

A new month, a fresh slate isn't it such a joyous event? There is nothing quite like a fresh slate to begin again on, to know that all of yesterday is gone, and tomorrow is not here yet. That what we create today is solely up to us. What will we make of it?

The only thing more special, to me, is when a new year begins on the first day of the week. What wonder and joy it beholds to think that we are not only given a new day, a new week, a new month, but a whole new year! Three-hundred-sixty-five days to make it what we will! The possibilities are as endless as the sand on the shore, and it makes my mind wild with ideas, my fingers itch to write them all out.

Yet, if there's one thing I've learned over the many years I've been blessed with life on this earth, it's that fresh starts do not truly erase pasts. For our past is what has made us who we are, and if we did away with the former us, we would not have the current or future us.

I, like many, have my own dark moments, hidden secrets, and by-gone errors that I wish I could have as a do-over, or erase them from memory. Yet, are those not the moments where we blossomed the most beautiful if we accepted the moment to learn in?

Twenty-Twenty dawned bright for most of us, didn't it? We stayed up late and welcomed her in with pomp and circumstance. My own family meticulously counted down the hours from 1pm onwards; that's eleven hours of preparation, excitement, and joy we had in awaiting the arrival of a brand new year that would give us one additional day. One additional clean slate, twenty-four hours to make something of ourselves!

Yet, for most of us, by the time February or March rolled around, we found that we weren't quite so sure about this fresh new slate we'd spent hours welcoming in. The memes about such a thing rolled out, and made many of us chuckle while a few sobbed quietly. And I, like most of you, have faced Twenty-Twenty with a sense of apprehension.

After all, who in their wildest dreams anticipated that a pandemic would rock the earth? {Hands down to all the authors in the back row there!} Yet, this has been a year of wild growth for me in ways I could have never imagined! Painful at times, crazy messy, but perfectly wonderfully beautiful.

I'm one of those crazy nerds who goal plans each year. I spend the month of December prayerfully considering the goals I will be working towards in the New Year, and when the confetti from our celebration has landed, when the smoke from the sparklers has dissipated, all the "New Year" jokes have been laughed at, and my family crawls sleepily off to bed. I lay awake there and dream of what the New Year will hold for me.

Will I meet those goals? Will I smash them out of the park and need new ones? Or will I make pitiful excuses as to why I'm not tackling them head on? Will the unknown knock a log in my path that will take every bit of effort to overcome?

This year felt like a log might be in my path and I might not overcome it. I felt the stress that millions around the world felt at the unknown futures that lay ahead of us. I groaned at each new rule rolled out, and each new carefully constructed plan. I thought hibernating until it was over would be better, because I didn't appreciate the command to sit on my sofa and watch tv to save the world.

The funny thing is, even those moments of deepest night when the suffocating darkness threatened to leave me without words, or thoughts, or breath I realised that I had two choices to make. I could sit on the sofa and watch tv to save the world, or I could take action to save myself.

It's an odd statement, isn't it? To proclaim that I can save myself? I agree, it totally is! After all, are we not raised to believe that worrying about ourselves should be on the bottom of the list of to-dos? That others are more important, and that dealing with self, is, well.. selfish? Yet, in our well intended teachings I think we miss a few important things.

There's an age old saying, and a mandatory rule about flying on a plane: "Put on your own oxygen mask before attempting to help those around you." The Steward(ess) will go on to explain that if you can't breathe you can't help your child. That if you are calm, collected, and cool-headed you can think clearly and save your own child by helping them get their safety gear on. Why do we not apply this mentality to our lives? I've pondered that question more times than I care to tell you this year.

Why have I always put myself last? Why have I waited to seek my own oxygen mask at the moment that I have no air left to breathe? I'm not alone in this journey, this misconception. I have heard the cry so many times over, that I've lost count.

This year, this crazy wild, unexpectedly turbulent year of Twenty-Twenty, I chose the word Courage to live by. I can't say for sure why I was drawn to that word, but after much soul searching, many hunts through a dictionary (I told you I was a nerd.) After countless meanders through the thesaurus, I was brought, time and again back to Courage. Did you know that courage is the act of being brave?

It left me unsettled, and a little bit curious. Would my plans for Twenty-Twenty be rocky and I'd have to put on a brave face as I endured it? You see, my family was suppose to be making an international move. International moves are not simple, this I know, but would it be so turbulent I'd need a mask of bravery, until it was so firmly cemented in place that I could consider myself courageous?

As each new wave of craziness rolled across our airways this year, I silently wondered, "Was it this, that I needed courage for?" Yes, there were moments of breathless panic. There were moments of tears and frustrations, but not one of those moments felt like a call to courage. Perhaps they were. I won't lie, it *did* take courage to remain calm at times, plaster a smile on my face, and greet my children with a, "Race you to the sofa.." many mornings, but it didn't feel like a *true* call to courage.

There was a slump somewhere in there, a point when I stopped embracing each new day as a fresh slate. Where they all blended in together and there was no excitement about the freshness of a new day, a new week, or even a new month. *Was this the call to Courage? To pick myself up and begin again?*

Maybe. I may never know, but it's exactly what I did. I picked myself up, dusted the frustrations and setbacks off, and began again. One foot in front of the other. When I couldn't leave my home, I retreated to the backyard. I worked out, much to my neighbour's amusement, back there, slipping and sliding on dewy grass.

I soaked up the sun in a child's beanbag, much to his amusement, and the moment I stood up, he jumped in. I read books, I challenged my kids to ping-pong matches. They won them all. I planted seeds that never grew, repotted herbs that flourished, helped my husband clean out the garage, and then the shed. But none of that truly felt like a call to courage.

And then it happened, right there in the middle of an ordinary day! A book was read, a switch was flipped, and suddenly I realised that years of hurt and pain and discomfort were lodged deep within me. Years of giving of myself over and over until I had nothing left to give and still choosing to give more had robbed me, not only of my health, but of me. I started asking, "Who am I?"

It's a most peculiar thing to look in the mirror one day and wonder who you are. I knew my name, my birthdate, where I lived, who my parents were, who my children were, that my husband loved me. I knew where I was, and where I was supposed to be, but I looked into the mirror and I did not recognise the girl staring back at me. Who was she?

It was the moment that true healing began, The moment I was willing to look deep inside myself and accept my past for what it was, my future for what it could be, and to know that while none of it may not turn out "as it could be", I could still enjoy every moment of it- so long as my own oxygen mask was on first!

To those who walked and talked alongside me on the journey (thank you!), I called it "reclaiming my health", which sounds funny doesn't it? It brings up visions of racing down the road and snatching something out of a person's hand, but it's not. It might sound like eating well and exercising, but that's only a portion of the picture.

You see, I always thought that health was all about getting over being sick, a broken bone (I've had a few), and other ailments. But oh, Dear Reader, it's so much more! It's messy, and beautiful and crazy and it takes a lot of courage, but it's so worth it to find yourself again. To find the true you, to unbury your smile and to laugh again.

Author's Note:



Today's story, is a true story. It is open, and raw, and entirely me. I wasn't sure about sharing it, but the part of me that is practicing courage this year decided that if it was healing to write, it may be therapeutic for others to read.

It is not meant to be a lecture to put your own oxygen mask on, but a glimpse of the road I journeyed thus far in Twenty-Two. It is meant as a glimpse into my life, a reflection of the person who writes the stories, an honest look into who I am.

I hope that whatever road you are walking this year, you are able to find your own sense of peace. That if you have lost yourself, you are able to find him or her. That you too will smile again.

The Reluctant Author:

