



## LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE

TV WRITER DANIELLE HENDERSON GETS PERSONAL WITH HER NEW MEMOIR, *THE UGLY CRY*

**TV WRITER AND** former *Rookie* editor Danielle Henderson's new memoir, *The Ugly Cry* (Out June 8 from Viking), is a testament to the fact that most childhoods cannot be distilled into pure tragedy or pure comedy. She revisits her curiosity and confusion while coming of age in the '80s as a Black girl in a white neighborhood in upstate New York, and her recollections oscillate between the tragic (various forms of abuse), the comic (a song to accompany outdoor peeing), and the tragicomic (her grandmother's penchant for slasher movies and straight talk). This tonal variety runs through Henderson's entire writing portfolio, which includes the 2012 book *Feminist Ryan Gosling*, the hilarious 2015-2017 Hulu series *Difficult People*, and the trippy 2018 Netflix drama *Maniac*. It also characterizes her plans for the evening. Following our interview, she was due to discuss the "awful" 1989 skateboarder revenge movie *Gleaming the Cube* for her film podcast, *I Saw What You Did*. But first, she dipped into a deep chat with *BUST* from her home in L.A.

—MOLLY MACGILBERT

PHOTO: MAILE WRIGHT

**A lot of the topics you write about are typically discussed in serious tones, like racism and abuse. Why was it important for you to approach these subjects with a sense of humor?**

I can't help it! That was a survival instinct that I learned very early on. I think I give those subjects as much gravity as I do humor, but I definitely think some of the things that happened to me are funny. It didn't feel authentic to ignore the fact that, as hard as my childhood was, there was also a lot of joy and humor to be found there.

**How do you think the tough-love approaches of the women who raised you impact your life today, for better or for worse?**

It is definitely a balance. I'm grateful for the lessons I learned early on in that tough-love kind of scope, because they prepared me to go out into the world much sooner than anyone I knew. By the time I graduated from high school, I was ready to be on my own. I grew up knowing that I couldn't depend on anybody but myself, so I'm grateful for that lesson. But I do also think that had there been more care in certain situations, I probably would have a different approach to my self-esteem and my self-worth today, which I still struggle with.

**Knowing what you know now, what would you tell your younger self?**

That's always a hard question for me, because I feel like I wouldn't be the person I am if I did anything differently. But I wish I'd been kinder to myself, and I wish I'd been able to learn how to be more loving to myself early on. I really struggled to find my place in the world, and I think if I knew how to be kind to myself, that would have been different. I would tell her that I'm proud of her for surviving what she survived, and I'm proud of her for being who she was in a time when that wasn't accepted or expected.

**What do you want readers to take away from *The Ugly Cry*?**

I want them to understand that they can laugh, and then turn a page and cry. I want them to embrace the full spectrum of their emotions and their experiences, because I don't think we're taught how to do that. My grandma is truly a maniac, like, she's the wildest person I've ever met, and I can't just write about the doom and gloom without writing about all the joy that she brought into my life. I wasn't born into trauma. I wasn't born into violence. That's something that happened to me. But I did have, for a number of years, a really idyllic childhood. I lived in the country and played with my friends outside, and it was the '80s so no one was really watching us, and we had a blast, and I lived in a multigenerational home, and there was a lot of joy before the things that happened to me. The things that happened to me were not more powerful than the joy.