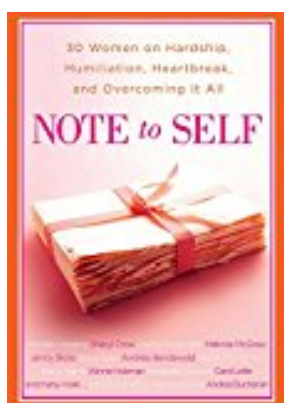


[PDF] Note To Self: 30 Women On Hardship, Humiliation, Heartbreak, And Overcoming It All

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Books Details:

Title: Note to Self: 30 Women on Har
Author:
Released: 2009-01-06
Language:
Pages: 336
ISBN:
ISBN13:
ASIN: B001NLL78E

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pdf, mobi, epub, azw, kindle

Description:

About the Author Andrea Buchanan is an award-winning filmmaker best known for her work on VH1's *Behind the Music*. She is an active writer, director, and producer in all forms of television and film. This is her first book. She and her husband live in Los Angeles, California.

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When Your Pride's in Jeopardy

Camryn Manheim Camryn Manheim is an Emmy Award-winning actress, most notably for her roles as Ellenor Frutt on *The Practice* and Delia Banks on *Ghost Whisperer*. She wrote her first book, *Wake Up, I'm Fat!* in 1999. She lives in Los Angeles with her amazing son, Milo. Her running charade skills are unmatched.

Most of my humiliating and humbling experiences have come not from the moments in which the horrifying incidents occurred but long after, when I put the pieces of the puzzle together and the whole picture became painfully clear. Like the time I wore a pearl jeweled brooch in my hair to a Golden Globes ceremony. At the time I thought I looked so chic and confident, but in retrospect it was truly a fashion faux pas. Lucky for me, the picture only showed up on several thousand websites and hundreds of publications...until Tara Reid's boob fell out of her dress on a red carpet and stole my limelight. I should send her a thank-you note.

I'm no stranger to humiliation. Most of the time, though, I'm able to take the punch, put it in its proper place, and find the amusement in the retelling of it. However, there is one moment that lives on in my memory, in my bones. The humiliation can still be felt when I turn the channel to ABC at 7:00 p.m. on any given night. It's humiliating times ten million, because that's about how many people watched me fail, and I failed big.

As the daughter of two Jewish educators who sent their only son to Harvard, there was an underlying pressure that I, too, would follow in their academic footsteps. At the age of ten, when I decided I wanted to be an actor, my parents thought the passing phase was cute. But as ten turned to eighteen, and I decided to seriously pursue being an actress, my parents found it no longer cute but -- how shall I say it? -- terrifying.

My whole family is a bunch of smarty-pants. And while I think of myself as smart, I guess my strengths would be better described as "differently" smart. For example, I can't spell my way out of a paper bag, but I like to think of myself as a good writer. When my son was born, I began a journal for him. This is an excerpt from my very first entry.

Dear Little One, There are a few things you should know about me before we go on this journey. First, you're going to see a few pictures around the house of me on a motorcycle. This does not mean you will ever be able to ride one. Secondly, I'm a terrible speller. I think I'll have you covered through second grade, but when you get into the five-letter words, you're on your own, kid.

While other new moms were reading first-time parenting manuals, I was leafing through the *Oxford English Dictionary* trying to figure out how to spell *pacifier*. The truth is, I was never able to retain the simple facts you learn in school. Geography? A blur. Social studies? If only it *were* social. Spanish? I was so bad at it, I couldn't even remember the swear words. Oddly enough, I could kick ass at charades and poker, but the decade when Trivial Pursuit was the number one parlor game was slightly traumatic for me. Truth be told, I would rather have a root canal than collect all the plastic wedges required to win that tedious game.

My parents used to quiz us in the car when we would go on long family vacations. How many senators are there for every state? What is the capital of Ethiopia? What kind of number is the square root of eight? Ad nauseam. It always felt like when the genes were passed out among the siblings, they were not equally dispersed. My brother got most of the "fact retention" genes, my sister got all of the "visual art" genes, and I got the "social" genes. I could make friends with a

lamppost. That came from my mom. Since my dad was a professor of mathematics, you didn't get the car keys in my household without calculating the wear and tear on the car, the gas mileage, and the increased insurance for having a minor on the policy. Somehow or another, calculating odds and probabilities became my forte. As a result, my reports cards were strangely inconsistent: straight As in math and science, and Cs and sometimes Ds in reading comprehension.

I always wondered why I had so much trouble holding on to bits of information that other people could so easily retain. Because I excelled in so many other areas of my life -- math, performing arts, problem solving, public speaking -- no one, including me, ever dug deeper to uncover the mystery. I tried to talk about it with my parents and peers, but no one felt it was as important as I did, so I kept my concerns to myself. It was my little secret that I had to read the same sentence three or four times to really understand it but if I read it out loud, I could absorb the information immediately. It never occurred to me that what I was experiencing was a legitimate issue that learning specialists have known about for decades.

But I digress, which is not entirely surprising, considering the fact that I've been asked to talk about my most embarrassing moment. So here goes. It was circa 1998. I had just won an Emmy for best supporting actress on *The Practice*. I was the toast of the town and receiving invites left and right to premieres, charity events, art gallery openings, and talk shows. It was every young actor's dream come true. I was just about to buy a house (and contrary to popular belief, I was not making crazy TV money) when my publicist called and asked if I wanted to be on *Celebrity Jeopardy!* Um, lemme think about that for a second. ...NO! But then she told me that in lieu of payment, all three celebrity contestants would get ten thousand dollars' worth of Sony electronics. So, although my gut said I probably wouldn't fare that well in a game requiring a knowledge of endless facts, ten thousand dollars' worth of electronics made the idea a little more enticing.

Still, I wasn't sure if I should do it. I tried to discuss it with some friends: Should I? Shouldn't I? Should I? Shouldn't I? But no one really understood my dilemma. Everyone thought I'd be crazy not to go on *Celebrity Jeopardy!* and get a new state-of-the-art TV. "Everybody knows they dumb down the questions for celebrities, right? Besides, you're a fierce game player!" When I tried to explain that I don't retain *Jeopardy!*-like facts and that Trivial Pursuit gave me hives, not one friend believed that I couldn't fill out a United States map or name the landlocked countries in South America. It's not as if they were saying that to be kind or complimentary. They truly believed that I'd go on *Celebrity Jeopardy!* and kick ass. But I knew better. I knew that as the fateful words "Okay, God damn it, I'll do it!" were coming out of my mouth, I'd live to regret them.

When I arrived at Sony Studios in Culver City, I was escorted to the greenroom, where I met Alex Trebek. I don't remember the date. I don't even remember who my celebrity competitors were. I've blocked all of it out, and I have never spoken of it since, until now. It all started out just fine. After meeting Mr. Trebek, I was brought to the ! soundstage, where we had a practice run, which mostly consisted of getting used to the handheld buzzer and giving our answers in the form of a question. The rehearsal went fine, because they *did* dumb down the questions and I wasn't feeling as hopeless as I thought I would. But when it came time for the real game, the nightmare began.

Thirty minutes never seemed so long. Even recalling it now, all these years later, makes me nauseous. I didn't know the answers to any of the questions, but I kept clicking my buzzer anyway, making my score dip lower and lower into the negative numbers. What evil person thought of docking people for trying to answer a question and getting it wrong? I didn't even know the answer to a question about musical comedy, which made me feel beyond humiliated. In the Final Jeopardy round, the clue had something to do with a bicycle race in Europe. I thought the answer might be the Tour de France, but because I had already made such a fool of myself I was sure that anything my brain had come up with would be wrong -- so out of total desperation, I peeked over my

opponent's shoulder and copied his answer. Since I had the fewest points, Alex asked me to reveal my answer first -- and (OH MY GOD, I WANT TO VOMIT) it was wrong. My only consolation was that contestant number 2 was also revealed to have the wrong answer. When contestant number 3 turned over the correct answer, which was the fucking Tour de France, the lights started flashing and there was a rainstorm of confetti and applause. In all my years doing theater, I have never wanted to get off a stage so desperately. The second they stopped taping, I quickly slipped out a side door, got in my car, drove home, and cried.

You can imagine how I felt, knowing that in three weeks my secret would be aired on national television for millions of people to see -- not once, but replayed over and over again for, who knows, possibly the rest of my life? It didn't matter how many times Tara Reid flashed her boobs, or that Paris Hilton was incarcerated, or that Angelina wore her lover's blood in a vial around her neck. I was certain that none of these indiscretions would ever overshadow my *Jeopardy!* debacle.

I considered calling the network to see if I could pay them not to air my episode, or staging my untimely death so they would feel bad about airing, but I chose that familiar friend, denial, and did nothing. Three weeks later that *Jeopardy!* episode aired, after which a strange silence filled my home. I hoped it was because everyone knew I was about to leave on a big press tour to promote a book I'd recently written and they wanted to give me some space, but deep inside, I feared it was because no one knew what to say to me. It was the first time I viscerally understood what the word dread felt like.

On my press tour, I traveled to all the major cities. Wouldn't you know it -- the same p...

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