

1.

So I had a choice of what time period I wanted to travel back to. And I totally fucked up that choice.

It seems like a great opportunity, right? You could go back and be the first person to create the microchip, the person who hit the mega lottery when otherwise nobody got it right, or even better, the person who took out Lee Harvey before he could get a shot off.

At least that was the case before they changed the rules. So many people went back and bought tech IPO stock, or won the lottery, and returned to their current lives with a huge fortune now in place. The government stepped in, as they always do, and kiboshed that. Two separate people dialed in November 21, 1963, Dallas, Texas, but were stopped from proceeding. Can't radically change history, they decided. So now you can't go back and do that kind of thing - buying stocks, stealing someone else's future invention, changing the course of history. Not sure how they police all of that, but they do. Folks have been caught and put in prison already.

But there's still cool things you can do. Leave home 5 minutes earlier so you actually catch that train, get that job you missed out on. Decide not to do that daredevil slide across the ice, and avoid having a chronically painful elbow throughout life – to say nothing of spending half your senior year in a cast.

So what did I choose to do? I went back to 10th grade and asked out Celia McPherson.

Whaaaatttt?

Very fair question. See, in 10th grade I was painfully shy, awkward, zit-faced, and a bit small compared to my classmates. Not a great catch. Celia wasn't much either, but she had what I call sneaky good looks. Kind of average girl-next-door. She didn't have much in the way of boobs then, not much of a figure, but she was basically well-proportioned, had clear skin, and bright blue eyes. She also happened to wear thick-framed glasses that didn't exactly help the overall look, covering those blue eyes. And she was a bit quiet, so she was basically a wallflower like me. You wouldn't have expected much from her going forward, definitely not listed in the Most Likely To for anything. But she was in drama, and though she wasn't a great actress by any stretch, she always seemed pretty comfortable on stage.

So what, you say. She's a 4, why would you bother wasting your golden ticket on asking a 16 year old 4 out on a date? Because the 25 year old Celia was a 9 (under the long-lived rule that you can't give out 10's), and the 30 year old Celia was a rich and famous TV personality. And if I could get in there as her boyfriend before it all happened, I'd be set, right? And that rising tide would lift all ships, even a tugboat like me. What I haven't mentioned is that I'm still single, despite overcoming the zits and puniness. Still a little shy. The apartment I live in smells like boiled underwear, though that's not totally my fault. If I could afford to live in a building that didn't also smell like boiled underwear I would. That would probably involve getting a job that paid more than minimum wage. I'm not required to shower everyday for work, that's a plus. Working in a basement tending to machinery mostly by myself does have its benefits.

2.

So what happened? The time machine company sends you back to your requested time, and poof, you're there. Took a bit used to being back in my lame-ass 16 year old self, but you know, the price we pay. In gym class, which we both tended to spend along the sidelines, I approached her. I made up a story about the really popular guy in our class, who at present was running down the field looking like the Greek god Hermes in those really short nylon Adidas shorts that athletes could wear well but people like me could not. I told her he was once caught touching his dog inappropriately and was going to be kicked out of school for cheating. The first part I made up, but the second was true. I knew that because of my time travel. The dumbass got a copy of the test, and copied the answers nearly word-for-word, but accidentally skipped the second one so he had the exact answers to the wrong questions. Kind of obvious. Celia was laughing hard, nearly in hysterics, about the dog part. I thought that was cool, since I was concerned she actually might be grossed out. And when the dumbass did get thrown out, she looked at me like I was something more than the weird guy in the class. We started going out, and that lasted all the way through graduation.

I was excited. I had applied to the same school as her, and we both got in. I could see the future with her, being by her side as she eventually became that beautiful TV star. She was already way better looking than before, but still stuck with me even though I was only marginally better. But that summer was when everything would change.

We decided to have sex. Up until then we fooled around, but never got that far. I was nervous anyway so I didn't push it. But we agreed we should do it, we were 18, adults, it was time. We knew we had to be safe, I wore a condom.

And here's where I fucked up. I haven't yet mentioned my friend, well sort of friend, Minker. Douglas Minker, but everyone calls him by his last name. And by everyone I mean the 3 or so friends he has, including me. These are not close-knit friends, who hang out all the time and have amazing shared experiences. These are more like the group of losers nobody else in the class likes, but who all happen to be fans of Marvel movies and zombie video games. Minker had even less going for him than me at the time, if that was possible, but if I had to spend time with anyone it would usually be him. He had an older brother who was actually socially adept, not inept like us, but happened to be a dick to Minker most of the time. One day Minker asked me if Celia and I had sex yet. I then made two crucial mistakes. I said it might happen soon, and I agreed to him asking his brother for a condom. I was deathly afraid of going to buy one at the store, so this seemed like a decent solution.

A day later Minker walked up to me at my locker, reached into his pocket, and discreetly handed me the condom packet. I took a quick look at it under the protective cover of my locker, it looked fine, even brand new and shiny. I thanked him. I actually thanked him.

Celia and I planned to get together that weekend. Saturday night at my house. My parents were going out somewhere, I didn't really listen to the details other than the part where my Mom said they'd be out

for a few hours. I told Celia we could watch Spiderman, I knew she liked it almost as much as me. I think she also knew what we might do instead of just watching.

I won't get into specifics, trust me, it's not impressive. Not as awkward as it could have been, not as short as I was afraid it would be, but overall just did the job respectably. She seemed pleased. Some expressions of pain, though I imagine not due to me as much as to the virgin thing. We then watched the end of the movie. Spiderman won.

Graduation was the following week. She and her family then went on a trip for a few weeks. At the end of the trip she threw up a few days in a row. After the second time her mother asked her the obvious question, and Celia told her about us. Her mother made her take a pregnancy test and it was positive. Celia immediately called me to tell me the news. I was shellshocked. I wore a frickin' condom, what gives? I didn't tell her that, I was a little more sensitive. But I did ask her what she was going to do. She hadn't thought much about it, but she said her parents were devout Catholics and abortion would not happen, so she'd probably have the baby. I gulped. I'm too young for this entire discussion, to say nothing of the life decision I had to make.

But I made the honorable decision, and Celia and I got married. Our baby boy was born 8 months later. Celia's parents helped me pay for a technical school, and so I became an HVAC repair guy. Celia got a job as a receptionist at the same place I work. She never did go to college, never did become that TV star. But we have a nice little life for our family of 3. Celia says she's happy, being a mother was something that she says she always envisioned for herself. She put on a few pounds with the baby, her skin got a little blotchy, but I love her no matter what. Who am I to complain? But I wonder if she's truly happy. If she only knew.

As for that condom, funny story there. Funny for Minker's older brother that is. When Minker told him that I was going to be a father, he fell off his chair laughing. He fessed up to sticking a really thin needle through the packaging. I never noticed it, obviously. Thought about killing his brother, but this brought me my family, so maybe it was a blessing.

But back to work. Today, I'm in the basement of some ratty building, where all the machinery is. There's a guy working by himself down there. Jeez he stinks. Take a shower buddy.