

Michael MENDIS

The Calling Implicit in Being a Writer:

10 Bullet Points on How I Navigate my Responsibilities, Jotted Down Irresponsibly Quickly

1. Hi. My name is Michael. I am not a writer. I am not a teacher. I am not an activist. I am not a lawyer. I am a person.
2. Like everyone else who is a person, I live with people. I know people, I like people, I hate some people. I talk to people; people talk to me. With some of them, I have fallen in love. With more, I have experienced hurt, poverty, illness, fear. I can't fit all of this—that is, all of what it means to be a person—into a bullet point. But you get the picture.
3. One thing that is clear: being a person, this smallest unit of a bigger, larger *peopleness*, comes with responsibility. To love. To know. To understand. To be honest. To not turn a blind eye. To reach out when it seems necessary; to abandon your retreat when you feel you are needed. To help each other with our common, confounding humanness. But this responsibility can, sometimes, be exhausting.
4. I need escape: to be “me,” on my own. Not as a person. As myself. Whatever that means.
5. Things I write are, in many ways, language games I play with myself: filters of let's-figure-this-thing-out; bed-sheet tents of the-world-can-go-fuck-itself; mountain cabins in the middles of cities; long-winding sentences of I-want-to-believe-again.
6. Things I publish are invariably things I write. Things I write are not always things I will publish. In letting my words leak out into the world, I teach myself to be careful.
7. Who will read me? Who will find themselves in my words? Described, but tastelessly, unfairly. Whose lived realities might I flatten on a paper? Who becomes invisible in my omission of their existence? When should I care, and when is it my “freedom of expression” to not-care?
8. When I am writing, even if it's the most reclusive thing I do, I am more a “person” than I can ever hope to be doing something else. There's a paradox in there. Because the reclusiveness of being “me,” and the responsibility of being a “person” sometimes seem mutually exclusive.
9. Whatever. I can only be sincere. I can only be honest. I can only be discerning in knowing the difference between writing and publishing; to know which things I write might help someone else, and which things I write are really not anybody else's business to care about.
10. The rest is up to everybody else, who are (all of them) persons, too—and who, in that way, have a responsibility, themselves. To be a “person.” To be a person to me.