

Dear Teen Me from author Suri Rosen (PLAYING WITH MATCHES)



Dear Teen Me,

In a flash of science fiction, I (your older self) have come back to give you one of the cheapest — but truthful — forms of wisdom. Hindsight.

Think of me as your Hindsight Fairy.

I'm here to help you do the disaster checklist of your miserable life. School? Check.
Um...everything else? Yep.

Okay, you're in a really good school — it's just *really* not a good school for you. The school day is nine hours long (yes, *nine*) with hours more of homework piled on. It's tiny with few course options and you are forced to take what's offered. (*Physics?* Why, I ask. *Why?*) While you have some truly wonderful teachers for art, French, and history, and a group of awesome friends, none of them can compensate for what effectively is incarceration with a pleated skirt.

(You will *never* be objective about Nova Scotia tartan again.)

On top of the thirteen-hour days, you're working on major piano and theory exams and you've started taking flute lessons - all privately, and out of the school. You're barely holding it together so you drop the flute and resort to writing harmony during class. Until the day Miss N. catches you at school and yanks your sheet music from under your desk and rips it to pieces. You feel like you're at the bottom of a well.

But strangely, sometimes miracles come in the form of orthodontists.

Your braces turn out to be a blessing in not-disguise, because every month when you go into the office to get them adjusted you swipe a pile of appointment cards. Each little amber card is filled with beautiful blank lines for you to write in your bogus appointments. It's your exit visa as you sign yourself out of school on a regular basis. Your parents don't know it and neither does the school, but you've essentially turned yourself into a part-time student, in a school where there is no such thing as a part-time student.

You've been saved by the Orthodontic Miracle - the Dr. Reinstein miracle, to be specific. (Didn't I read somewhere that if you save just one molar, it's like saving the whole world?)

With your newfound freedom, you explore downtown Toronto. You hang out at two fabulous bookstores, David Mirvish Books on Art, and Britnells. You immerse yourself in a universe of beauty, order, and limitless imagination. You fall in love with Picasso, Rousseau, and Vermeer.

You're dazzled by Bach, Louis MacNeice, Jacques Brel, and Erik Satie. You buy rush tickets to the symphony, even if no one wants to join you. (*Stravinsky*, Suri?) You binge on wind-quintet concerts like a huge tub of Rocky road ice cream.

And you write and write. Poems, stories, and plays pour out of you. Some are funny, some serious, some absurd, and some are very, very sad. You also paint and draw and especially love the technical pen, and your sketchbook is filled. You've found a refuge and it's a good one because you will go on to be a professional artist. You will create modern illuminated manuscripts inspired by medieval designs. You will live in Manhattan for a time and teach art and calligraphy at the 92nd Street Y, while you work on your commissions and exhibit your work at various shows.

But I have to warn you, Teen Me. Those neglected stories will never leave you alone. They'll haunt you and bring you regret.

And you will constantly encounter those stories scrawled on papers lurking everywhere – in the back of cupboards, on the bottom of drawers, in piles of old letters, and inside stacks of photos. They're like zombies trying to march back in. You ignore all the writing until you can't ignore them anymore and then you wonder why you ever abandoned them.

The fact is, and I know this sounds a bit strange, but no one ever bothered telling you that you're a writer. Or that you could be one.

But one day you will start writing again. You'll write non-fiction; news stories and features for newspapers and magazines. You'll meet fascinating and inspiring people with beautiful souls who change the world in quiet ways. You'll write a non-fiction book for kids and illustrate two board books. But here's something amazing. You ready?

You will publish a novel.

So here is where the Hindsight Fairy tries to set you straight. Don't ignore those voices in your head and abandon those stories. Right now you don't really believe that you can do it. But that's a mistake and it will lead you to re-focus your efforts. If I tell you to 'believe in yourself' and 'follow your dreams' I would actually be making a valid and relevant point, but we totally risk summoning the Cliché Fairy and after the years I spent writing my new novel, as well as drafts of two new ones, *I refuse to get the Cliché Fairy involved*.

So there.

I promise you'll get out of that well.

xox

Future You

P.S. In case your future teen-aged daughter is reading this, please disregard the above post: I never actually skipped school and was a perfect student.

[Suri Rosen's](#) debut novel [Playing with Matches](#) was released by ECW Press on September 1, 2014. Suri dabbles in many arts, but excels in daydreaming. She has worked as a professional artist, art teacher, filmmaker, journalist, and mini-documentary producer for a local television station. She lives in Toronto with her family and still gets spooked by Nova Scotia tartan.