

## Another Forgettable Day

Today is my seventy-first birthday. The kids called yesterday and asked, "What do you want to do tomorrow, Pops?"

"Nothing," I said.

They seemed relieved, which told me everything. Another birthday acknowledged, quickly forgotten by Tuesday. Just like the seventy before it. I can't remember what I did last year, or the year before that, or the year before that.

Well, that's not entirely true. Three years ago, the family gathered at the Italian restaurant that stayed open during the winter storm. It took nearly three hours to get served, the food arrived cold, and everyone left mad. I remember that one perfectly.

So, I recall the disaster, but not the pleasant ones. Is that really better than forgetting entirely?

Lately I find myself wondering about all those days that fade into nothing—even birthdays. I think of the obvious highs: weddings, births, graduations, the first real job. I remember the lows: deaths, divorce, the last job. But all those days in between? The thousands of ordinary Wednesdays and Fridays that made up the actual substance of my life?

Gone. All of it.

And here's what keeps me up now: how many more of these days—good, bad, or forgettable—do I actually have left?

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I did the math. Well, I estimated. At seventy-one, I've lived roughly 26,000 days. So how many do I actually remember?

Maybe a thousand, if I'm being generous. Probably closer to a hundred if I'm being honest. Let's call it five hundred and split the difference.

That means I've forgotten 25,500 days of my own life.

At the risk of sounding existential, did those days even happen? They must have. How else did I get from birth to seventy-one without them? Time marched on, with or without my participation. But there's something absurd about having lived through an experience and having absolutely no proof of it. It's like those trees falling in empty forests—except the forest is my life, and I wasn't even there to hear it.

Let me test this. Pick a random year—say, 2019. What did I do in 2019?

Nothing. I got nothing. Did I even exist in 2019, or was I some kind of hologram going through the motions?

Okay, fine. Let me try something more specific. What did I do in March 1983? No clue. What about March 2023? Also, nothing, and somehow that's worse. Forty years ago, I'd expect, but a few years in the past, there should be more.

Here's what I *can* remember from the 1980s: the jingle from the Doublemint gum commercial. "Double your pleasure, double your fun." That one stands out, but I can't remember a single Tuesday from 1987. I probably know more lyrics from TV commercials than I have memories of actual days I've lived.

Does this mean my memory is failing? Should I be worried? I've started paying attention to those Prevagen commercials. But honestly, I bet the thirty-year-olds can't remember March 2023 either. The difference is they'll have time to make up their forgettable months. I'm not so sure I do.

Twenty-five thousand five hundred days gone. That's seventy years of Tuesdays, Thursdays, and ordinary Saturdays. That's breakfast and lunch and dinner times twenty-five thousand. That's conversations and drives to work and evening television and all of it—all of it—vanished like it never happened.

The weird part? I'm not sure if I should be horrified or relieved.

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Questions like these deserve research, so I did what any rational person does in the twenty-first century: I Googled it.

I typed something generic into the search box: "Why do I forget most things in life and what should I do about it?" I didn't expect much—probably a list of wellness blogs and memory supplements.

But Google, in its infinite algorithmic wisdom, had a fairly poignant response:

"Forgetting the normal things in life threatens our sense of self and continuity."

Whoa. What does *that* mean?

I pressed further. Google elaborated: "When the filler scenes in life disappear, the story feels fragmented, leading to a fear that life is passing us by without truly being witnessed."

Who knew Google moonlighted as a psychiatrist?

Being a typical male, I couldn't let a problem exist without finding a solution. Google obliged with two options: First, the Zen approach: let the forgotten days pass. Don't stress about what you can't remember; trying to cling to every memory only causes anxiety. Second, the Stoic approach—strive to remember, not every detail, but the quality of your experiences. Journaling was highly recommended.

I've tried both.

The Zen approach works beautifully until it doesn't. I can let moments pass with equanimity, be present, live in the now, and then my next birthday arrives and I've still forgotten the entire year. So much for that.

The Stoic approach isn't much better. I've started journals countless times, mostly tied to New Year's resolutions. They usually make it to mid-February. And not once—not *once*—have I ever gone back and read my old journals to refresh my memory. They sit in a drawer somewhere, full of forgotten days that I forgot twice: once in real time, once in the journal.

So where does that leave me? With a dilemma and no solution?

Or maybe, and this took me seventy-one years to consider, maybe forgetting isn't actually the problem.

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I've been treating my memories like a highlight reel—keeping the anniversaries and big moments, editing out all those Tuesday afternoons doing laundry or quietly reading a book on the couch. Standard procedure for life, I thought.

But here's what I'm starting to realize: those edited-out moments? They weren't filler. They were the actual life I lived.

Take my marriage. Twenty years this past May—I remember that anniversary because I wanted to do something special—and she didn't. But you know what I don't remember? The thousands of mornings my wife and I bumped into each other in our tiny kitchen, doing that awkward dance where we'd go butt-to-butt to get around each other. I don't remember a single specific instance of that happening.

But it happened. Probably a thousand times.

I don't remember specific conversations we had over breakfast, or which Saturday we walked the dog in the park, or the particular evening we laughed at some stupid thing on TV. But those moments—the cumulative weight of all those forgettable moments—that's what a marriage actually *is*. The intimacy isn't in the anniversary trip. It's in the ten thousand forgotten mornings.

Same with raising kids. I remember their births, obviously. First days of school, graduations, weddings. But their actual childhood? Most of it is gone. I don't remember what we talked about at dinner on a random Thursday in 1995. I don't remember teaching them to ride bikes or helping with homework or any of the individual moments that supposedly mattered so much at the time.

But I was there. I did those things. And somehow, mysteriously, those forgotten days created the relationships I have now with my adult children. The vanished days weren't absences—they were the steady accumulation of love and presence that built something real.

Maybe that's what memory is actually for—not to preserve every day, but to let most days fade so the important pattern can emerge. I don't need to remember every conversation with my wife to know the shape of our life together. I don't need to remember every dinner with the kids to know I was there for them.

The forgettable days weren't wasted. They were life itself.

Here's the thing that keeps me up now at seventy-one: I'm running out of forgettable days. I don't know how many more Monday mornings I'll have, bumping into my wife in the kitchen. I don't know how many more unremarkable Saturdays I'll get. And the truth is, I'd take a thousand more forgettable days over the alternative.

I'd rather have another year I won't remember than no year at all.

Because that's what I've finally figured out: the forgettable days aren't the problem. They never were. They're just life, happening at its own pace, in its own quiet way. Most of it disappears, yes. But I was there. I lived it. And at seventy-one, that's enough.

Maybe it has to be.

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So here I am, back at today. My seventy-first birthday.

Will I remember this day any better than the previous seventy? Probably not. By next year, it'll be gone, just another vanished day in the pile.

But this afternoon, I'm cooking Rouladen—that German beef dish my mother used to make when I was a kid. She learned it when she and my dad lived in Germany after the war, and she'd make it for special occasions. It takes three hours to braise properly, and the whole house smells like my childhood.

I don't recall most of the times she made it. I probably ate it fifty times growing up, and I can recall maybe three specific instances. But I remember *her* making it. I remember standing in the kitchen watching her roll the beef around the bacon and pickles, the way she'd tie each one with string like she was wrapping a tiny present.

She's been gone thirty years now. I'll forget most of today, including this meal I'm making in her honor. But I'm here, in my kitchen, doing something she taught me, on a day that won't stick in my memory.

And somehow that's okay.

I doubt even writing this essay will make much difference in the grand scheme of things. A year from now, I'll probably forget writing it. But the important things are still here, and they're easy to sum up:

I'm alive. I'm seventy-one. I'm having another forgettable day.

And that's everything.