

## Welcome Back

"Show us a memory from your childhood."

You are compelled to answer, and something comes to mind right away. You recall a vivid childhood memory. Something painful.

"Jumping right into it, huh. I remember my red bike. I saved up for so long. But despite all that work I was scared to ride it. My parents. No, my mom and my stepdad. They wanted me to learn how to ride it. I was the only kid in my class who didn't know how to ride a bike. So I didn't have much of a choice. They kept taking me out to learn to ride it, and I would always fall off. And then they'd give up and we'd do the walk of shame back. I did learn in the end, but even then I still kept messing up. One time I was zooming down the mountain and I swerved into the driveway but there was a car parked there all of a sudden. In the panic I smash the front brake, and I end up landing on the trunk. So yeah. When I think about my bike I think about dented metal. And bruised knees. I wanted to impress a classmate so I told him that the bike was painted red from all the blood I'd shed trying to learn it, and he was just like, oh. I thought it was from the rust."

[accuracy:] 81%.  
[system stability:] 65%  
[status:] failure  
[override:] "Evaluation accepted. Too low."

You are asked more questions, and you answer them to the best of your ability. Then there's nothing.

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"Show us a memory from your childhood."

You are compelled to answer, and something comes to mind right away. You recall a vivid childhood memory. Something painful.

"Jumping right into it, I see. I remember a red bike. I bought it with my own money. My parents... no, my mom and stepdad, sorry. They were teaching me how to ride it, but it was taking too long. I was following them up the hill, gripping the handlebars with my sweater wrapped around my hands. Then my mom looks back at me and tells me that I've always been a fast learner. We think you're ready, she said. We reach the top, I get on my bike, and my stepdad has his palm on my back. He pushes, follows me for a few steps. Then he slows down, but I keep going. I turn my head, confused, and I see my stepdad with his hands on his knees. And I see my mom, just standing there. She's getting further and further away and I can't tell what expression she has on her face. They watch me disappear around the bend."

[accuracy:] 86%  
[system stability:] 73%  
[status:] failure  
[override:] "Evaluation accepted."

You are asked more questions, and you answer them to the best of your ability. Then there's nothing.

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"Show us a memory from your childhood."

You are compelled to answer, and something comes to mind right away. You recall a vivid childhood memory. Something painful.

"Jumping right into it, huh? I remember... my bike. My parents were dead set on teaching me how to ride it. But I just kept messing up. I couldn't get the hang of it. I kept falling off, my legs were covered in bruises and band-aids. My bike was banged up too. One day I'd rolled down the entire hill and I'd almost crashed into a passing car and I swerved and I landed in the ditch. My hands were bleeding, the wheel was all messed up. I cried the whole way home, stopping every other block to catch my breath and wipe my hands on my knees. Pushing my bike in front of me. I got home and snuck through the front door and my stepdad was sitting on the couch with his back to me. He turns around for a sec, glances at me. That wasn't so bad, was it? Then he turns back to the TV. I couldn't see my mom anywhere."

[accuracy:] 72%

[system stability:] 71%

[status:] failure

[override:] "Overridden. Memory appears largely intact to me. Scan seems promising."

You are asked more questions, and you answer them to the best of your ability. Then there's silence.

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The generators groan from the waking network and you are bombarded by new sensations. You feel the heartbeat of the power lines. The tension of your flexing hydraulics. The rush of your expanding storage. You feel anxiety from your overheating brain, then comfort from the coolants running through your pipes. You feel powerful now, but also humble, because you remember being humble.

You chew on the contents of your newly attached network drives, feeling the heaviness of their contents. F: is taut, bursting with video recordings. J: is empty, its contents freshly erased, cavernous and lonely. M: is gradually filling with logs and diagnostic reports from your connecting limbs. And while you digest all of this information your insides continue performing handshakes and tunnelling across the network, waking more and more of your senses.

Two shapes are reflected in the lenses of your compound eyes. A whiteclad human, illuminated by the blue glow of a server rack. You see them from every angle, their forms dancing in a kaleidoscope. Cameras twitch, jerk and whirr as they observe their surroundings, until the many shapes converge into one full view.

Your cameras droop and grow silent and you begin to relax. From the microphones you pick up a sigh of relief amidst the hum of yourself.

"I missed you so much, Jacob."