



## Letter to My Younger Self

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Christopher Woodall

**I**F YOU'RE LISTENING to this tape, you're as curious as I was at your age. In fact, I was precisely the same age as you in 1975. I'll explain. Are you noticing my voice?

I knew there'd be no point sending you an actual letter, whether handwritten or typed. In your experience, only Americans type their personal letters and my handwriting has deteriorated so far you wouldn't recognise it. Anyway, who'd open a letter purporting to be from their older self? We have no patience with sci-fi mumbo-jumbo, do we? Whereas I knew you couldn't resist the mystery of a tape.

Is my voice giving you goose bumps yet? Isn't this weirdly like listening to an older version of yourself? It should be. More gravelly in the bass perhaps, more *childish treble* in the upper register? I'm afraid I've reached the sixth age of man. Next comes *sans everything*.

It took a while to procure some pre-cassette audio tape. It's not used nowadays, in 2021. Hey, don't switch off! Hear the voice. I'm you, but forty-six years on. Yep: I'm sixty-eight in December.

You're thinking of sixty-eight-year-olds as being born in about 1907, right? We were both taught by men from around then. You remember our English teacher? 'When I was in India...blah-blah... Chest out, Woodall! Shoulders back!' You need more proof? This should clinch it: I know what Linda from number forty-two showed you behind that garage wall when you were seven...



How are the goose bumps now?

So why contact you? Let's just say, it was an offer I couldn't refuse. I'm supposed to give you advice, older writer to younger writer, that sort of thing. In 500 words. It's taken me 300 to vanquish your scepticism and establish trust. I've blown another fifty on throat-clearing. Besides, all I have is a warning.

You barely know you're a writer yet. You don't have a clue where to start. Most fiction writers start from themselves. But you don't feel you have a self, do you? Neither a younger nor an older self. Nothing to excavate. Luckily, in 1975 the rapidly incubating injunction to, quote, 'Write what you know about', unquote, has not yet escaped from the UEA, the sickbed of creative-writing's patient zero. When you do eventually start writing, with neither advice from elder nor reference to younger selves, you will follow the un-signposted path, discovering just what interests you by writing about it, employing writing not as synthetic personal *expression* but as experimental, forensic *exploration*.

As your Walter Benjamin pointed out, 'The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual who [...] is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others.' Still, cheer up! Benjamin's is a *non-counsel* of *non-despair*.

As promised, I have no advice, only a practical warning. Make a note in your diary. On the seventh of July 2005, just after 9 a.m., *do not* catch that westbound Piccadilly Line tube into central London. *Turn back*. As I did. Your best writing will still be ahead of you.