

Script

To my niece, Elly.

Your mom tells me that you fight going to sleep. You finish your bottle, your eyes get heavy, and as soon as they start to close, you curl your whole body up like a fist, and you cry, like really angrily cry. Parents online are quick to say that it's normal at 4 months old for babies to start fighting sleep. They call it sleep regression.

Now, I don't have any kids, and I don't know much about sleep regression. But I've had my share of sleep issues, and I know nature sounds and bedtime stories can help people of all ages fall asleep, so I made this for you. Or maybe I made this for my baby sister, your mom.

I'm going to play for you 2 sounds that help me sleep, and if you're still awake when it's done, I'll tell you the stories behind why and where I recorded these sounds.

First, you'll hear 2 minutes of a train. It makes me feel like I'm rocking side to side. I stood outside on a little platform behind a train car and watched snowy mountains, rocks, and a river pass by.

Next, you'll hear the ocean from Gulf Shores, Alabama— a trip I took with your mom when you were still in her belly. Maybe you remember it. It will also be about 2 minutes.

Breathe and try to relax. Unclench your fists and relax those wide open eyelids. Ride this train from the waking world to dreamland.

[Train]

Are you still awake? That's okay. Up next is the beach; listen close to the waves hitting the sand and retreating with a sigh. Breathe in the sea air. Expand your little rib cage, let a yawn spread over your face, and relax your muscles as you exhale. Ready? Let's go to Gulf Shores.

[Beach]

Hm, you're hearing this now, aren't you? That means you must still be awake. I promised I'd tell you a bedtime story about the sounds I recorded. Please forgive me if it's a little dense compared to our family favorite, *Moo, Baa, La La La*.

Once upon a time, your Aunt Minnie (that's me) believed that recording nature sounds was magic.

If I could capture sound and video from a moment I wanted to keep, I could put my headphones on, listen to the recorded sounds, and be transported back to the recorded moments. I felt I found the secret to pausing time.

In May 2025, and I got to take a really special trip for your mom's birthday. We went to the

beach— Gulf Shores, AL. In the evening, we sat together on the Gulf of Mexico, enjoying the breeze together and perfect sunset after perfect sunset every day we were there.

Your mom, my little sister, was expecting a baby. That baby is you! She'd never had a baby before. She never had any type of major medical procedure before! Like the anxious big sister I am, I worried about her and you all of the time.

Your uncle Christian and I have known for a long time we don't want to have children of our own. I never regretted our decision, but on this trip with your mom, I realized that for the first time my sister was taking a path I never would.

All our lives, I took pride in being the big sister— by 2 years, but a big sister nonetheless. I told her all about kindergarten so she wouldn't be scared on her first day of school, and I told her about riding the bus too and which kids were nice and which were mean. We watched all the same movies and shows. We played all the same games, and she looked up to me.

Then, all of a sudden, time brought us to a place where I had no advice or help to give her. All I could do at that time, in those moments, was enjoy her company at the beach, sitting side by side.

This is where my magic recorder came in. I wanted to pause time so that nothing would ever change between my baby sister and me, so that I can protect her from anything scary or painful that birth or parenthood might bring her, no offence.

And so I captured the beach sounds you heard earlier.

But of course, vacations end, and the adults have to return to work and regular life.

That October, you were born— beautiful, healthy, and perfect. I held you the day after you were born, and your mom was beaming, already so proud of you and happier than I've ever seen her. I held you out in front of me and studied your precious face. You were about 5 pounds and had soft, dark hair on your head. And I wished I could keep you tiny forever.

But time never stops.

As I held you for the first time, my husband received a text. I could see from the corner of my eye that he was trying to hide his reaction to the message he'd received. He faked a smile around your parents until he and I were alone later.

His aunt Alice had died unexpectedly at the age of 63. You don't know this yet, but 63 isn't a very long life. It wasn't enough time.

I think I'm writing this to you because I still don't understand how you'll never meet someone

who had such a massive influence on me and who was looking forward to your birth too. I'd like to tell you about her now.

Alice and I had a close relationship and a lot in common. We liked all the same foods and joked about being twins. We first bonded over our mutual love of driving— and especially driving fast. But don't mention that part to your mom.

We also both loved documenting the world around us.

Alice loved to visit Alaska, and she was an excellent nature photographer. She once captured a photo of a bear on a mountainside that would have fit perfectly in Nature magazine. Even though she shot the photo from over 2 football field lengths away, I swear to you that the final picture looked as though she could have reached out and pet the bear.

In 2022 we finally got to go on an Alaska cruise together— Alice, Tony, my husband, his parents, and me. We all got to sit on a balcony and hear glaciers crackling. We got to tour a salmon cannery in Sitka, and we learned about the Tlingit people who have inhabited this area for thousands of years.

We also took the train ride you heard earlier. I brought my recorder and tried to take hold of these joyful moments so Alice and I could replay them when we returned home. Alice later told me that she would play my recordings and videos over and over because she so enjoyed our trip and liked revisiting it.

But that magic that allowed us to capture time and travel back to it on command had its limits. No matter how hard I tried to grab it or pause it, time didn't actually stop. That trip would be Alice's last time seeing Alaska mountains and glaciers in person.

When you're by the ocean on a clear, perfect day like the one I captured with your mom, those waves crashing onto the shore were likely formed by wind and energy from a storm far, far away— completely out of sight and sound to those of us on the beach. We may never see the storm, but we feel the effects of it. The energy moves through the water and becomes waves.

My grief of losing Alice is a storm you will probably never see, but I hope you will see in me the waves she made.

I hope you will know as I did with Alice that I love you more than words can express.

[pause]

I've realized I no longer wish for time to stand still or for you to stay tiny forever.

I know you're fighting sleep because you're worried you'll miss something. And you're probably right about that; you actually might miss something.

But if my not-so-magic recorder and I can teach you one thing: change is always going to happen, whether you're awake to see it or not, whether someone captures it or not, and whether you're ready or not.

Fighting change is like fighting ocean waves with your fists– exhausting and inconsequential.

On the other side of everything you miss while you're sleeping, you will wake up to find more. More love. More laughter with your mom. More life experience. Instead of punching at the waves, try this. Unclench your fists, take a big breath and release it. Lay back and let yourself float.

The end.