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**Naomi Jacobs**, 34, had been going through a tough time, but nothing could have prepared her for the shock of waking up trapped in the mind of her former teenage self, triggered by a rare form of stress-related amnesia **BY SOPHIE ELLIS**

# «One morning I woke believing I was 15 years old and still living with my parents»

On 17 April, 2008, I said goodnight to my 11-year-old son and went through my usual bedtime routine, reading a chapter of my book before turning out the lights – the ritual of an evening like any other. The next morning I woke in a strange room, in an unknown house – and when I looked in the mirror, I saw a new face staring back at me. In my sleep, the episodic part of my brain had shut down, and transported me back to 1992 – when I was just 15. I awoke expecting to see Tom Cruise posters on my walls, with my parents downstairs; instead I woke up 17 years older than I believed myself to be.

I found my way to a bathroom, passing a sleeping cat I didn't recognise and a room with a slumbering boy. Looking in the mirror, I saw crow's feet and laughter lines; I had an adult's face. Was I dreaming? Had I time-travelled into the future? Cold panic gripped me as I ran around the house looking for some clues as to where I was. A name and number popped into my head but, when I dialled it, I didn't recognise the woman's voice who answered. Nevertheless, I couldn't stop myself sobbing down the phone to her. I told her that I didn't know where I was and what was happening to me.

Fifteen minutes later, the same woman arrived at my door and, although I didn't recognise her, I had no choice but to trust her. Katie – a friend I'd known for years – remained calm and reassuring. She told me everything was going to be fine, and rang my sister Simone, who arrived soon after. They looked at me with a mixture of horror and confusion, but they both believed it was a blip – a temporary malfunction that would quickly resolve itself.

Katie and Simone babysat me and my son Leo during that first bizarre day, which was a maelstrom of misunderstand-

ings and confusion. I didn't understand the concept of mobiles or emails and spent a lot of time crying for the life I'd lost – the simple routine of school, my best friends, sneaky cigarettes and cider in the park with the bad boys we had crushes on. I couldn't even look at Leo. How could I have given birth to this boy when my mind was telling me he was only a few years younger than me?

**A day later, when I woke up for the second time believing I was in the future, Simone took me to the GP. I was diagnosed as having transient global amnesia.** But, my 15-year-old brain scoffed, doesn't amnesia just happen to victims of head trauma? Apparently not. I was told that in the period running up to that fateful morning, I had been under severe stress. I'd been suffering from a stomach virus, followed by aggressive tonsillitis, topped off with an emotional break-up. My body couldn't take the strain and, to protect itself, my brain had taken me back to a safe and secure place in time. While my semantic memory remained intact, meaning I could remember how to drive, my pin number and regularly used phone numbers (thank goodness), the past 17 years of my emotional memories were gone. I was told they could take anything from four weeks to eight months to reappear. In the end, they showed themselves at eight weeks, but it took six months before my memory fully returned.

My doctor insisted I didn't read newspapers, watch television or force myself to remember – it had to happen naturally. But like any petulant teen, I couldn't help myself and curiosity to see how the world had turned out got the better of me. It was mortifying – reality TV, which seemed to be on every channel, was baffling and my sister had to painstakingly



PHOTOGRAPH: CLAIRE WOOD.  
HAIR AND MAKE-UP: TALLY BOOKBINDER

explain 9/11 to me. I was dumbfounded, but learning about my personal history would prove to be even harder to swallow.

Luckily, I had kept 20 years of diaries and journals, which I avoided reading at first as I was worried that my road to adulthood would be a disappointment. But deep down, I wanted to know how I'd grown into the person I'd become, so I switched off the television, threw away all newspapers and magazines and launched myself into my past. I learnt I was a single mother and had never been married. I had had a 13-hour labour and Leo was born in water to the sound of Alanis Morissette. I used to have my own successful holistic therapy business and I had a degree in psychology.

It took eight weeks for my mind to settle itself back in the present. And although it was a rollercoaster, I'm grateful for being unceremoniously hurtled forward in time. It's given me the chance to rediscover myself and remember the things that were important to me when I was younger – imagination, creativity and writing. It also helped me realise that today is the future – and if it isn't the one you pictured as a child or teen, then do something about it. I am.»

*Naomi Jacobs has written a novel based on her experiences, as yet unpublished*