

## **The Purpose of Self-Doubt by Olivia D'Silva - Introduction**

*Self-doubt has been my lifelong companion. I tried all those motivational tools to crush it, conquer it, overcome it, but it always came back to follow me around! The time in my life when I was struck with the worst case of self-doubt made me start to think about it differently. If I had been trying to deny it, for so many years but it was still hanging around, maybe it had a purpose?*

*Sometimes, no matter how much brain power, logic, experience and brilliance you put into a plan, it's impossible to know how, or if, things are going to work out.*

*Sometimes, when you really, really want something to happen, but you don't know how to make it happen, it opens the door to a chasm of self-doubt.*

In June 2010, I married my husband. We had a beautiful wedding, a simple occasion with no fuss. With a small budget we could only invite a few guests. We were married in a registry office with a church blessing followed by an intimate reception in the church hall, which we catered for ourselves. We have always agreed that if we had our time over, there's not much we would do differently. The day was a reflection of our lifestyle; simple, beautiful, centred around great food and our love for each other.

We were married in England, but our home was in rural France. After the wedding we returned home and wrote out a shopping list. We had fed our guests a wonderful five course feast but when I checked our bank account, the money we had been waiting upon from a project had still not arrived. We had €10 spare to spend on food. My husband recalls my tears of frustration as we drove to the supermarket. We bought milk and cheese.

It hit home that the idyllic lifestyle we set out to create had become unsustainable.

Over the coming weeks we got by with the help of some friends and we were fortunate to have the availability of wonderful produce from our own land and livestock. But it was apparent that something had to change.

In October 2010, I left my new husband with our dog, our livestock, our unfinished building project and I returned to England to find work.

England was in the thick of one of the worst financial crises that the country had seen. I moved back into a family home that I had moved away from 15 years previously. Returning to this position was not in my life plan. In fact, if you had asked me at any point during those 15 years where I would least like to end up, it would be here. Nevertheless, I was fortunate to have a place to stay.

I couldn't see how things were going to work out. I would have to find work, or we would inevitably lose our home, along with all the hard work and sacrifice we had put into it.

I was able to sign on at the local job centre and claim some benefit, which paid for my rent, fuel and some basic supplies. I had a three year, difficult to explain, gap in my CV and there were literally hundreds of candidates applying for each position.

I couldn't see how things were going to work out. The self-doubt I experienced at this moment in time was immense and overwhelming. It manifested as a constant ache in the pit of my stomach, which would be the last thing I would feel at night and the first thing I would feel in the morning. It would whisper to me in the small hours telling me that I was no good, there's no way I can compete, I may as well give up. This is my life now.

I couldn't see how things were going to work out. I couldn't think of the long-term; how I might get back to our home in France, or how might my husband get to England. How could we be together again. I could only focus on the most important thing in front of me; getting a job.

I remember waking up one morning consumed by this feeling, but I also knew that I couldn't afford to be crippled by self-doubt. The only way I could move forward from that point and

function to the level I needed to be was in making a *decision to trust* that everything was going to work out, somehow, even if I could not see it.

The job centre required me to apply for two jobs a week; I applied for at least two jobs a day. I would arrive at my fortnightly appointments, spreadsheet in hand with the evidence of my endeavours. I attended their courses but by this time I knew more about the job market than they did. I had some promising interviews that resulted in me being a close second candidate, which only means that they liked me but there was probably someone who demonstrated more reliability and less maverick in their CV.

It was four months before I was offered a position on a Thursday evening to start the following Monday. I was so relieved, I was exhausted. Finally, I could let go and know that my decision to trust was working out.

The next morning, I was woken early by my brother making a racket downstairs. When I asked if he could keep the noise down, he lost his temper and flew into a rage. Memories of bullying and intimidation came flooding back; these had no part in my peaceful life anymore. I left that house within the hour and never went back except to collect my belongings.

On the Friday night I slept on the sofa in another brother's flat. I woke the next morning, effectively homeless and due to start a new job on Monday. I called around some friends trying to find a room to rent or somewhere to stay. Someone who I can only describe as an Angel stepped in and offered me the use of his spare room, free of charge, no strings attached. It was 4 miles away from my new workplace. I moved in immediately and was able to turn up to my new job on the Monday morning, ready to start.

I couldn't see how things were going to work out, but at least I knew we had a chance of keeping our home now.

## **The Decision to Trust**

*“You have to trust in something - your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.”* <sup>[1]</sup> Steve Jobs.

The decision to trust was a practical one because it meant that I could function, despite being overwhelmed by doubt and insecurity. I had to remind myself regularly that I had made the decision to trust; perhaps every 30 seconds when the panic would hit.

I can't explain to you what I trusted in. I have no particular religious influence or devotion and I am certainly no expert on spiritual matters. All I know about the powers of the universe is that I am not the greatest power. There is much I don't understand, and I am comfortable with that. This was apparently enough.

Actually, it would not have served me to question my decision too much. After all, if it had been necessary for me to define what I was trusting *in*, it would have taken away the essence of that trust.

I did have an unusual experience during this time, which I've never spoken about. In mid-January, it is the anniversary of the death of my eldest brother. On the morning of the fifth anniversary of his death, as I was in the town where he had lived, died and lays to rest, I decided to attend the morning prayer service at the church where his funeral was held.

Present at the service were the Vicar, the Curate and me. If I'm honest, I don't know how I feel about churches. I recognise the sacrosanct atmosphere, I appreciate the natural stones and wood of the structure, the artistic stained-glass windows, the artefacts, the sense of peace. But services are awkward, unfamiliar and I'm never sure if I should be there; there is no sense of belonging. But I wanted to go this time to remember my brother. I don't remember much about the short service, but I do remember leaving the church bracing myself against the January morning, but instead I was struck unexpectedly with a light and a warmth that

seemed to penetrate my being. I didn't know what to make of it, and like I say, I've never spoken about it. I sat for a few moments on the bench next to the garden of remembrance where my brother and my Dad are laid to rest. After a short time, I moved on with my day, into the library next door to continue my job search. I had received some needed comfort from somewhere that I cannot explain, I don't need to explain.

As part of the same quote Steve Jobs also says; *“You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So, you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future”*.

When I started my new job, I still couldn't see how things were going to work out. I could never have connected the dots going forward. I was still living apart from my husband and we still had an unfinished renovation project. A few months after working in my new position, the company was sold and relocated to another city around 200 miles north of where I was staying. I was the only person from the small team who was able to move with the job. There was insecurity throughout this transition period too. For about three weeks, I didn't know if I was going to be moved or lose my job. I remember having to hand in the notice on my rented room before knowing whether or not I would have a job. This really felt like jumping off the cliff edge and trusting I was going to land.

If I had been left to my own devices to plan how things would work out, my limited imagination would have focused upon getting enough for today rather than making a path for the future. I would have accepted an offer from the first job I interviewed with when I returned from France. I would have chosen security and comfort every time and I would have played safe for fear of the unknown.

How did things work out? I was offered the job and even given an unexpected small pay rise. In this wonderful new city, I was able to rent a one bedroom flat for the same price I paid

renting a room in the South East of England. This meant that after two years living apart, my husband could leave France and we could live together again.

Now I'm able to look back and connect the dots. I know that I got what I needed exactly when I needed it. I couldn't know that at the time. My decision to trust proved fruitful because even though I didn't know what I was trusting in, it worked out.

## **Gratitude**

As well as the decision to trust, the other thing that helped me through was a grounding of gratitude. This was a challenging period in my life but throughout this story, there is so much that I am grateful for. I don't just recognise it now; I knew it at the time.

Firstly, how did I get into this position in the first place? I was pursuing a dream. How many people talk about giving up their office jobs and moving to the countryside to live a simple life, but never get anywhere close to trying it?

I wouldn't change a moment of the time since I met my husband and moved to France. I am so privileged to have had that experience and everything I gained from it. On the back of our wedding invitation, I had the quote "*Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction*". The whole time we spent apart, we were very much together, supporting each other and believing in our vision. I am so privileged to have experienced a love like this and it is worth every single moment of the adversity.

Moving back to live with my family was not what I wanted to do but I was so fortunate to have a place to stay and the security of a roof over my head. Relations with my brother were strained but I recognise that he had come a long way from the person he was. I also know that I'm not the easiest person to live with. I suffer from a condition that makes me very sensitive

to sound. I can be irritable, moody and unsociable and I know this can make me appear controlling and arrogant (even though this is not what I'm feeling inside). There is no blame towards my brother; families can bring out the best and the worst in us and that's just the way it is.

I am grateful for the support that I was given by the UK Government in being able to claim some benefit during this period. I know that many would say I was only getting what I was entitled to, but I recognise that so many in the world don't have this luxury.

I am grateful that I was young enough, fit enough (mentally, emotionally and spiritually) to get through this challenge. I am grateful for the love and support of family and friends. I am grateful that I do not know what it feels like to be hungry for food.

I am grateful for the lessons I learned about myself; that I am resourceful, creative, courageous, humble. I am willing to keep trusting in something and to keep growing, a day at a time.

### **The Gift of Desperation**

Desperation may seem like an extreme word for my circumstances. In comparison to a large percentage of the human population on earth, things were going great for me.

But I was desperately unhappy with how things had turned out; I was not willing to resign to these circumstances and accept my lot in life. I could have plunged into a pit of despair and self-pity, which is what my self-doubt apparently wanted from me. But this would not have served me at all. I did not want this point to be the end of my story.

I was desperate enough to believe that things would work out, if only I could trust and move forward. I was desperate enough to keep taking daily actions that the loud voice of my self-doubt told me were probably pointless.

This was the gift of my desperation; the unwillingness to accept and the motivation to keep trusting and moving. I was rewarded for my endeavours and, of course, this hasn't been the end of my story.

But this book isn't really about the moments when we are so desperately motivated that we will do just about anything to get by.

This book is more about that insidious level of self-doubt that sits in the wings of life. We're aware of its constant presence, just waiting for that moment to take centre-stage. We ignore our self-doubt and seek the comfortable zone of competence and knowing. We deny it because we know that when it does take centre-stage, it will take the limelight and all the other players become insignificant. Self-doubt is a powerful force; it has the power to cripple us.

This book is about having the courage to turn around and face our self-doubt. To look it in the eye and invite it to join the chorus. Give it a place. Embrace it, sit down and have a cup of tea with it. Thank it for its role in our lives; ask what it wants from us.

We may find that by doing so, it becomes a positive, motivating force in our lives. It reminds us that we do not, cannot ever, know everything. We are human, and we are humble. It may encourage us to take a bold step, think of a creative solution, or ask for help. If self-doubt is to be our constant companion, let's make sure it's the kind of companion that supports and wants the best for us.



To find out more about how this work can help you, go to: <https://oliviadsilva.com/the-purpose-of-self-doubt/>