

This year was the first birthday I felt old.

Twenty-three is not that old, sure, but there's something symbolic about it to me for reasons I can't fully explain. Maybe it's just growing up American, it's imprinted in my mind as the real start of adulthood. *Post-student* adulthood. At 16 you can drive, at 18 you're legally an adult, at 21 you can drink, 22 is the age people graduate college. *23 though...*

In my mind, 22 is the last trial year. The last year you can reasonably fuck this up and it'll all be okay. At 23, for whatever reason, you start being an actual big kid.

And I feel like this year, I graduated from something. Not in the sense that I have another expensive piece of paper to hang on my wall (cheers, LSE). I became an adult this year. It didn't happen on my birthday. It didn't happen on any particular day; it's been a continuous process of feeling that *the long beginning* has ended. And while I hope for nothing more than constant new beginnings from here on out, I'm taking some time now to look back on what I graduated from.

2016, the year of Trump, Bowie, Brexit, the Aleppo massacre, a hundred thousand deaths, famous and unknown, is finally coming to an end. 2017 is going to be difficult and painful, but I've got a fire to light the way through this time, I hope.

Here's what this year's taught me:

1. Everything is some kind of choice, even if all of the options sound awful.
2. Stop looking for the final meaning of your life. It means exactly and only what you believe it does in each moment, and that's as meaningful as any meaning ever can be.
3. That goes for you too. You are free to recreate yourself in every moment.
4. What people think of you has literally nothing to do with you. And you will never be able to control what they think of you, so fuck trying.
5. Not every rule deserves your obedience.
6. Get as comfortable breaking rules as you are following them. A lot more of your life is habit than you'd like to imagine.
7. The most important question you can ask yourself is Why. The next is, How.
8. If you want to live consciously, start simple. Take it no faster than you can. Try to fix the whole world from day one and it will all slip through your fingers until you're left feeling powerless and dissatisfied.
9. People will always surprise you, and those surprises can bring you sadness and joy.
10. Making assumptions about someone seeks to remove their agency. You don't know better than someone else what they need, or how they'll get it.

11. Everything you feel, you are allowed to feel.
12. You can't teach someone by hitting them over the head. No matter how obvious an answer may be to you, it may not be so to someone else. And you might not be the one to explain it to them.
13. You can't be someone's doctor without their consent. You can't help someone unless they let you. Don't try to fix people. If you think you know how to, you're probably wrong.
14. This whole utopia thing, this evolution revolution thing, it's an uphill battle. It's not going to be easy, and it's going to take some time.
15. Living with love means you sometimes have to throw a few punches. In the words of Andrea Gibson, "there is such a thing as a nonviolent fist."
16. Tear down the cruel as you build up the beautiful. It will come faster from both sides, and we've been out of time for a while.
17. Don't wait around for the world to catch up to you. Live your utopia now, as best you can. But keep working on the world when and where you can, because it won't catch up without you.
18. Trust what feels right.
19. There are no saviors. No one is outside the loop. We liberate ourselves, we liberate each other, the oppressor and oppressed within each of us. We build a better world ourselves, together.
20. You are you, you are me, you and all of us are one. Even if you don't buy the oneness thing, we're still together in this. When you serve your authentic needs, you serve us all. When you serve others, you serve yourself. The question is figuring out what your needs are.
21. Equality means you don't get privilege anymore. If you're only up because someone else is down, don't kid yourself you can make it right without giving up some of the comforts you're accustomed to.
22. Fear is normal. It doesn't mean you're doing it wrong. It probably means the opposite.
23. When we can love without trying to control, enjoy without trying to possess, speak without seeking to coerce, find freedom without imprisoning others, climb without pushing others down, in short – when we learn to *live* ourselves without needing that self to be defined in contrast to anything, we're doing this evolving thing right.