

Terrible Memory

A monologue
By Adrian Clayton

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Characters

ADRIAN, 20, male, a young man attending UC Santa Cruz and majoring in game design. He wears plain but comfortable clothes, and glasses.

Setting

June 28th, 2023. An indoor theater, being occupied by a class on playwriting. The context of the scene is a pre-written monologue, performed for the class.

SCENE 1

Cheap yellow lighting illuminates a stage containing a single wooden stool and a microphone stand. There is silence. ADRIAN enters from stage left. He stops at the stand, removing the wireless mic. The fumbling is amplified by the equipment. He takes a step back, then leans forward as an afterthought to slide the now-empty stand to the side. He sits in the stool, which appears slightly too short, and hikes one leg up on one of the stool's crossbars. He holds the microphone in his right hand, bringing it to his mouth. He stops, tilts it away to clear his throat, then moves it back into position.

ADRIAN

I've always had a terrible memory.

(pause, then casually)

There was going to be a joke here: "as long as I can remember, I couldn't." Too pithy, don't you think?

ADRIAN adjusts his position on the stool, leaning forward. He rests his right elbow on his knee.

See, when your memory is really terrible, you notice it a lot. School assignments are one. "Write about a time you..." — always struggled with those. Events just don't... stick in my mind. How they're supposed to. It's not just that, though. Names — I'm terrible with names. I compare myself to other people. For me, it takes... five,

seven times seeing someone? Before I have a decent guess. So I warn people, when I meet them. I say "Great! I'm not gonna remember that." Cheerfully, you know? Just so they know.

(pause)

And I can actually guess why I'm like this. See, my memory for "Things That Happen" starts... maybe halfway through middle school. That's when I can actually, like, experience remembering stuff. And that makes for a funny kind of dynamic, because I find out about the first decade of my life from other people.

ADRIAN adjusts his position once more. He switches which foot is hiked up, straightening up.

I feel like I should clarify. This isn't amnesia. I didn't, like, get in a car crash at the age of 10. This is just a really bad memory. It's like bad eyesight. Which I also have.

ADRIAN gestures with the microphone to his glasses.

Anyway, my theory. So what I'm told happened – because, well, you get it by now – is that elementary school really wasn't fun for me. I didn't know how to interact with people – how to talk with people, you know? Part of that was probably ASD, but who knows how much. I do remember one time – and this is pretty much my only memory before the age of 12-ish, which is kinda sad. During one of the rougher periods, I was trying to figure it out, and I made the comparison that it was like everyone thought I had some disease. In hindsight, probably super exaggerated. A confused kid. But that's not a great thing for an eight-year-old to be thinking!

ADRIAN chuckles.

So there's the theory. Having a really-not-great time, so your brain goes "Shut it down!" "Stop remembering things", you know.

That's my best guess, anyway.

ADRIAN pauses, and again
adjusts his position.

I don't really like talking about this. Not because it makes me uncomfortable or anything, don't worry. But, like, it's a sad thing to think about, isn't it? And that's the thing.

I'm not a sad person. That stuff is way in the past. Me, now? I'm doing great. Cheerful, good self esteem, take care of my mental health – all that stuff.

And that's what's weird about it. That kid is so far from who I am now. And I don't remember being him. It feels like a different person.

Maybe my brain made the right call.

So that's why I get worried talking about it: It feels like it gives the wrong impression. A story like that doesn't really tell you much about who I am now, because "who I am now" didn't even really go through any of that.

I just have the side effects.

Reflection

I didn't really notice much difference from doing a physical warmup—I do a lot of writing in general, so maybe I'm just generally used to the process already. If I experiment more with this I'll let you know how it goes.

I do have some general reflection notes, though, which I figured I should put here (otherwise I'd just be adding them as Canvas comments). This was my first time doing any kind of playwriting (my focus up to this point has pretty much been prose and video game dialogue), and I actually had a lot of fun with it. I do like playing with formatting, so that was part of it, but in general it was just a fun exercise/way to be thinking about how I'm writing.

The original draft of this was well over 800 words, so I had to do a *lot* of editing to get it down to 500. Took some effort, but I'm pretty happy with the end result. That said, there *is* a caveat: According to Google Docs' word count, this monologue is *exactly* 500 words, *if you don't count any of the stage directions*. Hopefully I haven't overstepped too much with that. And if I have, hopefully the content itself is good enough to make up for it.