



Lessons From Lucy: Reunion Questions, Creating Time Portals, and Helping People Witness Themselves in Narrative Therapy

Travis Heath, Rowan Ramsey, Luke Riley, and Fernando Ocampo-Gomez

heatht@msudenver.edu

“... the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.” ~ T.S. Eliot in ‘Tradition and Individual Talent,’ *The Egoist*, 1919

I (Travis) remember the first video I saw of David Epston using what I later came to understand as Internalized Other Questions (IOQs). I was taken aback by the direction the questions went. I recall David interviewing a person as if she were her grandmother. Most astonishingly, David didn’t even “set-up” the line of questioning. He just more or less started asking the woman questions as though she were her grandmother. I remember feeling a jolt of energy tingling down my spine followed by a breakout of goose bumps across my body. I must admit, though, I was just as confused by what I was watching as I was energized.

A couple years removed from this now I sometimes wonder if David sent some of these interviews to me purposefully knowing that they would tickle my mind in a way I could not ignore. These questions were like none I had ever witnessed before even in narrative practice. For whatever reason, I am almost magnetically attracted to lines of inquiry that are different. Perhaps it’s because I have found such lines of inquiry to be mandatory in helping those who come to see me who have been “therapized,” a term a former client of mine gifted me for persons who have seen many therapists previously. It has been my experience that those who have been therapized are keen to the ways of psychology and the practices of mental health. They can almost smell the script and what is to come next and become bored and frustrated with it rather quickly. As such, I’m always looking for ways to shake up the experience of the therapized, and Internalized Other Questions have helped me do exactly that.

Of course, it’s one thing to want to ask a new genre of questions. It’s something entirely different to do so with any semblance of success. It took me at least six months of practicing IOQs with people who consulted me before I felt like they were going much of anywhere. Initially, I found myself riddled with doubt and I spent way too much time “setting them up.” It was if the people I was having conversations with could sense my discomfiture, and as such, were even more discomfited than I was. As you can imagine, such conversations were halting





and I often aborted them soon after we had begun. When I called on enough gumption to just jump into the questions, I found that people responded in turn.

As IOQs can be a bit challenging to understand in the abstract, here is an example of a series of IOQs I asked a person we will call “Shawn.” Shawn’s father had died over a year prior to this conversation. Just a few months after his father’s death in 2015, pain made Shawn believe that he had no other choice than to drink large amounts of alcohol. One evening he was pulled over for driving while intoxicated. As a result, a judge mandated that he be on probation for at least 18 months. His probation officer sent him to see me a short time later. In one of our conversations I learned about the importance of Shawn’s best friend Rachel. He said that she knew him better than anyone else. In this particular meeting something was starting to percolate in Shawn’s life. His spirits were quite a bit higher and he had recently cut his trademark long hair, something he hadn’t done since before his father’s death. What follows is an example of me interviewing Shawn’s ‘internalized other’ version of his best friend Rachel. Remember, Rachel isn’t actually in the room. Instead, this is Shawn embodying Rachel and speaking as though he were her.

Travis: Rachel, Shawn has told me that the two of you are quite close and that no one knows him better than you do. Given that you haven’t seen him in person since December being away at school, what do you notice about him now that is a bit different than in April?

Shawn as Rachel: He cut his hair. I know that anytime he cuts his hair something is going on.

T: Yes! He hadn’t cut his hair in almost 2 years. He hadn’t cut his beard, either! Rachel, what has history taught you about what a haircut and shaving of the beard mean for Shawn?

S as R: It means he’s growing.

T: I find this really interesting, Rachel! Is it okay if I ask you more about this?

S as R: Sure.

T: Rachel, are you saying that when Shawn’s hair gets shorter his spirit is expanding?

S as R: Yeah, I have always known him to be doing a lot of painting during these times. He loves painting. That’s when he’s back to the real Shawn.

T: Rachel, Shawn has described the final few months of 2015 after his father died as a “brutal winter.” Have you noticed anything else lately that has let you know the real Shawn is blooming for spring?

S as R: He’s back on his bike again. Shawn always used to ride bikes with his dad for hours at a time, but there was a time last year where he didn’t ride much at all.





T: Rachel, given that Shawn has weathered the most difficult of blizzards this last winter, what do you think this will mean for the other blizzards that mother nature inevitably will send his way throughout the seasons still to come in his life?

S as R: I think he will weather them better. I mean, there will still be times where it's windy and cold, but... what do they call it... like the weather people on TV use the term to describe when it's hard to see outside?

T: Is it visibility?

S as R: Yeah! There will still be moments of decreased visibility, but he will be able to find his way better during this time.

T: IS IT Almost like this last blizzard has equipped him with a winter sonar system that will help him find his way even when his vision is obstructed?

S as R: Exactly.

About a year into using IOQs as a staple of my interviewing practices, I started asking questions that I had taken for granted as being simply IOQs. However, when David read an excerpt of a transcript from one of my interviews, he noticed something different that I had failed to recognize. Via email he asked: "Travis, what are these???" Initially I feared that he might be admonishing me for a poor job of adapting IOQs to my work. He continued: "I have never seen these before!!!" I wrote back: "I guess they are kind of an Internalized Other Question where the internalized other is a past version of one's self." David said that we must come up with a name for these in order to distinguish them from IOQs. Nothing immediately came to mind, but David emailed me back within 24 hours to propose the name 'Reunion Questions'. I was instantaneously attracted to the name, and this is the working title we have given such questions.

I originally started asking Reunion Questions to virtually every person I was working with who had been referred to me by local probation offices in my area. As our work was drawing to a close, something in me wanted to be able to have a conversation with the person who originally came to see me some months prior and the person who was sitting in front of me now. It simply wasn't enough to take a quick trip down memory lane. It wasn't visceral enough. I had the sense that we actually needed to bring that person from some months ago back into the room somehow. This was the genesis of Reunion Questions, and they are now a part of my interviews with (almost) everyone I have conversations with at some point in our journey together.





The results have, quite frankly, been stunning. When people are invited into a reunion with prior versions of themselves they often see things or say things about their current selves that they otherwise wouldn't have. It is as if a mechanism for time travel has been established.

In my work as a supervisor I have heard any number of supervisees say when introduced to Reunion Questions, "Oh yeah, I do these kind of questions." Without exception, though, I have found that they stop one step short. They ask a person what a prior version of themselves might think or say, but they do it by having the current iteration of the person give the answer. The magic in this line of inquiry, as I strongly suspect is also the case with IOQs, is when it becomes not simply a cognitive exercise, but an exercise of time travel where the person actually responds from the embodied presence of an earlier version of themselves. I might equate this to seeing a picture of Machu Picchu in Peru. Without question, the picture is beautiful, maybe even stunningly so. However, when one is actually hiking the magnificent Inca fortress once occupied by emperor Pachacuti, the magic becomes experience near and the person can feel it in their body in ways they can't when simply seeing a picture or thinking about it afterwards. For a reunion question to have maximum impact, we would do well to invite the person to hike the incredible terrain again rather than to simply show them a picture and reminisce about what it was like when they once hiked it. When people can assume the position of their former selves and give voice and body to them in the present, only then can the full value of the reunion be realized. I use the word "body" intentionally, as it is not uncommon for people to hold their bodies differently when responding to IOQs or Reunion Questions than the ways they might hold their bodies when being the current iteration of themselves.

Take for example the story of a person we will call 'Arnold'. Arnold was 33 years of age when he came to see me and had felt under the control of depression for going on two years. As he sat on the couch in our first meeting his body slumped over almost as if it was soaking wet and thus too heavy to assume a regular sitting position. As I came to learn more about Arnold I discovered that he was once infused with an adventurous spirit the likes of which I had seen very few times before. He told me stories of hiking some of the world's largest mountains, sailing across the Pacific Ocean by himself, and canvassing glaciers that had seen only very minimal human interaction. The content of the stories was mesmerizing. However, 33-year-old Arnold told them while under the influence of depression, and thus, the tenor of the stories was similar to someone telling you what they ate for breakfast when they've eaten the same thing every day for the last decade. The pitch of his voice never changed. His eyebrows stayed stationary. His body remained slumped over in despair. It was as if he was reading the stories off a cue card. This is when I decided to invite 25-year-old Arnold into the room. I chose this time because it was fresh off a trip across the Pacific Ocean on a sailboat he manned completely on his own. It took a couple of minutes for 25-year-old Arnold to begin to become





embodied in the room, but once he did, it was like speaking to a different person. I saw Arnold hold his back up straight for the first time since I had met him. He leaned forward in his chair, and there was a distinct twinkle in his eye that I had never witnessed before. He spoke quicker and with more purpose. He made motions with his arms as if to show a neophyte sailor like myself how I might begin to navigate the open ocean. It was (as if) I could see the life being breathed back into him. To my astonishment, I learned in our next meeting that Arnold had hiked a 14er (a mountain over 14,000 feet in elevation) for the first time in over a year after having been reintroduced to 25-year-old Arnold. It started to become clear that perhaps the best elixir for depression was a visit from an old friend, a friend who just so happened to be an earlier version of himself.

In the spirit of practice transparency and showing the work in action, what follows is a 'reunion interview' with a woman who we will call 'Lucy'. Lucy was 26 years old at the time of the interview. This story is shared with her permission and was co-authored.

Per Lucy's words, she had seen "countless therapists" over the years. She had originally come to see me with complaints of "anxiety." After our first meeting when Lucy began to get the sense that she might invest in our work together she made two requests of me:

(1) "Don't worry about me. I hate when people worry about me." (2) "Don't tell me I'm strong."

In the spring of 2016 Lucy began to really confront her anxiety. She called it 'The Bully'. The Bully requested that Lucy not attend school or work a job on the grounds that if she did, she would fail and look like a fool in front of everybody. The Bully also convinced her that if anything went wrong, it was exclusively her fault. After three or four months of regular meetings Lucy started to get an upper-hand on the Bully. She began working a job again and was enjoying as much success in college as she could remember. Near the end of this chapter of our work she did make reference to the fact that she still had a relationship with alcohol that she didn't like, but nevertheless, she believed that she had gotten what she wanted out of our meetings and was ready to go it alone.

In the winter of 2016, Lucy returned. The Bully began making a bit of a comeback. Moreover, Lucy resolved that she never arrived at the relationship with alcohol that she desired, and thus she wanted to focus a bit more on developing that in this new chapter of our work together. After a few months, The Bully had again lost the hold it had on Lucy. Still, curiously, alcohol played a larger role in Lucy's life than she would have preferred. We began looking at ways that she might rebel against The Bully's mandate that she must drink alcohol to be a person that other people would like to be friends with. This reunion conversation took place on the heels of Lucy going out to a rather large event in the city where she resides where pretty much everyone drinks to the point of intoxication or beyond. Lucy, however, did not do that on this occasion. While she was able to acknowledge that this was a step in the direction she wished to





travel, she didn't seem to truly grasp the magnitude of the change until she had a conversation with a previous version of herself. As a point of context, we chose Lucy from July of 2016 as the version to reunite with because that was the very month when our previous work had concluded prior to Lucy (deciding to focus) on changing her relationship with alcohol.

1. Travis: Lucy from July 2016, when you look at Lucy of April 2017, what do you most admire about her?

Lucy: I admire her confidence and that she is able to be independent from the group. She feels okay with who she is.

2. T: Lucy from July 2016, are you in any way surprised by some of the stories you've heard from Lucy of today during our conversation this afternoon?

L: Yes! I would have thought it would take her two or three years to get where she is.

3. T: Lucy from July of 2016, what do you think it says about Lucy of today that she was able to do in one year with her relationship with alcohol what it might reasonably take people two, even three years or longer to accomplish?

L: She used to think of herself as small and fragile. Now she can stand up for herself because she knows herself better. She is better at knowing The Bully and not being consumed by it. She will punch back now. She doesn't give The Bully too much time or energy like she used to.

4. T: Lucy from July of 2016, what are the parts that most invigorate you when listening to Lucy of today?

L: That she likes herself more. She's more open to things and more comfortable being who she is with the knowledge that not everyone is going to like her and that's okay. I mean, I would want to be her friend. I would say, "Who is that?" I want to be like that. I want to be that confident and open without the protection of being drunk.

5. T: Lucy from July of 2016, imagine that you were friends with Lucy of today. Do you have any ideas about what the relationship might teach you?

L: Be more present. Be in that second... like that very second. I think she would help me be more social and not doubt myself so much, you know, just the way that she is.

6. T: Lucy from July of 2016, if you could ask one question of Lucy of today what question would you most like to ask?

L: Where did this self-esteem come from and when did she finally accept herself?

7. T: Lucy from July of 2016, what about Lucy of today's way of being lets you know she accepts herself?





L: Look at her shoulders. She holds them high and her head is not staring at the floor. It's like she is open to the world.

8. T: Hey, Lucy of 2016, would it be okay if we posed the question you wanted to pose to Lucy of today?

L: Yeah, sure. (smiling)

9. T: Lucy of today, where did this self-esteem come from and when did you finally accept yourself?

L: That's a big question!

10. T: I know. I have to be honest, a wise friend of mine from the past spoon-fed me that question.

L: (Laughs) It's important not to hide parts of yourself, even the weird parts. If you just let those parts out and own them, people will just begin to let you be who you are and not try and spend so much time changing you into someone you're not.

11. T: Lucy of 2016, does this wisdom ring true in any way to you?

L: Yes. It's the wisdom I always needed to hear.

12. T: Lucy of today, would it be okay if we went back and read the account of how Lucy of 2016 experienced you today?

L: Sure.

TRAVIS READS EACH ANSWER BACK TO LUCY IN ORDER

13. T: I'm just guessing here, Lucy, so I know I could be wrong, but do you feel even a little in awe of yourself after hearing that?

L: Yeah (tears begin rolling down her cheeks). It's just because it seemed so hard.

14. T: May I ask Lucy of 2016 one more question?

L: Of course.

15. T: Lucy of 2016, what do you think it says about Lucy of today that she was able to do something so hard?

L: She's strong.

(Pause with no talking for about thirty seconds).





16. T: Lucy of today, I know what kind of relationship you've had with that word strong before. Would it be fair to say that it's a word that has been very hard for you to hear directed towards you in the past?

L: Yes. Very much so.

17. T: Lucy of today, what's it like to hear Lucy of 2016 use that word to describe you?

L: I can't even believe it. It's like I just called myself strong. I never would have guessed in a million years I would say that about me.

18 T: Lucy of today, given the impact her words have had, would you like to invite Lucy of 2016 to stay around as a consultant in our future conversations? Do you think she might help us understand aspects of you that even the two of us might otherwise miss?

L: I mean, of course. I'm just speechless.

19. T: I just want to extend my sincere thanks to Lucy of 2016. This work would not have been possible without you.

A: (nods as if to say thank you).

20. T: Might I also take a moment to thank you, Lucy, for being so kind as to hear out Lucy of 2016 even though I know some of what she was saying might have surprised you in ways neither of us could have imagined just a few minutes ago.

L: Thank you. Thank you for doing this.

Something I try and avoid when having a reunion conversation is the potential pitfall of speaking to a previous iteration of the person as though she is in some way inferior to the current one. My hope in this case was that I could treat Lucy from July of 2016 as an important and active contributor to Lucy's recent achievements in her identity. One so important, in fact, that we literally could not have arrived at the current iteration of Lucy without her.

In addition, I've found reading the questions and responses back to the person to be of profound importance. The deft work of David and Tom Carlson and their Insider Witnessing practices (http://www.journalnft.com/uploads/9/4/4/5/94454805/jnft_2017_full_release.pdf)

has demonstrated that it is very hard, if not impossible, for someone to be themselves and witness themselves at the very same time. As such, David and Tom were hoping to find a way to help people experience themselves as both an 'insider and outsider' to their stories and





experiences. Reunion conversations hope to do something similar and pull people out of themselves so that they can witness themselves in a way that they simply can't when they are *being* themselves.

Reading back the responses to the person helps to deepen this experience of pulling a person outside of themselves. Lucy noted in a conversation we had after this interview that it would have been very unlikely she would have used the word "strong" to describe herself, especially given her particular aversion to the word, had I simply asked her questions about herself. Moreover, had I not re-read her responses back to her so she could experience them outside of herself, she suggested that she would have been far less likely to ever use such a word. In that sense, this reunion conversation led to a remarkable outcome. It was as though Lucy was calling herself strong due to the fact that she was able to observe herself as she actually was and not how someone else has told her she was or should be. In fact, she noted that people told her she was strong quite frequently and that only intensified her feelings of disdain for the word and for people "worrying" about her. I might humbly suggest that while IOQs provided the framework that helped give birth to Reunion Questions, these questions might rightfully reside in the same spirit or genre as Insider Witnessing practices, which David and Tom argue might very well be cutting to the heart of narrative therapy.

The reunion conversation with Lucy happened two and a half weeks before the Therapeutic Conversations 14 conference in Vancouver, Canada in late April of 2017. Lucy was gracious enough to insist that we use the transcript as part of the presentation given her belief in the insight it might offer therapists who are working with what she refers to as therapized persons. Two days before the conference, I had a conversation with Lucy about the reunion conversation from our last meeting. In a wild turn of serendipity, it hit me that I would love to talk to a version of Lucy from the future. I had never tried anything quite like this before, so this was my very first go at it. The end result, not as though I had planned it this way in advance when the idea struck me, was that we ended up with three different versions of Lucy in the room all at once. I've taken to calling these "Futures of the Present" questions. The word futures instead of future signals an important distinction, as the goal is not to describe a single, linear future, but rather, any number of futures the person might experience in their future.

1. Travis: Lucy, I know in our last meeting we spoke with Lucy from July of 2016. Might I ask you how you reflect on that conversation eleven days later?





Lucy: It was like the weirdest conversation I've ever had. You know, a lot of people have told me I'm strong or whatever, but when it comes from other people it's easy to brush aside. It's easy to say, "Oh, they're just trying to be nice."

2. T: Did you experience it a bit differently coming from Lucy of 2016 instead of from some other person?

L: Being from myself, it has more validity to it. I don't think I could just brush it off even if I wanted to. It's weird and I can't even believe I'm saying this, but I still believe what I said about me last time. I believe that it's true. I know it. I can feel it in my bones. The whole thing has been like a weight off my shoulders. After talking about me then and me now, I'm a person that I like way more.

3. T: Do you have any sense of how our conversation last time has impacted The Bully?

L: The Bully sees me as tougher competition, that's for sure.

4. T: Hey Lucy, I just had a wild idea. As always, please tell if you don't think this idea is worth pursuing and I will not be in the least bit offended if you don't think it is. What if we talked to Lucy from the future?

L: (Big smile)

5. T: If that smile could speak, what would it say?

L: It would say, yes!

6. T: What future version of Lucy should we interview? I mean, we could do two days, two weeks, twenty years and on and on. What do you think might prove most helpful, Lucy?

L: Well, we did one year into the past, so why don't we do one year into the future?

7. T: That sounds like a tremendous idea! Would it be alright if we began?

L: (nods her assent with a curiously excited facial expression)

8. T: Lucy of 2018, would you be so kind as to bring us up to speed on how life looks for you right now given that this is the first time we've ever spoken with you?

L: There is more independence. I see it more in work and personally. I'm financially independent. I don't have to lean on others to be happy or live my life.

9. T: Lucy of 2018, are there any events that have transpired that might surprise those of us who still reside in the year 2017?





L: I have a job that's full-time and demanding... (pauses as if waiting to deliver an unexpected plot twist) and I still *love* it.

10. T: Wow! Lucy of 2018, I don't know if you recall, but there was a time when Lucy of 2016 didn't believe that she would ever be able to work a full-time job. This is just beyond words exciting, wouldn't you agree, Lucy of today?!?

L: It is like odd, but it definitely makes me happy. I guess I never really entertained it before because I didn't think it would ever be possible.

11. T: Hey, Lucy of 2018, do you mind if I inquire about what the job is?

L: I'm working for the state and doing research, but I know that I'll be going back to grad school in the future and I'm excited about it instead of scared.

12. T: Isn't that something?!? Can you believe that, Lucy of today?

L: (tears begin slowly coming down her face) I've never been able to imagine that until now.

13. T: Lucy of today, how does it look when you imagine it?

L: (tears still flowing) It looks... beautiful. Like the one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen.

14. T: (tears begin) Beautiful, indeed.

(Lucy and Travis crying together in silence for 60 seconds or so).

15. T: Lucy of today, I'm just speculating here and I know I could be wrong, but is it possible that Lucy of 2018 has just taught both of us a lesson today about doing the undoable?

L: I think so.

16. T: Lucy of 2018, given that you are an expert at making the impossible possible, is there any particular wisdom or advice you might offer Lucy and I of today as our work together is scheduled to come to an end at the conclusion of our meeting in just a few minutes?

L: You're capable of anything you want to do. At least give it a shot and try it. It will pay off.

17. T: Lucy of today, if you were to take to heart the wisdom that was just so graciously lent to us by Lucy of 2018, what do you think it would mean for your life?

L: It would mean I could be everything I want to be... actually, more than I want to be or thought I could be.

18. T: Lucy of today, what might happen if you were to carry forward Lucy of the past and Lucy of the future as consultants in your endeavors outside of the work you and I have been





doing? I know this might sound weird, but could you have conversations with them when you needed to?

L: I mean, I guess they've always been in there, right? To be honest, I don't know why I didn't have conversations with them sooner.

19. T: Lucy of today, if you had both of them onboard as consultants, do you think 'impossible' might continue to make its way to 'possible' in your life?

L: Yes, I mean, I have no doubt that would be true.

20. T: Lucy, I just want to tell you the immense amount of pride I feel in the work we've done together. It has been my distinct honor to ride shotgun on this journey with you. Thank you for allowing me to accompany you. It has most assuredly changed me – not just me as a “therapist” (air quotes) but also me as a human. Thank you.

L: Thank *you*. I don't have the right words. Just... thank you so much! I just wish everyone could come do this. It saved my life.

While there is quite a bit from this last exchange that we might discuss, I am drawn immediately to one line. After the second question Lucy replied that she could feel the wisdom imparted by Lucy of 2016 “in her bones” because it was an embodied response. Would this have been possible, to extend the previous metaphor, if we just showed her a picture of Machu Picchu and she didn't once again feel the sweat on her brow as she hiked the extraordinary terrain? Lucy's response was a resounding no.

There is much talk about the present moment in the mindfulness movement and in other areas of psychology and the broader helping fields. The ability to stay in the present moment no matter how one might be feeling is often thought of as an ideal that we must be striving to embrace. However, the current moment can be as stifling as it can be exhilarating. When it becomes stifling, we can be imprisoned by it, even feeling paralyzed. Knowing intellectually that this moment won't last forever, as we all inevitably realize at some level, I have found is of little consolation to most. Could it be that becoming a time-traveler and leaving the current moment could somewhat paradoxically help people see themselves in the current moment in ways they can't while they are 'being' in that moment? Instead of focusing so hard on being in the moment, what if we all carried with us as consultants our past and future selves? Perhaps as Lucy noted, we already do. The more interesting question then might be: what if we choose to consult and perhaps even embody these selves when the current moment begins to feel insoluble? Might it offer us a kind of wisdom, that as Lucy noted, we “couldn't brush off even if (we) wanted to?”





As a child growing up I lived in a house that was quite literally (as any of my childhood friends will attest to) lined with books from floor to ceiling in virtually every room save the kitchen and bathroom. My late father's favorite genre was science fiction. As an adolescent I much preferred reading non-fiction, mostly autobiographies. I remember once asking my father why he liked science fiction so much since the storylines were based on something that "wasn't true." The example I brought up specifically was the idea of time travel, almost mocking the possibility that this could ever be realized. He replied with his trademark brevity: "Well, son, most everything was once thought to be untrue until someone conceived that it wasn't." I'm sure somewhere my father is smiling, in the way wise fathers do, now that I have discovered the merits of time travel in my own life.

My co-collaborators, Rowan Ramsey, Luke Riley, and Fernando Ocampo-Gomez spent many, many hours during the first four months of 2017 living with and scrutinizing my attempts at Reunion Questions. Other than Lucy, I can't think of three people better positioned to talk about their experiences with these questions. What follows are short reflections on the relationships they have formed with reunion questions and time travel.

Reflections from Rowan Ramsey

Having a conversation with one's past self is like getting the advice you always hope your friends will have for you. Lucy says it perfectly, "It's the wisdom I always needed to hear." It's deeply comforting and affirming, and it's really rather amusing and strange, which is part of the magic. As I have been having conversations with myself, I always find a smile growing on my face throughout. It feels like "of course! This was here all along, how could I forget? And how fortunate I am to be reminded of it now!" When I was in the last few weeks of the semester, Rowan from January – the Rowan who was so pumped full of energy and joy for the semester – was a welcome friend. She knew *exactly* what I needed to hear in my darkest moments of doubt, frustration, and self-criticism. She helped me chunk tasks into manageable pieces, she reminded me it's okay for me to not be perfect; she gave me permission to be upset without the upset taking over; she gave me energy and hope. As I reunite with myself more, I find my past selves branching out towards me, asking for a chance to share their tales and be heard. Rowan of January had that unmistakable Infinite Excitement for School Wisdom; I wonder what wisdom Rowan of a year ago has? What about Rowan who welcomed her sister into the world 5five years ago? And Rowan who traveled alone for a month after graduating high school? We have a well of experiences stored in our bodies! Our past selves can help us navigate new and difficult situations; they can comfort us; they can remind us of things we have long forgotten; they can serve as council. And what about the wisdom Rowans of the Future hold? I'm due for a conversation with Rowan who has forgiven her mom. I'm certain she will have some important





insights for me. And I would love to have a chat with Graduate School Rowan! We can invite these practices into our everyday lives by starting a conversation, “Hey, it’s me. It’s been a while, hasn’t it? Let me fill you in...”

Reflections from Luke Riley

Whatever happened to that gentle smile, framing the innocent eyes that were warmly sparked with the glint of its bashful youth? It’s been almost a year now since I have revisited my baby and childhood photos, but I can still remember the powerful inquiries stirred about as I curiously unshelved the picture books from my closet. This magnetism as I turned through the pages afforded a type of stillness, quieting the time around me. I was no longer in my room, but rather existing as that child, and as others observing that child. What was it that I lost so long ago? A forgotten beauty sheathed from the spite of embracing too personally the undeniable torments of this world. Has this world finally accomplished its mission of darkening this ripe kindled light? No, I live as the embodiment of its revolt whispered to me that day. A personal shining endearment towards resonating with that one thing in childhood I never thought I could lose. Something without a name, personally formulated and explored when childlike wonderment was at its prime.

When I came upon Lucy’s reunion questions I had that same feeling again of immortalizing a bond previously unspoken. More than that, these reunions are an attempt at immortalizing a theory of self that can be called upon anytime with the right inquires and mindset of course. We can forever be changed by those that we carry with us on the inside, and who better to carry with you than yourself? Lucy now carries just exactly that inside of her. She is no longer Lucy of ‘now’. She is Lucy from a year ago plus Lucy of now. Just like I am no longer Luke of now, I am Luke of a ripe childlike wonderment plus Luke of today. Although I am a fan of mathematics, I cannot say what these different perspectives added together equate to. Perhaps that is a benefit of reunion questions; there is a potential greater than the sum of its parts, and should not be limited by formulaic designs in explaining its exploration. A spiraling staircase of self-generative beauty appearing to organize the entropy of subjective life by personal laws known only through this reunion experience. The present is my vehicle for time travel; asking advice mediates my passage in time. Traveling back I can remember; traveling forward I am allowed to forget. In forgetting all the hardships of searching for lost time, the future is met at its dimly lit horizon with just enough light to encourage the yearning ventures of life yet begotten.

Reflections from Fernando Ocampo-Gomez

I remember the first time I was presented with reunion questions, I thought the nerdiest thing: *this is straight out of Doctor Who!*





For those who aren't familiar with the show, it's about the adventures of a humanoid, time-traveling alien; whenever he has been fatally injured, he goes through a spectacular transformation, changing everything about himself including appearance. Not only that, but there are several episodes where he literally encounters his former versions of himself. I always loved these episodes because it's magic to see how the same person, the same consciousness, could be so different in different points in time; these version also learn so much from their interactions with each other, even if it is *the same consciousness* meeting itself.

So imagine how exciting it was to be introduced to a form of narrative therapy that encapsulated this very idea! That all of us could have a conversation with ourselves from the past and recognize that they can still provide valuable insight; Lucy of a year ago, or Fernando of 2013, still have much to offer. Perhaps the biggest lesson I learned, and perhaps Lucy did as well, was understanding that my past self is in awe of the accomplishments I have made. It drives hope into us because then we think: what will our current selves think when we become 'the past self?' What will Fernando of 2017 say when he is no longer the present one, and what things will he be in awe of when he observes Fernando of the future? It makes me hopeful for what lies ahead, making me that much more excited for the prospects of my future self.

I (Travis) would like to kindly invite you to view Reunion Questions and Futures of the Present Questions not as inventions, but rather as practices that are still being invented. This is how I have started to imagine these questions. If the inspiration strikes you, please take them up in your own work. See where they take the conversation. Grab the brush and render your own strokes. Perhaps you'll be as surprised by what emerges on the canvas as I was.

