

Dear Me
Annette Mendes

Dear Me,

I am writing this letter to myself to say goodbye to the dope forever. It held me down for so long that I didn't think I would come out alive. I thought it loved me more than anything in the world. It took everything I had and turned it into shit. I know too many families that fell apart from it.

One day I woke up and said, "I'm tired of this, burning one bridge after another." I knew I had to get myself some help. On that day, I went into detox, then to a house for pregnant women. After that, I went to a transitional house, then to a family shelter. After 5 ½ years of struggling, we finally got our housing.

I am still struggling, but now I accepted a higher power in my life. That pulled me out of the bondage I was in with the dope. Since I divorced the dope, I feel and look much better.

Love,
Annette

The Beauty of Life
Sharina

Dear Ann:

I get mad when I can't read and write what I want. Sometimes I can't do things on my own and that makes me very nervous. I like to be independent and do things on my own, but most of the time I can't do it by myself. My reading and writing is not good enough. When I read and I don't understand what I read I get very upset. I keep trying over and over until I get what I want. Sometimes I really want to express myself, the way I feel inside my heart. I can't explain it in pen and paper and that makes me feel bad.

So girl when I feel like this I drop the pen and paper and put on some country music like Patsy Cline and Jim Reeves and sometimes I cry and this takes my stress away, and sometimes I sing and dance like hell and forget about the reading, girl. Go have a nice, hot bath with salts for a half hour, after that get something to eat with a glass of wine and the music playing. Sit back on the sofa and listen to the beautiful songs and love yourself- sweet girl.

You should always remember what a special person you are- hold on to your hopes and reach out for the stars. Live with happiness and when you think of yourself always be with a smile. Look forward to do the things you always wanted to do. You are special and I love you. Fill yourself with the beauty of life.

I'm Like a River
Hewida Abdelmoty

Be patient. Be secure in yourself. Take step by step. Learn from mistakes. Try not to do it again. Even if you make a mistake, try again. Even if you feel not right, think about it. Take your time to think. Take a bath and imagine you make love with somebody you care about- it is a passion and that passion makes you see clear.

Does the heart have time to be upset? Life is good if I know how to treat myself. So good I could be an angel. I am a woman. When I think about other women feeling sad I like to make them feel better.

The river my name. Who I am my heart is. My soul, my brain is slow, but I know I am not slow. I want to know who I am. I know what I need is like a river. The moon is like a mirror in the river is like me. I wave and need to know my soul. I need to know who I am. I need to know what I need to know.

I'm like a river just going, the river never stops.

I'm waving like a river.

A Woman's Journal on Being Good to Myself
Mirella

I am writing this to a woman just like me. If you are always making mistakes, maybe you feel you can do better at your job. Just say I will be strong and do better at my job next time. If you are learning how to knit, I say try, don't give up, and don't put yourself down. Here is some advice on how to take care of yourself during hard times. What I do during hard times is meditate, yoga, stop and smell the flowers, read a good novel, and exercise. I write affirmations in a journal. When you feel down talk to God. Smile each day, think positive, learn from your mistakes, and be kinder to yourself.

Dear Friend
Carol Ann

Dear Friend,

It seems that you're having some problems like the way I use to be but there is a way you can manage your problems. For example, talk to a teacher, friend, family member and tell him or her about your problem or try to work things out yourself. I know sometimes it's hard to deal with some things alone but there's always someone you can talk to.

Most of the time you feel like you're shy or feel stupid for the things you did wrong. I know for a fact that it's not that really good to hold things inside because you might become a person that you don't want to be.

Yours truly,
Carol-Ann

Changes I Could Make About Myself

Venitha

Hi! My name is Venitha Alexander and I am from St Vincent which is in the Caribbean. I came to Canada as a refugee in 2004. I always like to write stories about myself.

Most of the time I called to myself, "Jumbie, you are stupid Venitha.

"Why are you doing this; because you do not love yourself?"

"I am too black and too fat. That is why I do not love myself."

"Black is beautiful. Not everybody looks the same...some black, some white, some fat, some thin, some with purple hair! Why should you get vexed with yourself?"

As I was lying on my bed I was thinking about some parts of my body. I had eyes. I had mouth. I had ears and feet. OK! This is what each and everyone is saying.

Mr. Eye said, "I am very important. Without me you cannot see where you are going."

Mr. Ear said, "It is me who hears when people bad talking all of we."

Then Mr. Nose said, "When a place smelling bad like hell is me, Nose, does have to smell the scent."

Mr. Mouth said, "I am very important too. If I don't eat, how you will get strength?"

Mr. Hand said, "I am important too. If I don't work how you will get food to eat?"

Mr. Foot jump up and said, "When you thief, people think is me Foot. I have to run."

Each and every one is important.

After all the arguments, Mr. Brain said, "What about me? You forget me? I am very important too. If you aggravate me I will be acting stupid."

But this is the King of your body, Mr. Heart.

Heart said, "All of you talking! I am the one who controls every part of your body. I will block off every part and set the whole body out of control. Don't forget me. It is me, Heart, who has the steering wheel. So I am the most important part of your body so do not mess with me.

I am writing this to all the ladies who don't love themselves. I am a woman. I walk like you. I look like you. I talk like you. Men must respect woman. Women are their mothers, women are their wives, their sisters. Women bring the child into the world. So men must give woman their respect so we can respect them too.

You are the one who has to love yourself so that someone else can love you; but if you do not love yourself who can love it for you? If you love yourself you have to do what is right. Give yourself the right food and keep away from all drugs and give yourself some time to get good exercise. Sleep well. Do a lot of walking and keep your health in good condition. When you do love yourself you will see how good it will be.

This is the good time of my life, coming to school here and meeting people learning about history. I am doing better about myself by stop bad-talking myself and to be what I am today. I know I am not stupid. I am wearing my nice ear rings, my nice red dress. I am combing my hair...looking nice. My body is very important to me now. I am a beautiful Darkie. Now I can see how much I love myself.

Sometimes I get mad with myself. Sometimes I am thinking that I am too hard on myself. I just feel like giving up on myself and that might not be only me. It might be all of you guys. I wish life was not so hard because when I first came to Canada I did not know how to read or write. Look at me now.

Struggling in Life

F. G.

Seventeen years ago, I was new to Toronto city. I had to learn many new things every day. There was so much to learn. Like the people behaviour, culture and how to survive.

It was difficult to learn the new cultures, because there are many different types of people from other country. Even though my brother helped me with some ideas, I found it hard to learn the new environment.

I used to feel down everyday. All my ideas were poor. I had a hard time eating food except drinking water. I also cannot sleep. It feels like I am all alone inside bushes and no one around. But some days I feel better. Meaning that I stopped worrying about the future. Sometimes I tried to live in the present, but I can't do it. I feel hopeless and my moral was very weak.

After several years, I started to think for myself and stopped worrying about others. For example getting up early morning, eating healthy, studying the city, and looking for a job or school.

I changed my idea of working and started ESL school to learn about the culture. I stopped calling myself poor and weak. For two years I learned at the school and got a job at IKEA, cleaning 15 washrooms. It was temporary. Mentally I was still weak. Some days I am happy and other days I am miserable. My working or going to school feels unreal. It feels like I am dreaming of everything.

But I kept struggling to win my weakness. I do nice things for myself, like writing letters for my friends, and cook food every day. Some write a letter back to me, others don't write. So I kept going to church to lift up my spirit. There are many people from my home town at the church. Going to the church was a big step I took. It feels good.

I think you should lift your spirit up by going to the house of God. And don't worry about tomorrow, only for today. You should appreciate what God gave you for today and feel good about everything. Try to listen your heart for decision.

I Can be Nicer to Me

Marilyn Dymchuk

Writing in my journal tells myself how good I am doing. I move to a different spot that is quiet when I get upset and frustrated. It's not a race to get my writing done. Coming to class to see new people with the same problem that I have feels good because then I am not alone in my learning. Relaxing in the same space that I am learning in makes it easier to learn. I am proud to show my work off when I have it done. Seeing my work published makes me happy. I am happy going to school and having friends and learning how to read. I stay away from people that I am not comfortable with because it won't make it easy for me to learn. Listening to music relaxes me. When I am stuck I pull the teacher aside and ask questions. I can go on to something different that I understand. I am encouraged by my husband, Boyd, myself, and others. I like having my learning kept confidential. That would make me happy.

Guilty Reflection of a Broken Mirror

Carolyn Trombley

The world I know appears to be shrinking day after day, minute by minute. The words I speak fall upon deaf ears. I see the mistakes in the guilty reflection of a broken mirror, when my days of anger existed. Now, as time passes, I confront my anger, and pick up the pieces of my life. I tell myself the cracks are in the mirror, and I am beautiful, despite the bitter words I had once called myself. These days, I cover my mirror in flowers and sing happier songs, while dancing in cheerful strides of strength.

A new woman lives in my home, free from the broken mirror and a broken heart from loved ones lost in the twisted metal of an accident on a darkened highway. My husband, two sons, and daughter live on in heaven's realm. I live each day hopeful and true. Photos are the only things that lift my spirits, memories that comfort my heart. I do not mind the quietness now, for I only hear what I want to hear. Today, I will call a new friend, a woman I met in a women's group two months ago.

She loves me for whom I have become. I will let her know that I am still alive. That will cheer her up, keeping her from her own depressions in life. I will live for my new friend and help her through her sorrows and grief. I will help dry her tears with what little love I have left within me. I cry no more on the outside, but on the inside, I am a wreck with hope.

My past is filled with sadness. Grief eats at my soul. I hunger for loved ones concealed behind the cold steel of cemetery gates. At night the pillow beside me is cold and the house is empty. I cannot sleep, for dreams turn into nightmares. Familiar shadows pass before me, leaving me with words left unspoken. These days I think of the mirrors shattered fragments, and repeat to heaven above, "Forgive me! Forgive me!"

Overcoming Frustration

Anne Thompson

I can get frustrated when I am learning new things. When I am frustrated I put myself down. I tell myself that I am stupid. I shut myself away and I watch T.V. I don't talk to any one and I am not nice when they talk to me. I can also get impatient with other people when they pressure me.

I have learned some better things to do. One of the first things I can do is take a time out, like going to the movies or going shopping. Talking to people about the problem also helps. I tell them how I feel, I ask questions and I ask for help. I stick with it until I get the help I need. I keep focused on things I like to do.

Being involved in healthy activities helps me feel good about myself. I participated in Brownies and Guides when I was young. When I was a teenager I started figure skating and continue to do so as an adult. Some times I just need to slow down and focus on the things I like to do.

The best advice I could give is just don't give up on yourself.

Finding a Way
Heather Kathleen McGann

I would like to start off by saying that by my own personal experience, in order to survive in life and be a survivor, you really have to have hands on experience. I also believe that experience is the key to life and without it you have nothing but fear and the unknown.

I say that because I used to be the opinionated one who was always quick to judge. I was and still am at times hard on myself for the littlest things, like not getting all of the questions right on a math test or not looking up to par with my classmates. All that got me was poor concentration and low self-image. I figure that life is way too short to be critical and judgmental. As a young girl growing up, I would get put downs by my father and mother for the littlest things. They were extremely critical on me and my siblings as well. As I grew up and left home, I fell into abusive relationships that got me nowhere.

I've learned that there are so many things that we cannot control in life and we need to just let them go. Usually things will find a way to work themselves out. I know that because of where I came from and the challenges that I have faced in life. When I thought that there would be no end to all these problems, somehow I knew it would get better if I just stayed strong and stuck it out. I had also kept in mind that there will be a light at the end of this tunnel. Not long after I left, my housing came through and here I am in school, I got daycare for my little girl, and a car to boot!!

What helps me with day to day stressors is I'll try and put myself into someone else's shoes, or try and turn a negative situation into a positive. I try to remember that bad times won't last forever and there will always be a calm after a storm. When you tell yourself something enough times you are likely to believe it sooner or later, and that's just what I did. I told myself that this abuse cannot and will not go on and I also told myself that I can do it on my own and lo and behold, here I am

Always remember that when one door closes another one will soon open.

Be Yourself, Be Your Best
Mary Thompson

I sometimes find things I what to do. Is hard for ME because of my spelling when it came to writing. I know how I felt but when it came time to write things down this is when I find it hard
Sometimes when I go to bed I think what it would be like to be normal but then that would not be me. I like to write a story for a contest but this is not going to be a story or a letter or a poem. THIS was to be a story but it is missing lots of word but I do not now how to find them and if I get help then it is not going to be me. BE your self and do your best.

Your Help
Thorn P.M

You are a teacher
you're often in the library
and so much more
You help all who come through
those big glass doors
and so much more
Once you helped a caretaker
that needed it so
and so much more
You went out of your way
to help that caretaker that very day
and so much more
I'd like you to know
that your help made a difference
that very day
and so much more
I like to say Thank-you
from the caretaker you helped
and so much more that very day

Start Living Again
T. Sampson

Today is a day when I feel that I just can't write a good story. Today that feels true. So what could I do to be nice to myself? At one time in my life, I would have said not too much because of what I was going through. Eventually, I learned to be nice to myself.

I always had heart problems, and I was ok with that. Then one day, I had pains in my lower back. A couple of days later, I went to the doctor's office, and he rushed me to the hospital. I had to have a kidney transplant. At the time, I was only 25 years old and had no kids. Something that I always wanted was to be a M O T H E R, but it just didn't happen. My doctors said it would be a high risk pregnancy. So with all the sorrow in my life, it took me a long time to come to realize that I still have a life. It was time to start living again. When I came back to school and started living again, that was one of the nicest things I could have done for me, besides going shopping or having a lovely bubble bath and relaxing at night.

Now that I decided to roll with all the punches life throws my way, it feels great to live again. For everyone that reads my story and has a lot of sorrow in their life, all I can tell you is to pick up all the pieces of your life, throw them in your back pocket and keep on walking. Just think about being nice to yourself for O N C E!!!

Willing to Face the World

Linh H.

Before I came to the learning centre, I remember that I didn't have the guts to express my opinion in front of people. I was very concerned what other people thought of me. I was fearful they might laugh at me or they might disagree with me. I just followed what other people were doing. If I was asked for a favour, I would agree even if I didn't want to do it. I felt that I didn't have my own voice. I didn't have confidence. I didn't have energy. Sometimes I felt terrified and upset.

When I stress out or become upset, my chest tightens and the back of my neck aches with pain. Tears come out easily like pouring rain. At that point, I don't feel like talking to anyone.

There are some successful methods I have tried to ease my anxiety. I need to take a few deep breaths, close my eyes for a few minutes, and release the tension in my body.

During the winter months, I will make myself a cup of warm ginger or lime tea to soothe my sadness. When the weather is warmer and if there are people around, I drag myself out of my house and have a walk in the park and listen to the birds chirping. Nature boosts my energy. I stretch out both my arms high up like I'm reaching to touch the blue sky.

Another thing I love to do to relax is to shop for bargains at Winners or second hand stores. Sometimes I can find precious pieces which are brand names at good prices. They need not cost a lot. I also enjoy searching for items. It feels like a treasure hunt. Once I have found my treasure I feel so happy.

Whether I have a cup of warm tea, or walk in the park or hunt for bargains, I begin to feel my tension leave my body and more willingness to get my spirit back to face the practical world.

******Dear Friend**

Yvonne Coyle

Well I like to start by saying when you're feeling bad about yourself or anxious or overwhelmed, sometimes you have to take a step back and take a deep breath. Sometimes you have to tell yourself it's not your fault sometimes you can't control what other people say and do. Sometimes you feel like your going crazy or you're going to fall apart. Sometimes the days are good and sometimes they are not so good at all. Sometimes you're struggling over what you should say or do to make things better and you feel like giving up. Well you have to stay strong for your self and know that things will get better do things that make you happy don't give up things will get better look at the good side of everything. Just because you don't understand something at first you can't give up. You will get it .I'm going to school now to get my G.E.D. now although it's hard for me to get here because I don't have a car. I had to change my work schedule but I still get here because it's important to me. I took my first part of my test this past week .I was so scared but I passed that part I was so happy .My point is don't give up do things that make you happy make your self a priority.

YOU!
Angel Eyes

You need to be strong.
I know things seem to be going wrong.
You need to look at yourself and say "I love you".
You need to stop feeling so blue.
You need to see how beautiful you are.
Stop looking at you inner scar.
You are a super star.
You can walk the mile.
And embrace us with that beautiful smile.
Please stop beating yourself up.
You are the person I want to be around.
You need to find it, and it I know I have found.
Look beyond your body, and look into your soul.
I know you see nothing, you just feel so cold.
You may have made your mistakes.
Had your heartaches.
Nobody's perfect.
I know that for a fact.
You need to dry those tears.
I know you're in fear.
Just stand tall.
Embrace your next fall.
Pick up the pieces, and carry on.
You need to be strong.
Fix up your wrongs.
Keep looking at yourself and say "I love you".
Still try to stop feeling so blue.
You are the beautiful one.
Just try to have some fun.
This is your life, that you need to live.
No one can say any less.
Don't let this turn into a mess.
You have the power.
No one else, but YOU.

Be Nice to Myself

Claude

I am going to be nice to myself by going to school to reach my goal. To reach my goal, I have to make a lot of sacrifices. One sacrifice is spending less time with my family, but I stay positive even though I am tired. I try to stay strong and never give up.

I attend this school so I can improve my English. Learning English would help me reach my goal of becoming a nurse. I have a busy life. I work in a mental institution with teenagers. It is very stressful for me and my family every day, but I still attend my classes. It's very important to me. Going to school is hard for an adult because adults have a lot of responsibilities. For example, I have three children, bills, pressure from my husband, and I am learning English as a second language, but I trust myself. I stay focused and go to school so I can reach my goal. Since I made the decision to go back to school, I am better able to speak and understand English-speaking people much better. That makes me happy because I see the improvement. I will never give up. I hope I can keep making improvements so I can attend college.

Once I get to nursing school, I want to specialize in labor and delivery of babies. I have a very helpful husband who supervised our children. My oldest daughter is seventeen years old, my second boy is thirteen years old, and my youngest is two years old. My husband helps out so I can go to school. I hope I can reach my goal. I will be happy to work in the hospital as a delivery nurse because I know how hard it is to give birth. I want to help women have their babies safely.

I would advise every woman to take care of herself first. Even if obstacles come, she should not give up. If she can't make the decision to take care of herself, no one is going to make it for her. Women are the only ones who can be nice to themselves.

*****Being Nice to Me**

Gina Saad

Being nice to me, can be when I take care of my own identity, nurture my relationship with people that are close to me and spend time to take care of my mind, body, and spirit.

A way of being nice to me can be by taking care of my roots and my identity. The way things are special and unique to me are things like music, dance, food, fruit, sharing, talking to my people and celebrating. When we move further from our place of birth, we learn to define ourselves. We lose a direct connection with the environment that nurtured our uniqueness. The place where things were special and unique to me. Nurturing this essential part of who I am is being nice to me.

We need to be around people that are close to our hearts. People such as families, friends, and special friends. Being closer to them makes us feel happy, enthusiastic and important. When I am around them, I learn more about myself. I can express my deepest thought without any fear of rejection because I am hundred percent sure they care for me. Because I feel this deepest sense of security, I feel strong, confident and important. When I dedicate time to nurture this deep need of relationship, I am being nice to myself.

Bread and Roses competition, winning stories, 2008.

www.learningandviolence.net

Being nice to me is to have time to spend for my body, my mind, emotion and spirit. I feel fulfilled when my mind is asking me to do something that challenges my body, for example, walking a long distance, talking to a special person with whom I feel a special connection, or my mind is telling me to give my help or support to another person. Sometimes, my body is telling me to rest, meditate, to forgive or spend special moments to talk to God or whatever nurtures that need for spiritual power. When I dedicate time to nurture these deepest needs in me, I am being nice and kind to me.

Being nice to me, is to give to myself the time, and caring that I need to live my life with meaning and harmony with myself and others.

*****GRASP THE CONCEPT**
Donna Willis

Throughout my life I've had many struggles that I had to learn to overcome.

I was born the third child in my family in a small community outside of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Growing up as a child I had to deal with a lot of rude children and name-calling. When I'd go to school a lot of the kids would laugh at me and it seemed that I was an easy target because I was overweight compared to most of the other kids. It wasn't until I moved to Toronto in 1985 with my older sister that I got confidence.

We found a nice apartment. We adjusted well and both managed to find good paying jobs to support ourselves. The following year I began to experiment with drugs. I lost my self-esteem and I didn't believe in myself anymore. Things spun out of control so fast for me. I didn't even get a chance to grasp the concept.

Nine months after I had my daughter, I was introduced to cocaine while living with my younger brother in Calgary. By the time my daughter and I moved back to Toronto I was completely hooked. I just wanted to get high all the time.

At first I tried to convince myself that I was on top of the world. When I was high I felt confident and invincible. I didn't realize then how much the drugs were going to destroy my life the way they eventually did.

Soon after the birth of my next two daughters I began to deal drugs and ended up in and out of jail. I still did not see the fact that I had a serious problem. It got worse because my baby brother ended up getting murdered over drugs and I began to live my life in total self-destruction. However, I finally began to realize how much I was hurting those around me, especially my children, mother, and sister who were taking on my responsibilities.

Somehow, I found it in me to go back home to my family. I got on the right track until my older sister was shot by her husband and my mother passed away. After that I began to turn to drugs all over again, leaving my sister with the children to deal with. My children were getting older and were fully aware of what I was up to. My oldest daughter, Alisha, was sixteen around that time.

Throughout the years I was used to people in my family telling me I needed to do the right thing. I would think about it for a while and then dismiss it, until one day I got into an argument with Alisha and she told me how she felt about me not being around for her and her siblings and what it was doing to the rest of the family. I decided to come home for good and try to straighten myself out.

Ever since 2003 I have been struggling to stay clean. I can honestly say that I never thought I'd be able to find a substitute for the drugs but I did. I found life and love.

I couldn't read or write until I went to jail and took classes to pass the time. Now, one of the most important things to me is my education. I feel so blessed to have the chance to go to school and complete my GED. But my biggest blessing has been the forgiveness from my children and their continuous love and support. They understand that back then I was selfish and they now see past my mistakes. I've been given a second chance. My oldest daughter is about to give birth to my first grandchild. I will soon be given the chance to help raise my grandchild in a pure mind state. I now have the chance to make it right and Alisha is so happy to have the mother she always wanted.

Life now is so beautiful and fulfilling. There is absolutely nothing that could take me back to the life I lived. I am now in the process of graduating from Ryerson and getting closer to my goals. I hope one day soon I can be a counsellor for troubled youth. Before, when I heard the phrase "new beginnings" I never fully understood what it meant. Now, by the grace of God and love of my family I feel like I have a new beginning. Thank God.

Fighting my Critic

Schi E.

I'm hard on me when I learn something new.
I am my toughest critic.
The mistakes I make, that I often do,
my thoughts tend to revisit.
Do it this way.
No! You don't have it right.
What in the world have you done!
This is the point where I give up the fight,
And accepting loss has begun.
I give up at times because in my mind
I can do nothing right.
But if I try, I may just find,
Success won't come without fight.
Though times get hard and draining too,
I am quite capable,
Of being nicer to me and learning what's new.
If I could just be willing and able.
Not fighting the world or fighting myself,
But fighting to learn the truth.
That I need to be nicer to me
and you be nicer to you.