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Halfway down the stairs is a stair where I sit. There isn't any other stair quite like it. I'm not at the bottom, I'm not at the top. So this is the stair where I always stop. Halfway up the stairs isn't up and isn't down. It isn't in the nursery, it isn't in the town. And all sorts of funny thoughts run round my head. It isn't really anywhere, it's somewhere else instead. I remember sitting on a particular stair when I was young, and it felt like the perfect place to be. It wasn't at the bottom, where everything is new and exciting, nor was it at the top, where things are familiar but maybe a little boring. It was exactly in the middle, where the stairs seemed to fade away into nothingness. But as I grew older, I realized that this stair wasn't just a physical place – it was also an emotional one. Sometimes I felt like I was sitting on this stair when everything seemed perfect, and other times when I felt lost and uncertain. It was like my own personal limbo, where I could sit and think for hours without needing to do anything else. As I look back, I realize that this stair has been a constant in my life, even if it's not always the most obvious one. It's a reminder that sometimes we need to find our own halfway point, where we can sit and reflect on what we've got and what we want more of. And it's okay to be somewhere in between – being at the top or bottom doesn't mean you're anywhere near as interesting as being in the middle. For me, this stair is a symbol of balance – finding that sweet spot where I'm not too much like my parents, but also not too different from them. It's about embracing my own journey, and not trying to force myself into someone else's mold. And it's okay if things don't always make sense – sometimes the best thing to do is just sit on the stair and see what happens. I've had people ask me where this stair is, and I tell them it's wherever they need it to be. Sometimes it's in a physical place, like a staircase or a mountain peak. Other times it's more of an emotional state – feeling grounded but also free to explore. The thing is, the stair is always there for you, whether you're sitting on it or not. It makes me think about all the other stairs I've sat on throughout my life. There was the one at school where I used to sit and do my homework. There was the one in my childhood home where I used to play with my toys. And of course there's the one in my own heart, where I try to find peace and calm. Sometimes people tell me that I'm a bit too introspective, or that I spend too much time thinking about what could be. But for me, this stair is a source of strength – it reminds me that even when things get tough, there's always something to be found in the middle ground. While we do choose to aspire to reach our destination, whether it's up or down, we also need to keep a firm grasp on where we are, in addition to where we are heading. Falling down stairs is never fun, whether they're literal or metaphorical. We can get ahead of ourselves, we can rush. We can find ourselves too immersed in the end goal to realize what we're doing until we topple, head over heels. Bringing mindfulness to the staircases in our lives can not only enhance our experiences, internally, but can save us from massive bruises, externally. “The elevator to our highest potential is out of order. You have to use the stairs, one step at a time.” ~ Joe Girard In my childhood, I had a little Mickey Mouse record player that was literally a Mickey Mouse record player. I did a little Googling, and lo and behold, there it was: That's exactly the model I had. I am pretty sure it was a Christmas gift. The mouse-hand-needle-thing destroyed many a record. In particular, my father's copy of "With The Beatles", which I played endlessly. Along with the gift of the record player, came The Muppet Show Album, which had a cover that looked like this: This album featured a number of genuinely great songs. You might doubt that a Muppet Show album could actually have truly great songs on it but I'm telling you, this was the case. I loved Kermit's rendition of "Lydia The Tattooed Lady", Scooter's "Mr. Bassman", and the first (and certainly most uptempo) version of the jazz standard “Tenderly” I ever heard, as interpreted by members of Dr. Teeth and the Electric Mayhem. I remember playing all these songs on my Mickey Mouse record player and jumping up and down on my bed while singing along in Pigs In Space pajamas (I couldn't find any images of these, but trust me, they existed). One of the quieter songs on The Muppet Show album was a musical interpretation of the nonsense poem “Halfway Down The Stairs”, by A.A. Milne, as sung by Kermit's nephew, Robin. Until I started writing this essay, I had never taken the time to really research the poem or the song in general, let alone the Muppet version specifically. Imagine my surprise, then, when I discovered that the song “Halfway Down the Stairs” – the Muppet version - had reached the top ten in England in 1977, and the album The Muppet Show was also number one (also in the UK) - knocking The Beatles Live at the Hollywood Bowl off the #1 spot! As far as I'd been concerned, this song was a rare b-side of an even rarer Muppet album. Only one person I've ever met (besides my brother) ever knew what I was talking about when I mentioned this album. But apparently, a whole bunch of British people knew about it as well. In the early 2000's, when my daughter, Emma, was about one or two years old, we started a tradition where I would climb into bed beside her, turn the light off, and sing her a “night-night song”. I tried all different sorts of songs, mostly pop songs like “California Dreamin'”, “Yesterday”, and a few others. One night, for reasons unknown, “Halfway Down The Stairs” popped into my head. Except that in my version it was “Halfway UP the Stairs”, as I couldn't remember some of the lyrics. After that first time singing the song to her, there was no going back. “Halfway Down (Up) The Stairs” became THE night-night song. I tried to suggest alternatives, but Emma was not having it. It was decided. I sang that song (with incorrect lyrics) hundreds of times. Although the song is a nonsense poem, over the years the words took on different meanings to me. When I quit drinking many years ago, the lines “I'm not at the bottom, I'm not at the top; so this is the stair where I always stop” took on a slightly more profound meaning, and one thinks differently of the phrase “Halfway Down the Stairs” in general once one has passed 40 years of age, I've found. The song followed us from Curious George to The Hunger Games, from Caillou to Dance Moms, from The Beauty and the Beast soundtrack to Adele. Cookie Crumbs is shared free of charge on Substack, with no pay-wall. If you enjoy my writing and would like to help me keep writing, sharing, and creating, you can buy me a virtual cup of coffee (as little as a one-time contribution of \$5), with genuine thanks. One night, shortly after Emma turned 13, she was going through the steps of getting ready for bed. I asked if she'd brushed her teeth, set her alarm – all the usual parental reminders. I followed her into her room, ready to proceed with our usual routine when she said, oh-so-casually, “It's OK, Daddy, you don't have to sing me a song tonight”. I let that sink in, then said “I don't mind...”. She smiled at me and I could tell she was trying to be careful to not hurt my feelings. Emma has always been a naturally compassionate person, one of many qualities I love about her. “Nah, it's OK,” she said like it was no big deal. And just like that, after 11 or 12 years of singing that song, a chapter had ended. I smiled and said, “OK. You can change your mind if you ever want to, you know...”. “I know,” she said, “but I'm not a baby anymore”. As I sat on the couch afterward I thought of all the mini-graduations a parent witnesses. Each one a triumph and a marking of time. First words. Walking. Down the slide on her own. Graduating from the baby swing to the big-kid swing. Tricycle to training wheels, to a two-wheeler. Times-tables. Taking the subway on her own. Each one an assurance that I've helped do my part as a parent to one day make her independent and self-sustaining. Working ever so hard to put myself out of a job. To help her not need me as much. To be smart, kind, confident, and wonderful. Each another step on the stairs. And with each of these steps, for me, another grey hair, a little more battered by life, a little older – hopefully, a little wiser, too. Singing and music were a big part of Emma's growing up. Literally within minutes of her birth, between the delivery room and taking her to be seen by various family members, I stood in a hallway with her, just the two of us, and quietly sang “Happy Birthday” to her as tears rolled down my face. We sang while we got ready to go out when she was little, and there was a period from the time she was about 3-5 years old where we would dance and sing to disco songs in the morning as I looked back, when it comes to Dad's behavior, breakfast might have been a clear sign that he wasn't entirely straight. Even in my teen years, I sometimes sang along to music while tidying up and doing the dishes with Mom. Now, as an adult living in my own apartment in Toronto, I still find myself humming “Halfway Down The Stairs...” when I'm getting ready for bed at the end of a long day in New York. ###ARTICLELooking forward to seeing everyone at the meeting tomorrow and discussing our strategies, we find ourselves on a journey “somewhere else instead.” The staircase of life, with its ambiguous location, is like the human experience itself - full of uncertainties that leave us in places that are neither here nor there. It's in these in-between moments where we pause, reflect, and let our imaginations roam. Halfway Up the Stairs is more than just a children's bookshop; it's a celebration of the beauty of ambiguity. We're an award-winning shop based in Greystones, Co Wicklow, offering books for all ages - from babies to young adults - as well as gifts and games. Our subscriptions and gift box service is very popular, and we have a wide range of Irish authors and language section. We've been named An Post Bookshop of the Year in November 2023 and Best Independent Bookshop in Ireland in March 2023, with several more accolades to our name. We're proud to support local businesses and offer nationwide posting for our customers. Please visit us Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5:30pm or order online for Click & Collect. As we strive to bring Irish children's books to everyone, we believe in the power of imagination and exploration. Join us on this journey and discover new stories, authors, and worlds. We can be reached at info@halfwayupthestairs.ie or by phone 01 2873002.

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