

Where's "Little Jackie"

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Walking along the platform of the metro station I was unaware of the musty smell of underground places. I had forgotten about the group of people I had been walking with and might have even forgotten that I was in a foreign country. Exactly what I was thinking about, I couldn't tell you; probably the normal things 10-year-old girls think about. Suddenly, the hissing and slamming doors of the departing metro brought my day dreams to a crashing halt. I turned frantically just to find that the platform was empty. How did TEN people not notice me!?!? Not even my parents?!

Apparently my dad came upon the same realization at roughly the same time, because as I was looking at the train in panic, he was banging on the door from the inside with the same horror-stricken face as mine. His shrieking was the most frightening part of the ordeal: "DON'T MOVE I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!!!! DON'T MOVE!!!" His voice vibrated through the station. I immediately relaxed. I knew the routine; I was used to it by now; my parents had been in the habit of losing me since I was three. Not just me though, my older brother and sister got forgotten their fair share but I was the littlest and the easiest to lose I guess. It happened most commonly at the grocery store but also at places like the zoo and even in the ocean once or twice—twice actually. A wave lifted me right up off the beach and out to sea before my dad, again screaming, came running in after me.

It was as if I had the magical powers of being invisible; accept that it was never by intent, and sometimes quite frustrating. In a room of people or in the car, often times, I would try and try to talk to the adults but it was as if I was talking to myself. It wasn't that no one liked me.

People use to dote on me plenty. The older kids use to endearingly call me “little Jackie,” which I took offense to. But it was no use protesting, no one ever heard me anyways.

Now, I would never insinuate that my parents were ill-fit parents; it’s just that my father was always busy entertaining groups of proselytizing tourists (proseli-tourism, if you will). He was possibly the best tour guide ever; if he didn’t have some grandiose story to tell about a particular tourist attraction, then he would invent one. He also loved telling tall tales from Arkansas and imposing his southern gospel music on the group. My mother somehow always managed to keep up with her hideous backpack full of hairbrushes, Bibles, mints, oversized plastic water thermos and God knows what else whether we were at Sunday Church services or mountain-climbing, but just seemed to have a harder time keeping up with her children. Strangers on the street also had a tendency of handing me change - I’m not sure what that was about—but that’s neither here nor there.

This must have been the millionth group of Americans who came to Romania to help us do the “Lord’s work” and each time we would take them to surrounding countries to see the sights. My parents would tote us from country to country, forgetting us all over the world as I acquired currencies of all sorts from kindly Europeans. The first of such instances—which I can recall, of course—was when I was three or four.

My parents dropped my brother, sister and I off at school one morning, which was in an apartment building in New Ulm, Germany. Off we went, the three of us, running up the stairs to our school-apartment. As hard as I tried, I couldn’t keep up and by the time I got to the right apartment, they had already gone in. I went to open the door. It didn’t budge. It seemed to have been something like a steel vault door. Note to self: ask Mom why we went to school in an apartment with vault doors. I pulled and pulled and banged on the vault door for what seemed to

be an hour. Finally I gave up. I slumped down against the wall outside the door and sat there in my little-house-on-the-prairie dress and tights half the day, fighting back tears until one of the teachers decided to call my parents to ask why I wasn't at school. A frantic manhunt was launched and a teacher charged out of the vault door in search of me, where she found me right where I had been all day.

And 7 years later, from a hallway of steel vault doors to a musty underground station somewhere in Europe, here I was, still sitting alone, waiting. But this time I'm not fighting back tears. I'm observing people coming and going, coming and going. No big deal, they just forgot me again...