

## Dear Me

Letters from eight luminaries who share the wisdom of their adult years with their 16-year-old selves.

**WHAT WOULD YOU** say to yourself if you came face-to-face with the 16-year-old you? One of the many things that delighted and touched me as I read the letters from Dear Me: A Letter to My Sixteen-Year-Old Self, some of which follow, is the commonality of our human experience. Nearly everyone who wrote, whether their letter is jolly or poignant, seems to have looked back on their younger selves with compassion, remembering how vulnerable and dangerous an age 16 is, for all the fun and freedom it is supposed to entail.

Be yourself. Be easier on yourself. Become yourself, as fully as possible. Attempting to isolate those life lessons I could pass back to the girl I used to be was a truly illuminating exercise. It made me look at my 17-year-old daughter and remember, in a more powerful way than ever before, just how raw and vivid life is for her, in a way that it has been only intermittently for me as an adult. I would not go back to 16 for anything you could give me, and yet I still recognize that she has something I have lost along the way—something I had to lose, to stay sane.

—J.K. Rowling

Dear Me,

**I'M WRITING TO** you from the year 2010, when I have reached the totally ridiculous age of 62, in order to give you a piece of advice. It's simple, really, just five words: *Stay away from recreational drugs.* You've got a lot of talent, and you're going to make lots of people happy with your stories, but—unfortunate but true—you are also a junkie waiting to happen. If you don't heed this letter and change

the future, at least 10 good years of your life—from age 30 to 40—are going to be a kind of dark eclipse where you disappoint a lot of people and fail to enjoy your own success. You will also come close to dying on several occasions. Do yourself a favor and enjoy a brighter, more produc-

tive world. Remember that, like love, resistance to temptation makes the heart grow stronger.

Stay clean.

Best regards,

—Stephen King

Dear Suze in 1967,

**I JUST WANTED** to write you this letter because I think it is important for you to know that you really do not need to be as sad as you currently are. I know you feel as if everyone is smarter than you, that everyone is prettier than you, and that everyone just has a better life than you. But I want you to know that as you get older you will come to find that none of that is true. Your future is going to lead you to places that in a million years you could never, ever imagine. I don't want to ruin the surprise, but let me tell you this. You will never have to worry about finding love. You will never have to worry about being able to support yourself. You will never have to worry about who is going to take care of your mom. You will never have to worry about being happy or fulfilled. The only sad part is that your father does not live long enough to see what happens to his little girl. So love him up now, Suze, and be proud of who he has taught you to be. By the way, your Mom will live to almost 100 and the two of you will always take care of each other. Always remember, my dear Suze, to be as happy in your sadness as you are in your happiness and then you will know the key to life. Think great thoughts but always relish small treasures. Now stop wasting time being sad. Do you hear me?

—Suze Orman

**TRASHY GIRLS** ARE exciting for about 5 minutes....Keep your eye out for a really good lookin' church girl.



Then you'll have the best of both worlds.

PS: The Yardbirds rule.

PPS: I think coffee might really catch on, maybe call it Star something....

—Alice Cooper

Dear Jimmy,

**YOU HAVE BEEN** blessed with a simple trick to make the best of life. It is a Woods family secret: Treat everyone with respect and demand it of them as well. If someone abuses you more than once, you deserve it.

Call someone in your family every day of your life. You may think it is tedious to do so, but a time will come when you would give your life to make that call one more time.

Hug your mother often and tell her how much you love her.

Do good work and do it because it is a gift to the world. No matter how inconsequential others may feel about the value of your contribution, it is the giving that matters. The surprise here will be that the beneficiary who gains the most when you give is you.

Be proud, but humble. Be strong, but caring. Listen more than you may be inclined to do. Talk less.

And most importantly, call your brother on July 26, 2006, and tell him he must go to a different hospital.

It is okay to fall, but not okay to stay on the ground.

Cherish the dead you once loved so carelessly.

They still live in your heart.

—James Woods



Dear Piers,

**A**LWAYS HEED THE following advice from family and mentors:

From your grandmother Margot: "One day you're the cock of the walk, the next a feather duster."

From your mother, Gabrielle: "Ambition knows no bounds."

From your father, Glynn: "Always be nice to policemen, and drink the finest French wine you can afford."

From your army colonel brother Jeremy: "Remember the 7 P's—prior planning and preparation prevents piss-poor performance."

From Kelvin MacKenzie, legendary former *Sun* newspaperman: "Never edit on a

hangover, and always get out of trouble a million miles an hour."

From Donald Trump: "Think big and kick ass."

From Rupert Murdoch: "Stiffs don't sell papers."

From Simon Cowell: "Treat

everyone who works for you as if they have a badge on their head saying: 'Make me feel important today.'"

From John Ferriter, your manager: "No is not an option."

From your older self: "Don't take anything too seriously."

Kind regards,

—Piers Morgan

Dear Stan,

**I**STILL REMEMBER how you always wanted to be a writer. In your last year at DeWitt Clinton High School you practiced signing your name, Stanley Martin Lieber, over and over again, making it look as bold and impressive as any of those at the bottom of the Declaration of Independence. You were certain the day would come when you'd write the Great American Novel and people would ask for your autograph, and you wanted to be prepared.

How could you have imagined the ironic development in later years? Today, people do occasionally request your autograph, but not for the Great American Novel,

which you never wrote, but rather for the oh-so-oft-maligned comic books, which nobody ever respected years ago. And, even more ironic, the name you now sign is Stan Lee, which you adopted legally because you were embarrassed that Stanley M. Lieber was writing those lowly comics—which have since become the wellspring for respected motion pictures, TV series, video games, and all sorts of enormously popular globe-spanning entertainment.

So bear this in mind, my impulsive 16-year old self— nothing ever stays the same. Tastes change and the culture changes. The important thing is to stay on top of what is au courant and be resilient enough to go with the flow and change with the tide.

And if you're lucky enough to be one who contributes to the change in culture, never forget your roots or those who helped you make the grade.

Excelsior!

—Stan Lee

Dear Me,

**F**IRST, LET ME dispense with all the obvious bits of advice: Don't smoke, eat and drink in moderation, and exercise regularly.

And then:

A few things you'll always take with you: pen, paper, and a handkerchief.

Always keep \$20 tucked away in your wallet. You will be surprised how often it will come in handy.

If you do try drugs, dabble gently and briefly. Above all, don't make it a lifestyle.

Be hungry but content.

Learn to juggle.

You don't learn a damn thing from successes, only failures. So don't fret about failures. Just try to keep them small.

Invest early in those stocks with baby-speak names: Google, Apple, Yahoo, and such.

Regarding the never-ending erection, the skinny wrists and ankles, and the hair so thick that your mother tells the barber to thin it out? Put them out of your mind.



None of these will be long-term problems.

—Older Me

Graydon Carter

New York, March 2011

Dear Hugh,

**J**UST THOUGHT I would pop you a little note to see how you are (even though I know) to tell you that yes!!! There will come a time when you get over Penny dumping you at the bus stop. In fact you will see her in a couple of yrs and wonder why you cried every time you heard the Lionel Richie song "Penny Lover."

Things are going to be different from how you imagine them. I know you don't have a clear idea of what you are going to do with your life, and I know that drives you a little crazy...particularly as you get asked about it every other day of your life. But when you are asked just smile and say "no idea...but when I do know I'll get back to you."

Truth be told much of what is going to happen will surprise the pants off you.... It will be way better than your wildest imaginings.

Love life? (spoiler alert) You will meet an incredible woman, and the choice to marry her will be the easiest choice of your life. Just listen to your gut. Keep writing down one list...and one list only...the 5 things you love to do, and the 5 things you are good at...they will keep changing, but one day they will match up...and there is your path...but even then keep writing your list just to make sure you are still on the right track.

I love you

—From YOU!

Hugh Jackman

P.S. buy shares in Google when they are invented!!!!!!



*Letters and foreword extracted from Dear Me: A Letter to My Sixteen-Year-Old Self, edited by Joseph Galliano. ©2011 held by individual contributors. Introduction ©2011 J.K. Rowling. For each copy sold, \$1 will be donated to Doctors Without Borders. Learn more at dearme.org.*