

Coffee Talk: Two Sugars One Life The Year of I Survived...ish

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December 2025

Your 2025 wasn't a rough draft.

I know. The internet spent December telling you to "reflect and optimize" and "learn from your failures" and "make 2026 your best year yet." As if the last twelve months were just a practice run for the real thing.

Most people don't actually reflect. They remember. Different thing.

They scroll through photos, feel some feelings, and call it reflection. They think about what happened TO them. The bad luck. The difficult people. The circumstances beyond their control.

That's not reflection. That's nostalgia with a victim filter.

Real reflection requires looking at yourself. Not your circumstances. You. What you did. What you avoided. What you knew you should change and didn't.

That's the part that bites.

I spent chunks of 2025 doing things I knew weren't working. Patterns I'd identified years ago, still running.

There was a conversation I tried to start last August. She deflected. I let her. Told myself I was giving her space. But really? I was hoping we'd somehow find our way back without having to go through the hard part. Gary (my right eye twitch) was going off the whole time. I ignored him. By September, there was no "back" left to find.

I knew better. I did it anyway.

Sound familiar?

Honest reflection isn't about cataloging your failures so you can feel bad about them. It's about noticing where you got in your own way so you can (maybe, just maybe) do it slightly less next year.

That's the whole game. Keep improving. Pick yourself up and move forward, even when it's hard.

A few years ago, I hit a wall. The kind where you realize you've been running the same broken code for decades, and it's not working, and it was never going to work, and YOU are the only one who can rewrite it.

So I did something that was part therapy, part obsession, part desperate attempt to understand why I kept ending up in the same emotional disasters: I started writing a book about it.

Not a self-help book in the usual sense. More like documentation of everything I'd learned the hard way about navigating emotional chaos. The patterns I kept repeating. The warning signs I kept ignoring. The moments where everything went sideways because I didn't have the tools to stop it.

Somewhere in that process, I discovered something that changed everything: I had an emotional emergency brake. I just didn't know how to use it.

Turns out, we all have one. Most of us just never learned it existed.

You know the moment. The one where you're about to say the thing you can't unsay. Send the text you'll regret. Make the decision from a place of anger or fear or exhaustion that you'll spend weeks cleaning up. There's a gap there. A tiny space between impulse and action.

That gap is the brake. And it's a skill. One you can learn.

My reflection led to that. Not just understanding my patterns, but actually building something I could use when the patterns showed up. A system that worked when I was too overwhelmed to think straight.

That system became a book. It's called STOP YOUR SPIRAL: *Your Emotional Emergency Brake*, and it comes out this year. But honestly, I wrote it for myself first. To remember what I'd learned, forgot, and had to relearn again. To have something to

reach for when Gary (you know, my body's early warning right eye twitch) started sending distress signals as subtle as a Riverdance.

Knowing about the brake doesn't mean you'll always use it. I still forget. Especially when the emotions hit fast and hard.

That's the honest part nobody tells you about self-improvement. You learn the thing. You practice the thing. You write a whole damn book about the thing. And then Tuesday happens and the emotions spike and you react instead of pause and suddenly you're cleaning up a mess you knew better than to make. Yep. Still do. We stumble even when we know better.

I catch myself sooner now. Not perfect, but improving. The gap between "screwed up" and "okay, what do I do about this" keeps shrinking. Not because I've achieved some enlightened state, but because practice makes the brake more instinctive. It becomes muscle memory instead of something you have to consciously reach for.

Progress isn't never forgetting. It's forgetting less often. Gary will still twitch. You'll still ignore him sometimes. But less often. That's the whole game.

My proposal for 2026: The Year of I Survived...ish.

Not your "best year yet." Not transformation. Not some optimized, 5 AM cold-plunge version of yourself that doesn't actually exist.

Survived...ish. Which sounds like lowering the bar until you realize what it actually means:

Survived...ish means you're still here. Still trying. Still showing up even when showing up feels like too much.

Survived...ish means you notice when you're repeating the pattern, and sometimes you stop.

Survived...ish means you keep moving forward, even when forward looks a lot like crawling.

Survived...ish isn't settling. It's honesty about what sustainable progress actually looks like when nothing goes according to plan.

The “crush it” people will tell you to aim higher. Set massive goals. Believe in quantum leaps and radical transformation.

If that works for you, genuinely, do it. But I’ve watched myself set ambitious January resolutions that become February amnesia often enough to know the pattern. The goals that stick aren’t the dramatic ones. They’re the boring ones. The ones that feel almost embarrassingly achievable.

“I will notice when Gary starts twitching and occasionally do something about it.”

“I will have one difficult conversation I’ve been avoiding.”

If your biggest goal is just to keep showing up, keep trying, that counts. That’s enough and that’s OK.

Not sexy. Not vision-board material. But honest. And achievable. And actually moving the needle instead of just fantasizing about a needle that doesn’t exist.

The year ahead doesn’t require a new you. It requires the same you, being slightly more honest about what isn’t working. And then actually changing it.

That last part matters. Reflection without change is just intellectual masturbation. You can understand your patterns perfectly and still repeat them forever. I know. I’ve done it. Understanding isn’t the goal. Movement is.

My wish for your 2026:

May you reflect honestly. Not about what happened to you, but about what you did and didn’t do.

May you set goals boring enough to actually keep.

May you discover the tools you didn’t know you had. The emergency brake between impulse and regret. The gap where everything can change if you just learn to find it.

May you survive...ish. Which is harder than it sounds, because it requires showing up consistently instead of dramatically.

And may you keep moving forward, even when forward is ugly and slow and nobody’s clapping. That’s not failure. That’s the whole damn point.

2025 wasn’t a failure or a rough draft. It was data.

2026: the year of survived...ish, honest reflection, and actually changing the thing you've been "working on" for three years. The one you told yourself you'd fix last January. And the January before that.

You know the one.

Cheers, Clayton

Coffee Talk 2.0: For everyone whose real resolution is "stop pretending I don't know what needs to change."

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