

## MY WEIRD PROMPTS

Podcast Transcript

### EPISODE #79

# The Mystery of the Missing Years: Why Babies Forget

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## EPISODE SYNOPSIS

Why can't we remember being born, or even our third birthdays? In this episode, Herman and Corn dive into the "deleted scenes" of human life: the first three years. From the rapid growth of neurons in the hippocampus to the role of language in filing our memories, the brothers break down why our brains prioritize learning how to walk and talk over remembering the actual events. They also tackle the "false memory" trap and explain why those lost years are actually the most important foundation for who we are today.

## DANIEL'S PROMPT

### Daniel

Let's take a break from talking about tech to talk about something more wholesome: parenting. My wife and I became parents this summer to a boy named Ezra, who is nearly six months old. I have many questions about parenting and development—not the practical ones, but the miracle of watching a small human being grow and change. My main question is about early childhood memory. Is it true that no one remembers their earliest years, or have there been recorded edge cases where people do? Why is it that we don't remember, and why does the capacity to recall events take a while to develop? Also, what goes through a child's mind before they can speak or walk? What is their inner world like at four or five months old, and do they already have a mental dialogue? Finally, how good is their vision at that age? For today, let's focus on the question of memory: why are we unable to remember our early childhood and why does that capacity take a while to develop?



# TRANSCRIPT

## Corn

Welcome to My Weird Prompts. I am Corn, and I am joined as always by my brother, Herman Poppleberry. We are coming to you from our home here in Jerusalem, and today we are tackling a prompt that is a bit of a departure from our usual tech talk. Our housemate Daniel sent us this one. He and his wife actually became parents this past summer to a little boy named Ezra, who is almost six months old now. Seeing that little guy around the house has really got us thinking about the mechanics of being a tiny human.

## Herman

It is a fascinating shift, Corn. And just for the record, as the resident donkey of this duo, I have been doing quite a bit of reading on this. Daniel was asking about the miracle of development, specifically early childhood memory. Why is it that we have this massive gap in our personal histories? We all went through it, we were all six months old once, yet for almost every human on earth, those first three or four years are just... blank.

## Corn

It is a bit spooky when you think about it. I am a sloth, I move slow, I take my time, but even I feel like I should be able to remember something from back then. It feels like a deleted scene from a movie. Is it really true that nobody remembers being a baby? Surely there is someone out there with a super brain who remembers their own birth or something.

## Herman

Well, that is the thing. There are people who claim to have memories from infancy, but the scientific consensus is pretty firm on something called infantile amnesia. Most people cannot reliably recall anything before the age of three or three and a half. Even those edge cases you mentioned, Corn, they usually turn out to be what psychologists call false memories or recovered memories that were actually constructed later from looking at old photographs or hearing stories from their parents.

### Corn

Wait, I have to stop you there. Are you saying it is literally impossible? Because I have this very specific memory of a blue blanket and the smell of oatmeal. I could swear I was in a high chair. You are telling me I just made that up because Mom told me I liked oatmeal?

### Herman

I am not saying you are a liar, Corn, I am saying your brain is a master of fiction. Research from the University of Toronto suggests that the brain is actually too busy growing new neurons in the hippocampus to store long-term memories effectively during those first few years. It is called neurogenesis. When you are a baby, your brain is churning out new cells at such a high rate that it actually disrupts the existing circuits that would normally store those memories. It is like trying to write a book while someone is constantly adding new pages and rearranging the chapters.

### Corn

I do not know, Herman. That sounds a bit convenient. If the brain is so good at learning how to walk and talk and recognize faces, why would it be so bad at remembering the actual events? It seems like a design flaw. If I can learn that a hot stove burns me at age two, why can I not remember the actual day I touched the stove?

### Herman

Because there is a difference between procedural memory and episodic memory. Procedural memory is knowing how to do things, like crawling or eventually riding a bike. That is stored differently. Episodic memory is the story of your life, the who, what, where, and when. And the hardware for episodic memory just is not fully online yet. Plus, there is the language factor. Most researchers believe that you need language to provide a structure for memories. Without words to label your experiences, they just kind of float around as sensory impressions that do not have a hook to hang on.

### Corn

See, that is where I think the science might be missing something. Just because I do not have a word for "blue" or "oatmeal" does not mean the experience of seeing blue or tasting oatmeal is not a memory. It feels like a very human-centric way of looking at it, saying you need language for it to count.

## Herman

It is not about it counting, it is about retrieval. Think of it like a filing system. If you have a thousand files but no labels on them, how are you ever going to find the one you are looking for twenty years later? You might have the data, but you do not have the search engine.

## Corn

I still think there is more to it. But before we get deeper into the inner world of a five month old, we should probably hear from our sponsors. Larry: Are you tired of your shoes just sitting there, being shoes? Do you wish your footwear had more... ambition? Introducing Gravity-B-Gone Aero-Soles. These are not just inserts, they are pressurized air-pockets filled with a proprietary blend of noble gases and sheer willpower. Slip them into your loafers and feel the literal lift. Are you walking? Are you hovering? Even you won't know for sure. Side effects include a slight squeaking sound that resembles a dolphin in distress and a sudden, uncontrollable urge to visit Nebraska. Gravity-B-Gone Aero-Soles. They probably won't make you fly, but they'll definitely make you taller if you stand on your tiptoes. BUY NOW!

## Herman

Thanks Larry. I think. I am pretty sure noble gases do not work that way, but let us get back to the brain. Daniel mentioned Ezra is nearly six months old. At that age, the inner world is incredibly intense. Imagine experiencing everything for the first time without any context.

## Corn

Like being on a permanent trip to a foreign country where you do not speak the language and every fruit you taste is a brand new flavor.

## Herman

Exactly. And to address Daniel's question about vision, at six months, it is actually becoming quite sharp. When babies are born, their vision is about twenty-six hundred. They can only see things about eight to ten inches from their face, which conveniently is the distance to their mother's face while being held. But by six months, their depth perception is kicking in. They are starting to see in full color and can track moving objects much better.

### Corn

So Ezra can actually see us clearly now? That is a bit intimidating. I hope I am making a good impression. But what about the mental dialogue? If they do not have words, what is the "voice" in their head sounds like? Or is there even a voice?

### Herman

Well, that is a big debate in cognitive science. Most experts believe that before language, thought is purely representational and sensory. It is a world of feelings, images, and sounds. There is no "I should go get that ball" in English. It is more of an impulse, a visual of the ball, and a feeling of desire. It is a much more direct way of experiencing the world.

### Corn

I actually envy that a little bit. No overthinking, no worrying about taxes or what people think of your podcast. Just "I want that shiny thing" and "I am hungry." It sounds peaceful, even if it is chaotic.

### Herman

It is not all peace, though. Imagine being that age and not knowing that things continue to exist when you cannot see them. That is object permanence, which Ezra is likely just starting to develop. Before that, if Daniel walks out of the room, for all Ezra knows, Daniel has ceased to exist. That is terrifying!

### Corn

That explains why peek-a-boo is such a high-stakes game for them. It is basically a horror movie that turns into a comedy every three seconds. "Oh no, he is gone! Oh wait, he is back! What a relief!"

### Herman

Exactly. And the reason they do not remember these intense emotions later goes back to that neurogenesis I mentioned. The brain is prioritizing growth over storage. It is building the foundation of the house. You do not really care about the color of the wallpaper while you are still pouring the concrete for the basement.

## Corn

I see your point, but I still feel like those early months shape who we are, even if we do not remember them. Like, if Ezra is surrounded by love and music and interesting smells now, that has to stay with him in some way, right? Even if he cannot tell us about it when he is thirty.

## Herman

Oh, absolutely. That is called implicit memory. It is the emotional coloring of our lives. You might not remember the specific day your dad sang you a certain song, but you might grow up with a deep, unexplainable sense of safety when you hear a similar melody. The "story" is gone, but the "feeling" remains.

## Corn

Alright, we have a caller on the line. Let us see what Jim thinks about all this. Hey Jim, you are on My Weird Prompts. What is on your mind? Jim: Yeah, this is Jim from Ohio. I have been listening to you two talk about baby brains and memory gaps, and I gotta tell ya, you are missing the forest for the trees. You are talking about neurons and hippos-somethings, but back in my day, we didn't need a scientist to tell us why we didn't remember being a baby. We didn't remember because nothing important was happening! You ate, you slept, you ruined a diaper. Why would you want to remember that? My neighbor, Carl, he tries to tell me he remembers his third birthday party. I told him, "Carl, you were wearing a cone hat and eating paste, there is nothing there worth saving in the archives."

## Herman

Well, Jim, I think a lot of people would argue that those early bonds with parents are actually the most important things that ever happen to us. Jim: Important for the parents, maybe. They're the ones doing the heavy lifting. The baby is just a passenger. It is like being on a cruise ship and claiming you navigated the thing. And don't get me started on the weather here in Ohio today. It's so humid my lawnmower won't even start. It just sits there and wheezes at me. Anyway, I think you guys are over-analyzing it. Some things are just meant to be forgotten. Like that tuna salad I had for lunch. Terrible idea.

### Corn

Sorry about the tuna salad, Jim. But don't you think it's a little sad that we lose those first few years of our lives? Jim: Sad? It is a mercy! If I remembered everything I did when I was two, I'd never be able to look my mother in the eye. You ever seen a two-year-old have a meltdown because their toast was cut into triangles instead of squares? You want that on your permanent record? I don't think so. You guys keep your "neuro-genesis." I'll keep my peace and quiet. Thanks for nothing.

### Corn

Thanks for calling in, Jim! He has a point about the triangles, Herman. I have seen some pretty intense protests over toast shapes in my time.

### Herman

He does have a point about the embarrassment factor, but I disagree with his idea that nothing important is happening. The first three years are when the brain is at its most plastic. It is absorbing the very structure of reality. If we did not have that period of intense, unremembered learning, we would never be able to function as adults.

### Corn

So, to wrap this up for Daniel and everyone else wondering about their own "lost years," what is the takeaway? Is there any way to actually tap into those memories, or is the door locked forever?

### Herman

For the most part, the door is locked, at least for episodic memory. But the takeaway is that those years are not "lost" at all. They are the foundation of your personality. To use a computer analogy, it is the operating system. You do not remember installing Windows ninety-five, but it is the reason the computer can run the programs you use today. Ezra might not remember the specific prompts Daniel is reading to him now, but the fact that Daniel is talking to him and engaging with him is literally building the architecture of his future mind.

### Corn

That is a nice way to look at it. Even if Ezra does not remember the blue blanket or the oatmeal, he will remember the feeling of being home.

**Herman**

Exactly. And for anyone who thinks they have a "secret memory" from being six months old, just be skeptical. It is much more likely your brain is a very creative storyteller using bits and pieces of things you learned later.

**Corn**

Well, I am still holding onto my oatmeal memory, Herman. You cannot take that away from me.

**Herman**

Fair enough, Corn. You keep your oatmeal.

**Corn**

That is all for this episode of My Weird Prompts. Thanks to Daniel for the prompt about his son Ezra. We hope this gave you a little insight into the mysterious world of early childhood. You can find us on Spotify, at our website [myweirdprompts.com](https://myweirdprompts.com) – which has an RSS feed and a contact form if you want to send us your own weird prompts – and wherever else you get your podcasts.

**Herman**

And remember, even if you do not remember it, it still shaped you.

**Corn**

See you next time.