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February 24th, 2026 is the three year anniversary of my freedom. Oddly enough, though I didn't really feel like I had led a life before I was free, I am just beginning to learn again now. Even if the ashes were still there, the fire was out and I was born again, growing slowly, never at once truly feeling it. So today, I am three years old; and a lot of developments begin to happen when someone turns three.

I began cooperating with others, though thought sharing was still challenging. Except for me, my toys are my responsibilities. They feel like my stuffed animals, and to this day as (legally) a 21 year old, I will be very upset if someone throws them around carelessly.

I begin to notice intense curiosity in why things are the way they are and why people act the way they act, regardless of my empathy, it does not explain their behaviors. I notice this impact my imagination and experimentation in my writing. Some people will not be gentle with the things I care about, like my stuffed animals, and that is okay, then I know that those people at this time are not meant for me and I am capable of being cordial and communicative. I know that what seems like isolation can also be independence, which I am slowly building in healthier ways. Unlike earlier infancy and toddlerhood, I began accepting help when I couldn't do everything on my own, especially when it came to my health.

Despite feeling like my life is still young and new, I have been faced with problems that have made me feel a lot older. I have the chronic condition of Pelvic Floor Dysfunction, and yes, I am potty trained, I just don't always know when I need to go, and relearning that process that came so naturally since diapers was really hard. When the worst bout I've experienced so far hit me in the fall of 2025, things meant to be humanly innate became utterly impossible. I wanted to take care of myself, but I could not feel through my pain. I could not feel my stomach, so I was

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never hungry. Eating and going to the bathroom became Herculean tasks. So much so that the week before thanksgiving, I had to leave college for the rest of the semester.

Yet while at home, I finished all of my courses with A's, including a seminar paper. My pain, physical, mental, and emotional, makes me more capable. I was born to feel, and I'm grateful for all that I've felt. Before, I thought I was meant to find some centered enlightenment, as if there is a right way I must be, instead of being myself— it just so happens that the right way *is* to be myself. And now, for the rest of my life I get to learn what that means.

I contain multitudes... I've been a singer, from my toddler sized plastic princess heels to singing opera in concerts, and now finding myself in jazz. Poetry is a large part of my life, it may be hard to find the right words or the right things to write, but its expressive method has undoubtedly changed me and the way I want to help people. I also love to bake. I know that when I am at my most frustrated or sad that I often need to take care of myself, and that often involves eating; and I like to think that even if I cannot feed someone's soul when they're upset, at least I can feed their stomach. I hope in some way I can feed you too, whether it is your brain, soul, stomach, or a wonderfully complex palette of all three.