

As a child, I learned to be self-reliant with a single mom raising my brother and me. Most days Mom was preoccupied with feeding us, earning, and spending money that she put to use keeping the ecosystem of our trio thriving. We were left to our own devices getting ourselves to school and back, doing our chores, playing in our free time, and curling up in bed each night to cap a full day.

This was the simple formula for a life well lived at eight years old. I was mostly happy. I felt a sense of accomplishment and purpose, knowing what Mom and my teachers expected. I learned it was safe to get along; no yelling from Mom if I just did what she said. It would be some time before I started asking myself what I wanted, and what I'd do if it was different than what Mom wanted for me. Two agendas split like hairs, peeling apart in opposite directions—what would I do then?

Remembering who I was then, at 8, at 10, 12, 16, 21, 33, and now, at 47—this is me. These memories transform into stories that contain the meaning we make of our lives.

One day on a vacation to Bend, Oregon, where I now live, I spent a day walking through houses for sale, "Just for fun," I said to my husband, Brent, but inside there was a small voice asking, *You are hoping to find another way forward*. I was seeking alternatives to my life that felt so planned out and stuck in one gear. I needed to see a new vision for my life.

At almost 40, when I paused to really look at my life and bravely ask myself, *Is this what I want for my future?* The answer was clearly, no.

I had put my career as a high school English teacher on the shelf to take a part-time, temporary job in an office at my dad's company. I entered the family business with blinders on, telling myself that this was temporary, not a final destination, naive to how sticky the commitment would prove to be.

Eight years passed and I was still walking the halls in my pencil skirt and heels, wondering if this was going to be enough for my creative, rebel soul that hungered for soul-shifting conversations and deep connection. My intuition knew it wasn't, but I had forgotten how to listen to her.

I had fallen out of my life-long practice for self-reflection with babies and a corporate job invading my brain from all sides. I fell into the trap of overvaluing the income, the title, and the status of my position, rather than noticing what I was giving up in exchange, like my freedom, my creativity, and my choice. I ignored the need to weigh the significance of my decisions, including what would be the legacy of my choice on my life's story.

I was thinking small: This works for now. Only, I didn't put a time cap on "now" and it stretched into what felt like forever.

If I was to reclaim the storyline of my life, I had to turn my attention to the question, *What do I want?*

I wanted to feel more of what I felt as a child. I wanted life to feel full of neon colors, crimped hair, roller skating to Olivia Newton-John, and the taste of mint-chip ice cream on summer nights. I wanted back the sense of wonder and discovery that always taught me something new about myself.

Our values and tastes change as we grow older. We don't have to pine for our childhood to appreciate that there is information nestled in the memories of it, in the stories of the experiences that convey something about who we are—what we love, where we've been, and what we will make from it all, like the artists that we are.

Now I want to remember it all, to feel it again, recall the sense of deep contentment in my body that I knew as a child, in order to bring it forward as I make choices today that realign me to that wild child, original self. She's still here, making heart-led choices like creating a program like this for You.