

OPSNIZING DAD

by Elisabeth Ingram Wallace

The future is... a fight
for memory

Writing the Future, the world's largest health short story prize, is brought to you by Kaleidoscope Health & Care. Inspired by science fiction, our shortlisted entries consider how health and healthcare in the UK will look in the year 2100.

Find out more at kaleidoscope.healthcare/health2100

KALEIDOSCOPE

I decided OPSNIZE was for me when Dad lost his trousers on the bus. He threw them out the window. Then he rolled around on the floor, screaming his own name, over and over, until some kid pushed a panic button.

David

David

David

That was his name. He wanted to hold on to it, for as long as he could.

Whole weeks went by where he lost it, though. Just sat in a chair and occasionally allowed his skull to rotate around three-hundred and sixty degrees on his neck.

Sometimes an arm fell off.

Dad was getting erratic like that, slipping up. His memory had been going for a while, hard disc scrapes, years of them. Then his drives got wiped, not once, but every time we had lightning. His flash memory was damaged by the heatwaves last year. Then he fell asleep in the sun and blacked out for most of June.

I can't remember if it was always this way.

There have always been flares. I know that.

Solar bursts. Sometimes, they kill things.

But not my Dad.

He was deteriorating, that was true, after several thousand rewrite cycles. But he was still there, somewhere, inside. Underneath.

On bad nights, I blame myself. I should have coughed up more money when his troubles first started, a decade ago. But Dad had never been a fan of splashing the cash. The KAZ was cheap, and a decent bit of Tech.

Maybe not enough to deal with Dad's memory problems, though.

Dad had been losing his memory for years, even when he was a young man. Keys. Pens. Money. Umbrellas, his wallet. Even me, once. He left me in a pub, I'm still not sure they found me. The right me, I mean.

When Dad was middle aged, he started putting the oven on, and going out for long night walks. He'd pace circuits through industrial estates tracing out lost flight paths, past migrations, from childhood homes though decades, to better, bulldozed, clearly lit times. I'd walk with him, and try to fill in the gaps.

Dad insisted in driving, until the end. Even though he kept losing his car, he would stride for hours, circling streets until he found it. He would not give driving up. Refused. Like all the old-fashioned

things. Like map reading, and maps. He prided himself on knowing where he was, being Chief Navigator. Up-Front. The man with the compass. In charge.

He thought he owned the past. It was safe there.

But, everything oxidises. Leave an apple out, it's going to turn brown, just like information. Leave memory out, it will go rusty after a few decades too, if it doesn't get scratched first.

Dad got scratched.

Dad was the old order. He drank wine, beer, vodka. He ate, a lot. All junk. He had three concussions as a kid, too, one playing Rugby, and two falling off things. He couldn't remember *what* he fell off. And that was part of the problem.

He kept falling, and falling and falling, and every time he crashed, his memory got chipped away, and he couldn't remember where or what to climb back on to.

But Dad was still Dad.

Even when he was uploaded, into a KAZ.

He still lost things. A robot arm. His trousers, on the bus. His name.

But some of the fault was the KAZ failing, too. In recent years.

The problem with technology is, it dates. It's not like an apple. It doesn't have seeds in it, so that, even when the fruit shrivels and goes black, you can bury the apple, and it will grow a new tree, full of fresh juicy life.

No. Technology just dies.

OPSNIZE are giving me the hard sell. 'Safe long term data storage is a concern for all of us. We must protect our future, now.'

They call OPSNIZE 'a crystal fortress', like it's a cartoon, like I am a dumb kid and will fall for a superhero sales pitch. Secure data storage, a memory hold, a bank!

Truth is, I'm already sold. I'm wiped out.

I've been running after Dad for sixty-three years. My knees went to shit thirty years ago and my liver is mush. Maybe my memory is going to run out soon.

The OPSNIZE Human Memory Glass Project will cost my house, my savings, Dads' Savings too.

Despite this, I'm in.

I'm looking forward to OPSNIZING Dad. I've spent a decade staring into his disposable KAZ green LED eye-bulbs and telling him not to rotate off the kerb and cause accidents; not to spin all night in the front garden when his fans get clogged with cat hair. I'm

fucking sick of the way his charging port bleeps at me and blinks orange then red then goes opaque grey and then blank. I stare at him sometimes and think, I'm the one that plugs you in Dad. Me. No one else pays to keep your memory alive. No one else gives a shit if your memories of thirty years cheating on Mum are all lost for future intelligent alien life-forms.

It's just me.

The Doctors here, sales-people to the core, say OPSNIZE Memory Glass can survive a nuclear holocaust and will persist for upwards of ten billion years. Who wouldn't want that for their Dad?

Who wouldn't want the day their Dad got drunk on peach schnapps and had sex with their fifteen-year-old babysitter, when they were a child of seven, and in the same room, fused into quartz in five dimensions?

That kind of epic shittyness deserves to be memorialised forever.

Each time he screwed around with another broken woman, or punched me – crammed into another terabyte.

All the times he got naked and touched himself in the street, when shit got bad, really bad, and the Doctors said *his memory is gone. Euthanasia?* And I said no – no – no – no. Put to rest.

He will be the size of a thumbnail.

He will be written into glass, etched, as a series of defects. That sounds about right.

He will be bulletproof. In case they still have bullets in ten billion years time. After the nuclear holocaust.

He will be gone.

But he will never ever be lost.

About the author

Elisabeth Ingram Wallace lives in Glasgow. She writes flash fiction and short stories, and is writing a novel. She is a 2017 Scottish Book Trust 'New Writers Award' winner, and has a Bath Flash Fiction Prize. Her writing is published in the Bath Flash Fiction Anthologies, New Writing Scotland, and b(OINK). She spent the last decade working as a Prop Maker, Art Director and Production Designer. She studied as a Mature Student at Oxford University, and has a Creative Writing M.Litt. with Distinction from Glasgow University. She was awarded a Dewar Arts Award for Fiction as one of 'Scotland's Brightest and Best'.

@shortstoryprize

elisabethingramwallace.com

Writing the Future is brought to you by Kaleidoscope Health & Care, in partnership with the Commonwealth Fund, Imperial Centre for Health Policy and the House of St Barnabas.

Kaleidoscope is a social enterprise focused on bringing people together to improve health and care. We seek to find new ways to start conversations which need to happen but often don't – in this case between writers and those working in health care.

If you are interested in how Kaleidoscope could help you spark debate and discussion on your topics, get in touch at **hello@kaleidoscope.healthcare**

KALEIDOSCOPE