

**The Way We Were**  
by  
**Daniel E. White March 24, 2025**

*Memories light the corners of my mind, misty water-colored memories of the way we were. Scattered pictures of the smiles we left behind, smiles we gave to one another for the way we were.*

In 1973, we saw the movie, “The Way We Were,” starring Barbra Streisand and Robert Redford. Neither Judy nor I had reached the age of 30. But we enjoyed the movie, despite its bittersweetness, and, I am sure, came away thinking about memories in the way that two people in their mid-twenties would have thought about memories.

Streisand made the title song from the movie, with the first two stanzas noted above, the title track for one of her many successful record albums. I hear her version occasionally on the oldies station here. It still gives me a warm feeling.

*Can it be that it was all so simple then? Or has time rewritten every line? If we had the chance to do it all again? Tell me, would we? Could we?* These words are the bridge between the first two stanzas and the last two. In 2025, these words carry meaning constructed over the 52 years of living since the movie.

Were things simpler? Would we welcome the chance to do it all over again? Could we?

My friend, the physicist, told me recently that a well-respected scholar had published a scholarly- adjudicated paper in which he posited that time could be reversed but that, as a result, memory would disappear. There have been several novels published using time travel, usually backwards in time, as a key story element. In the few I have read, the “cost” of travel back in time has been expressed in terms of people who, as a result, were never born or discoveries that were never made.

I have not come across the erasure of memory being seen as a “cost.”

In Ann Patchett’s novel “*Run*,” a series of events leads Doyle, the dad and a central character in the story, to reflect on how different things were for him and his family just the day before. Doyle was accustomed to imposing his will on his two adopted sons, even though they were nearly adults. They resisted, albeit passively. And Doyle had not anticipated that the boys’ birth mother would appear. But on that eventful day, little happened that Doyle would have wanted or expected.

Patchett continues “But no one was offering him yesterday over today. No one got to choose anything where time was concerned.” (p. 179)

People of a Certain Age, have you not in your experience had times when you lost out on something only to see later that something better for you happened that wouldn’t have happened if you had not lost out in the first instance?

I remember walking with Judy in the sand along Ma’alaea Beach on Maui one Sunday afternoon thinking that the current circumstances of our living and working were just about perfect. Changing anything about those circumstances was not on our collective radar.

Fast forward to when we walked away from those perfect circumstances to try our hand at consulting which led to work with the effort on Oahu to build a new independent school in West Oahu which resulted in Island Pacific Academy. To bring the IPA project to an Opening Day enabled Judy and me to engage much of what we had learned in our many years in other independent schools into the job of creating a new school.

Who knew? Who knew when reading “*Run*” that there could be a happy ending completely unpredictable to the characters in the book or the reader?

Tell me, would we, could we?

*Memories may be beautiful and yet, what’s too painful to remember, we simply choose to forget.*

Perhaps. Or not. In remembering Dad, there are two categories of memories; those of the good times we had together and those of the bad times he endured at a critical point in his life.

Those bad times recalling his pain don’t diminish how grateful I am that he was/is my dad. They aren’t my focus, though. They are simply a part of the story of Joseph R. White. I wish things had been different for him, but no amount of wishing can change what he went through.

*So, it’s the laughter we will remember whenever we remember the way we were.*

The song lyrics describe an either/or: the way to focus on the laughter is to forget the painful. This might well describe a common method of coping with disappointment and loss.

Our experience on Maui offers a caution—don’t be too quick to judge what is loss. I like Kenny Rogers’ gambler whose advice is to avoid counting your money “sittin’ at the table. They’ll be time enough for counting when the dealin’s done.”

The way we were almost never turns out to be the way we will be. Memories of the way we were are best curated for what they are and not as plans.

After all, Omar Khayyam was popular in 1973, too. “The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on.” Best accommodate oneself to his wisdom.

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