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# The Trust-Fall: Crafting a Re- Enchanted Present

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Like almost everyone, the COVID-19 pandemic drastically rewrote my future plans. I finished my B.A in spring of 2020, then moved home to regroup and figure out what to do next. And then I stayed there, trying to figure out what to do next, and making no progress. Nearly two years after graduating, it felt like I had nothing to show for it.

The hardest thing about having the rug pulled out from under you just as you're supposed to be taking your first adult steps into the world, is that you have no reason to trust yourself to handle it. You have so little history with yourself to look to for reassurance that you're going to be okay. The confidence to take steps, to move forward, comes from self-trust, and without it, you become stuck.

I think we have all experienced this to one degree or another, whether due to depression or life circumstances or bad habits, or some combination

of the three. The longer you're stuck, the more stuck you feel, and the more out-of-reach your best options appear. I could not move forward, because I didn't trust my own judgment to choose a forward path. What felt, at the time, like trying to build a life for myself, amounted only to treading water.

The first months of 2022 brought more dramatic changes for me. Some changes were good, and some less good, but the specifics matter less than the result: I was shaken out of the routine I had become trapped in, and forced to re-evaluate the goals I was ostensibly working toward. When I really stopped to think about it, I found that I could barely identify what it was that I wanted out of my present, or my future. What I wanted had been largely buried by all the things I told myself were simply too far out of reach. With that fresh perspective, the general boredom and loneliness I had been telling myself were normal, unavoidable,

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or all in my head, crystallized into very real unhappiness. I became, in a word, disenchanted with the life I had been trying to convince myself I was content with.

Which brought me back to the problem of trust. If I had spent nearly two years convincing myself to settle into a life that made me miserable, surely I couldn't be trusted to find my own way out of it. I needed to manufacture that self-trust essentially from scratch.

**This was my trust-fall:** In the summer of 2022, on some mix of impulse and intuition, I moved from my hometown in coastal Maine, to the Boston area.

The move was a risk. Although relocating would allow me to transfer from an online to an on-campus program at UMASS, which would provide me with peers and some structure to anchor me, I didn't know anyone in Boston starting out. Nor did I consider it an especially pleasant city, or have experience living in an urban setting - much less on my own. And, while what I would leave behind might have been lonely or unfulfilling, it was also safe, and safety is something I value highly.

Dropping everything to move would mean gambling that safety against the hope that I could build something good for myself somewhere new. I want to be someone who values their own happiness enough to take risks for it. I want it to come naturally to bet on myself.

And so, the trust-fall. I threw myself into something entirely new, somewhere entirely new, with no choice but to trust that I could catch myself.

If I'm honest, I didn't expect that I would like living here. I couldn't trust my instinct that moving here would, itself, make me happy. I half-believed that the point of the exercise would be to make the best of it - that that was where I would get to "catch" myself. I thought "I'll finish grad school, and then figure out what comes next after that. I can handle it for two years." I thought I was manufacturing myself a chance to be brave, to be resilient, and to figure out what I'd do next.

It *was* a chance to be brave, and to be resilient: settling in somewhere new isn't easy, and neither is meeting people, or learning how to navigate the city on your own. Living here is expensive, and loud, and often overwhelming. It can take as long as 90 minutes for me to commute to campus, 4 miles away. The sense of never being alone is a constant drain on my mental energy. And, I've been pleasantly surprised to discover that I love it here. I love the pace of the city, and the currents of art and music that are never very far beneath the surface, and the communities of passionate people creating beautiful things. And most of all, I love that I can see myself staying here. I'm not just waiting to have a better idea, or for something better to come along: I'm building a life that I love now, and that I think I will keep on loving as I go on living it.



*Moonrise from the North End, Emma Lovejoy*

Exploring my new city has been a spectacular adventure. I've found favorite places - to create, to recharge, to enjoy the first hot sunshine of spring and find mundane, beautiful things. I've stumbled, almost entirely by accident, upon hopes and dreams I could never have admitted to myself before, let alone articulated to others.

Trusting myself to take what felt like an impossibly big step and relocate has given me opportunities to see myself outside of my comfort zone, and to make intentional choices about when and how to push myself. Instead of defaulting to the assumption that

any and every change is out of reach, I've found the confidence to try anyway - and to believe that I will be able to handle the outcome, whatever it is.

Instead of unhappily continuing with online school for the sense of stability that academia can offer, I've been able to return to an in-person program. Getting back on campus, in turn, opened the door for me to explore and to fall in love with the field of Public History. After a lifetime trying to choose one interest to pursue at the expense of all the others, I've found a field that allows me to follow my curiosity and utilize the skills that come naturally to

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me. I feel, for the first time in years, that I'm working toward my own future, rather than simply working on something because it's "what you're supposed to do."

I have been able to give myself space to evaluate what ways of being bring me joy, and what vocations bring me a sense of fulfillment - and I have been able to pursue those things. I've prioritized my writing, and as a result I have my first published piece of fiction slated for this fall. At the same time, I'm learning to distance myself from the deeply-programmed feeling that a Capital-C Career is the only kind worth having, and the only way to prove that your work is worth doing. "Where does this job lead?" or "how do you make that a career?" are questions that steal the joy. Yes, I have found a field that I love, and yes, I believe I will find fulfilling work within it. But I'm learning to focus on the fulfillment, not the field.

Giving myself a clean slate was an incredible opportunity for self-reinvention. It's allowed me space to explore and embody the person I'm trying to grow up to be. I finally feel like I'm showing up for myself, as myself. And I've been lucky enough to surround myself with wonderful, supportive people for this process of reinvention: people who are kind, and compassionate, and who are also trying to learn what it could mean to live happy lives, if we can simply trust ourselves to take the leap.

My trust-fall gave me back authorship of my future plans. They're different than the future I imagined for myself in 2019, true. But they're also far more vivid and more hopeful than the best I could imagine in 2021. And, more importantly, my trust-fall laid the groundwork for me to believe that I am capable of creating a future for myself - no matter what my present may be.

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