

# Versions of me

By Tristan Alice Nieto

From:

Christopher Whitman  
St Xavier High School  
London E16 5RD

3<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2010

Dear Me,

So I have to do this stupid assignment for English where I write a letter to my future self in the year 2040, which would make me like forty-four. It's supposed to make me think about my future or whatever. Anyway, I'm sure you've got better things to do, so don't bother reading this because it's dumb.

So what's it like living in the future? Is it like flying cars and holidays on the moon, or is it atomic wasteland mad max shit? I don't know how well you remember this, so let me remind you: School is shit. Being fourteen is shit. Everything is shit. I can't wait for it to be over.

I'm supposed to ask you five questions about the future, which is stupid because by the time you get this it won't be the future anymore, but anyway here it is.

**Question 1** – Has Crystal Palace won ANYTHING yet?

**Question 2** – Do I ever get to nob Stacey Burns?

**Question 3** – Is the world on fire from Global Warming?

**Question 4** – What are the Lotto numbers for next week?

**Question 5** – Is Eastenders still running?

Cool, so let me know how this all turns out. Especially the lotto thing, that'd be really handy.

C'ya, wouldn't wanna be ya (...oh shit!)

Chris

From:

Christine Whitman  
2/5 Milburn street  
London SE11 2KA

5<sup>th</sup> of November, 2040

Dear Me,

Wow, so I was collecting the mail the other day and guess what turned up? My letter from 30 years ago. I guess Mrs Little finally opened her time capsule and mailed all the letters out. She must be close to 70 by now.

So, yeah, I'm forty-four. Not sure what to tell you about 2040. It's pretty much the same as the past only everything is smaller and faster. We fought back against a resurgence of fascism and won (again), society these days is getting more conscientious and ethical. However, the environment is screwed, politicians are somehow even more corrupt, and the global economy is ruined, probably never to recover. So no moon holidays, but no atomic wastelands either. It's a bit of a mixed bag.

To answer your questions:

1 – Yes, Crystal Palace are actually really good now. They won the premier league twice.

2 – No. She's not it to you. Move on.

3 – Not on fire, but sea levels are rising rapidly and summer in London is unbearable.

4 – So I had to look this one up, but here they are: 15, 26, 30, 35, 40, 41, and 34.

5 – Sort of. What used to be TV is now a collection of different media, but soaps aren't really the that popular anymore. There might be an Eastenders show still running somewhere, maybe on one of the ten thousand netchannels, but I've not looked for it.

I understand why you think this assignment is boring, but when you grow up you'll realise how much you missed out on by being so cynical and distant. Your life could have been so much easier if you'd only taken the time to think about who you really were and what you wanted. More than anything, you lost the chance to explore your gender and come to terms with your self as female. How different your life – my life – would have been if I had the self-awareness and the courage to transition back then. I have so many regrets – a failed marriage, a career I never really cared about – all because I waited until I was thirty-seven to admit to myself what I had really known all along. So, that's my advice to you, my younger self. Come to terms with your gender identity now, and save yourself thirty years of sadness and confusion.

I'm not sure what to do with this letter to be honest. Maybe I'll make my own time capsule. There's a return address on the envelope, so maybe I'll post it and just see where it goes.

Peace and Love,

Christine

From:

Christopher Whitman  
St Xavier High School  
London E16 5RD

8<sup>th</sup> of November, 2010

Dear Me,

So I got handed this letter from Mrs Little the other day. Apparently someone snuck it into her time capsule and she thought it was me. All I can say is this: Ha ha. Very frigging' funny. You think I should get a sex-change? Right, sure thing, person who is definitely me from the future and not Justin or Craig taking the piss. I'll get right on that. You twat.

So now Mrs Little is making me repeat the assignment because she thinks I was dicking around. She said I didn't take it seriously enough. I told her it's a letter in a time travelling biscuit tin. How seriously can I take it? So thank you mystery letter writer, you've now given me plenty of very serious material about the future.

I'm supposed to ask five more "proper" questions. So here they are:

- 1 – How can I be a transexual if I'm not gay? I like girls, so how does that work?
- 2 – Is a sex-change even a real operation? It sounds fake.
- 3 – Wouldn't I just get humiliated all my life? Wouldn't my parents disown me?
- 4 – Who the hell would want to hire me or date me?
- 5 – Okay smart arse, if you're me, what was the name of my blue teddy bear?

Oh, and another thing – if you're going to try and convince me to put on a dress and call my self Christine, at least make the other lies believable. Sure, maybe Stacey's not into me, and global warming is probably still a thing in 2040, but Palace wins the Premier League? TWICE? Yeah, I call bullshit on that.

Love and happiness and fairies and shit,

Chris

From:

Christine Whitman  
2/5 Milburn street  
London SE11 2KA

12<sup>th</sup> of November, 2040

Dear Me,

So this is spooky, but I got a second letter today. I vaguely remember having to rewrite that letter because Mrs Little deemed it inappropriate, but when I read it, I got chills. It suddenly sparked a memory of getting the letter from my future self, thirty years ago, and thinking it was a prank. I don't remember what happened to it. I may have thrown it away.

I don't know if this is some strange Deja Vu, or if I'm just going mad, but I'll try to answer your questions as honestly as I can, although some might be a little tricky to explain.

1 – Gender and sexuality are different things. You can be a transgender woman and be a lesbian, or bisexual, or even asexual. It's not about drag or cross-dressing, it's about what gender matches your identity. Imagine if you were a disembodied floating consciousness, with no physical body. What gender would you be then? What gender would you *like* to be?

2 – A “sex-change” isn't a real thing, no. There's no magic operation that changes everything. But there are things, medical things, like hormone therapy, that can help you feel more comfortable in your own body. You don't have to do it, but for some people it makes a huge difference to their happiness. It's all part of the process we call 'transitioning'.

3 – I honestly can't say. I can't tell you what transitioning in school would be like, because obviously I never did it. But I can promise that not transitioning is pretty hard. In fact, it very nearly killed me, so you'll have to weigh it against that.

4 – This might blow your mind, but at your age, it's likely that you could start transitioning now and no one would ever know. Like, unless they saw your medical records, they'd never be able to tell. And even if they *did* know, they may not care. Things are about to change a lot for trans people and in ten years, when you might be starting a career or a serious relationship, a lot of people won't really give a toss.

5 – This is a trick question. I never had a blue teddy bear. I wanted one, but Dad said I couldn't have it because it was for girls.

Look, I know how you're feeling, because I remember feeling it. And I also know how much less accepting the world is right now. But this isn't about what's right for the world, it's about what's right for you. Not just for the few years you're in high school, but for your whole life. And I know I may as well be telling you that the moon is made of cheese, but what people think of you in high school isn't really all that important.

Just think about it.

Love,  
Christine

From:

Christopher Whitman  
St Xavier High School  
London E16 5RD

15<sup>th</sup> of November, 2010

Dear Me,

Okay, I don't know what's really going on here, but this is freaky as hell. Mrs Little handed me ANOTHER letter, and I was just on my way to punch the shit out of Craig, but I figured I should read it, in case maybe it was actually Justin.

Whoever you are, you don't sound like a teenager taking the piss. You sound like a proper adult, and you seem to know an awful lot about me, and about the future. The teddy bear thing was weird, so I held on to it. Then the other day, when those lotto numbers came up I literally shit myself. I wish I had told my mum to get a ticket now.

I don't know what's going on here, but since I have to do the assignment AGAIN, I'm going to try asking you some for real questions. Not saying you're right, just asking.

How would I know if my gender was all mixed up?

Why would this happen to me? Like, what causes it?

Are there gender doctors or scientists who can tell me what my gender is?

Why doesn't everyone do it? Like, criminals in hiding or just people who are bored?

I asked Ms Ludwig if it was possible to send messages back in time. Pretty sure her answer was no, but sorta yes, but really no. She said the problem was called the Grandfather Paradox. Like, if you go back in time and kill your grandfather, then you stop existing. So if you don't exist, you can't go back in time to kill your grandfather, so then your grandfather doesn't die and you do exist. It took me a while to understand, but it made me wonder – If I do change my life because of these letters, what happens to you?

I don't know how I'm going to get this letter to you, because I don't really get how this works. Mrs Little hasn't asked me to repeat the assignment, so I'll have to sneak it into the tin somehow. Maybe I'll just give it to Doctor Who or some shit.

I'm pretty sure one of us is bonkers, (odds-on it's me), so this is probably all a waste of time. If this is really you, Craig, I'm going to rip your balls off and stuff them down your throat.

Thanks,

Chris

From:

Christine Whitman  
2/5 Milburn street  
London SE11 2KA

19<sup>th</sup> of November, 2040

Dear Me,

So, this seems to be really happening. I can't explain how or why. Sorry.

Every time I read a letter from you, I think *why did I say all that in the first place when I already knew what I wrote back?* Everything I read I remember writing. Because how can I not? But what I wrote only makes sense if I didn't remember it at the time. I don't know, perhaps I finally am going bonkers, as you put it.

To answer your question – no one knows what causes gender dysphoria (or *gender mix up*, which I think is far more appropriate). Honestly, I'm not sure it matters. It wouldn't change how I feel – it wouldn't make it more or less real to me.

How do you know? I hate to be prosaic, but the truth is – you just do. There's no test for it. The doctors who diagnose it just go on what you tell them. Ultimately you have to decide for yourself what's best for your happiness, but I'll give you the advice that was given to me years ago, which is this:

*Cis people (non-trans people), don't ask that many questions about their gender. They don't have a reason to. So if you find yourself asking loads of questions about your gender, then the odds are already pretty high you might be trans.*

It's not foolproof, and there are plenty of cis people that do investigate their gender, but it's rare (even rarer back in 2010). People don't transition on a whim or for a stupid reason because the fact is, it can be really, really hard. No one does it for fun, we do it because it's all there is. For most of us, living without transitioning is just not realistic. It would be like trying to spend the rest of your life pretending you were Irish. It might be fun for a party, but you'd get sick and tired of it pretty quickly.

I remember wishing there was some test – somehow I could know for sure whether or not I was trans. But there isn't. It's a completely personal decision and no one else can give you an answer. Not a doctor or a friend or your mum – no one. I'm not going to tell you what to do, or say that life will definitely be amazing. All I can say is how I feel now, at forty-four, and tell you the things I wish I had known when I was your age... when I was *you*.

I know it must seem like social suicide, and I can't promise it won't be, but you'd be amazed how much stronger you are once you start living your life as your true self.

Love and support,

Christine

From:

Christopher Whitman  
St Xavier High School  
London E16 5RD

22<sup>nd</sup> of November, 2010

Dear Me,

So I managed to sneak in and drop in the last letter without Mrs Little noticing. (I mean, obvs, since you replied). I may not get this one in, but I'm going to try. Either way, this will probably be the last letter I get to write to you.

I've been thinking about what you said, about gender and sexuality and about how there's no proof – you just have to try to do what's right for you. It's like trying to prove if someone likes strawberries. There's no strawberry-liking gene or whatever, we just take everyone's word for it.

Sometimes, I close my eyes try to imagine myself as a girl and it just feels right, and I think obviously it's what I want. But then I open my eyes and look at myself and it just feels totally insane. It's like sure, I'd like to be a girl, but I'd also like to be cyborg with rocket feet and laser eyes, and I'm very clearly not.

I talked some more to Ms Ludwig, and she was trying to explain what relativity is. Like how there's no centre of the universe, everything is relative to everything else. And it got me thinking about who I am and who you are, and maybe this is stupid but I can't seem to figure it out, so here's my one question:

*Are you me in the future, or am I you in the past?*

It might sound weird, but I think it makes a difference. If you're in the future, then maybe I can change things because it hasn't happened yet. But if I'm in the past then maybe I can't change anything, because it's already happened. Does that even make sense?

I know this sounds totally bonkers, but I can't get it out of my head. Like, obviously *I'm* in the present because it's now and not 2040. But then for you, now *is* 2040. You're not walking around going 'hey, wow isn't it great to live in the future'. Is there any way to know? Or is it one of those things there's no proof of?

And if I *can* change things, then should I? Different decisions might make things better in the future, but maybe they won't. Also, I don't want to paradox you out of existence.

Please send help, my brain is melting

Chris

From:

Christine Whitman  
2/5 Milburn street  
London SE11 2KA

25<sup>th</sup> of November, 2040

Dear Me,

Well, I got your last letter, but I don't know if you're going to get this reply in time, so sorry if that happens.

As far as relativity goes, and I know this probably isn't what you want me to say, but I've been wondering the same thing. I honestly don't know which one of us is in the true present, or even if there is a true present. It seems our life is permanently intertwined with things we know but cannot prove.

There was a mathematician named Kurt Gödel who came up with something called the Incompleteness Theorem. In it, he effectively proves that any system with rules, (be it maths or a language), can never be complete – there are always going to be rules that are true, but that you can't prove. There's something about that I find comforting, knowing that not only is it okay to have these unprovable parts of ourselves, it's an actual law of science.

The idea forced me to think really hard about what we really mean when we talk about our true selves. Maybe it's relativity – who we are depends on our situation. Or, maybe it's incompleteness – it's something we know is true, but can never prove. Maybe it's both. (It seems possible – Gödel and Einstein were best friends for years).

Perhaps it doesn't matter. Whatever happens, *whenever* it happens, it's the present for you. A second in the past is as good as fifty years in the past, and tomorrow may as well be next century. Only the present is ever in your hands.

So, you know what, forget me. Forget all my words trying to convince you to do what might be right for you in thirty years time. Do what's right for you now – in your present. Maybe I'm really you in the future, or maybe I'm not. It doesn't matter. Your identity is entirely within you. No one else can see it, hear it or feel it. And there's nothing anyone can say, no test they can do, and no magic letter from the future that can tell you who you are.

Love,

Christine

From:

Chris Whitman  
St Xavier High School  
London E16 5RD

19<sup>th</sup> of December, 2010

Dear Me,

So, it's been a while since I last wrote. Mrs Little finally sealed and buried her time capsule. So I guess the portal is now closed and I doubt you'll ever get to read this. Or at least, you're going to have to wait a long time. Or not, since you're already in the future. Damn, this shit does my head in.

I told Ms Ludwig what you said about that Gödel guy and she seemed pretty impressed. She thinks I'd be a good scientist, but I'm not sure about that. I mean, I'm willing to accept swapping letters with a female version of me in the future, but a science nerd? I just don't buy it.

She told me a cool story. After Einstein came up with relativity, Gödel looked at it and decided it made more sense if you just got rid of time altogether. And Einstein was like "damn, you're right."

The way she explained it to me – time is just another way to measure things. Our past, present and future all exist at once, and we just kinda "read it" like a book from beginning to end because it's easier to understand things that way. But just like the whole book exists regardless of what page you're on, our whole lives exist, regardless of where we are in time.

What it made me realise was that even though we're constantly changing how we look at ourselves, who we really are is always there. It really made me feel connected to you, like as past self to my future self. Even if it turns out that transitioning to female never happens for me, it makes me proud to know that there's a *me* somewhere that made it work.

I guess that's how I've come to think of my life. Just a long line of versions of me, all across time, each one just trying to their best in that moment.

So make sure to take your own advice. Make the decisions that are right for you now, whenever now is. I promise not to try and change the future, as long as you stop trying to fix the past. There's a whole line of you working on that, and each one of us is trying their hardest.

Love (for reals),

Chris