

Letter To My YOUNGER SELF

Maggie Cronin

What would you say to your 16-year-old self if you could go back in time? Every issue we ask a well-known name to offer their younger self, words of wisdom. This issue, Belfast's Maggie Cronin, an award winning actress and writer who appeared in the Academy Award winning 'The Shore' and family favourites like Doctors and The Bill has a few words with her teenage self.



Dear Younger Me,

Hi there! Thought this letter might find you in your bedroom crying - again. Come on, dry your eyes, and blow your nose. That's better. Sorry that letters can't make cups of tea. You look as if you might need one, and a little hug. This will have to suffice for now. I hoped by some magic to send you a photo of what you/I /we look like now, but that might set you off again so maybe it's for the best!

I know that things aren't going too well at the moment. School family boys. You can't see a way out of the various messes and muddles, some of which are serious. And some, from where I'm looking, don't matter a damn. How to differentiate? That, my dear, is a lifetime's work.

OK, the good news. You won't be stuck here forever. You *will* escape the family tensions and the rows. The bad news is - not as quickly as you hope. You're bright, but easily the most distracted girl that ever walked the earth. Get a little discipline, please! It will stand you in very good stead.

What else? Well, that boyfriend that I've just caught you blubbing over? He isn't 'The One.' (Or, as is said these days, 'So isn't The One.')

Cheer up. You'll have plenty of practice before you really fall in love and marry someone. I could say that you'll kiss a

lot of frogs before you find your prince, but that is a load of romantic tosh designed to keep women in their place, and absolutely untrue about your erstwhile boyfriends. Apart from one of them. No amount of kissing would transform his cold amphibian heart, never mind his looks.

Anyway, win lose or draw... Just love. Even when it doesn't work out for the best. Don't hold back. Don't look for something in return. The very act of loving amplifies your soul.

And, love your family. Be there for the important things - in life and in death. And keep them in your mind and heart - *always*.

Friends will give you a helping hand, a roof over your head, laughs, food and a shoulder to cry on. You owe them everything. Never forget them. You know those five school friends? The one you've known since infants and the others you met on your first day at high school? Treasure them. I've a feeling that they're going to be around for a while.

Never stop learning. The greatest gift you were ever given was your education. Don't be limited by your current teachers' expectations of you. Keep your shy dreams to yourself. *But keep them alive.* I do wish you'd make more of an effort in French, though. And you shouldn't have looked

out the window all the time in Latin. There's nothing I can say about Maths. It was and always will remain a mystery!

Respect your work, because if you don't, nobody else will. That means turning up on time for rehearsals. (Yes, you!) It means committing to the text, to the people, to the project, being dependable and forgoing the excuses. Now, by the same token, demand good standards from others, including potential employers. Watch out for the 'busy' people who can never say no. Generally speaking, people say yes fairly quickly if they want you for a part or like your work. But this business is notorious for the "long maybe", which in reality is a "cowardly no". People in positions of judgment must discharge that duty totally. Otherwise, why are they in those positions? Challenge the "cowardly no". And feel your own bravery grow exponentially!

Finally: The stripy dungarees don't work. Ditto the combat trousers, pink leggings and stilettos ensemble. You'll never be a marathon runner but try to walk the length of yourself everyday. Laugh a lot. Hug a lot. Join Equity. Enjoy the journey!

Lots of love, (much, much) Older Me.

xxx