

The Day Howard Smalding Changed the Future

by

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Howard Smalding woke up and remembered the future. Howard always remembered the future. In fact, he remembered the future more vividly and precisely than the past.

He looked at his watch. It was 6:48AM. Correct. That was the precise time he remembered waking up this morning. He got out of bed, put on his clothes, brushed his hair and teeth, had his morning breakfast, just as he remembered doing. He remembered leaving his home, driving his car, and getting to work at precisely 7:55AM, and that is exactly what happened.

Howard wasn't surprised. His memory of the future was normally very accurate, just like today. If he thought about it, Howard could remember tomorrow, next week, next year and even the next decade. He could even remember the moments of his future death. But, he wasn't thinking about his memories of the future beyond today. He was thinking about his memory of this afternoon. He was thinking of something he remembered happening this afternoon that he had decided to change.

Howard had never changed the future before. Since he had taught himself to remember the future, he had accepted his future memory as a given and unchangeable, much like his memory of the past. But, yesterday Howard asked himself, Why not? Why not change the future? The more he thought about it, the more determined he became to try.

He didn't think of the consequences. Were there any? After all, his memory of the future was just a memory. Why couldn't he simply replace one future memory with another? What bad thing could possibly come from one small future memory change? A lot as it turned out.

What Howard failed to consider was how his memory of the future was entangled with the future memories of all others on the planet, even those who had not developed the ability to remember their future and, indeed, would have considered the mere thought of anyone having a memory of their future absurd. For them, time was an arrow with only one direction, past to future. They had no idea that the direction of the arrow of time all depended upon your point of view. Howard understood that. Consequently, Howard could remember this afternoon just as easily as he remembered yesterday afternoon.

At noon, Howard went to lunch at the diner across the street from the building where he worked and had the club sandwich just as he remembered. He returned to his office and, as in his future memory, received a phone call from a client who asked for a meeting. The client asked that Howard meet with him at his office at 3:00. It was an easy three-block walk.

Up to that point, everything that day had progressed just as Howard remembered. It was then that Howard intervened to change the future.

In Howard's future memory, he left his office for the meeting with his client at precisely 2:40. At 2:45 as he walked slowly along the sidewalk, he watched as a young woman with blond hair began to cross the street in front of him. Howard remembered that she looked in his direction and smiled. Suddenly her smile turned to shock and then fear as a black sedan, moving fast, passed Howard and hit her, knocking her to the ground in front of him. Howard remembered running forward to her aid as did several other pedestrians. The black sedan continued on, never slowing. The young woman lay crumpled, obviously dead. That was Howard's future memory, the portion of his future memory that he planned to change.

Instead of leaving his office at 2:40 as he remembered, Howard left at 2:30. He reached the point on the sidewalk where he remembered the young woman being hit by the car at 2:40. He waited. At 2:43, the young woman came out of a shop just in front of Howard and began to step from the curb to cross the street, just as in Howard's future memory. At that moment, Howard ran forward and grabbed the young woman's arm and pulled her back to the sidewalk. The black sedan roared by, just missing the two of them. At first, the young woman was angry, wanting to know why Howard had grabbed her and pulled her back. Then, several people approached asking if Howard and the young woman were okay and expressing outrage that the driver of the black sedan could have killed them both. The young woman apologized and thanked Howard for his swift action that saved her life.

Howard continued to his meeting, just like he remembered. The rest of the day was the same as in his future memory except for the part where just at the entrance to his client's building he watched a police officer cover the body of a young auburn-haired woman with a cloth. He overheard bystanders telling the police that she had been hit by a black sedan.

The next morning when Howard woke, he remembered the future like he often did on waking. This time was different. He remembered not one future but two. In the first, a mother held a picture of a young woman with blond hair and cried while clinging the picture to her chest. In the second, a young woman with blond hair was laughing with her friends as she celebrated her 27th birthday, while the relatives of a young woman with auburn hair gathered around her casket.

As much as he tried, Howard was unable to suppress the two future memories or reconcile them. One would emerge in his mind and then fade as the other took its place. Both were equally real to Howard and he could find no valid reason for choosing one over the other. As he went about his life from that day forward, Howard seemed to be slipping between the two realities.

Worse, over the next few days and weeks the two future realities became four, then six, then eight. The number of realities increased at an exponential rate until there were hundreds or thousands. Each reality had an associated future memory that was equally real to Howard.

Perhaps it would not have mattered too much that Howard changed the future if the future he changed had not involved the exchange of one death for another. Before Howard's intervention, the future had collapsed, selecting one death and future memory over the other. Unwittingly, Howard had introduced an alternative future reality, or range of realities, in which the two young girls existed in an unresolved state of being both dead and alive and producing equally valid but

conflicting future memories. The longer the unresolved state continued, the more future memories were produced by the girls and all who knew them and the greater the complexity of the competing realities.

Ultimately, Howard wished he had left future memories alone and had just concentrated on remembering the past and living in the present.