



## Letter to My Younger Selves

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**M**ESSAGE TO MY primary-school self, scrawled inside the front cover of my sister's *Jackie* annual: 'Andrea, you have a natural ability to write, and you read easily, although you're lazy. Richard Scarry is not literature. You can't spell, but it doesn't mean you're stupid, no matter what your sister says. Spelling will always be a problem, but don't worry; in the future there will be clever personal computers that do the spelling for you. Just get your flow of words down and focus on that. Paint pictures with words. And listen; I know you like art better than English, but your teachers are right; art is not the subject you should focus on.'

Fax to my teenage self: 'Wow, yeah, faxes are amazing, right? Someone sends a picture down a telephone line and it comes out on a funny thin piece of paper in another town or even country! You will see this for the first time at a work experience placement (which you hate) in a graphic designer's office. Yes, you're still on about being an artist, and you've ditched the idea of an English degree. You are determined. Fair play to you.'

Note on torn beermat to my drop-out nineteen-year-old self: 'OK, so you didn't get into art college. You went with your dream, and it was tough when you realised you didn't have the skill. But don't give up; you're not a failure. You have a feeling that travel is what you need, and you're right. Now get out of bed and go and sign on, and then fill out those university applications for courses with a year abroad. Make the most of it; it's all free. Imagine that!'



Airmail letter to my student self, which has taken two months in transit: 'OK, so you hate being in Russia, the Soviet Union isn't what you imagined, you haven't got a clue what's going on or what anyone is saying, and you haven't seen a piece of fruit in months. Maybe you should have studied a bit harder in the first two years of the degree? But you know what; you won't die there, no matter how melodramatic you're feeling, and you can learn from this experience (and use your recollections) in the future; the good stuff is just starting!'

Email to my mid-thirties self: 'Well, who knew you'd get settled in the south of England and become a civil servant commuting up to Whitehall! You've done a lot of travel and seen a lot of things, started a family, got a cat, had your translation and writing skills critiqued and corrected by dozens of annoying bosses. And now there seems to be no time outside work, commuting and family for anything else. It feels like it's too late; you're an office worker, and that's it. Take stock. It's never too late for writing. And ditch the commute.'

Tweet to self, five years ago: 'You don't have to be on Twitter and tweet about books all day to be a writer #twitterwontsellyourbooksbutthatsOK.'

Post-it note to self, yesterday, today and every day from now on: 'Writing is art, words are my medium. I *am* an artist. I am a writer.'