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Young Adult Nonfiction

Dear Teen Me: Authors Write Letters to Their Teen Selves
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If only we knew then what we know now, everything would be different. Or would it? Most of the contributors to this terrific book of letters from young adult authors to their teenage selves come to the opposite conclusion; that is, no matter how awful, painful, awkward, or pathetic those teen years were, the adult cannot emerge except via those trying times.

Many of the seventy writers whose letters appear here are known to teens who read; they include authors of popular young adult novels, paranormal romances, graphic novels, cartoons, and fantasy series, and lesser-known writers with broad teen appeal. The expected letters reassuring the nerdy, misfit, friendless, bullied, closeted, or different teens, that life gets better are here; but so are missives for kids whose youth was spent dealing with illness, violence, disability, and being their own parent.

Sara Zarr, Ellen Hopkins, Nancy Holder, and Lauren Oliver are *New York Times* best-selling authors who know how to create compelling characters, but here they are themselves, addressing the selves they were. By now of course they know the score, but also that the game must be played out.

In “9 Things You Need to Know,” Robin Benway states an oft-repeated theme: “All these seemingly wrong turns are actually helading you in the right direction. All those things you want to achieve are just ahead of you.” In “Raising Me,” Heather Davis acknowledges that having no real parent was terrible, but “someday you will know real love. The kind where words match actions. The kind that doesn’t leave you hanging.” Coeditor Miranda Kenneally urges her younger self to listen to herself more, recognize friendship when it’s offered: “The next time a great person tells you that you matter to them—listen.”

Besides letters, there are several comic strips, graphic novel-style offerings, and compiled lists. For a book that began as a Twitter conversation, the letters vary from short and

succinct (but sidestep sweet), to elongated pleas for compassion and understanding clearly meant not so much for the vanished teen self of the author, but for confused or conflicted teenagers reading today. Along with sincere encouragement and sometimes painful, sometimes hilarious, honesty, we also get photos of the writers as teenagers—in all their goofy, once-trendy, clumsy glory; that is to say—in all their beautiful, open, hopeful, eager embraces of the life they hope to grow into.

Lisa Romeo