!” I couldn’t absorb it. It didn’t compute.

I pulled at my giant gray t-shirt. First thing, I needed some clothes. This might be my kitchen in the future, but it wasn’t my house yet, and I didn’t want to be here when the guy in Hudson’s room finally rolled out of bed. I gazed past the wall calendar up the stairs to the second floor. That’s where I had to go. I grabbed the wooden handrail and started climbing those steep stairs, because children lived in this house, and I needed those children. I knew they hadn’t grown up and left home, because the man had blamed Shane when I made noise on a weekend morning.

I reached the bedroom and gently pushed the door inward. Two beds sat on opposite sides of the room under the slanted ceiling. One boy slept deeply on his stomach, his face half buried in a pillow, his arm wrapped around his head. I found another boy curled up in a bean bag chair at the end of the second bed. He raised his eyebrows at me, and I raised my eyebrows back at him.

“Are you Shane?” I asked.

He nodded, his thumb deep in his mouth. He wore Scoobie Doo pajamas, the polyester kind that stick to your skin.

“How old are you?” I asked him.

He didn’t bother to take the thumb out. “I’th.”

“Six?” I nodded hopefully at him. “You’re six?”

He nodded.

The sleeping brother looked bigger than Shane. Maybe Shane had clothes he’d outgrown.

“Are there any pants that I could wear?” I asked him. “I only have this t-shirt.”

Shane finally let his hand fall from his mouth and wriggled to stand up.

“Maybe in the closet?” I pointed at the closet door.

“Yeah,” Shane said. “There’s clothes in there. Not girl clothes, though. Only boy clothes.”

“It’s okay,” I said. “I don’t care.”

I flipped on the light and surveyed the garments that littered the closet floor, checking tags for sizes. Good good. Shane’s mother hadn’t done a Goodwill run in awhile. I found a white t-shirt and a pair of size 5 jeans and a green sweater.

“Shane!” I hissed. “Could you get me some underwear? Fresh, clean underwear!”

Half a minute later, a pair of whitey tighties flew through the door. “Thanks!”

I tugged on the clothes, and I felt a lot better. The pants bagged on me a bit, but I tucked in my t-shirt, and they stayed up. I rolled up the cuffs so they hung to the top of my feet.

Shane didn’t seem the least bit worried that a little girl had marched into his room at 7:00 a.m. on a February morning. He just watched me. Finally he said, “We have to stay quiet. Dad likes to sleep in.”

I nodded.

“How long are you here?” he asked then.

“I don’t know,” I shrugged.

“You want some cereal?”

“Do you have any extra socks and shoes? Shoes that are too small for you?”

I carried my new socks and Velcro shoes as I slunk down the stairs, because we had to stay quiet. As we reached the bottom and I saw the calendar again, I thought to ask a question.

“Hey Shane,” I said. “What day is today?”

“Saturday.”

“Not Sunday?”

Shane shook his head. “Nope. It’s Saturday.”

“What’s the date?”

“Oh. I guess... Yesterday at school was February first, so I guess it’s February second.”

February 2, 1980. I’d travelled back in time 40 years. The day I left... it would have been 02/02/2020.

“So many twos and fours,” I said.

And it was Groundhog Day. I glanced up at the ceiling. “Oh, that’s funny,” I told God. “That’s just hilarious.”

How...how was I supposed to get back home? I mean, technically, I hadn’t left my house, but this was my house 40 years ago. How did I return to my life in 2020, to my kids and my stupid cats and the chemistry lab I had to manage?

I worked it over in my mind. Ronald Reagan hadn’t been elected yet, and Jimmy Carter still presided in the Oval Office! Mike Tyson hadn’t started knocking people out. The Berlin Wall still stood, keeping all those poor people locked away in East Germany.

Earthquakes. What earthquakes loomed ahead of us? I couldn’t think of any for a few moments. The big San Francisco quake, the one during the World Series, when did that take place? Shoot. It was... it

was my sister's 11th birthday. October 17, 1989. Nine years away.

Weird. So weird.

Shane and I soon ate our Fruit Loops in the kitchen, cross-legged on the floor with our backs to the cupboards. I crunched away on the fruity circles, astonished at the lack of nutrition in this house. The pantry had offered Apple Jacks and Fruit Loops as our lone, sugary choices for breakfast cereal. In the refrigerator I'd found white bread and rubbery singles cheese and bologna. Sunny Delight. I enjoyed an occasional bologna sandwich on white bread, but these people had no vegetables. No whole grains. They seemed determined to die young.

"So," I munched on the Fruit Loops, milk dripping down my chin. "When your parents get up, can we tell them I came over to play?"

Shane shrugged. "Yeah. I want you to play with my Hot Wheels with me. Maybe we can bring them down to the living room and set them up there." He got a little excited. "I can make the track reach all the way to the kitchen!"

I honestly thought that sounded fun. I liked Hot Wheels, but I wanted to figure out how to get back to 2020. Maybe if I went back to sleep in my room, I would wake up in my own bed again.

"How long do we have to keep quiet?" I asked.

"Dad likes to sleep until nine."

I had an unpleasant thought: if Shane's dad got up and saw a little girl in his house, he might send me home. I couldn't explain to him that he inhabited my house in the wrong decade. I needed to fall asleep in my bedroom, and I didn't want to get kicked out of the house before then.

"You want to play Hot Wheels, Shane?"

Shane nodded. "Yeah. It'll be fun! The cars go so sooo fast! And I have loop de loops. You'll see, it's a lot of fun."

"Okay," I said. "But, I'm tired. I'm going to take a nap in your brother's room."

Shane's eyes widened. "Oh, you can't! Todd will kill you. You can't go into his room."

I groaned. Yes, Shane. I have to go into his room.

"When does Todd get home?" I asked. "He's not here right now. He doesn't have to know."

"He'll know," Shane bobbed his head up and down. "And then he'll yell at me, and then Dad'll get mad at me."

Good grief, buddy. You are entirely too concerned about people

getting mad at you.

“Fine,” I said. “I gotta go to the bathroom.”

I shoved my empty bowl onto the counter by the sink, and I can’t tell you how ridiculous it felt to be so short that I couldn’t even see the sink itself. I had to stand on my toes and push the bowl with my fingertips to move it farther back on the counter. Then I slunk to the bathroom to find some scissors.

If I were going to be stuck in 1980 in boy’s clothes, then I might as well have a boy’s haircut. People were more inclined to protect a little girl. They might feel obliged to walk a little girl home. A little boy, though... they might simply tell me to get lost. I had to cut off all that long blonde hair, because I needed to stick around long enough to go back to sleep in Todd’s bed.

I slowly, quietly slid open each drawer in the bathroom. I found toothpaste and baby powder, extra toothbrushes and dental floss – the old kind of waxed dental floss, not the Glide stuff that floats between your teeth. I found Ben Gay and Tylenol and extra combs and soap and all the stuff people keep in their bathrooms. Finally, in one of the two bottom drawers, I found a leather bag that contained hair clippers and all the attachments. Woot!

I heaved the bag from the drawer, and I returned to the kitchen.

I said, “Shane, buddy, we are going to buzz off my hair.”

Horror widened the boy’s eyes. “I cut my own hair once, and Dad got so mad!”

“Your dad isn’t going to get mad,” I said. “I’m not his kid. He’s just going to think I’m a boy. See?”

Shane shook his head warily. “I don’t think you should,” he said.

I felt a twinge of guilt. They had Shane trained so well, and I wanted to jump-start his corruption.

I plugged the cord into an outlet near the ground, then I stripped down to my new underwear. I turned the little switch to extend the guard a smidge. I wanted a buzz cut; I didn’t want to skinhead myself. I snapped on the clippers and proceeded to run them through the hair above my right ear. That light, fine-textured four-year-old hair could not withstand the sharp little razor edges. It fell to the ugly linoleum floor like chaff. The clippers weighed down my hands, and I had to grapple them with both fists, but I ran them through my hair again, and row after row of locks showered down around me.

Shane just stared.

“Would you help me?” I held the clippers to him. “This is hard.”

He shook his head. "I don't know how."

Useless child! I started to hate this family. They stocked sugar breakfast cereal and white bread, had no books in the entire house, and raised a six-year-old who was too scared to go to the bathroom on a Saturday morning. I struggled to run those heavy clippers over my head until my arm muscles ached. It didn't take long.

"Please do the back," I begged Shane. No parents had risen to the morning light. They hadn't noticed the buzzing noise clear across the house. Shane watched in fascination as the clippers mowed down my hair. "I promise you won't get in trouble," I told him. "Please get the back of my head. I can't reach."

His lips bunched up with anxiety, but he finally nodded and took the clippers from my hands. "Turn around," he whispered.

I bent my head over so he had easy access to the area around the back of my neck, and he clumsily buzzed back and forth until the hair gave up from sheer abuse.

I reached up and felt around my head, looking for missed tufts. "There," I pulled out some hairs. "Get these."

Within five minutes, I had an easy-to-manage fuzzy bald head. The soft hairs hardly zipped against my hand when I brushed against the grain. I grabbed the hand towel from the stove door handle and used it to brush myself off, and I wished I could take a shower. I found the broom and used it to sweep up the light hay fluff all over the floor. I managed, but I kept giggling, because half of the broomstick poked into the air over my head.

"I am so short!" I couldn't get over it. Shane towered over me by at least three monstrously huge inches.

He held the dustpan for me, and we dumped my hair into the trash bin under the sink. I pulled pop cans and a mashed potatoes box out of the bag to place on top so nobody would notice the hair. Then, I tugged all my clothes back on, complete with socks and my cool Velcro shoes.

"Do I look like a boy now?" I asked.

Shane nodded.

"Would you even think I was a girl?" I asked.

"No," Shane said. "Not in a million years."

"Or. At least eight years." I giggled to myself.

# Chapter 3

Shane's parents walked out a bit later in bathrobes. Not remotely scary people. They didn't seem concerned that I had appeared in their house, except the mother said, "Oh. Shane has a sweater like that."

Wait. First she asked me my name. Then she said the bit about the sweater.

She saw me standing in the kitchen when she went to make coffee. "Hello there," she stood above me. "What's your name?"

I gawked at her for a few moments, blinking. A name. I hadn't thought about that. I needed a new name. A boy's name. I tried to think of something amazing.

"It's okay," she said. "Don't be shy. Did you move into that house a few doors down? The blue house?"

I shook my head. What was a good name? Bemus. LL Cool J. Frank. Dakota. Frankenstein. I laughed. It came out as a cute, little kid giggle.

"Does your mom know you're here?" she asked.

"Dodge," I said. "My name is Dodge."

"Like the car?" she asked.

No, I shook my head. "Like... like Dodge City. You know. 'I gotta get out of Dodge?'"

She smiled politely, but I could tell she didn't get it. I guessed she had never watched *Gunsmoke*.

"That's a very nice green sweater you're wearing today, Dodge," she said. "Shane has one that looks just like it. Maybe he can get his and you can be twins."

I nodded, and then I ran into the living room. Four-year-olds can get away with anything. They don't have to stand politely and make small talk.

Shane and I dragged down all his Hot Wheels tracks in three trips, and we set them up while the parents got dressed for the day. Shane's nine-year-old brother Elroy hauled the coffee table out of the way and built the tracks up and down all over the living room. They tried to

make them go up the couch and down the other side, but the cars just flew off into the dining room and didn't land on the tracks.

The boys ignored any suggestions I made, and they were having so much fun without me, I saw my opportunity to sneak away and hide in big brother's room. I shut the door behind me, and I climbed up into Todd's bed to send myself back to my own time, my own family.

As I lay there, I felt a little sad. Not everybody gets to fall asleep and wake up in 1980. I had a new name! Dodge. Dodger, the Artful Dodger.

To be honest - absolutely and completely dog-truth honest - the fact that I had managed to rewind 40 years pleased me. I found it ridiculous and entertaining that I walked around pretending to be a preschool-age child. I had 44 years of information stored in my head, and I knew about the future! I could say, "I, Carnac the Magnificent in my divine and mystical wisdom will ascertain the answers before even knowing the questions."

I could make some money!

I snuggled beneath the covers, considering my place in history. Had *Raiders of the Lost Ark* come out in the theaters yet? Darn. I didn't know. "Hindsight's not always 20-20," I said to myself, and I laughed again. 2020.

Weariness tugged at my eyes. I had risen early with a full bladder, and I had the body of a four-year old. I tried to remember the 1980s with my head on Todd's pillow, and in a few minutes, I fell asleep.

I awoke several hours later because a 13-year-old boy threw his coat on the bed.

I sat up and looked around. "Well, that didn't work," I frowned.

The boy jerked up his fists, startled. "What are you doing in my room!" he barked.

"I'm a time traveler," I said. "In the year 2020, this is my room. But, today I woke up in your bed."

He shook his head. "Shane knows he's not supposed to be in my room. Get out of here."

"He didn't come in." I slid off the bed with a thump. "He told me not to. But, I was trying to return to the future, so I went back to sleep in your bed."

"Look, I hate little kids in my room," Todd glared at me and pointed at the door. "Get out!"

I dashed through his door and trotted around the house. Hot

Wheels tracks slashed back and forth across the living room, but the rest of the family had disappeared while I slept.

I stood desolately in the kitchen for a few minutes. The clock on the wall said 1:12. “Wheel in the Sky” by Journey emanated from Todd’s room.

I made myself a bologna sandwich on white bread and ate at the dining room table, confused. It hadn’t worked. Falling asleep in Todd’s bed hadn’t sent me home to my own time. What was I going to do? I gazed around my no-longer dining room and realized that I couldn’t stay here. I tried to think of a single person I knew who would have lived nearby in 1980. Not a person. Nobody. I chewed on my bologna sandwich and pondered.

“Oh!” I realized I hadn’t answered one of my first questions. Had I stolen my body? Were my parents looking for me, or had I manifested as an entirely separate being? I finished my food. Then, I dragged a chair into the kitchen and climbed up to that banana-colored phone. There was one number from my childhood that I remembered, and I needed to call it.

My forever friend Suzie had lived in the same house for 14 years when we were kids. My mom was always moving, and I couldn’t recall my own phone number, but I knew Suzie’s, no problem. I punched in 1-2-0-6-7-4-7-4-1-3-6 and waited for the phone to ring three times. Suzie’s parents always answered on the third ring. It was their thing. If they had to walk across the house, they answered on the third ring, and if they chewed on pizza next to the telephone, they still answered on the third ring. I held that yellow phone to my ear with both of my small hands, and I waited for those three “brrrinngs” in my ear.

“Hello?” Judy answered. Suzie’s mom. Oh, good, they were home.

“Hi,” I said. I realized I didn’t know exactly how to handle this. “Um. Is Sadie Cook there?”

“Just a minute. I’ll go get her.”

“Really?” I panicked. “Okay. Thanks.”

I didn’t *actually* want to talk to myself! I had expected Judy to say, “No,” and then I could follow up with, “Oh. Well, do you have her number?” Then I’d call my house and talk to my mom. Of course, it made sense that the four-year-old me would be playing with my friend Doozie Suzie. But! I worried about speaking to myself. Would the universe unravel? Would time fold in on itself? Would I explode?

“Hang up,” I told myself.

No, I needed to make sure.

A child's voice spoke into the phone. "Hello?"

I glanced at the wall clock, and the secondhand kept ticking. No explosions blasted my world apart. Space-time didn't crack open to suck me into a void.

"Hello?" the little voice repeated.

"Hi," I said cautiously. "Um. Are you Sadie Cook?"

"Uh-huh. Who is this?"

"Do you have a little sister named Kiersten?"

"Huh? No."

"Oh." Stupid me; Kiersten hadn't been born yet. "Do you have a sister named Lila?"

"Yes."

"Is your mom Madeleine?"

"Yeah?"

"Okay. Hey. You know dogs named Baron and Shadow?"

"Oh yeah. They live next-door."

"Okay cool. Your mom is going to have babies soon. She thinks they're going to be girls, because the doctor said they'd be girls. When she has boys instead, she won't have names for them. You should say to name them Baron and Shadow. Okay?"

"Oh! Okay. I like those dogs."

"Cool. Well, thanks. Bye."

"Okay. Bye."

I hung up. Honestly, Mom should have named them Baron and Shadow.

I plopped down onto the chair and put my hands on my face. "This is absurd. This is crazy. This is crazy. This is crazy. This is insane." I sat there, listening to Journey songs pour from Todd's room down the hall. I had to make a decision about what to do.

I had gone back in time. I had gone BACK IN TIME! I sat on the chair, mentally sucking on that like a Lifesaver. I realized something quickly. I couldn't go home and see my parents. I couldn't interact with my original life at all, because I didn't want to risk messing it up. I still wanted that original me – that little girl on the phone – to grow up and meet my husband and fall in love with him! I wanted our kids to be born! I couldn't do anything to screw that up.

What was I going to do then?

I needed something to write on. I hopped down and rummaged through the drawers in the kitchen until I found a small spiral notepad and a pencil. I tore off a sheet of paper, then I leaned on the chair

under the phone and used it like a desk.

“All right!” I said to myself. “What are my challenges?” I wrote the word “Challenges” at the top of the paper.

Under it, I wrote “1. Short.”

What else. “2. No money.”

What else. “3. No identity. No birth certificate. No SS#. I do not exist on paper.”

Whoa. I didn’t exist!

I looked at the words I’d written, nice big words with nice straight lines. I drew a line down the center of the page for a second column. At the top I wrote “Assets.” I realized that most of the things in the first column had the potential to be assets. Except for “No money.” I couldn’t see anything good about that.

If I had managed to return to 1980 with the mind of a 44-year-old, though, I could find ways to take advantage. I wondered if I would just continue from this point onward, living in the 1980s, or if I would – pop – disappear from the past and reappear in the future in an hour or a day or a month.

“What if I have to repeat the next 40 years?”

That overwhelmed me for a moment. I didn’t want to think about it. “But, if I do have to do a repeat...when I reach Groundhog Day in 2020, I’ll have to show up here and take over for the original me that disappeared. So that my kids still have a mother.”

Unless I returned to 4-years-old again. An eternal loop from ages 4 to 44 over and again. That seemed a bit miserable and pointless.

That’s when a realization power-punched me. Right then, right as I pictured myself looping through eternity, an outlandish idea smashed through my brain like a train engine, obliterating all the other thoughts in its way.

I stood up. “I can go anywhere,” I told myself.

I had complete freedom! I had no house. No car payment. No bills. I had no parents looking for me or a job to go to. I had absolutely no responsibilities in the entire world. I couldn’t go home to Everett, but I also didn’t have to live in the frozen mountains of the north.

Jeopardy! I could head to Los Angeles and go on Jeopardy! If I were stuck back in time in a short little body, I might as well use my brains and win Kids’ Week on a game show. I could make a ton of money and stick it in the bank so that it would be waiting for me if I suddenly popped back into the future again.

I imagined the ocean and palm trees and a wonderful shortage of

snow. I needed to find my way to southern California.

I glanced at the clock. It was almost 2:00. It would be getting dark in a couple hours, and I had to think quickly.

I climbed back up the stairs to the boys' room and hunted through their closet again. A snow jacket hanging in the way back looked my size. Hats? No hats. Bags? A cheap nylon book bag hid under a pile of Shane's Legos. I dumped the Legos and took the bag. I stole a pair of socks from his drawer and another pair of stupid whitey tighties and put them in the bag. Geez, how long before boxer briefs became a thing?

I stepped lightly down the stairs to the kitchen and added two Nutty Buddy bars and a tin of sardines from the pantry. The bag weighed maybe eight ounces. In the hall closet I found a box of snow stuff, and I grabbed a hat and two mismatched mittens. Not proper snow gloves, just fuzzy mittens. I wanted snow boots, but I worried that I'd take something Shane still needed. Finally, I grabbed a new toothbrush from the drawer in the bathroom.

I tugged on my stolen hat and mittens and slung the stolen bag over my shoulder, and I headed out the door and down the snowy steps. One day those steps would belong to me. One far far away day.