

Dialogue List “AMEMORY”

by Victoria Joelle Hesselbach

Intro

Vici: Dear good Santa Clause, don't look at me so badly, put your rod down, I always want to be good.

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Vici: Memories are lived moments and experiences you've made. No matter whether we had good or bad experiences, every moment is a part of us and has shaped us in the past years of our lives. So when you retrieve a memory, it's an ability with which you can mentally relive past experiences. Some people also refer to memories as kind of a mental photo album, which you carry around in your head, because you always have access to the contents. But every person remembers its life in a different way – I don't remember anything, I don't have any autobiographical memories.

Professor: A scientist who is considered the pope of memory research, Endel Tulving, had already postulated decades ago that there should be people in the world who live normal lives but have practically no memories of their own past. And at some point, people like that actually showed up.

Vici: In my case, forgetting is based on the phenomenon of aphantasia. This is a condition in which you have no visual imagination. So when I close my eyes, I can't imagine anything at all, it's quiet and black.

Vici: It's hard for me to remember.

Teresa: How did you experience the memories? For example like a movie or more like a radio play or how do you experience it?

Vici: So if I remember, I don't have a movie that's playing, also I don't have feelings or smells... so probably remembering for me is like... notes or mind maps.

Merlin: Basically, our brain has built up a semantic network, so whenever we get information, it's built into a network of other information that's very close to it. Let's take an example of the information >police officer<. Then it gets tied to other knots – uniform, law,... it just gets embedded. And then you can embed it semantically, as I just did, with other terms. But of course, you can also embed it in sensory impressions. So with a lemon I taste the acidity, I smell the acidity, I see the yellow. And the more modalities you have at your disposal, the denser the net gets and the easier it is to remember the memory. And if you lose all those impressions, you only have the semantic. It's there too, it helps you to remember semantically, but it's much harder than if you had even more approaches, which can also be activated that the overall picture gets created. My personal attitude is that it's a skill. Some skills you have, some you don't. Sometimes I'm sad that I can't draw. But, well, other people can't do other things that I can. So on the whole, I'd say it's on the scale.

Professor: And in psychology, there is the expression “infantile amnesia” or “early childhood amnesia”, that practically, as adults, we don't remember things from the first four years of life. They're gone anyway, for all people more or less.

Teresa: How hard is it for you to remember memories, on a scale from 1 to 6, when 1 is very easy to remember and 6 is very difficult?

Vici: Six.

Teresa: So very difficult?

Teresa: Yes, that they will come back at all.

Vici: Yes so as I said, my memories almost already end on the day before.

Teresa: And do you think about your own life spontaneously or is it more like others help you to remember specific events from your life?

Vici: Hmm, I think that other people help me remember.

Grandpa: As far as I remember correctly, on your third birthday, you got an electric car. And somehow you were afraid of it, you didn't really want to play with it.

Mom: That's something I don't really know anymore, it's only a dark memory in my head.

Grandpa: Somehow you didn't really want to accept it.

Mom: The day with the electric car, when your Grandma Ela was visiting, you wore the red and white dress with the ladybugs.

Grandpa: Well it took some time, until she had the trick to get off the accelerator pedal, then the car decelerates. Once the foot was on the pedal it was on the pedal. And Grandma and I rebuilt the little bicycle, painted it, put flags on it and the electric car you got from your parents didn't interest you at all, the bicycle with support wheels was more interesting.

Mom: The bicycle was still packed in the backyard and Vici was wearing this double pink dress and had some braids. And she has unpacked the bike in the back on the meadow, we packed it in some big cloth or something.

Grandpa: Yes yes, yes yes.

Vici: So for the majority of the population, it's normal that they can remember but you can't. It's always been a little... depressing at times. The feeling that I'm losing my identity a little bit because I'm losing the connection to my years of life. And then I think it's just the thing for you to say to yourself: "Okay I already had a few relevant moments in my life, which I would have liked to keep, that I can tell them later." Which I always find a bit difficult. Because I am somehow so aware, okay soon I probably don't know that anymore.

Merlin: So by hardly remembering, you can definitely carry on better if you have experienced something bad. When I've done something embarrassing I don't think in bed at night, "Oh my God, I shouldn't have said that", because I've usually forgotten it. Or I'm also zero resentful. After I've slept one night I somehow remember I was angry for some reason, but I don't know why anymore. But then, the feeling of being angry completely faded away. So it's... I just don't have it anymore. And then it's kind of good if you had such a reset by going to sleep. And you could even go further by saying that aphantasists are happier people. Because the research shows that their orientation to the past and to the future like "sometime I will have achieved everything" or "everything was better in the past" isn't present, they rather live in the moment. That leads to a greater satisfaction in life.

Vici: Yes, that's exactly how I feel. I am so thankful that I can forget negative moments from my past so easily and that I can be even more in the here and now.

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Outro

Vici: Ohhh wow!

Grandma: What is it?

Vici: Mama! Ohhh!

Vici: For my dolls...

Grandma & Dad: Oh okay!

Vici: Mama look, it's for my dolls!

Grandma: I thought this is for you.

Vici: Nooo way!!

A film by Victoria Joelle Hesselbach