

Memories of Us

Rob looked fondly over his daughter Hope and her best friend Rae, today would be challenging for them. He sighed to himself, Rae in particular would find this tough. It was difficult enough to even get her to come, her grandma had been feeding her a constant stream of fear laced lies and misinformation about the past since her parents had passed away. Although Rob and his wife had tried to counter it, Rae adored her grandma as a daughter does their mother. It wasn't easy to get through. Rae was starting to show the tell tale signs of a climate skeptic, prone to conspiracy theories and untrusting of authority. He wondered again if today was a mistake, but dismissed his fear knowing that he owed it to Rae's parents.

Rae followed a few paces behind Rob and Hope as they walked through an unassuming doorway, she couldn't help notice the carved sign above the entrance that read "Memories are the soil in which the future grows". She rolled her eyes, typical hippie shit. It was another disgustingly hot, soupy day. Rae was dripping in sweat and in a fearsome mood. She liked Rob, saw him almost as a father figure to her, and Hope was the best friend she had ever had, but she could not be arsed with today. Some crappy museum about the town's recent history. Her gran would have a fit if she knew she was here. She had promised though and didn't want to let her friend down. They had been inseparable since meeting on the first day of school, shortly after she had moved to this small Yorkshire town.

They entered a blessedly cool hall, with high ceilings and sunlight streaming through the skylights. A few people were milling about, some in small groups quietly conversing while others sat alone. Soothing, ambient music drifted over the air played from unseen speakers. A giant canvas stretched the length of one side of the hall, half filled with drawings and iconography as well as words and phrases.

As they wandered further into the room, a smiling old lady with frizzy graying hair strode across.

"Rob, Hope, lovely to see you both down here again. Who have you brought with you today?"

"Joanne, always a pleasure. This is Rae," Rob said, beckoning Rae forwards. "She moved to our town nearly 10 years ago now, but I have only just managed to persuade her to join us on one of our visits. I am not sure her gran approves."

"She doesn't" Rae muttered. Then forcing a smile to her face, she added, "Hi".

"Well Rae, it is wonderful to meet you at last. Hope has told me all about you, you sound like a wonderful friend." Joanne said warmly.

Rae shot a glare in Hope's direction before replying. "What do you even do here?"

"Well, this space is what we call a memory sanctuary, one of many actually. I volunteer my time here, acting as a weaver of memories. Today, I will be your guide and storyteller helping you make sense of the cacophony of memories that constitute this space." Joanne spoke with enthusiasm that she saw was not reflected in the young girl in front of her.

"Okay, but what is the point? If I want a story I can just pick up a book." Rae said, crossing her arms.

"They have some really interesting perspectives here Rae, not just memories from this town but access to voices and memories from people living in towns just like ours all across the world." Rob chipped in.

"Indeed." Joanne added. "Memory sanctuaries came about as a way for towns and communities to understand and make sense of the changes and turmoil they were living through. A safe, peaceful place for people to grieve for what has been lost, but also a place to celebrate the changes and progress that is being made and a place for people's voices to be heard. A place for difficult, uncomfortable conversations to be navigated as conflicting memories and narratives of histories are brought into the light. We try to reconcile these different threads and weave them into a shared narrative of our recent history."

"Oh give it a chance Rae. Please. For me." Hope pleaded.

Rae just shrugged.

"Well, we have a lot to get through." Joanne said, clapping her hands.

"First, let me give you your memory interfaces. Through these you can engage with and contribute to the memories we are going to be experiencing today. Rae, you will need to provide us with an identifier we can use to authentically associate with your interactions within these memories. There are a number of wallet applications available for your screen if you don't already have one. Let me know if you need any help."

Joanne turned to Rob. "I assume you and Hope still have control over the identifiers you used with us previously. Feel free to create a new one, but we do love to see the history of contributions from participants over time. It really adds to the sense that these memories are sourced from the community. If participants allow it, you can even

connect with them directly and ask deeper questions about the memories they have shared with us. We only ask that all conflicts and challenges over the memories are aired out in the open."

"How are you getting on Rae?"

"All sorted." Rae gestured to the black, microphone shaped device in her hand.

Joanne glanced at a notification that popped up on her device, tapped the screen a few times and looked up smiling.

"Excellent. You kids these days amaze me with your technical wizardry. It took me ages to figure out how to use a digital wallet and look after my keys." Joanne chuckled.

"Right, I have added a young adult restriction to your identifier and set Rob up as your guardian. This just stops you from accessing certain restricted memories we have judged too violent or disturbing. Rob will also have to sign off on any of your contributions at the end of the day."

"Great, so now I am being treated like a child." Rae scowled. "How does this thing even work?" She added, waving the strange device around.

"I will explain as we explore, but essentially as we move through the sanctuary you will be able to use this device to both experience and participate in the memories I am going to walk you around. We joke that it is your memory wand."

"So you must be the wizard?" Rob laughed.

"You could say that", Joanne stifled a giggle. "We call ourselves memory weavers, so perhaps it would be better as our needle but anyway."

"Right, so this is a cult?" Rae did not look impressed. "Why should I believe anything you are going to tell me today?"

"Rae, be nice c'mon." Hope put a hand on Rae's shoulder. "This place has memories of events that I lived through, you did too. They are telling the truth, I know they are."

"Well, Rae, that is a very intelligent question. " Then looking at Hope she continued.

"Actually, we aren't telling the truth. That is harder than it seems at first glance. Whose truth? It turns out it is complicated and contested."

Turning her warm gaze back towards Rae, she continued.

"We do aim to ensure that all memories are contributed by actual humans. Using these memory wands, having people come in person to this sanctuary, or ones like it, as well as some complicated information locking and time-stamping processes that I don't fully

understand. These all contribute to the authenticity of the memories that have been inscribed here. But as for the realness of a memory, the truth of it, well that is all rather subjective. After all, even our own memories can be deceiving from time to time."

Smiling apologetically at Rae, she added. "Sorry, I know that's a lot of information. Please ask me any questions you may have, I will do my best to answer them."

"Okay then. Who are you? Why should I trust you?" Rae persisted stubbornly.

"Well, I am part of a network of sanctuaries and weavers. We are a guild of sorts. Or if you must use the term, a profession. We pool knowledge, learn from each other and attempt to hold ourselves accountable. I am a volunteer, no one is paying me to be here. I do it because I have learnt to cherish this sanctuary and have seen first hand the important work it does in recovering from the trauma of these times." Joanne said, getting a little flustered.

"Rae, just keep an open mind. Many people have spent a lot of time and effort on this." Rob said, sighing.

"Okay, okay. Sorry. Let's just get on with it." Rae shrugged.

"Right, yes. Follow me." With a final glance at Rae, Joanne turned and let them across the room.

As Rae trailed the others across the room she noticed an alcove tucked away to one side. Inside were a couple of comfy looking sofas set around a low table.

"What is that for?" Rae asked, trying to keep her voice uninterested.

"Oh Rae, that is one of the spaces they have for contributing memories. We came here a couple of years ago and told them all about our mum. " Hope gushed enthusiastically.

"Yes, Hope's mum has been something of an inspiration to this town. We were only too happy to add her garden trowel to our tales of regeneration and restoration collection."

"What do you mean, her garden trowel?" Rae asked, this time failing to keep the interest from her voice.

"Oh, you know my mum. She loves gardening. We contributed her trowel to the sanctuary to celebrate and remember all the hard work she put in helping this town become food self-sufficient." Hope said proudly.

"Yes, all the way from her guerilla gardening days. " Rob chuckled.

"A fantastic example!" Joanne exclaimed, clapping her hands together. "We like to use physical objects as pointers to and containers of memories that we hold here. We find

the ability to touch and feel something in your hands really enhances the whole memory experience."

"Cool, something I would actually like to see. Your mum is a legend!" Rae said, catching some of the enthusiasm in the room.

"All in good time. The first memory space I want to show you is in here." Joanne said motioning towards an opening to their left.

They stepped into a spacious room that seemed to have multiple competing areas of attention. Joanne headed for the armchairs, set about halfway around the room. Once they had all settled into their seats, she began.

"Okay, welcome. This is one of three memory spaces we manage here at the sanctuary. Each space serves a different purpose, but they all follow a similar structure. Generally we split spaces into ten distinct points of attention, or memory locations, with the fifth usually a place to sit and reflect. I won't get into it, but this is based on memory techniques like the memory palaces of the Greeks or the memory landscapes that many indigenous, oral cultures have used for millennia to encode their knowledge systems. These days, many people believe that this was the primary purpose of Stonehenge and other neolithic sites around the UK. Memory sanctuaries create a sequential landscape of distinct, memorable locations that we can use to encode memories. Memory weavers like myself rarely rely on the memory wands you will be using today when walking participants through an experience. Instead we tell stories from our memory, that draw on many sources and memories contributed here. Then we let you explore the landscape for yourself, using your memory wands to interact with the interconnected web of memories that you have just been oriented within."

"For today's experience, I have encoded this space to memories of climate protest and resistance. Over there at the entrance of this room we have the first memory location, for me this is Extinction Rebellion's 2019 protest. I am reminded of the collective up-swelling of hope, of community and of possibility. Also of the bright pink Berta Cáceres, the boat they used to take over Oxford Circus in London. Although two locations to the left, I am reminded of the Canning Town debacle and the fracturing of the movement with a number of more radical elements breaking away such as Just Stop Oil."

Rae's gaze took in the bright pink flag, with a black symbol in the middle that hung on the wall. In front of the flag she noticed a strange looking device.

"What is that?" Rae asked.

"Ah yes, I almost forgot. Each location will have some way for you to connect using your memory wand. Entry points to a digital landscape that you can explore. We are always experimenting with the many different mediums through which memories can be brought to life."

"Over at the fourth location, I have placed youth climate protests world wide. I am reminded of Greta Thunberg, or the Ace of Wands as I know her here. The lonely, persistent school striker outside the Swedish parliament who inspired the marches of millions worldwide. At this location you will find Greta's 2019 UN assembly address, as well as contributions from children of this town who were inspired to participate in some of these protests by Greta."

"After Greta you arrive here, halfway through this memory space. We always like to make the halfway point a seat. It helps me remember that there should have been four locations so far."

"The location we are currently sitting in reminds me of the COVID19 crisis. A strange pause. A strangely peaceful world. A glimpse at the untold reality, that things could indeed be different. It was also the moment that accelerated conspiracy theories, exacerbated a cost of living crisis and brought into stark focus the powers of the state. Everyone experienced this moment differently, I have tried to honor that with the memories I have highlighted at this location."

"After here you will find the location I have associated with the local protest and resistance in this town. A microcosm of the events unfolding in towns across the UK. Your mum's guerilla gardening fits in here. As well as the graffiti and its responses that emerged in the time."

"Then we have the confluence of the Gaza war protests, public sector dissatisfaction and the intensifying of the climate crisis that led to mass protests and strikes of 2026. A real catalyst for change."

"After that I have a location that tries to bring in a global perspective, drawing on memories contributed to sanctuaries around the world."

"Then I have a location that focuses on the political response to these protests. From denial, to police brutality all the way to the transformative government legislation that was eventually introduced."

"Over at location nine, we have the creation of memory sanctuaries, which was, we must not forget, itself a form of protest and resistance. Who controls the narrative and all that."

"Finally, I touch on protest and resistance today. We have made a lot of strides forward, but the need to question power, the need to resist overreach and the need to stand up for what we believe in hasn't gone away. I truly believe in a healthy society it never should."

"Right, that is enough of me waffling. Go and explore the space, take as much time as you need. Remember you can contribute, save or challenge any of the memories you encounter today using your memory wand. Let me know if you have any questions, I will be here if you need me."

After almost 40 minutes Rae came wandering back over looking sheepish.

"You know Joanne, this museum is actually pretty interesting. I had never heard Greta Thunberg's speech before. And I can't believe that they only recently made it law to consider future generations when making decisions, that just seems obvious."

Joanne smiled, pleased to see the magic of the memory sanctuary at work again.

Note: The rest is a work in progress in much rougher shape than above.

"Thank you Rae. I always enjoy hearing which elements of these experiences stand out most to different people."

Helping people see, feel and experience the past in new and different ways. Helping them empathise with others, see the world from their perspective, making them care. Helping them recognise the narrative ocean they swim in, showing them that it is but one version of the past. Each with their own logic, their own meaning making functions, their own judgement and measures of value. The secret is that the lens can be changed.

Joanne was brought back from her reverie by the approach of Hope and Rob.

"I am glad you see it that way Rae." Joanne beamed. "It really has made a huge difference to the kinds of decisions being made."

"Right then, unless anyone has any questions let's continue on our journey. I think you are going to find our next stop very interesting. We have special experience that is being put on by Santiago, a memory weaver from one of our twin towns in Nicaragua. He has joined us for six months as part of our residency and knowledge exchange program. He has put together a piece about the experience of, survival in and ruggedization responses to extreme heat."

They set off out of the room, along a corridor passing a number of closed doorways. Rae thought she could hear the murmur of voices behind a few of them.

"What goes on in there then?"

"Oh, those are our education spaces. We do our best to curate a set of classes, talks and workshops that complement the work we do here, popular courses include the Long Time Academy, Playful Imagination and Making Meaning. We also have an upcoming series of workshops on Ruggedization that I am looking forward to. I can share our full timetable at the end, you are welcome to just drop in or you can sign up for a full course and collect badges of learning. There are a number of foundational courses that all memory weavers practising in a sanctuary are required to have completed. "

"So I would be signing up for extra school? No thanks." Rae laughed.

"What. No way. I could learn to do what you do?" Hope eyes grew wide.

"Sure, with time. There is no special magic to it. We can all learn to be better memory weavers and shapers of meaning."

"A shaper of meaning. Hmm, that sounds cool."

"No Hope, it sounds dumb." Rae rolled her eyes.

"Don't listen to her Hope, I think you have the makings of a wonderful memory weaver. You both do." Rob chimed in.

"Right here we are everyone." They came towards the end of the corridor. "The memory space we are about to enter focuses on survival and adaptation in an unpredictable planet. This space can be intense, but it contains important lessons that we can all learn from."

Memory location around flooding triggers Rae to remember parents death in flash flood.

Sends her in a spin. She turns and rushes out of the room. Enters the garden.

Joanne finds her there. They talk. Basically questioning how her gran could manipulate and withhold the truth from her.

TODO: Integrate from previous draft

"Rae look you have got caught up in and messed about by a battle over narrative that has been raging for as long as the climate has been a topic. People knew about climate change for years. And did nothing. First they tried to hide it, then deny it. Five stages of guilt.

"Your grandma is, in many ways a victim. Trapped in her own narrative lens, her own meaning making engine. Unable to even see that there could be a different way. Bridging across those disconnects. Those fractures in society. That are so intertwined with who we are. That go back generations. Stories and framings that are integral to how we understand the world, but are so deeply ingrained we barely even notice them let alone question them. Is hard, messy work. It is an important part of what we are trying to achieve here at the sanctuary. To make visible what for so long has been hidden. To have a conversation. To talk, learn from and build with each other.

"What is important is that we are all here together, living through these times. That is not just nationally, but globally. How we remember, react and respond to these times will define us. The world is going through a tough spot right now, but I believe in your generation. We failed you, but I hope you can live by different stories. Treat each other with compassion and humility. Learn to live in and with the boundaries of this finite, beautiful goddess that is our planet. Our mother earth."

What about the garden of apologies and forgiveness? What is function of garden?

Resolution. Rae resolves to become a memory weaver?

Let's go back inside. We have one final memory space to explore. This one is all about Restoration and Regeneration, its a fun, positive one to end on. There is so much to celebrate going on all around the world.

TODO: Work in? Like the landscapes and walks bit.

However, memory weavers can't help bringing their own perspectives and biases when crafting memory journeys. We are telling stories, and the story teller matters. What I can tell you is that the memory sanctuary as an institution does not dictate or proscribe the narratives we should tell. This one at least. Each weaver walks their own trails and makes their own decisions about what to highlight and what to skim over, today you are getting my version. Even so, we try to be transparent about what we chosen to exclude, pointing out other trails even as we stick to our own. Finally, with a little training, which we are happy to provide, you could create your own pathways through our memory landscape and delve into our library of memories for yourself without a guide. A wilderness walk if you will.