

MEASURING TIME

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OPEN BOOK UNBOUND WRITING

Time is relative. Albert Einstein said that, but you don't have to be a genius to know it's true. Five minutes in the dentist's chair can be an eternity while those five days we spent in Rome went by in a heartbeat.

The way you were then, that's how I like to remember you. Laughing, smiling. It's how I like to remember us. You looked cool in the heat, radiant in the sun, enjoying *La Dolce Vita*.

Funny how it's always the old films we recall. Cosying up to enjoy Jimmy Cagney's rat-a-tat-tat delivery in *The Roaring Twenties*. A film made nearly 90 years ago about events occurring a decade before that. Soldiers returning from World War 1. The Great War they called it then, but that was before we knew we were going to have another one. Prohibition, bootleggers, gangsters, the Wall Street Crash, all wrapped up in the glamour of Hollywood's golden years. We were young when we first watched it. Youth is relative.

Five days: 518,400 heartbeats each - give or take.

Time goes slow at first. Summers last forever when you're a kid. Now Mondays follow Wednesdays and I'm meeting myself coming down the stairs in the morning when I'm on my way up the night before.

It takes one year for a tree to grow a ring of new wood. The oldest rings are in the centre, the newest growth just inside the bark. Imagine if people were like that; a new ring for every year that passes. Growing taller and stronger instead of... instead of... dancing sailors. You loved those musicals - Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra, Jules Munshin. I read Sinatra was so embarrassed by his skinny ass that he wore padded trousers for that film. Fancy, all that money and fame, all those big hits – *Fly Me to the Moon*, *Call Me Irresponsible* - and beautiful women – Ava Gardner, Lauren Bacall – and yet he was worried about his lack of posterior.

That was never a worry you had. I saw the way they looked at you in Rome. Like you were Sophia Loren or Gina Lollobrigida. I looked at you that way too, put you on a pedestal. You deserved it.

You know what little Georgie said the other day? He asked if I was alive when dinosaurs roamed the earth. Can you believe that? I knew he was kidding me - he's sharp as a tack and knows all about dinosaurs and how they went extinct way before people existed, but it got me thinking. Do you remember that clock we saw at the museum – the one that showed the lifespan of our planet as if everything happened in a single day? Dinosaurs appear at 22:47 and we humans don't show up until one second to midnight. Do you remember how tickled we were by that? All these years we've been together, all these years of anyone in the history of humankind being alive –

Cleopatra

Michaelangelo

Rabbie Burns

Marie Curie

Elvis Presley

Kenny Dalglish

Dolly Parton

– everything that was ever built by human hand -

Egyptian Pyramids

Antonine Wall

Stirling Castle

Taj Mahal

Trevi Fountain

Caledonian Canal

Blackpool Tower

- everything that ever happened in human history –

Roman Empire

Black Death

French Revolution

Discovery of penicillin

Berlin Wall going up

Berlin Wall coming down

World Wide Web

– everything anyone ever knew or experienced -

- all crammed into the single tick of a clock.

One little second containing 65 summers.

The summer picnics we had – remember them? On the beach, up in the hills, down by the river... seven a year, easy. You made the sandwiches. It was basic fare in the early days - meat paste or corned beef on thick sliced-white bread. Then we started getting adventurous. Egg mayo on wholemeal, tuna mayo on crusty baguettes. You always added chopped onion to the tuna. Then we got pretty sophisticated - brie and cranberry on sour dough – too chewy for me – and hummus and falafel in pitta. I wasn't convinced by that one either, but no matter the bread or filling, we always had hard boiled eggs to go with them.

I was in charge of boiling the eggs. I gave them 12 minutes minimum, like rubber balls you said, but you ate them all the same. Never once did you ask for yours to be cooked a little less. We had one a-piece with salt sprinkled from a foil twist.

Seven per annum equals 455 picnics with 910 hard-boiled eggs between us.

Hard-boiled eggs, sandwiches, cake, fruit, a thermos of tea, all laid out on the tartan rug. Picnics were our love language. I wonder what happened to the tartan rug, I haven't seen it in I don't know how many moons.

Sixty-five years, that's 780 full moons.

Sixty-five Hogmanays.

One trip to Rome.

Five billion heartbeats between us.

Give or take.

*LG Thomson is an artist and author living in Ullapool. Her latest books, *Modernist Dreams Brutalist Nightmares* and *Bitter Fruit* (Outcast Press) are searingly honest and brutally funny memoirs set in the 1970s and 1980s. Find out more about her art, writing, and creative writing workshops at www.LGThomson.com*