

Anne Lamott (Author) Writes Down Every Single Thing She Knows, As of Today by Anne Lamott

I am going to be 61 years old in 48 hours. Wow. I thought I was only forty-seven, but looking over the paperwork, I see that I was born in 1954.

My inside self does not have an age, although can't help mentioning as an aside that it might have been useful had I not followed the Skin Care rules of the sixties, ie to get as much sun as possible, while slathered in baby oil. (My sober friend Paul O said, at eighty, that he felt like a young man who had something wrong with him.)

Anyway, I thought I might take the opportunity to write down every single thing I know, as of today.

1. All truth is a paradox. Life is a precious unfathomably beautiful gift; and it is impossible here, on the incarnational side of things. It has been a very bad match for those of us who were born extremely sensitive. It is so hard and weird that we wonder if we are being punked. And it filled with heartbreaking sweetness and beauty, floods and babies and acne and Mozart, all swirled together.

2. Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.

3. There is almost nothing outside of you that will help in any kind of last way, unless you are waiting for an organ. You can't buy, achieve, or date it. This is the most horrible truth.

4. Everyone is screwed up, broken, clingy, and scared, even the people who seem to have it more or less together. They are much more like you than you would believe. So try not to compare your insides to their outsides.

Also, you can't save, fix or rescue any of them, or get any of them sober. But radical self-care is quantum, and radiates out into the atmosphere, like a little fresh air. It is a huge gift to the world.

When people respond by saying, "Well, isn't she full of herself," smile obliquely, like Mona Lisa, and make both of you a nice cup of tea.

5. Chocolate with 70% cacao is not actually a food. It's best use is as bait in snake traps.

6. Writing: shitty first drafts. Butt in chair. Just do it. You own everything that happened to you. You are going to feel like hell if you never write the stuff that is tugging on the

sleeves in your heart—your stories, visions, memories, songs: your truth, your version of things, in your voice. That is really all you have to offer us, and it's why you were born

7. Publication and temporary creative successes are something you have to recover from. They kill as many people as not. They will hurt, damage and change you in ways you cannot imagine. The most degraded and sometimes nearly-evil men I have known were all writers who'd had bestsellers. Yet, it is also a miracle to get your work published (see #1.).

Just try to bust yourself gently of the fantasy that publication will heal you, will fill the Swiss cheese holes. It won't, it can't. But writing can. So can singing.

8. Families; hard, hard, hard, no matter how cherished and astonishing they may also be. (See #1 again.) At family gatherings where you suddenly feel homicidal or suicidal, remember that in half of all cases, it's a miracle that this annoying person even lived. Earth is Forgiveness School. You might as well start at the dinner table. That way, you can do this work in comfortable pants.

When Blake said that we are here to learn to endure the beams of love, he knew that your family would be an intimate part of this, even as you want to run screaming for your cute little life. But that you are up to it. You can do it, Cinderellie. You will be amazed.

9. Food; try to do a little better.

10. Grace: Spiritual WD-40. Water wings. The mystery of grace is that God loves Dick Cheney and me exactly as much as He or She loves your grandchild. Go figure. The movement of grace is what changes us, heals us and our world. To summon grace, say, "Help!" And then buckle up.

Grace won't look like Casper the Friendly Ghost; but the phone will ring, or the mail will come, and then against all odds, you will get your sense of humor about yourself back. Laughter really is carbonated holiness, even if you are sick of me saying it.

11. God; Goodness, Love energy, the Divine, a loving animating intelligence, the Cosmic Muffin. You will worship and serve something, so like St. Bob said, you gotta choose. You can play on our side, or Bill Maher's and Franklin Graham's. Emerson said that the happiest person on earth is the one who learns from nature the lessons of worship. So go outside a lot, and look up.

My pastor says you can trap bees on the floor of a Mason jar without a lid, because they don't look up. If they did, they could fly to freedom.

12. Faith: Paul Tillich said the opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. If I could say one thing to our little Tea Party friends, it would be this. Fundamentalism, in all its forms, is 90% of the reason the world is so terrifying. 3% is the existence of snakes.

The love of our incredible dogs and cats is the closest most of us will come, on this side of eternity, to knowing the direct love of God; although cats can be so bitter, which is not the god part: the crazy Love is. Also, "Figure it out" is not a good slogan.

13. Jesus; Jesus would have even loved horrible, mealy mouth self-obsessed you, as if you were the only person on earth. But He would hope that you would perhaps pull yourself together just the tiniest, tiniest bit—maybe have a little something to eat, and a nap.

14. Exercise: If you want to have a good life after you have grown a little less young, you must walk almost every day. There is no way around this. If you are in a wheelchair, you must do chair exercises. Every single doctor on earth will tell you this, so don't go by what I say.

15. Death; wow. So f-ing hard to bear, when the few people you cannot live without die. You will never get over these losses, and are not supposed to. We Christians like to think death is a major change of address, but in any case, the person will live fully again in your heart, at some point, and make you smile at the MOST inappropriate times. But their absence will also be a lifelong nightmare of homesickness for you.

All truth is a paradox. Grief, friends, time and tears will heal you. Tears will bathe and baptize and hydrate you and the ground on which you walk. The first thing God says to Moses is, "Take off your shoes." We are on holy ground. Hard to believe, but the truest thing I know.

I think that's it, everything I know. I wish I had shoe-horned in what E.L. Doctorow said about writing:

"It's like driving at night with the headlights on. You can only see a little ways ahead of you, but you can make the whole journey that way."

I love that, because it's true about everything we try. I wish I had slipped in what Ram Das said, that when all is said and done, we're just all walking each other home.

Oh, well, another time. God bless you all good.