

Self-doubt, vulnerability, lessons from writing

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I feel like I have been running a sprint.

Ever since I committed to writing this past year, I have searched high and low for nooks and crannies of my life to find space in which to fit this endeavor. Between my part-time job feeding the Brandt Clan, I left myself little margin as every spare moment went into stringing words together on my trusty Mac. I chased this passion until it wore me down a little, encroached on my family life more than a little, and consumed most of my mind. In this imperfect life, even the best of creative work can become contaminated with burnout and burdened by the unrelenting demands of a fast-moving world of ideas.

As we entered the summer season with the children home from school, it was a seamless transition into a break from blogging, which also naturally lent a time of recalibration and reflection. Ironically, just as I was dialing down my writing life, a series of opportunities came knocking at my door—I was featured on a massive platform, [Momastery](#); published a feature at [Taipei Times](#); and became a [HuffPost blogger](#). However, this whirlwind of events haven't managed to knock me off my feet. I am still recalibrating and reflecting, because I sorely need to catch my breath from this sprint, and I'd like to run the marathon, in both writing and life.

Yet something sinister has accompanied my past year of writing. I was diligently being a truth teller, doing my best to be faithful to the craft. I believed this creative expression would bring clarity to my ideas and perfect the art of paying attention. But like our aging treadmill with a small, barely detectible vibration that threatens our equilibrium on the belt, there had been an underlying malfunction corrupting my writing routine. I recognized it as self-deprecation—every single time I wrote a post and released it into the world, I would psychologically punish myself for having written such crappy work. I was gripped with the fear of sucking, and the way I coped with this fear was to preemptively tell myself that I sucked before the world got a chance to do it. If this sounds horrible to you, trust me, it was worse having to

live it. This poison I fed myself seeped into other aspects of my life. I could not receive affirmation from friends and family because my self-doubt stood guard, batting compliments away with excuses not to believe them. Any criticism, constructive or not, destroyed me. Rejections destroyed me. My heart became tattered and torn until I only looked a shadow of my normally confident self.

This summer, I am staring down this monster within me. I had believed the self-doubt was part of writing openly and exposing my heart. I thought, of course, I am sharing my soul with the Internet, for pete's sake, it's normal to be afraid. But what had happened is that the monster held my dignity and worth in hostage. It told me,

"If your writing is crappy, then YOU are crappy."

"If no one paid attention to your writing, then YOU are not worthy of attention."

"If you fail at writing, YOU ARE a failure."

I developed a codependent relationship with this monster and embraced its lies with vigor. It is time I freed myself from its menacing grasp.

The truth is, our work never defines our worth. What is intrinsically valuable about us is not what we produce. What we create is an overflow of who we are: our character, our love, our courage, our resilience, our joy, our ability to learn, make mistakes, and grow. These are the important things that define us. This is why my children can draw a stick figure and I frame it and delight in it as a masterpiece, because I find their worth not in their product, but because they are my children, they belong with me.

Brene Brown, in her new book, [*Daring Greatly*](#), says we are to engage the world from a place of worthiness. She says about the state of wholeheartedness that "at its very core is vulnerability and worthiness: facing uncertainty, exposure, and emotional risks, and knowing that I am enough."

I needed to hear this. My monster needs to hear this and back the hell down. I am enough not because of how much I write, how well I write, or how many visitors I have to my blog. I am enough because I belong to my people: to God, family, friends, and readers. The answer is not to stop being vulnerable, but to bravely face the uncertainty and risk with the assurance that my worth is enough. I don't need to overcompensate to seek validation, nor wear false humility and berate myself unnecessarily. I need to walk a steady path, keep the main thing the main thing, and stay faithful to this sacred art.

I am enough: the mantra I repeat whenever the monster speaks. I am enough.
Armed with my worthiness I will keep telling stories with conviction, using my words
to seek justice, love mercy, and to walk humbly.

And if I fail, I'll know I'm not a failure, but rather, to paraphrase Theodore Roosevelt,
I will have spent myself in a worthy cause and failed while daring greatly.

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