

The Time Warp

I was standing in the living room scrolling through the music videos on my iPod and had just downloaded Bon Jovi's "Runaway." I was happy that iTunes had added some more of the classic 1980s Bon Jovi videos to their inventory, but then I was struck by just how far technology had come in the last few decades. I was holding my iPod in the palm of my hand watching the video I had first seen as a preschooler and was suddenly struck with an odd feeling that I was caught in some sort of time warp. I felt like I was being pulled backward into a drastically different but strangely familiar world that I had not been to in a very long time. I was no longer a twenty-something enjoying awesome, retro rock-and-roll on modern technology; I was a child in the 1980s glancing into an amazing future where you could have a color TV, VCR, and command over MTV in the palm of your hand. It was incredible! But a moment later I was an adult again, longing for the care free days of childhood rather than the quarter life crisis of student loan debt and having to pay a small fortune for a tank of gasoline. I am open to the possibility that the "time warp" feeling that came as quickly and unexpectedly as lightning might have been a side effect of the migraine headaches I suffer from. But that's all the more reason I wanted to revisit my childhood – migraine headaches weren't invented until after the 1980s drew to a close (at least in my experience).

For days afterward my mind kept drifting back to that feeling of amazement over just how far and how fast technology had developed and the "time warp" feeling that I had experienced, but even more so to the 1980s. Back when everything was radical and everyone, at one point or another, walked like an Egyptian. It was a time when rock stars wore fluffy, permed mullets and spandex leggings but still managed to look cool. It was back when Bill Cosby sold pudding by day and got phenomenal primetime ratings at night. Pee-Wee Herman may not have been the King of Cartoons but no one could deny he ruled Saturday morning. Every cool kid had a metal TV tray at home and a metal lunch box at school. MTV and VH1 played nothing but music videos. McDonald's sold their food in Styrofoam containers. It was when Marty McFly playing "Johnny B. Goode" at the Enchantment Under the Sea dance was the coolest thing that you had ever seen, and made you want to learn the electric guitar. This was back when John Hughes was the king of the box office and if Emilio Estevez, Judd Nelson, Alley Sheedy, Molly Ringwald, and Anthony Michael Hall attended your school you would have done everything in your power to get Saturday detention. VCRs, Walkmans, and home computer systems were recognized as the ultimate status symbols of the American middle class. Michael J. Fox was selling Diet Pepsi and Max Headroom was selling Coke. Almost every cereal box had a cool prize, and more sugar than essential vitamins. Every store, restaurant, and street corner had a pay phone. AT&T and MCI were doing battle for control of your phone line. Gasoline cost 93¢ a gallon. Boom boxes and break dancing were awesome. *The Boy Who Could Fly* debuted and will always remain one of the greatest fantasy movies of all time. It was when every kid in America was a devoted fan of Nickelodeon and longed to win the Super Toy Run Sweepstakes and be a contestant on *Double Dare*. Most department stores in America sold lawn darts (aka

“Jarts”) and many people spent countless lovely afternoons sailing the occasionally lethal projectiles through the air. This was when Reese’s Pieces were purchased by little kids anxious to eat them as a snack and to use them as bait for extra-terrestrials. You had at least one school picture taken that was a “dual image” photograph, and the pictures taken at home meant waiting five minutes for the gray Polaroid image to clear so you could see the results. Eventually your parents probably switched to a 110 camera which required a flip flash, until they got a more advanced 110 camera that had the flash built right in.

It was an era of Peter Billingsly selling Hershey’s Chocolate Syrup and longing for a Red Ryder BB gun in *A Christmas Story*, one of the greatest Christmas movies ever made. It was a time of wearing leg warmers while you were walking on sunshine. We learned that UFOs were capable of time travel by watching *Flight of the Navigator*. It was when all the cool kids at the arcade had big teased up hair, Jordache jeans, huge baggy t-shirts, and Swatch Watches. If it was winter you were wearing an oversized sweater with shoulder pads that were eight inches thick. It was an era of wearing three pairs of socks over your pegged pants and walking around in L.A. Gear High Tops; but of course the reason we wore our socks *over* our pant legs was because our stonewashed jeans were too skin tight to leave room for socks. Looking back at the photos the fashions may seem ridiculous but in your heart of hearts you know everything about that decade was cool (except maybe mullets and rattails, but you could get away with them then). You have probably wished you could return to that era and may have even attempted to build your own Flux Capacitor. Everyone who lived during the 1980s, especially those of us who were young, knows that it was a truly awesome decade.

If you are a true fan of the 1980s you know that “Video Killed the Radio Star” by The Buggles was the first music video ever played on MTV. You know that Toni Basil was in her 40s when she did the video for “Mickey.” You are also well aware that before Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey were cutting the rug at Kellerman’s they were killing communists in Colorado. You know that *The Breakfast Club* and *Some Kind of Wonderful* were the best John Hughes movies of the decade, and arguably the best of his career. You recognize that Activision was responsible for creating some of the best video games of the decade. You remember when Big Wheel tricycles were a big deal, and if you were a kid you clearly remember how tough it was to pedal a bike with hollow plastic wheels down the sidewalk, and you can distinctly remember the loud grating, scraping noise those wheels produced. You also know that if Ralph Macchio would have just unleashed some of those *Karate Kid* moves on those drunken Socs that *The Outsiders* would have had a much happier ending. Poor Ralph! If only the Daniel Larusso role would have come before the Johnny Cade role!

So after several days of reminiscing I have decided to commit some of my own 1980s memories to paper. This isn’t intended to be a complete memoir of my childhood; it’s just a collection of some of my memories from the 1980s. A complete memoir would probably be somewhat dull to read, you don’t want to hear about all the times I was on my best behavior or doing ordinary things like jump roping or coloring in a coloring book. As every adult who was

once a child can tell you there is a fine line between behaving and misbehaving and I enjoyed dancing on that line as often as I could, seeing how much I could get away with before I got into trouble. I figured you might like to read about the times that I was being bratty and discovering the new technological wonders of the 1980s, and so I have omitted the boring parts of my childhood from this book because I'm sure you don't want to hear about the times when I was following all the rules. I hope you enjoy my book because if you do we both win. If not, well, you've already purchased the book and I still get the royalties. So I guess I win even if you hate my book, but I have a feeling that you'll like this book almost as much as Mikey liked Life Cereal.

Happy Birthday, Jadie

I was born on August 7, 1980 (it was a Thursday, at 4:07 a.m. if you care to know the *Rain Man* level details). I made my grand debut in State College, Pennsylvania in an area known as Happy Valley. As a child I always assumed that the valley was given that name after I was born in celebration of me, but I was disappointed to learn later in life that the valley was so named before my birth. Yet this minor detail doesn't stop me from attempting to fool gullible people into thinking that the region was formerly called, "The Valley of Gloom and Despair" but was changed to Happy Valley in my honor. Usually I can at least get someone to question me on this point. I have to say that gullible people are almost always fun to talk to.

The origin of my own name, Jade, is something I never joke about because it is such an amazing story. Mom had decided that she was either going to name me Megan or Sarah Elizabeth after her maternal grandmother. Every day Mom read the birth announcements in the paper and noticed that both Megan and Sarah were becoming very common and began to rethink the name choices because she wanted me to have a unique name. With her due date rapidly approaching Mom was trying to come up with a unique name for a baby girl. One day she thought of the name Jade and was struck by it, but was uncertain if she should use it since it was so different. She had never heard the gemstone used as a name before. Shortly after that Mom was talking to her mother, my Gram Harman, on the telephone and Gram said, "You know I was lying in bed last night thinking about names and I thought that Jade would be a really neat name for a little girl." Mom was reeling in shock, she hadn't mentioned to anyone that she was considering using the name Jade. The striking coincidence was not lost on Mom, who thought that it was meant to be and I was given the name Jade Lauren. A few months after I was born we moved to my mother's hometown about an hour away. This is the place that I have always considered my home, and a big reason that I love my little hometown is that nearly everyone in my Mom's big extended family has always lived here too, so we always get together for holidays and birthdays, sports and school activities, and we visit each other often.

Mom was a stay-at-home-mom who doted over me and thought everything I did was cute (well, mostly, I did try her patience from time to time with some creative bratty adventures but that was only when she caught me). Mom has always been cheerful and optimistic, and has a very sweet nature. She spent the days of my childhood teaching me how to read and write, how to spell, and do basic math. She made sure I always had plenty of dolls and a ready supply of coloring books and Crayola Crayons. She read at least one story book to me every day, and she also read to me from my children's Bible on a daily basis. She took me on walks to visit Gram or to go to the playground. One of the best parts about going for a walk was being near the train tracks as a massive train, pulled by a big blue Conrail engine sailed through town. When I was little most trains still had a caboose at the end, and I always waved to the guys onboard and was thrilled when they waved back.

Dad was a hard-working auto mechanic who appreciated practical jokes. He could be strict, but I learned early in life that if he found humor in my endeavors away from careful adherence to the rules I was encouraged rather than disciplined. One time when I was about eight he tried to scare one of my friends by hiding a rubber lizard in her shoe, so I took revenge by hiding a fake centipede and some other toy insects on his pillow. The following night I went to bed and discovered these same critters on my pillow. Not to be outdone, the next night I waited about a half-hour before I went to bed and got an ice cube out of the freezer and put it on his pillow. Dad told me the next day he was surprised when he went to bed that half of his face was suddenly immersed in a cold, wet puddle. He congratulated me on my creativity and declared me the winner of the three day prank war; I guess he was fearful of what else my brain could devise at his expense. Victory was especially sweet when I heard him bragging to other grownups about the grand prank-plotting prodigy that his daughter was.

After nearly four years of being an only child I was joined by my brother Seth. I remember Daddy taking me to the hospital and holding me up to the nursery window so I could see the couple of babies in their little bassinets. Daddy told me to pick out which baby brother I wanted. *I got to pick?* I realized that as the firstborn I would have some special privileges but I had no clue that my power extended to the realm of getting to choose my own sibling. I carefully looked at all the babies, and I decided on a particular one. He stood out because his skin had a nice lemony tinge to it (which I later learned was jaundice), but mostly I picked this particular infant because there was just something about him that I liked. Amazingly, the baby I chose really was my brother! I adored my baby brother and felt very proud to be a big sister.

Let me start off with this disclaimer: since I was born in 1980, I don't remember much before 1983. But what I do remember of 1983 was awesome, and considering how young I was, is it any wonder that these early memories occur in short, colorful bursts? It seems that what I remember clearly are big and exciting events, like birthdays and Christmas mornings. My consistent memories of typical days don't start until I was closer to the age of five, so if the early memories I share in the next few paragraphs seem choppy and disconnected it's because that's how I remember them. So if some of this first chapter seems written in a somewhat spastic manner and revolves around toys and birthday cakes, I apologize. But in the spirit of writing truthfully and giving you a window into my early childhood, this is what it is. However, as I grew older and my capacity for remembering ordinary things, as well as my keen powers of observation and a carefully cultivated bratty streak grew the events of my childhood become more interesting. I had debated on whether or not I should include these few recollections, but since they help set the tone for my childhood I decided to keep them in.

I spent many happy birthdays in the 1980s. All of my birthdays were fantastic days because my Mom carefully planned every detail of each of my birthday parties and made sure I had lots of presents. Some of my earliest memories are of my third birthday. My third birthday stands out because my parents got me the best gift that I could ever have imagined: a metal swing set. It was beautiful! It had white metal poles with some of sort geometric design

stamped on it in blue and brown, which was very cool for that time. It had a sliding board, a teeter-totter, two swings, and something that I called a “space swing” (I’m not sure why, other than I sometimes used it as a rocket when I played astronaut), which were two bench style swings that faced each other and was big enough to seat four little kids, and a short metal bar that looked like a trapeze type of thing. Unfortunately I was far too clumsy and uncoordinated to use the trapeze swing but I had a lot of fun with the rest of the swing set. Some other awesome gifts I got that year included a real metal wagon from Papa Heasley, a plastic toy stove from my Uncle Jim that included play food, pans, and a green gingham bag to carry everything in that I cleverly used as a table cloth, and Smurf sheets for my big girl bed from my Gram Harman (I loved Smurfs!). I don’t remember my birthday cake or any of the games, but I remember the presents which means that I was somewhat caught up in the materialism that would later define the decade.

Another truly classic birthday I can remember was my 5th. I can’t imagine that any child in the 1980s had a cooler party than I did that year. It was 1985 and my Mom let me pick out all the paper table wear and party accessories. I went with Cabbage Patch Kids party hats, paper plates, paper table cloths, and hanging garland. My Mom ordered me a cake from her friend whom as a child I referred to as “The Cake Lady.” Her baking talent knew no bounds, she could decorate cakes in extraordinary ways and her recipe for icing is the best icing I’ve ever tasted in my life. For my 5th birthday The Cake Lady made me the coolest cake I had ever seen: Pac-Man. She made Pac-Man out of a round cake pan and covered three-quarters of him in yellow icing. The last quarter of his mouth was covered in chocolate icing, giving the impression that his mouth was open. I had no idea that you could mix white icing and chocolate icing together on the same cake and the levels of The Cake Lady’s confectionary genius left me astounded. But as cool as Pac-Man was, the ghosts were awesome. In addition to the cake she had made some cupcakes, but instead of merely icing the tops, she peeled the papers off and iced the whole, entire cupcake and transformed them into the little ghosts just like the ones in the Atari game. It was a great cake.

My presents that year were awesome. Mom and Dad got me the deluxe set of The Heart Family dolls, and the Heart Family Nursery play set, among other things. My beloved Gram Harman got me a Hello Kitty Hello Color doll that was stuffed with a sponge type of material so that you could take it in the swimming pool or bath tub. The best part was that Hello Kitty changed colors when she was submerged in water! No, the doll didn’t turn blue to look like she was drowning if that’s what you’re wondering - her clothes changed color. I loved that doll. Next to the Atari 800 Home Computer System I think she was the most technologically advanced toy I owned up until that point of my life. My Aunt Kelly got me “Fluff,” a little white cat for my Barbie® doll that came with a ton of accessories which were totally cool. Fluff even had his own room in my Barbie® doll’s house.

Other memorable 1980s birthday cakes included my 6th birthday when I had a Cabbage Patch Kid cake, my 8th birthday cake which had Pee-Wee Herman on it, along with Magic

Screen, Chairy and Clocky. Other memorable presents included my seventh birthday when I got a lavender plastic GE boom box that had an AM/FM radio *and* cassette player! It even came with headphones that stayed in a built-in storage space in the back and a three foot antenna. On my eighth birthday I got the Super Dough Snack Shop (the commercial had the coolest jingle) and a Fisher-Price Microscope set.

I hope that everyone can look back at their childhood and have good memories of their birthday parties, but there was just something special about being a kid in the 1980s.