

By Vida Zelenka

Before you read another syllable, I must warn you; this story is entirely about me. If you are potential employer, this is an embellished story of someone I sort of know.

I have this problem and I'm not sure exactly where it stemmed from. Perhaps it's from being humoured as a child and being allowed to breast feed until the age of two and a half. Or from being chauffeured around to gymnastics practice 60 km away, 6 times a week from the ages 6 to 16. Or from stories every night at bedtime and having doting grandparents.

The problem you see is now I have the delusion that I am actually important. This terrible condition would not be a problem if I had done something to warrant this feeling. Graduating with distinction, landing a prestigious position at an innovative forward thinking company, financing the building of the new paediatric wing of an urban hospital, adopting many children from impoverished countries, donating my eggs to lesbian couples or finally saving the whales.

Unfortunately, none of this is the case. While all of my friends and peers were coming out of the haze that is post-secondary education, realising that they needed to make their own way in this world, I had other plans. They were busy buying condos in downtown Toronto, beginning post grads, teaching English overseas, having babies getting married, buying houses, working full-time, drinking takeaway grande trim half-caf lattes, owning dress shoe and going to the gym to use the treadmill. My plans involved going to all night dance parties before the final exams of my victory lap year of university, falling in love too quickly and moving in with said love even quicker. I was becoming proficient at slicing up an entire pineapple in less than 2 minutes and executing 80's dance moves in my underpants. I had a war to wage against the encroaching cockroaches to ensure said love and I had a place to stay and I needed to find more than eleven ways to cook tofu. Having weed induced paranoia and an active imagination I had worried about being pregnant several times and had followed the thought all the way through to birth to curly haired toddlers to college funds. I had lived entire lifetimes so wasn't it time to retire? Make pictorial quilts, knit scarves and bake sultana cake?

Now this story isn't entirely self-indulgent. There is a purpose. It is the longer and more honest answer to the question that always arises when someone hears my

delightful Canadian twang, the “what brought you here?” question. My usual answer varies from ‘I wanted to see the world¹’ to ‘teachers college is very difficult to get into in Canada²’ all the way to ‘I’ve always wanted to be a teacher and just decided to do it in NZ³’.

Someone with my disposition would be inclined to begin at the beginning and step you through each bowel movement and developmental stage and the exact order that my baby teeth came in but thankfully, someone in their wisdom has put limits on me, 1500 words.

So, the war with the roaches took its toll on the country. Any relationship, no matter how good can only handle so much vermin, tofu and 80’s dancing. My love and I went our separate ways.

Perhaps this is where the story begins. Heartache and disillusionment. I think at this point I did what anybody that was grieving a loss would do. I found spirituality I lost slash gained weight, I drank heavily, I had psychotherapy, I called my ex incessantly, I cried, I read books on megalomaniacs, I jogged. I really lost it and went on a 5 week road trip with my loving but overbearing parents. I wore short skirts and cut off my dreadlocks and not necessarily in this particular order.

Sadly, despite what everyone will tell you, none of it actually works. I got out my globe and string and tried to find the furthest place (that was not open ocean) from ex-lover. Fourteen-thousand four-hundred and forty-two kilometres seems like a long way to go, but even Canada seems small when you have to share the country with someone who knows the very best and very worst versions of yourself. Plus this (aside from a restraining order or lobotomy) was the only way I could guarantee not turning up on his door.

Planning has never been a strong point and I had clearly mixed up Australia and visions of year round beach volleyball with Christchurch and its frost and fog. I had packed shorts. My knees got cold.

A change of countries means you can reinvent yourself as whatever or whomever you want. In hindsight I should have recreated myself as someone very interesting and exciting. A lady that wears lipstick. Bright shades of course and my

¹ I don’t actually

² Especially if you have a D average at university

³ Yes it’s true I have always wanted to be a teacher, but only if absolutely nothing else, including scrubbing toilets at a prune factory, came up.

lips would have obliged me by becoming the sort of lips that actually looked good in lipstick. Instead I was an abstaining vegetarian that had the habit of naming her possessions.

My first purchase in the country was an all-steel Raleigh cruiser bike who was called Sophia. When I would feel homesick, I would purchase a handful of overpriced Californian cherries and Sophia would take me to sit in the square by the double doors leading to nowhere(which coincidently is how I felt my life was going) and we'd pretend we were in an Ontario summer.

I shaved my head once, and fell in love 3 times. The first was a friend from teachers College. He preferred blonds not balds. The second was entirely too handsome and to this day I question whether he really existed. The third was orange, far too young, autistic, liked the CD's to be returned immediately to their cases, a musician and a relentless dreamer who wore shorts with white socks and loafers. He was perfect.

I finished teachers college and actually taught. Chemistry became fun when I threw in homemade muffins and poems about the periodic table. I had opinions about learning and was in charge of things.

I decided that 2 years is as long as anybody should ever teach, and everybody in the world should teach for 2 years. I told my dad I wanted to retrain. The hard-working eastern European immigrant responded with 'you're pushing thirty'.

I mentioned that perhaps I could make a living by making small creatures out of felt. I haven't heard from my father since. He could be dead.

Now I work part time, day dream part time and make small creatures out of felt part time. I stay in New Zealand because your immigration laws are lenient⁴ and it's easier to do what you want, even though you are 27 years of age, with the distance of an ocean between you and your eastern European parents. I amuse myself by placing my cold feet on the underbelly of said orange person, filling out job applications and using 'the space provided to tell them about me' to make miniature patchwork quilts. I write about the exploits of my charming but treacherous teddy bear Snugs and the lady on the cover of the Klaus Wunderlich record. I also enjoy sitting by the Peacock Fountain in the botanical gardens on a Sunday, wrapping my

⁴ I'm kidding

mauve silk scarf around my head like a *burqa*⁵ and watching people's reactions. I do some baking for the gluten-intolerant vendor at the farmers market. At school I like to wear brightly coloured tights and use words and phrases such as 'super duper', 'awesome', and 'rad'. I complement students on their manners when they say please and thank you. I swing by the museum if only to stroke the giant piece of pounamu or compare my nose to the nose of Roald Amundsen. Or I ponder Andy Warhol's words about "art being what you can get away with" while looking at the Reasons for Voyaging sculpture outside the gallery.

My mother had recently watched a documentary on brain types and calls to inform me that the great minds, the discoverers and inventors had slightly disorganised thinking⁶. They were disorganised enough to go off track but not too far so as not to realise when they were finding something new. She also said that drifters and layabouts' thinking was too disorganised to ever complete anything⁷. I untwist the phone cord into a string of hearts and prod my giant pile of unfinished sewing projects and fabric. I hang up with my mother but not before assuring her that I do love her despite my behaviour.

It is here in the story that I will leave you. I put my tutu on, place my feet in 1st position⁸, hum the Nutcracker suit and plié⁹. I am now a prima ballerina.

⁵ The *burqa* is usually understood to be the woman's loose body-covering (Arabic: *jilbāb*), plus the head-covering (Arabic: *ḥijāb*, taking the most usual meaning), plus the face-veil (Arabic: *niqāb*). From Wikipedia. In this case I am referring to the head covering and face veil.

⁶ Key word here is slightly

⁷ My mom is meaning me in this situation

⁸ Heels together, toes facing out

⁹ A deep knee bend