



**Enjoy reading these letters to our younger selves by older members of our community, and reflections on these letters by Whitchurch High School students.**

**Mwynhewch ddarllen y llythyrau at ein hunain yn iau gan aelodau hŷn ein cymuned, a myfyrdodau ar y llythyrau hyn gan fyfyrwyr Ysgol Uwchradd yr Eglwys Newydd.**

#1.

You may be shorter than most people and look younger, but it is good this doesn't phase you. You have some good friends who love to laugh and go to jazz clubs. You know how important friends are, they always will be.

School is comfortable, perhaps too comfortable. You could maybe take more risks, especially physical risks, in sport, it doesn't matter if you fail at first, you can learn and improve. You are aware that some teachers are rubbish, humiliating, and patronising, don't let them put you off subjects you might enjoy. Learning and study will always be stimulating and absorbing.

All those novels you have read will build into a library that will stay with you and will widen and deepen your understanding of other people and their lives. Talk to other people about what you are reading.

You think your parents are boring. Try to appreciate the support and encouragement they give. You know you will always have your father's unconditional approval. You keep your feelings to yourself, if you could share some with your mother, she might be kind and understanding.

You have learnt to be independent and responsible; this means you can travel and explore without fear. Enjoy, and take more risks.

## RESPONSE

*I find your words very relatable. I would even go as far as to say this is the story of my life. I too am shorter than most, but that's okay. I'd rather be 5 foot than 10 foot.*

*I have made some amazing friends in this past year, one of which is sat next to me right now. Friends are so important – but not just anyone you spend time with is your friend. The girl who only interacts with you because of who you're dating isn't your friend. The girl who listens and doesn't stick up for you when people are talking badly about you isn't your friend. The girl who spreads rumours about you isn't your friend. The girl who makes situations worse because she wants to feel special and involved isn't your friend.*

*This made me realise how mistakes do not matter as long as you learn from them. It shows how we all make mistakes, and we are all humans in the end. No one is perfect and we cannot always get everything right in our short lives. We can always improve on everything we do as long as we put in the effort to do so. Throughout our aging lives, we learn things which benefit us in all sorts of ways and we learn things which make us a better person. There will always be someone out there who can give us advice on how we can improve our livelihood and how we can live to the fullest.*

#2

Well fifteen – what a year!! Childhood had been difficult and overshadowed by care commitments and domestic tasks. Not much time for play or normal socialisation.

Then at fifteen mum died and threw you into a chasm of chaos and grief. You didn't understand what was going on and had little support. Times were different then and sharing feelings was seen as a weakness. This was particularly so for you coming from an army family. Schools were not the caring institutions they now are. None of the teachers knew, as the Headmaster didn't inform them. Adults didn't know how to react and the only messages you received were about 'being strong' and 'not upsetting your father'.

So you buried the feelings and 'soldiered on'.

You wasted a lot of time feeling envious of others, feeling that life was unfair (it is!) and became a bit of an emotional island absorbing others' messages about being strong.

Then at 35 dad died unexpectedly in an already challenging year. You had already lost grandparents and a close friend and in your usual fashion had pushed the feelings down and tried to carry on.

This time, though, you weren't successful and had to face the enormity of all the losses you had experienced. It was a very overwhelming and traumatic time. However, it was also the period that changed your perspective on life. Reluctantly you accepted counselling and started to understand what had happened and how it was possible to do things in a different way that was more emotionally healthy.

You learned a lot in that time and continued to use that knowledge and emotional awareness as you progressed through life and faced further challenges, resulting in a better outcome for your mental health.

My message to you is not to feel you have to manage situations on your own. Reach out and talk to your parents, foster carers, trusted adults and friends. Sometimes, someone to listen is all it needs to put things into perspective. It is important to develop your strength and resilience. On other occasions you may need some professional help. School nurses may be able to help or if the problem is deeper then perhaps counselling is the answer. It won't make the difficult feelings go away but it can help to manage and understand them.

I wish you all the best on your journeys through life.

## RESPONSE

*"An emotional island absorbing others' messages."*

*This quote made me realise that your emotions should never be deserted like a singular island desperate for communication. The 'island' metaphor represents the singularity you may feel and experience when struggling mentally. This quote should be a reflection and representation of there being multiple islands on the Earth. Everyone is an island of their own kind. If anything, there are no separated islands, it's just one big land. Nobody is alone on this land, the land is not deprived of social interaction and communication. Everyone has equal opportunities and will be equally heard, no matter their struggles. This quote made me realise the significance of reaching out and speaking about your mental health issues, just like those on a deserted island. Instead of dwelling on your 'island', merge with others to create land. The land should be a safe space to communicate, to reach out. Instead of making yourself singled-out, be the one to merge the islands together. Do not be*

*ashamed, seek out help in desperation or complete sanity. Take what others say on-board but don't let it sink your boat. Be somebody's life-boat.*

3.

Hi XX,

Well, we made it. We survived our teens, partied through our twenties, matured and settled down in our 30s/40s/50s and revamped our life in our 60s. The last few decades are yet to be written but we have some truly exciting ideas and daydreams.

I have to admit that our plans and daydreams were hi-jacked and derailed somewhat, so we never became a wildlife conservationist in Africa. Instead we became (no laughing now) a wife, mother and a banker. I know not on of those ever featured in our thoughts but I have to tell you, we were good at what we did. Okay, maybe not the wife bit but everything else was a success. Yes, even the motherhood, which was a bit of a surprise as we were adamant – no kids! But they are both your best friends (and here is where I don't mention the grandkids.)

Our life has been, like so many others, a rollercoaster of varying peaks and troughs. Some of the troughs have been really deep but the ride back to the top has been more courageous and rewarding. The important thing to know is we rode that rollercoaster with fortitude but had fun and laughter along the way. We embraced what life threw at us and with the help of family and friends we collected along the way, we have made it so far.

Sometimes I wonder if there is anything I would have changed but when I reflect, every bad decision or event has had a positive effect i.e. a failed marriage have me 2 glorious kids, so no regrets there. For each disappointment there has been numerous highlights, with plenty of friends and family riding that rollercoaster with me.

Finally, I do ponder what my life would have been like in Africa but who knows, I may have been eaten by a lion or stamped on by a rogue elephant.

What I am trying to say is go with the flow. Worrying and fretting never changed a thing.

Oh, and if you see Tony Bodin [from school], tell him people over 40 are a useful and innovative part of society and do not need to be shot!

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RESPONSE:

*“A rollercoaster of varying peaks and troughs. Some of the troughs have been really deep but the ride back to the top has been more courageous and rewarding.”*

*Taught me to live life happily*

*Knowing when I'm at my lowest I can always climb to the top*

*Knowing the saddest parts of life can lead to the happiest.*

*Taught me life is as random as a rollercoaster, so I know,*

*to just go with the flow in life*

*No plans*

*No restrictions*

*Every decision I make will eventually have a positive impact on the rest of my existence.*

*Taught me the highest parts of my life are important*

*To be cherished*

*And remembered.*

*The old have a bigger impact on our lives than we know,*

*They teach us the importance of life*

*And the troubles and celebrations within it.*

**#4.**

**Things I learned...in South Sudan**

**(after working in South Sudan 1980 – 83)**

How to enjoy rain, heavy rain

How to live without television or marmite

How to become self-sufficient

How to enjoy local beer

How to make my own clothes.

Where to buy the best spinach

Where the Colobus monkeys could be seen at dusk.

Where the mango trees provided shade

where we sat outside, around the charcoal fire drinking tea,

while the stars came out.

Why male pawpaw trees never produce fruit

Why a homemade pillowcase and matching kettle holder will never catch on.

Why I always bought my dress fabric from the man with the handsome eyes.

Why I cried when I came home and found no-one

to share my homemade biscuits.

Why my memories would last a lifetime.

RESPONSE:

**How to Enjoy Rain, Heavy Rain**

*Weathering the storm, allowing the droplets to wash over me*

*The gale is never-ending, my body is paralysed*

*A watery prison encases me as I scramble for air.*

*A voice calls out,*

*It guides me, assuring my every move*

*I take a step,*

*the puddle creating a stadium around my foot*

*With each tread, the crowd continues to thin.*

*What was once a tidal wave, is now a small stream.*

*The once soaked-through coat becomes a shirt just off the ironing board*

*The tempest dwindles and the droplets vacates my body.*

*I am now free,*

*As I step out into the bright summers' day.*

#5

**A letter to my sixteen-year-old self**

Hi ("Dear" is only used in Official Letters these days) My Sixteen-Year-Old Self,

I know you are down in the dumps after going into a daydream while sitting your Maths "O" Level (snappily renamed "Maths G.C.S.E" now). You are convinced you have failed. The teachers at our grim Grammar School have drummed into you that failing English or Maths means a lifetime of cleaning floors in one of

Wolverhampton's many factories. (They've nearly all gone now. The factories, I mean, though of course the teachers....).

Anyway, I thought I'd pop back and brighten you up with some surprising news about your future. First of all - you know how unbelievably ancient your grandparents are? Well, you're going to live to be older than any of them!

Secondly, you are going to spend your long declining years in the mysterious country of WALES!! I KNOW!!! When our husband (that's worked out okay, by the way) came home and told me we were moving to Cardiff because of his job I was dumbfounded. I mean all you and I knew of Wales (now Cymru...) was from:

- a) a dismal Sunday School outing to Rhyl spent mostly in the coach (charabanc to you).
- b) a weekend on a foggy campsite surrounded by invisible mountains
- c) a car journey to Llangollen which might have been glorious if we hadn't had to stop every few miles for brother Sam to be car sick (more good news - he's improved with time and I don't just mean the car sickness). Everyone knows that Cardiff has lovely countryside. It's less well known that the people who live here are the kindest and most hospitable in the U.K (I've been around...). So, of course your children (that's turned out all right too) and grandchildren (ditto) don't want to live anywhere else.

You remember how after being forced to overdose on Latin you told Mum and Dad that Languages were OUT ? Well, now here I am having a go at learning Welsh (Cymraeg..). The daydreaming doesn't help... Which reminds me – somehow you scrape through your Maths “O” Level.

You also learn that it wouldn't have mattered anyway. Our teachers omitted to mention there's such a thing as Resits... There are some useful life lessons there if only you were smart enough to work them out.....but I get the feeling I'm wasting my time.

With love across the years,

Your older but-not-much-wiser Self

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RESPONSE 1:

*Dear you,*

*What a beautiful letter you have written. The lessons you have learnt inspire me not to worry. Your life has worked out very well and you seem to have enjoyed it. You have taught me not to worry, everything has gone so well for you and I hope the same happens for me. You seem so happy with your life, you seem to live with no regrets and I'm glad it has gone so well for you. Your letter brought tears to my eyes.*

*Every line is a thought, a story, a memory, a hope. I wish you all the best and I wish your life continues to flourish, no matter how hopeful any day may feel, I pray my life flourishes as yours has.*

*Your letter fills me with hope and I will try to embody this hope so that it may overflow to all those around me.*

*With love,*

RESPONSE 2:

*Dear you,*

*I hope your life has been as joyous as your letter.*

*I hope that my life could be as bubbly and exciting as your letter portrays your life.*

*I enjoyed reading about your life tossing and turning- and the message you gave me that no matter what you will enjoy yourself and life will always find a way to carry on in full. I really love the way you speak to yourself – as though your younger self has so much to live for and that your advice is the only gift you can pass onto them.*

*I really liked the difference between the initial discovery of Wales in your childhood and when you began to live there. You speak of Wales as though you are proud to have lived here and the Wales is one of the things that make you tick. I am very happy that you have discovered what you want to do in the future and I hope that I do to.*

*Thank you – I know your younger self will be excited for the life ahead of you.*

RESPONSE 3:

*Hi me,*

*I'm writing this because I was told to*

*I promise there is a point to this...I think.*

*HEY!*

*Keep reading*

*My train of thought is arriving*

*We just read a poem by "Mary" (anonymous – you get the point)*

*because I was told to*

*bear with me here.*

*The person who wrote it seemed nice*

*They seemed happy with their life and how much better it is when they are older.*

*I am happy for them.*

*I hope I can do that*

*So people are happy for me.*

*I hope I feel fulfilled*

*And have found what I actually want to do*

*See*

*There was a point.*

*Thank you to "Mary"*

*The anonymous writer,*

*The happy person*

*I'm sure they didn't write that just because they were told to.*

#7

## A LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF

February 2024

Dear younger self

You have a very interesting life ahead of you. There will be lots of ups and down – the ups can be terrifying, as I discovered the one and only time I went rock climbing. But the downs (in this case abseiling) can be so exhilarating – the only trouble was, there could be no exhilaration without being terrified first! At other times the ‘ups’ will be exhilarating and the downs; terrifying – you just have to take each one as it comes and make the most of them all.

You will make some good friendships but come to realise that they will not all be life-long ones. Think of railway tracks running alongside each other for some miles and then one goes off in a different direction. But you can still keep in touch, and you may have chances to meet up again later on. You have to work at friendships if they are worthwhile.

You will have to learn to say ‘yes’ and ‘no’ at the right times, and if you can say them firmly but politely you will make more friends than enemies. Don’t rush to decisions, ask for more information before deciding, but don’t be afraid to try new things. If you have a particular fear and can find the courage to confront it, then it will already have lost most of its power over you. The first time you do anything is the scariest – after all, when you were a toddler learning to walk, you didn’t just walk straight across the room, you held on to the furniture, then took a step, fell down, got up, took another step, fell down again and so on until suddenly you were walking. Find the story about Rober the Burce and the spider – if at first you don’t succeed, try, try and try again! I need to warn you that learning is a life-long process; school is just the first stage. Take every opportunity to learn from other people’s experience: ask questions, research topics. A lifetime of saying ‘I wish I could...or ‘I wish I knew’... is a lifetime of wasted opportunities. Take every chance to fill in gaps in your knowledge to learn new things. In old age, when you can’t remember what day it is or what you have just had for breakfast, you will remember poetry, quotations, songs and music learnt by heart now, and everyone will be so impressed. Try Pam Ayres ‘I wish I’d looked after me teeth’ (very sound medical advice!) and Jenny Josephs ‘Warning’ ( maybe you can add a few things to her list?)

Finally I just want to wish you well. People or events may disappoint you as you get older, but I hope that if you look back in old age you will think it was worth it. And if something is not going quite as you hoped remember the song ‘Pick yourself, dust yourself down and start all over again’. Have an interesting journey!

RESPONSE:

*I learnt that no matter how many times you fail and don't succeed, don't give up.*

*Don't give up on yourself. If you put your mind to something, don't stop until you succeed. As if you give up, you can never reach your full potential. How it is normal to fail the first time and that you have to learn from your mistakes.*

*I learnt that if you think a friendship is going to last a lifetime then you have to put effort in. Don't just walk away after an argument as you need to make it work and fix it. Any type of friendship requires sacrifice and dedication. Friendships are extremely important and when you're older and your family are gone or you have no siblings, that friendships may be the only thing you have. They could be your only support team.*

*I learnt that it is okay to be scared. Sometimes you just need to take a leap of faith. It's normal to be scared to try something new because it could be amazing and if you were scared you would have lost that. Everything requires risks and most things come with a reward. If things get hard, it's okay, just get back up and try again.*

*I learnt that you need to find opportunities for yourself and make them as opportunities won't always present themselves to you and you have to put effort in to make yourself an opportunity. That's what makes you unique and different from everyone else. Don't reject any opportunities and try new things. As if you don't take opportunities then later on in life, you'll wonder what could've happened. Your life would be full of "What ifs" and that is not how you want to live your life. Take advice and listen and learn from other people's experiences. You will 100% regret it if not – so don't waste any opportunities.*

#8

### **Things I've Learned**

Terrible haircuts at school build character

If you're given a retainer to wear, please wear it.

When someone shows you who they are, believe them.

You have more time than you think you do.

Adults know a lot but they do not know everything.

The choices you make at 15 do not matter when you're 20.

A good GCSE does not guarantee a good life.

Being a strong woman means whatever you want it to mean.

Dress as the person you want to be.

No is a complete sentence.

Just because someone loves you does not mean they know what is best.

If you're rubbish at something, own up to it.

It's never the mistake that defines you, it's how you deal with it.

The subject you hate at school will never bother you again after graduation (same with the teacher).

Learn to be happy by yourself because that is who you spend all your time with.

On a bad day, a slice of cake or a sweet treat will help.

Life is as interesting as you make it.

RESPONSE 1:

*I feel like I've always know how to live my life.*

*Terrible haircuts change me for the better.*

*I wore my retainer to help me change,*

*Believed the people and what they showed me,*

*Embraced the times I was given.*

*I took adults words as guides, not laws.*

*I chose what I did and when.*

*Let the woman I was be strong*

*And dressed the way I wanted to, not the way others would.*

*I owned up to my wrongs and rights.*

*Had sweet treats on my good days.*

*Life is as interesting as you make it.*

RESPONSE 2:

*The poem "Things I've Learned" makes me feel like I should live my life and truly experience the highs as highs and lows as lows. These moments will make me stronger and help me to better myself.*

*I find this poem empowering. I know I must have a whole world of opportunities ahead of me, and I can be as strong as I want to be, in my mind or in my body. I deserve to feel empowered and loved, and treated respectfully by family, friends or in a relationship. I know my worth.*

*Live to the fullest, but help people, be kind, give everything you have to give, love however you want to love. Break a few rules, stay up late, laugh like you have never laughed before, dance like nobody is watching, sing as if you are performing to 10,000 people. But mostly, be respectful.*

*Life really truly is just as exciting as you make it, so live it. When you're older, you don't want to be regretful of the things you didn't do. You want to be able to remember the times when perhaps you should've been embarrassed but weren't, the time you made yourself proud for taking that step and skydiving, or even submitting your dream college application.*

*Feel the moments, the passion, the spirit.*

*Life is as interesting as you make it.*

#9

### **Things I Learned**

I am not alone

I learned to make mistakes, to say the wrong thing.

I learned not to talk over people & to wait my turn.

I learned that I'm not everyone's cup of tea.

I learned to have courage.

I learned that a different outcome than expected does not equate to failure.

I learned to accept my own mistakes & to embrace me.

I learned to say no – that disagreeing doesn't make me disagreeable.

I learned the power of YES – to follow those things that intrigue and inspire.

I learned to recognise my mistakes.

I learned that less is more -I'm learning to edit.

I learned that I belong in a different tribe and I learned to embrace that difference.

I learned that life begins at the edge of my comfort zone.

I learned to be as kind to myself as I am to others.

Dearest You (1989),

You do not know me – I am a stranger to you – but I know you. I see you, really see you. I understand your pain, your angst, your complete dread of the world and everything in it.

You feel othered. Different. An alien living on the wrong planet. Human Beings baffle and terrify you. No matter how hard you work to try to understand and follow the rules, you still get it wrong, leaving you at the mercy of cruel jibes and more othering. You absolutely do not belong.

I ask you to read this and know that one day – far off into the future – the world will catch up with you. The world will learn that you are autistic and that your differences are something to be appreciated and celebrated.

The world will learn that it has got so many things wrong over the decades and you will play a key role in dispelling those myths and misunderstandings. You will be seen, heard, understood and respected by others. You will find your tribe and see that you do belong.

Please believe me when I tell you that your life matters. The world needs you to hang on in there. Do not despair. Turn your mind away from all ideas that you are broken. Unworthy.

Instead- stand upright. Be courageous. Speak out and be heard. Be bold – learn to say no and mean it. Know that disagreeing does not mean you're disagreeable. But also remember the power of YES. Say yes to the things that intrigue and inspire you. Realise - a different outcome to what you expect, does not equal failure.

Lastly, recognise what a truly wonderful person you are: your kindness, empathy and emotional intelligence will connect you with some awesome people along the way – believe them when they talk about your strengths - and silence those who offer unwanted criticism.

I am you, reaching back across the ever shifting and unpredictable sands of time to let you know it will be okay. All will be well. Believe in yourself and trust your instincts.

Kindest Regards,

XX 2024



#10

At junior school learned to love a teacher and all she taught us, and how sad it was when she left us mid-term, having been diagnosed with TB (in the days before it became a curable disease).

I then learned how depressing it was to have a disagreeable and uninspiring teacher; but I learned to suppress bad memories. All I can remember of that year is her name - Mrs Crayl. Then I was fortunate again -my best teacher ever. I learned to love poetry. In fact this very morning I checked up on YouTube the wording of a poem I learned that year. He didn't make us learn it – he just made me love it so much I remembered it forever and have recited it to my grandsons. I also learned that you have to write clear and accurate descriptions, and the beginnings of an interest in history.

In the playground I learned not to play with other girls – when I did it always ended in trouble – I didn't understand them or their ways – better to stick with my two male best mates. I had already learned in my awful infant convent school that it was far more fun to ignore rules and do what you wanted, so was running out of the playground into the surrounding countryside to our den in the thick hedges and run through the cowslips.

You should have learned to think more rationally about your physical self, not just believe odd remarks people had made about looks. Simply believing that your legs 'looked like oak trees' caused you to worry about them for years. In fact it was literally 40 years before you looked into a long mirror dispassionately and saw they were perfectly normal legs with normal ankles, not beautiful but certainly not odd or shapeless.

You should have been willing to show your enjoyment at parties and dances instead of adopting a supercilious look, not wanting to look interested in attracting any male interest. Then you would have been able to find a boyfriend (which you did really want) at an earlier age and only with the help of your friend. You didn't have a clue!

You definitely should have done more (or some!) homework. You really enjoyed school but didn't feel work should continue at home. But on the rare occasions you really put effort into a piece of homework your teachers were full of praise. Instead of inspiring you to carry on you felt this just proved how good you were really, so don't bother anymore. You could have done really well with just a bit of effort.

Although you were a terrible worry to your parents, I don't regret the freedoms you took for granted. But I do regret the lack of affection I gave my mother. It was only later I realised how hard it was for her to endure the lack of love from my father, whom she adored, and for me to appreciate her special qualities, totally lacking in my father, of a sense of fun and sociability, which made her friends wherever she was.

#11

### **To my younger self –**

I hope that you grow in confidence

And learn to worry less.

I hope that you will travel and enjoy it,

I hope that you will discover very soon that

Not everyone has the legs for miniskirts and that vests are essential winter wear.

Your parents are a valuable gift – treasure them – you will grow out of the arguments.

I hope that you will realise that education does not finish with 6<sup>th</sup> form or university

And that you will still be learning over half a century later.

Value your friends, some will stay your friends for life

And there is an infinite opportunity for making new ones in the future.

One day you will enjoy Thomas Hardy's 'Under the Greenwood Tree'

But you may never find a use for calculus.

"Old" is not 28 but stays at least 10 years older than you are throughout your life.

Keep reading – a love of books will carry you through bad times and good.

Don't believe anyone who says "your school days are the best of your life" –

The best is yet to come.

#### RESPONSE 1:

*Keep reading. A love of books will carry you through good times and bad. Through books I have lived a thousand lives, each one an adventure granting me immortality a joy unimaginable through average human experience.*

*I have been lost in pages, a jungle of words, a castle of inspiration, inevitable exploration each one differing from the next.*

*Through each turn of a page I have been a lover, a friend, a princess, a warrior, a Yale graduate, a beautiful witch and a dead poet, reciting my art in a society. Here I have escaped from the mundane. I have embodied magic, seen ghosts both figurative one frightening, I have travelled the world over, left the city I live in, one so unimaginably mundane – replaced by the art of the unknown. Literature has granted me a gift of life, the opportunity of liberation from modern stress. Here I am not just a student or a girl or a daughter, I am limitless and infinite.*

*Each book read has marked an era, each page finished a day passed in life are now tainted with misery, beauty, poetry, romance and love.*

*Words are the blood that runs within my veins, a lifeline for which I can escape. Through books I learned that time will pass, the good times and the bad. As when one story finishes then another begins.*

*Alive, waiting and endlessly beautiful.*

RESPONSE 2:

*Don't believe anyone who says 'your school days are the best of your life' – the best is yet to come.*

*I'm so glad you have said this because I relate to this. This relates to me as I have so many plans for the future and knowing that these are supposed to be the best days brings me relief as it is exactly how I feel. It is also saying that if you look into the future, the best days are still ahead and you always have something to look forward to, because you basically have your whole life ahead of you. I really agree with you because I relate to it a lot.*

#12

Dear XX,

First of all, congratulations. At this point you managed 12 years of school and 5 years of university and through it all you managed to make friends, have a laugh and hold on to a few scraps of dignity.

This is you at 22, but at 15 you are an idiot. A nice idiot for the most part but an idiot with an awful haircut and a retainer that you should be wearing but you won't.

You can't change the past I suppose but you can learn from it. So here's a few things you should do some day, so you can be even better than me.

1. Buy that red dress that you wanted for prom and ignore that sales lady that is going to tell you that you look fat. You don't.
2. Be nicer to your mum. You are her. You learn to accept that.
3. As much as you hate exercise, give ballroom and Latin dancing a go. You will like it I promise.
4. Stop running from your problems, they are faster than you.
5. Admit that you have feelings - you are not fooling anyone.
6. You can still be kind without being a pushover
7. Dump that boy. Just do it. You know which one.
8. Don't start drinking coffee!
9. Your mum finds out about the cigarette. You were wrong. It was not worth it.

That's all for now I guess. Have fun. It goes by fast.

Love always,

XX

RESPONSE 1:

*'At 15 I am an idiot. A nice idiot for the most part, but an idiot'*

*Beside my bed is a retainer that I refuse to wear. My nights are spent blankly staring at it, my mind racing with possibilities.*

*I feel an emptiness, that I hope will one day be filled with a vast assuredness and the sounds of laughter from the friends that I have yet to make. Scraps of dignity and knowledge gained and lost through years of education. An emptiness that is currently echoing with the harsh words of a salesman and my mother.*

*I am beginning to see my mother within myself. I get the distinct impression that we are one and the same. I am all she could have been. She is all I might become.*

*I have taken up running. I think that maybe if I can out run my past times, I may be able to outrun my past. As I run I feel poison coursing through my veins, my eyes begin to sting and I close them tightly. I feel as though I am a child, convinced that if I can't see my seeker, they cannot see me. Sometimes am engrossed by this narrative, maybe I can fool them. My eyes are heavy. I am engrossed by the bitter scent of coffee, I long to feel alive. Instead I drown myself in smoke. My lungs burn. Perhaps it is guilt. It is worth it.*

*I hope this goes by fast.*

RESPONSE 2:

*"Be nicer to your Mum. You are her. You learn to accept that".*

*Even though at this point in time I can't fully understand or relate to this but it holds great importance as it is something that I hear a lot. I care greatly about my mum and I think sometimes people will have disagreements with their Mum's which sort of makes them lose sight of this. At the end of the day mums won't be around for ever and this line really emphasises how we could all maybe take a moment to realise that your mum is your mum and I don't think until you end up losing someone is when you really find out how much you cared and appreciated having them around. This also makes me feel you have to come round to acceptance of your mum at the end of the day because there is nothing you can do about it and people might need the reminder that its your mum's life too and a part of her is in you.*

*I feel like as you grow older and older you start to see more of your mum within you which helps you think about how much you love and cherish her.*

#13

I was born in Kenya, Nairobi.

From a very young age I was multilingual, i.e. I could speak Punjabi, Urdu, English and Swahili.

I had a shock when I and my siblings and my Mum moved to Pakistan, but Dad stayed in Kenya. I had separation anxiety. Pakistan is a very male orientated society, so Mum had to be very strong to bring us up in that male orientated society.

I wanted to go to university but then again had to ask Dad, uncles and on it on it went.

After his retirement he decided to come to the UK.

Mine was an arranged marriage but I have been married (happily) for 47 years and I have 3 beautiful children and 1 grandson.

#14

### **Advice to the younger me**

Do NOT, I repeat, do NOT procrastinate

Action or actions you must take,

Whether paying bills,

Or mending your health,

Must be taken sooner rather than later,

To prevent future ills,

Or making matters worse,

The arguments I won't rehearse,

Keeping up with every friend,

Is not a means to an end,

Will not drive you round the bend,

Through the effort made,

But will bring you joy.

Their company you will enjoy,

Help put your problems,

Into the shade,

Or even help them

Be resolved.  
So with friends,  
You must keep involved,  
Don't ever lose touch,  
With such and such.  
I can state without doubt,  
That it does you harm,  
When you don't get out and about.  
It is your psychological lucky charm  
To ensure your psychological balance  
So never give it up.  
You know that that makes sense.  
In life you 've always been physical  
Whether it be sport or dance,  
It has been your passport  
To retaining physical health  
And a helpful trigger in my social life.  
Even when you regard oldies  
Engaging in dance,  
Somewhat grotesque or repulsive,  
Keep in mind the pleasure it does give  
To you in this activity,  
And bizzarely to other folk,  
So carry on  
Till you're a very old bloke  
Regardless of senility.  
Remember, do remember please,  
Hygiene is all very good and well  
But it must be understood,  
That the kinder dog breeds,

Cast a delightful spell,  
And put you at your ease,  
So don't be inwardly shirty  
And think petting them is dirty,  
Delight in stroking the hound  
When they are around,  
You know it relaxes you  
And there are precious few things that do.  
And sometimes leads to enjoyable chat  
About this and that  
With the lady or man,  
Who is walking the hound,  
And I'll be bound,  
It can be fun,  
You son of a gun.  
So just carry around some gel,  
Then your hygiene dogma,  
Can be adhered to as well,  
If you keep these things in mind  
And remember to yourself, to be kind,  
Then both your body and your mind  
Will tremendously benefit.  
Don't think twice,  
Obey this advice,  
You'll have a better life,  
And deal better with strife,  
If you reason it out ,  
You'll understand what I'm about,  
Your life you can improve,  
What have you got to lose.



If you ignore these words of advice,  
I'll write you off in a trice.  
Try to enjoy, enjoy, enjoy.  
These suggestions are a ploy  
To guarantee  
A better life for the younger me.

### **Some things I have Learned Over Time**

Over my life  
I have learnt a great many things.  
From the big to the small,  
None earthshattering,  
But they mattered to me  
Don't you see.  
After opening a tin,  
Always push the top down,  
Otherwise you can cut your hand.  
I cut my finger something awful  
Not something to repeat,  
You've got to take care when you eat.  
It mattered to me,  
don't you see.  
My friend Anne persuaded me  
To open tins carefully,  
Because of the accumulations of dust  
You simply must.  
Otherwise it could get into your food,  
A minor matter,  
But it mattered to me  
Don't you see.

I learnt to re-use diaries and calendars

When the dates re-occurred.

It appealed to my sense of recycling

And not letting things go to waste,

So don't throw away in haste.

It matters to me

Don't you see.

At University

I learnt squash, badminton, tap and Jazz dance

Aside from squash, they enhanced my physical health and social life.

It's so good trying new things out,

And helps you getting out and about,

It mattered to me

don't you see.

I've learnt that for some reason

People can be uplifted,

Seeing you enjoy yourself.

By, in my sphere of activity: dancing -

Regardless of your age

So be sage,

Never stop dancing or playing sport

For that I give you my full support

It's important for others and for you.

That's an important issue

It not only mattered to me

Don't you see .....And that's the point crucially.

#15

Things were very different then.

I've been very lucky.

When I went to Glantaf Secondary after the war, it had everything in it. We learned such a lot. it was a marvellous school. I went to church in Llandaff and was confirmed there, but was married in Llandaff North.

Working in a shop with fashion- I enjoyed it – making clothes.

I made my own wedding dress – I've done all sorts of things.

I was more like a boy than a girl – I'd go with my father on the horse and carriage.

We would help each other – that was the sort of family we were.

I learned to be seen and not heard

It was always like that

I was told to wait til you get older

My father was lovely but my uncle was the oldest bachelor, my mum done her best

I had a happy bringing up. I went to St Ann's nursery and lots of schools.

I was always very quiet, but I'm chopsy now.

#16

If I could go back to the being 14 again, I would try not to worry about things as you don't know what you'll miss out on if you don't try new things.

I used to be scared of swimming so I plucked up the courage and learned. I felt good and proud of myself once I learned.

I remember being scared about starting YTS scheme but it worked out fine and I ended up getting my first job in a care home.

#17

### **What I learned at school camp**

I learned how to abseil down cliffs and I hated heights.

And we did river walking but the water was freezing cold.

It was winter time.

We played football. We also did horse riding,

I didn't fall off.

We stayed in a tent.

It was cold at night.

We learned to wash up dishes.

We went to the fair ground.

We did swimming.

I swam.

When I was 16, I came out of school.

I felt I could do nothing.

It was the right thing to do.

I went on job search, nothing went any good.

I found I had a learning problem.

I couldn't read or write.

It was only when I joined an adult education courses that I learned

To read and write.

I got in with the wrong crowd.

I got drunk at a young age.

My parents told me off.

I had loud music still

I got told off for that too.

My parents bought me a bike  
but I got run over.  
I thought I learned my lesson.  
But I couldn't stay out of A + E  
"Please stay out of A + E!"

#18

### **Some of life's lessons**

At school I learnt to laugh at myself to deflect other people.

I learnt that only some of your friends are really your friends, but that those who are are a gift beyond price.

When going for an interview or to address an audience I found it useful to think of Alice, "They're all just a pack of cards."

I've learnt that choosing a Liquorice Allsort is always an uplifting experience.

I learnt from my horrified in-laws that making a cup of tea is an art, not just a matter of throwing a teabag into a cup of warm water.

I've learnt that your children never really grow up – nor do you.

#19

## Things That I Learned From My Cat!!

Anyone who has owned a cat knows that they rule the roost!

They somehow manage to ingratiate themselves and despite your best efforts become the BOSS.

How Is It?

You are up feeding them at stupid o'clock?

Share your bed with them but somehow seem to have the smallest space?

Find their fur on everything but have to cheerfully brush it off?

Struggle to type with them walking over the keyboard?

Keep stroking them on your lap despite your legs going stiff?

Have to stop watching the television / read your book because they want to play?

Because:

They show you such love in their eyes as they paddle on your lap

They listen to you when you tell them your troubles and don't interrupt

Stroking their soft, silky fur is hypnotic and therapeutic

The sound of their purring is so relaxing

They are good company

It would be nice to rule the roost but perhaps knowing your place is the best way. We can't all be the boss.

Leave that to the cats and enjoy their company and therapeutic value.

A supporter of

