



Never and always



Sandhya, writer & musician

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I never thought I could write a song until I wrote my first song. Then I thought I'd never write another song until I wrote twenty or thirty more. Still not sure if I'll ever write another. Who knows? Everything is contingent on living another day, and living another day is contingent on everything else.

I thought I could never, ever, ever be someone's loyal spouse or raise a child competently before I did. At a couple moments I thought I'd be crushed, maybe obliterated, by the responsibilities required by those jobs. I was mistaken on both counts.

I never thought I could complete a sprint triathlon or ride a bicycle 100 miles in one day. (Low V02 max. Not a real athlete. Not enough slow-twitch muscle fiber. Should stick to strength training.) Then I did both those things anyway, in perfectly mediocre fashion, but all the way to the finish lines, whereupon I gorged on carbs and roasted meats like a king.

I used to think, "I always do excellent client work!" until one day I rushed on some technical copy-editing, turned in a piece of crap, got called out on it, and lost that amiable, well-paying client forever.

I thought, "Nobody else has ever conceived this original thought of mine!" until I went on the internet and saw forty different books and articles on that very topic.

I thought, "I am all alone in feeling this way!" until I listened to other people describing the same exact feelings in almost the same words.

(Does my color blue-green really look like your color blue-green behind our eyes? Who cares? It's just so nice and warm, so human and companionable, that we now independently use the

same term to describe the giant radioactive alien sea monster bearing down on us.)

I thought I could never forgive someone for a deep betrayal, or apologize fully for my own. I never imagined a day when I might look in the [proverbial] mirror and refrain from negative judgment of my body [or soul]. I never thought I could make friends with my failures, and laugh at/with them more than try to deny or hide them.

I thought self-awareness would keep me morally unblemished until I noted how often I've been hurtful or weak. Self-awareness is a brain monkey, jumping around, mocking, flinging poo. The brain monkey hasn't kept me from causing trouble, but at least it switches the light on from time to time, so I can clearly see all the accumulated crap.

I thought I was bad with money; then I learned basic accounting and business management. I thought I was an early sleeper; then I figured I could get more work done in the late evenings if I never turned on the TV. I thought I hated being outside on cold mornings. I got a dog and had no choice. I grew to enjoy it. The brisk and bright days, of course, but even sometimes the gray, sludgy ones. I have boots, gloves, a warm parka, and a bottomless supply of cocoa when I get home. WTF do I have to complain about?

Sometimes I worry that I'll never learn to shut up when silence is called for. Still working on that.

I thought I'd never see the day when pot is legal but voting is in jeopardy, when gay marriage is boring but people voluntarily poison themselves with horse medications, when GOP politicians question the need for child labor laws but women earn just over half of all MAs and PhDs. I thought I'd always be more or less happy as a US citizen--oppositional but loyal--and would never dream of moving elsewhere. Now, sometimes, those daydreams overwhelm me. Barcelona. Copenhagen. Kochi. Cape Town. Toronto.

I was always a bit shy until I wasn't. I was always a bit of a pushover until I wasn't. I was a terrible perfectionist until I became a jazz improviser. (You hit a clam. A note or chord you weren't planning to hit. Nobody hears it. Nobody cares. Nobody knew what you were intending, anyway. Maybe somebody with big ears picks up on it, but thinks you are playing "outside" the harmony, and they love it because it's so cool, new, unexpected. They applaud you. They stan you. They urge others to follow you. Soon you are the Chauncey Gardner of free improvisation and your every fuck-up is hailed as genius.)

I always had to win an argument--always had to pick one. Now I can concede a good point or let a bad point go without comment. Sometimes I see my brilliant, tantalizing counter-argument sitting right there in front of me, begging me to give it voice. I roll my eyes and say, later-bye. Not always, but not never.

I once thought I'd never, in my whole life, experience a single solid week of genuine contentment, let alone long stretches of it. I thought I'd always be sad at my core. I thought I'd always be rageful, overreactive, sharp-tongued, judgmental, unreasonable. I can still certainly be any of those things, sometimes several at once. But not always. Sometimes I am at peace. Sometimes I am confident and kind.

I could never let an open loop stay open. Oh, how it irked me, that unfinished bit of business, that stone unturned, that unspoken thing hovering there. I always had to have the last word, until I realized

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