***The buddha – the buddha, said that we become the thing that we most resist. In my case, I think that means that I must have been pushing very hard against a fat Yorkshireman.***

It doesn’t take much of a journey of self-knowledge for me to realise that that’s what I am.

But what I’m going to do now is tell you a bit more about me. A bit more about why I’m going to tell you what I’m going to tell you. A then a bit more about why now is a good time to be telling you. And then I’m going to tell you a bit about more about you.

### Why me?

Since I was a teenager, I have fantasised about being a writer. And I’ve written things. But, you know, life got in the way. I studied English Literature at university because I liked poetry, but, for me, having to write essays about poetry is like having to submit a form to the government for permission to have sex. And then – actually around about the same time that I discover non-government sanctioned sex – I discovered philosophy.

And then just recently I actually wrote a book. And then even more recently I found a publisher for my book!

Why now?

***They say there’s no time like the present, and they say there’s no present like time – but it’s a fucker to wrap.***

## The biscuit tin and the biscuit

Why this? Because while I was writing my book on project management, I realised something so blindingly obvious that most people don’t notice it. Ideas and things are made of different stuff. Descriptions of biscuits on the tin and the actual biscuit – they’re made of different stuff.

### Exact Match

Why is the great British Bake Off such a successful show? Because there’s something really dramatic about failed baking – it’s drama, and it’s just making biscuits in a tent in Berkshire. But, of course, the biscuits get judged. These biscuits have consequences.

Dealing with these emotions, dealing with this judgement, is work.

### Why you?

I bet there’s something creative that you’ve wanted to do. Actually – let’s not get fancy and say creative. Because when we say creative, we start thinking about artists and geniuses and that gives us a cop out. ***I’m not an artist, I’m not a genius. This is literally a conversation that I had with a friend of mine. He said that he was disappointed that his son wasn’t a genius. And I said – that’s not that surprising if you’re his father. It would be more suspicious if he was a genius.***

Let’s forget about creativity. Let’s just think about something that you’ve wanted to do. And then you didn’t do it. I bet there’s a biscuit that you fantasised about making. And then you didn’t make it. Or maybe you took lessons for a while. You made a biscuit – and it didn’t turn out how you expected. ***Like on the bake off, it was soft when it should have been crispy. And it was crispy when it should have been soft.*** And then you gave them up the lessons, or you gave up practicing. Maybe you got to a point where you weren’t making any progress, so you just kind of stopped. Maybe you did something and somebody said something snidey or sarcastic and you died a little bit inside.

Emotional labour

This is the work that you need to do to deal with emotions that you don’t want, or don’t expect to have. A writer called Arlie Russell Hochschild wrote a book called “The Managed Heart.” And she calls this emotional labour.

***Now by emotional labour, I don’t mean what the nurses said to my mother when I was born – with serious faces – “It’s a ginger!”***

Emotional labour is the work that you have to do to deal with your emotions. I’ve seen a couple of reports of famous actors talking about – James McAvoy saying that he’s known some people who were fantastic actors – but they just couldn’t take the rejection. And apparently Patrick Stewart gave a speech at a graduation at a drama school where he said, that’s you ***job*** now. Your ***job*** is to take the rejection.

And emotions are what you get when you make biscuits, you do something creative, or actually when you do anything, certainly anything where you expect any outcome.

When you do something creative, you’re giving yourself work. You’re giving yourself emotional work.

Six basic emotions  
  
When I say emotions, what am I talking about?

Sadness, happiness, fear, anger, surprise and disgust.

These are the six basic emotions and what I realised is that we can experience all of them whenever we do something creative.

***And it’s the same emotions that we could experience in a torrid lover affair – or while assembling a piece of IKEA furniture.***

## The heroine’s journey

## Abandoned Quests

### Agreed Activity

***I lived in North London for several years and almost as soon as I could afford it, I signed up for improvisation classes – I’m not entirely sure why, I think it’s some kind of rule.***

But doing those improvisation classes – and then reading about improvisation. I learned some interesting things. One of them is the idea of agreed activity. What’s agreed activity.

OK, let’s give you an example. Imagine this is an improv show and there are four of us on the stage and we ask for a location for a scene. And the scene is on a sailing ship. One of the improvisers has a good idea and puts a pretend telescope to their eye and says “Look! A pirate ship!”

This totally takes the story in a direction that the audience are happy with. And now what do they want to see! They want to see the engagement with the pirates! They don’t mind seeing comedy attempts to get ready for the pirates arriving. But they want to see the fight with the pirates.

***There’s a traditional dress for a pirate. Eye patch. Parrot on one shoulder and a missing leg replaced by the leg of a dining table. It tells the story of a bruising raid on an unusually well-defended pet store followed by a hurried visit to an antiques shop.***

But here’s what actually happens a lot of the time. Instead of moving the scene forward, someone on the stage says something like “Let’s scrub the decks!”

And if you’re not careful all of the other improvisers on the stage say yes, lets! And then the scene just gets very boring. Because it’s not going forward.

## The solution

Find something just slightly more edgy than agreed activity

Get up and do the thing that you want to do every day.

Do something expensive / humiliating / stupid (it worked for me).

Insert just a little bit of jeopardy.

### Notice the emotions

Especially notice the negative emotions that you might not want to admit to anyone else. Boredom, jealousy irritation.

### Second Circle

I read another book – called Presence by Patsy Rodenberg. And the basic idea of the book is that there are three ways that we communicate. She calls them circles. She calls them first, second and third circle. But I’m going to talk about them in this order, 3, 1 and then 2.

There’s third circle – which is **SHOUTING!** This out, pushing, forcing out.

There’s first circle – which is in, hardly making any noise at all, yes, whatever you say.

And then there’s second circle. Second circle is the difficult one. Second circle is a conversation.

Oh, my god! I’m having a revelation! (I’m not I had it earlier, but I’m pretending I’m having it now for dramatic effect). This is what creativity and doing things is about.

But this is what I realised. I realised that I can’t be in second circle all day. I can only do that for a few minutes – maybe an hour tops a day.

### Monkey Mind

There’s another really stupid thing that you can do to fuck up your own efforts. And that’s basically – having done something, pile on the expectations.

Did you ever think that setting yourself ridiculous goals might be your own way of scrubbing the decks (Oh my God! This is another revelation that I had earlier that I’m pretending to have right now!).

### Know your power

Yeah, I know that would be a great title. For a self-help book. I’d like to claim entire credit for this next bit. But there are a couple of people I need to credit. One of them is Mr North, my O-level physics teacher – yes – I did O-levels, I’m that old. He had us do this exercise in class. And it’s an exercise to discover your power. Anyone know what the scientific definition of power is?

It's the amount of work you do divided by time.   
  
Anyone know what the scientific definition of work is? It’s force times distance travelled – that’s Newton we owe for that.  
  
So here I am – a fat Yorkshireman – and I exert a force on the ground. And if I step up and down on this chair, I’ll travel a distance.

## Understand that sooner or later, someone has to say fuck it!

This is a really powerful exercise. But be careful with it. ***I once did it with my wife over dinner – true story – and it turned out the thing that she was hesitating from doing was telling me all the things that I was doing that were irritating her. She started talking during the starter and she hadn’t finished by desert and coffee.***

Hesitation

Frustration

Impatience

Fuck it!