

HOW TO WEAR A WIG

DENVER HUTT

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We

all have internal “big stuff” that we don’t necessarily share when people ask “how are you?” The question becomes the balance between sharing enough, too much, and false answers. And when.

We all wear wigs. We cover from shame. We cover for pride. We cover because sometimes even the most screaming truths about our worlds are not, ultimately, best honored by our screaming them. We cover because we only make sense as part of something larger than ourselves, and sometimes we can be our own greatest obstacle to remembering that.

And for as important as it is for us to be exactly as bald as our worlds and the drugs make us, the drugs and the details of our battles don’t define us.

We are defined by who we are at a deeper level. And we are defined by how we show up in relation to other people. How we behave. How we love. What we stand for and beside. And maybe we’re defined, for whatever it’s worth, by how we’re remembered.

We all wear wigs. Cancer’s a pretty good way to learn a few things about how to wear a wig.

I suggest a different teacher, because this one’s kind of a dick, but here are a few notes I’ve taken.



IF YOU LEARN TO SWIM, IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW DEEP THE POOL IS.

B

eing able to swim doesn't mean you'll never fall under a wave or get to float on your back to enjoy the sun.

Being able to swim means you know you have the skills to make it across any body of water. The fundamentals. The knowledge. If you can swim, you can glide across puddles, and go against the current of the ocean.

You can make it across to the other side - not without effort - but with confidence.

Some side effects are going to suck more than others. Some treatments are going to wipe you out more than you want. But you're going to get through them. You can swim in any body of water.

YOU CAN'T 60 PERCENT SKYDIVE.

Did you take the risk? Did you really take the risk, or did you just tell yourself you took the risk? Did you take part of the risk? You know, put your foot out of the plane, but never really jumped?

You may have attached the parachute.

You may have boarded the plane.

You took off. You stood by the door.

That's 60% of the steps required for a skydive. But it's just an airplane ride, not skydiving.

Did you jump?

To the world you may have; but to you, in your own heart, did you jump?

YOU CAN SURVIVE ANYTHING WITH GOOD MAKEUP AND A SMILE.

I

t's easier to fool another person than it is to trick your own reflection. Looking the part (not for anyone else, but for yourself) can help you feel the part. And the moment you begin to feel, you can begin to believe.

Showing up with a game face on isn't just about appearing strong, capable or confident to those around you, it's about building the confidence you have in yourself that you have the right, the ability, and the purpose to be where you are in that moment.

BE THE SAME
PERSON AT 4:59
AS YOU ARE AT
5:01.

M

ove away from the idea that you have a work life and a non-work life.

Who you are is not situational.

Sure, different sides of you may be drawn out or best suited in certain situations, but the values, beliefs, personality, preferences, core traits that define you transcend all of these artificial boundaries.

Besides, managing so many personalities is exhausting.

FEAR IS JUST CONFIDENCE DRUMMING UP COURAGE.

P

eople don't bother being afraid of things they don't think they can overcome.

What you're really scared of is doing the work and succeeding.

Why?

Because, shit, you just raised the bar on yourself.

Next time, everyone's expectations will only be higher, and for all the work you just got through doing, you're going to have to do even more.

Stop. Remember. You did it once.

Well done.

EVERYONE SHOULD OWN A YOGA WIG.

I first went to a yoga class as a way to find balance and peace and some good introspective me time. Of course yoga turned out to be more physically challenging than I'd expected, but the real work was internal.

When I'd show up to class, I'd spend so much time worried about the people all around me on their mats that I'd totally lose focus on "where I was" – physically and emotionally – on my own mat.

I felt clumsy, like any newcomer. But I also felt very, very bald.

And way too concerned about managing what impressions or stories other people would apply to me.

Being bald at yoga tripped me up. I wanted to explain myself and make the story compelling for people. I wanted to hide the story altogether and blend in so I could get what I wanted from the class. I felt ... awkward.

And feeling awkward meant that I wasn't giving myself a chance to

find that balance and peace and good introspective me time I was looking for.

So I bought what I call my yoga wig.

Was it from shame? Ego? Maybe both. But sometimes you just need to make a choice to move things forward, you know? Engage reality as it is?

It's just an old wig. A little worn down with a little less bounce. Like your hair after a long work out.

Owning a yoga wig let me show up already in the headspace to be at yoga. Like putting on a sports bra or lacing up a good pair of running shoes.

Everyone should have something that teaches them what my yoga wig has taught me. Go get what you need. Let yourself need what you need. And know it's okay to still hope your wig never falls off during downward dog.

IF IT'S YOUR STORY, BE THE ONE WHO TELLS IT.

S

haring things about your personal life is hard. That's partially why we consider them personal.

But not sharing can be hard too.

Not sharing means you're letting other people do the talking for you.

You won't know just why they're telling your story, and you won't know what they're saying. Or, if you do know what they're saying, you know that it's definitely not what you would be saying if you were the one doing the sharing.

When you share, you get to set the tone of the story.

When you share, you get to manage the message.

Sharing is equally about what you say as what you choose not to say. The message you deliver will still likely get mangled as it gets passed along by others, but at least you spoke for yourself. And that message can't be taken away no matter how many times it's repeated.

IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW FAST YOU'RE GOING WHEN YOU DRIVE OFF THE CLIFF.

D

reams fuel us, and they don't have to be practical. And they don't have to be smaller than the lives we're given to pursue them.

Your dream is not stupid. It's beautiful. It's your imagination coming out to play. And quite frankly, we don't let ourselves play enough. Embrace that shit.

It's true that some dreams last longer than others and some stay dreams while we dedicate time, energy and resources towards making others into realities. But dreams exist to live beyond ourselves.

Dreams can inspire others. Dreams can let you outside to play when you're too tired to move from the couch.

AS THE PIECES OF YOUR LIFE FALL OFF, YOU'RE STILL THERE.

W

herever you go, you're still there. And you do not exist because of the size clothing you wear. You do not exist because of your job title. Your relationship status. The length or color or texture of your hair. You are not the hours you spent at work today, or this week or this month.

You are not your doctor's visits. You are not your CT, MRI, EKG, or x-ray results. You are not a tumor marker.

You're the catalyst all these things float around, but you are in fact none of them.

Yes. You could do this.

I'm rather thankful you have never been on the other end of a phone call telling you that there are newly discovered lesions in your brain, but, you know what? If you were ever on the other end of that call, you would find words to respond.

They would be your words. And they would perfectly embody you in that moment. Which is lovely.

And then you show up in your favorite comfy shoes, or maybe fierce stilettos, ready for the next step of the journey.

CANCER IS FUCKING BORING.

By definition, cancer is a thing, sure, but, cancer is far more about context than about disease.

Cancer is an experience.

And cancer as an experience is sometimes also boring. Or, at least we hope it is. Most days it is. Most days cancer is no more interesting than what you ate for lunch. Assuming you didn't skip lunch that day because you got stuck in a work meeting.

EVERYDAY IS YOUR NORMAL.

A

ll those things you used to do (good, bad, drunk, sober, with that one group of friends) are in the past.

What you do every day, every Today, is your normal. Your normal today may not be the same as it was yesterday but that doesn't make it any less normal. For now.

RESET YOUR ZERO.

S

peaking of normal, it's normal that at 28 you act differently than you did at 21. It's also normal at 28 to not wish you were still acting like you're 21.

Your new normal comes with its own zero by which you will experience "good" or "bad" days, news, and experiences.

Sick or healthy, the worst thing a person can do is to measure today by yesterday's baseline. You must constantly reset you zero to the new realities of your world, and pursue a direction from there.

Resetting your zero is a lot like saying "okay, that's reality. Now what?"

Your base point - your zero - is how you start every day.

Starting at zero doesn't mean you stay at zero. But you do have to start somewhere.

BE MATTER OF FACT ABOUT YOURSELF TO YOURSELF.

Y

ou can't edit what hasn't been written. You can't make changes to something not yet crafted.

Build yourself fully, and be the thing you are. You'll make plenty of adjustments and changes in the future, so you might as well start with a full foundation.

Life has no rough drafts but there is plenty of time for editing.

EVERYONE IN THE ROW NEEDS AN OXYGEN MASK. PUT YOUR OWN ON FIRST.

S

ome of us are natural caregivers. We're the moms of our friend group. When we go out, we keep an eye on where everyone is, make sure jackets are zipped up on cold nights, and have chocolates and tissues ready when friends call after a bad day.

When we share tough stuff about ourselves, we share in a way that makes it easy for you. We struggle to let other caregivers give us the care we are used to providing.

Caregivers sometimes like to care for ourselves in private because we don't know how to let others care for us. It's not that you can't help. It's that I need to know I can still put on my own oxygen mask.

Silence is the
worst response.
Say something.

YOU'RE ONLY HALF
OF EVERY
CONVERSATION (AND
RELATIONSHIP)
YOU'RE IN.

**I planned our
conversation
out in my head.
It took a
different turn
after I said hello.**

IN THE ABSENCE OF LOVE, KINDNESS AND POLITENESS ARE DECENT PROXIES.

U

nderstanding isn't about agreeing. It doesn't mean endorsing. It doesn't always mean supporting, appreciating, or going along for the adventure. Understanding definitely doesn't guarantee riding shotgun or waving to the plane from the runway.

Maybe at a different time, in a different scenario, if the context was this but not that.

We can disagree about the choices we make in response to our realities. And even when it costs us something, we can still be decent to one another.

YOU CAN BE PROTECTIVE WITHOUT WEARING KID GLOVES.

I need you to be honest, authentic and in the moment with me. If you're scared, be scared with me. If you're timid, be timid with me. Seeing you helps me see myself with you as a partner, a friend, a support system I can rely upon.

You are strong. And your vulnerability makes you stronger in my eyes.

I don't need protection from you.

You can help protect my world by being in my world.

RESPOND TO THE COUGH DROP IN THE SPIRIT IT'S OFFERED.

T

hat cough drop is not going to help. Not even a little bit. It will not make me feel better. It will not make my cough stop. It probably tastes gross.

None of that matters.

You saw a problem (that I'm coughing), had a solution (that cough drops help tame coughs) and offered it without any expectation in return (it's pretty unlikely I'm going to offer you a cough drop in the future.)

Thank you for your thoughtfulness, kind person.

YOU DON'T KEEP
SCORE ACROSS A
SEASON; YOU KEEP
SCORE GAME BY GAME.

**I assume cancer
is going to one
day kill me.**

But then again, I could get hit by a bus on my way home tomorrow afternoon and then my having had cancer wouldn't matter a whole lot to the story.

THE LOSING SEASON IS STILL WORTH PLAYING.

Y

ou need bad times to appreciate the good. You need cold winter days to appreciate the sunny warm ones. Yadda, yadda, yadda. Sometimes, you deal with a bunch of shit and all you get on the other side of it is to know that you are capable of dealing with a bunch of shit.

And that's a pretty damn good thing to know.

PIVOT.

It does not matter how much time, thoughtfulness, or brilliance went into the decision you made yesterday. Yesterday ended and that once brilliant decision might be useless today.

And that's okay.

Make every decision to the best of your ability at the moment you have to make it. Use data, tools, resources, networks, whatever you can, to feel good about your choice and commit to your decision. You can't 60% skydive.

And in the very moment you decide, you'll know you decided as best you could.

That specific moment is over now.

If there's new information available, it might be time for a new decision.

You made the right choice the first time. You can make the right choice the second time, too.

It's my cancer.

I constantly have to remind myself that I have cancer. You think I'd remember, but I don't. I forget all the time.

I was camping with friends once and we rappelled to the bottom of a revine. (I suck at rappelling, by the way.) Once at the bottom, a group of us congregated to cheer on those still making their way down the hill. Everyone was in high spirits (it probably helped that we had also consumed a good deal of spirits ahead of time.) It was the perfect crisp fall day with the most perfect group of people.

Then I had to hike out of the canyon. I was miserable. I could only walk a few feet at a time before needing to stop and catch my breath. I'd cough violently and throw my hands on my hips to remind myself to stand up straight to maximize how much oxygen I could breathe. It never felt like enough.

It took a while, but I eventually made it back to the campsite. The first few minutes of the grueling walk I encouraged my friends to go ahead without me so I wasn't holding up the next adventure. Some did, some didn't.

Everyone knew I was happy to be there and wouldn't be offended by their own quick strides. No one cared I was coughing up storm. I'm not sure my friends ever forget that I have cancer, but I'd like to think that they do.

I LOVE YOUR
HAIR. WHAT KIND
OF PRODUCT DO
YOU USE?

It's
called
chemo.

It's expensive and I don't
recommend it.

IF YOU HAVE TO GO SEARCHING FOR THE RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE, IT'S NOT YOUR PERSPECTIVE.

Maybe look at being true to what you're made to be/do in the world.

I don't know what it means to be a Jewish cancer patient although I've been asked how I feel my religion impacts my cancer experience. The parts of me that are most spiritual don't exist outside of the parts of me that aren't spiritual at all.

During this process of life and death and fight and sweetness, I've rediscovered a favorite freckle on my right cheek but I'm not sure if it's Jewish or not.

GOOGLE IS THE FASTEST WAY TO CONVINCE YOURSELF YOU'RE DYING.

A

s animals we're wired for "fight or flight" in high stress situations. Even knowing this, it's a fascinating moment of self reflection when you realize you're fighting.

Every time my treatments change, I make a choice. I always choose not to Google.

This isn't willful ignorance and is not not pretending that shit's not real. It's deciding that it doesn't matter what the fight, I will rise to the challenge.

DAILY TASKS ARE GREAT MEASURE STICKS.

I can't pick up my finger.

It's on the "e" key. I need to move it. I don't care where it moves.

Why won't it move? Pick up. MOVE.

BE KIND WITH YOUR ADVICE, IT'S MORE A REFLECTION OF YOU THAN THE PERSON YOU'RE ADVISING.

I saw a card that said “when life gives you lemons, I promise not to tell you a story about my cousin’s friend that died of lemons.”

Yes. That. Please don’t tell me about your friend that died of lemons.

Your story about what worked (or didn’t work) for someone is great and I’m truly happy (or sad) for them. I know you are sharing the story because you want the same (or different) outcome for me. But I’m not them and our journeys are not the same.

I know you’re probably going to tell me your story anyway so how about this: I’ll promise to listen to your story graciously, if you promise you won’t tell me what I should do.

**Yes, you could
do it. Again.**

Never cry wolf
in Yellowstone.

COUNT ON GREAT
STRENGTH FROM YOUR
MOST NEGLECTED
CHARMING PLACES.

T

he parts of you that you've put away are exactly where the world has done the least damage. You are still charming there. Let that be the word you use when, in your wandering, you bump into those parts of yourself. Those parts will always be carrying gifts for you. Receive them.

REDISCOVER YOUR FRECKLES.

A

s a kid, I hated my freckles although looking back I couldn't tell you why.

At some point I started loving them. They became a favorite feature. I even picked a favorite freckle.

Then I kind of forgot about them all together. I guess I was so used to seeing them, I started overlooking them.

Then I lost my hair and my skin changed as I tried different treatments.

I started seeing my freckles again. And you know what? I think I still love them the most.

Dear Reader

#TEAMDENVER

Now that you've finished this book I'm sure you've come to understand what made Denver so special. I'd like to end with some of the things Denver taught the world to help you understand the truly magnificent person she was.

I met D, as many of her friends called her, when I was 24 and she was 23. She was a California native who graduated from Indiana University and decided to stick around the state and become a Hoosier until cancer took her, too soon, at 28. I'm lucky to have known D for as long as I did. There is no doubt she changed my life for the better.

You see, Denver never met a stranger. She was a connector, a builder, and a believer. At 25, she was Executive Director of the first co-working space in Indianapolis, The Speak Easy. She changed our community, owning her role and building an ecosystem of professionals, friends, and investors, who followed her inspiration in pursuit of their dreams.

Denver had grit. She was strong and driven. She was a young woman in a middle-aged, white male world, and she kicked butt. It was amazing to watch her work. She was fearless in bringing new ideas to the table. She did her research, practiced her pitches, and was confident that her efforts were the best thing for her and everyone around her. She won nine times out of ten. Yet, when she got knocked down, she didn't give up. She'd go back to the drawing board and return with something better.

Denver was passionate about making the world a better place, and about bringing people together to do things they didn't know were possible. No matter how you met Denver, professionally or personally, you got the same woman. There were no

divides between social groups – everyone was welcomed to be a part of her world.

Cancer never defined her. Mostly because she refused to let it, but also just because she didn't let anything define her. Not her job, her family, or her appearance – even though you could recognize her a mile away due to her beautiful signature black curls. What defined Denver were her actions.

She lived life through a few phrases, but the one that always stuck with me is “If not now, when?” She applied this phrase to every aspect of her life. Any time she felt someone was letting fear hold them back or getting in the way of doing something outside of the norm, she'd look them square in the eyes and in a light-hearted

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manner just casually say – “If not now, when?”

To fully understand Denver, you have to know how important her family was to her. They were her rock and her inspiration. Larry, Amanda, Ethan, and Marcie I’ve come to recognize the bond you share is truly unique, especially considering you each live in a different state coast to coast! This never stopped any of you or Denver from being each other’s supporter, champion, and friend. You helped shape her into the extraordinary woman that she was. She has left a lasting impression on all of us, and I thank you for sharing her with us.

This book honors her legacy by letting the world see her actions, and understanding the lessons she learned as a friend, a

daughter, a sister, and a partner in crime.

I’d like to thank a few individuals who have brought this book to life in honor of D. Thank you to Pete Gall, founder of Family Lines. A mentor and friend to both Denver and me, Pete collaborates with individuals who have something worthwhile to say, and creates amazing personally-treasured writings for his clients’ friends and families. Pete and D spent hours together discussing the content of this book, even while Denver was at the hospital receiving her chemotherapy. She passed as they were making the final edits, but Pete helped bring this publication to fruition using her words and her heart.

Thank you Pete.

Thank you to Tom Hanley, Denver’s “partner in crime.” Tom was Denver’s partner, support-

er, care giver, and now the torchbearer for her legacy. Tom is the perfect example of what D’s love, passion, and drive produced in people. She pushed him, challenged him, and supported him into growing his own successful non-profit organization, Nine13sports, and to be an important influence in our community. Tom is truly a remarkable person and has a heart the size of the sun.

Tom, along with Denver’s father Larry, started a legacy foundation in Denver’s name, and all proceeds and donations from this book will go directly to it. This foundation honors D in so many ways. It’s about supporting young women in high school and college to follow their dreams through scholarships and internships. It’s about remembering a woman who changed the life of everyone she met, and it’s about reminding our community that we

need to work together, not against one another, to make this world a more beautiful place.

Again, thank you to the Hutt family for sharing Denver with us and for your continued friendship to all she knew.

Lastly, I thank you for taking the time with my friend’s words, and for supporting her legacy foundation in whatever way you choose.

As the rest of us who knew Denver strive towards daily, I invite you to live your life a little more like Denver.

***Smile at strangers :: Be kind
Judge less :: Hold the door***

I miss you my friend,
LAUREN MULVEY

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

