

the ONE where I thought I was living in Freedom

by Guru Mani H

I thought I was living in freedom until... I stopped giving time to my passion because I *had* to, but because I *wanted* to. **It was only then that I...** realized that it had all become a bit *forced*, and that I'd lost the *fire* I once had for it.

I thought I was living in freedom until... I quit my job and set up my own business, where I didn't have to do what my *boss* said, because I was now in charge. **It was only then that I...** started to feel *alive* again, the adrenaline of the risk and excitement replacing the *deathly* boredom that used to be my constant work companion.

I thought I was living in freedom until... I resigned from the church that had become my *family* for years, and just went it alone; an *orphan* with his god. **It was only then that I...** saw for the first time what I thought was *light* was actually the *darkness* of religion and ritual [no matter how much those inside said that it wasn't].

I thought I was living in freedom until... I finally *gave up* on my marriage, despite being misunderstood by most of my friends who told me to "*keep going*". **It was only then that I...** *found* again my own voice and personality that had become *hidden* long ago; my true self.

I thought I was living in freedom until... I pressed '*pause*' [until a future date] the *project* I was working on, which although a great idea [and still is], was consuming me, stressing me, draining me. **It was only then that I...** felt like that huge *weight* had been lifted from me, that I could breathe at last, that I'd made *space* for other important things which I wanted to be part of my present.

I thought I was living in freedom until... I had some sessions with a therapist, and really *opened up* about my past, the part of me that I desperately tried to *close* down and

push away. **It was only then that I...**O my goodness...just like a different person; floating, high, flying, soaring, without a care in the world...walking through my days *smiling* instead of wearing a permanent age-inducing *frown*.

I thought I was living in freedom until...the financial *strain* I'd been under for years suddenly lifted, and whilst I wasn't rich, the new *situation* meant that at least I now comfortably had a roof over my family's head and food on our table. **It was only then that I...**started to not *wake up* to that sick feeling that had been my stomach's constant companion for as long as I can remember, and didn't *go to sleep* at night with that sense of dread and fear about the next day.

I thought I was living in freedom until...what I'd thought was *care*, I finally understood was actually *control*. **It was only then that I...**escaped, regained my own passport, and was able to come and go as *I* wanted, on my own; not as *he* wanted, always supervised.

I thought I was living in freedom until...a particular circumstance opened my eyes to see that a close friendship that had started as *helpful*, had now become *harmful* to my mental health. **It was only then that I...**felt empowered to walk away, and set a boundary to stop all contact, trusting *my* own inner voice instead of needing and relying upon *theirs*.

I thought I was living in freedom until...I decided to let go of the unforgiveness I felt towards an authority figure who had deeply hurt me, even though their *attitude* and *actions* towards me hadn't changed at all. **It was only then that I...***stopped* having panic attacks every time I thought about them, and *started* making decisions without worrying what they might think of me.

I thought I was living in freedom until...I dared to say "no" to the rules of this organisation, and learned the hard lesson that my acceptance was *conditional* upon my

conformity. **It was only then that I...**understood that what seemed like the *end*, could actually be the *start* of a new chapter in my journey.

I thought I was living in freedom until...a spiritual *experience* that I neither believed in nor was *expecting*, hit me without warning. **It was only then that I...**finally *let go* of the guilt of my past, and that inner sense of dirtiness and failure which I didn't realize I'd been *holding on* to daily.