The Most Important Thing I Learned

The most important thing I learned completing this 30-day challenge is, we are always growing and forever changing, whether it be our behaviors, careers, motivations, goals, judgments and tolerances. The biggest thing for me is I learned to broaden my thoughts, think for myself, and stop trying to please others. I also learned how important it is for me to be happy. Some people say it’s selfish and we should always be about doing unto others, but the real truth is, we can’t be better at anything or for anyone until we are personally happy in our own skin. That often means making changes others may not like, respect, or accept.

I collect quotes, so my other goal was to match a favorite quote to each daily lesson. This project was my 50th birthday gift to me. It’s cathartic to put feelings into words, remind myself how far I’ve come, and have some words of wisdom to leave for my children so they can know me as an individual; not just as a mom--the provider and protector.

30 of Life's Most Valuable Lessons in 30 Days

Day #1: Change and Growth

It’s ok to change. Change=growth. Most of us are afraid to initiate change in our "comfortable" lives. Why? Because change=doubt and doubt=discomfort and discomfort=fear and fear=pain and we fear pain the most. Once we learn to accept the process of change, we realize the strengths that lie within us. Only then can we learn to enjoy the changes and reap their rewards.

"I Choose…to live by choice, not by chance; to make changes, not excuses; to be motivated, not manipulated; to be useful, not used; to excel, not to compete. I choose self-esteem, not self-pity. I choose to listen to my inner voice, not the random opinion of others. I choose to be me."—Miranda Marrott

Day #2: Goals and Dreams

Pursue your goals, dreams, hobbies and passions as if your days are numbered; because they are numbered and you have no idea how many you have left. Travel now, work harder now, be creative now, listen to your heart now. Do it all now. No one is guaranteed tomorrow.

"The only people worthy of hearing your goals are the people who will be genuinely supportive and help you to achieve them."—Unknown

Day #3: Random Stuff in My Head

1. Cough syrup doesn't work.
2. If you have to ask "does my butt look big in this"? It probably does.
3. You will usually only get a speeding ticket when you're trying not to get a speeding ticket.
4. Waterproof mascara is evil. It should not take an exorcism to get it off.
5. I can go days without chocolate, until I purposely try to go a day without chocolate.
6. I’d be okay if we stopped with Blu-ray. I am over re-recording my entire home video collection.
7. Why should we tip more for an expensive meal at a fancy? Did my waiter/waitress have to personally catch, skin, and harvest my food? Did they work harder to serve me than my less expensive meal at Applebee's? It just doesn't seem fair to me.
8. The public restroom stall you choose will always be the one without toilet paper. And who named it a "restroom" anyways? That's the last place I'd choose to rest!
9. You will run out of gas when the gauge is higher than the last time you "pushed it to the wire" and made it.
10. Waxing your own eyebrows almost always results in the need for a fill-in pencil for the next few weeks.

Day #4: Family
Never forget where you came from. Despite decades with random or obligatory family functions and Christmas cards, some relatives would love to spend more time with you. It’s never too late to form a bond with extended relatives. It’s easy to forget that you have other family besides those in your immediate circle.

**Day #5: Attitudes and Opinions**

Give every person benefit of the doubt. We should never let the opinions of others influence our judgment about someone. We should form our own opinions. We don’t know other’s stories or histories or why someone might behave, think, speak or act the way they do. It’s perfectly fine to not agree or have different opinions and it shouldn’t affect the relationship. Agree to disagree, have lively debates, but don’t let differences ruin your relationship.

**Day #6: Life and Death**

Disease, illness and death have no boundaries. It doesn't matter how healthy, how young, or how clean you live your life, tragedy can strike anyone, anytime. Many people live their lives afraid of “what could happen”. You can die doing just about anything. Don't wait for the perfect time to do something, and most importantly, make peace with your loved ones, or at least try; success is never guaranteed but you will know you made the effort.

**Day #7: Common Sense**

Rules override common sense in most cases. I love being carded at this age. I realize I don't necessarily look my age, but I'm fairly certain I do not look under 21!

**Day #8: Friendship**

Non-judgmental, unconditionally loving friends are priceless! Don’t feel guilty because you have friendships that are bound stronger than your family ties. Don’t be afraid to let the fake friends go. If they can’t support you when you’re at your lowest, they do not deserve you at your highest.

"Family isn't always blood. It's the people in your life who want you in theirs. The ones who accept you for who you are. The ones who would do anything to see you smile, and who love you no matter what." Unknown

**Day #9: Self-Control**

Backgrounds, upbringings, and circumstances may influence who we are, how we start out in life, or how we feel about certain things. They are, however, not responsible for who we become, how we will interact with others, if we will be well-educated, the career we will have, or how we will raise our own children. We are in control of our own, thoughts, decisions, and emotions and only we can mold our own destinies. We needn't become a product of our environment, so don’t use a not-so-perfect childhood as an excuse to not be better.

"Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary."—Steve Jobs

**Day #10: More Random Stuff**

1. Everything is better with bacon. There is no logical reason why, it just is.
2. The squirrel or rabbit will always change its directional mind...swerving to miss it is pointless.
3. People change. Try not to hold it against them, they're figuring it out, too.
4. Trust your gut, it's usually right; especially when you've changed the answers on your test.
5. Make extra copies of everything; the one thing you need is always the one you can't find.
6. Teachers and professors always said that one day I'd need Algebra. I'm still waiting.
7. People may nag and complain that you do too much and need to slow down. It's not my pace that bothers me, it's that sudden stop at the end. Move at the pace that gets you to your goals!
8. If it takes you more than five adjectives to order your coffee, it's probably not coffee.
9. It’s not your job to make everyone happy. Has it worked yet?
10. Clowns suck.

Day #11: Time

Time is a terrible thing to waste. You can never get it back or make more of it. Let the anger and resentment go. In the end it's you who will pay the price. Time is not a renewable resource. Don't take it for granted.

"The bad news is time flies. The good news is you're the pilot."—Michael Altshuler

Day #12: Getting in Too Deep

We can't help getting into holes. Sometimes we fall in, sometimes we are pushed in, and sometimes we dig it even deeper. We always expect help getting out of a hole, but in most cases, only we have the ability to get ourselves out.

DAY #13: Childhood Memories

1. "Wear clean underwear in case you're in an accident." This never made sense. If I'm in an accident, I'm probably going to crap myself anyways. But really, shouldn't you put on clean underwear AFTER you have an "accident"?
2. "This is going to hurt me more than it does you" is complete bull-shit. I mean, how heavy is that paddle anyways?
3. "Because I said so" is not a valid reason and will only cause further questioning that will ultimately lead back to #2.
4. "Eating raw potatoes and cake batter will give you worms". I always thought worms were cool, nice try though.
5. "I'll give you something to cry about"! And we're back to #2 again.
6. "If you fall out of that tree and break your leg, don't come running to me"! And the point would be? I can't run and #2 is coming again!
7. "I hope I'm alive to see the day when your kids are as bad as you"! I wish today's kids were as bad as I was!
8. "I can't wait till you have a home of your own so I can come over and make a mess in it". Well, those rotten kids you wished on me already beat you to it!
9. "Those starving children in Africa would give anything for what's on your plate". I beg to differ. Everyone has their limits!
10. "You think this is bad, just wait till your Dad gets home". Great, more of #2!

Day #14: Relationships

Sometimes you have to run away to see who will run after you. Sometimes you have to talk quieter to see who's really listening. Sometimes you have to step up to fight only to see who will fight for you.

"We are afraid to care too much, for fear that the other person does not care at all."—Eleanor Roosevelt

Day #15: Anger and Grudges

When it comes right down to it, life is really only about asses. We are either covering ours, kicking one, kissing one, or acting like one. Don't show your ass. Let go of grudges. They are useless wastes of time, emotions and energy. Nothing good ever came from a grudge. You only hurt yourself and make no one want to be with or come around you. No one likes a negative person. Also, never force someone to apologize. Most of them are fake anyways because people do not really regret saying what they felt or thought.

"An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind."—Mahatma Gandhi

Day #16: Aging

It is possible to age without "getting old". Age really is just a number.

"We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing."—George Bernard Shaw
Day #17: Dedication and Believing

I have never taken "no" for an answer if I believe in something. That defiance landed me in a lot of trouble as a kid, but it's served me well as an adult; and that's when it really matters!

"A pessimist sees the difficult in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."—Winston Churchill

Day #18: Be True and Regret Nothing

Be yourself and not what others want to see. Never blame anyone else if you get hurt because you took the risk and decided who or what was worth the while. Take chances. Say what's on your mind. Never say "I wish I could or I wish I was". Do it, make it happen, have no regrets.

Day #19: Kindness and Paying It Forward

There are kind, selfless, generous people in this world and random acts of kindness do happen when you least expect them. Pay those acts forward and never break the chain. Never devalue anyone.

"When a bird is alive, it eats ants. When the bird is dead, ants eat the bird. Time and circumstances can change at any time. Don't devalue or hurt anyone in life. You may be powerful today, but remember, time is more powerful than you. One tree makes a million match sticks but only one match is needed to burn a million trees. So be good and do good."—Unknown

Day #20: Self-Gratification

Sometimes it's okay to be selfish. The best way you can be strong for others is by taking care of yourself first. Being selfish means gaining personal satisfaction from our life's choices, which allows us to become empowering and insightful.

Day #21: Clutter and Stuff

Clutter is a drain both mentally and physically. When it comes right down to it, all that "stuff" really doesn't matter in the end. Hoarding or keeping things because you fear you might need them one day, creates clutter. Clutter is toxic and depressing to look at, so clear the path and create a clutter-free living space.

Day #22: More Random Stuff

1. Men's boxer briefs are surprisingly quite comfortable.
2. One day you will be uncool in the eyes of your children.
3. Memories and thoughts are priceless. Write them down when they happen or when something cool comes to mind. They will come in handy one day when you want to list all the things you've learned.
4. Apparently, there is only one right way to hang the toilet paper and I've been doing it wrong my whole life!
5. Get shit done. Don't put shit you can do today off just to add it to tomorrow's shit list. Shit piles up and next thing you know; you're covered in shit.
6. "Junk" is something you've kept for years and throw away three weeks before you need it.
7. There are more stalkers than interactive friends on Facebook. No, you don't really have 500 "friends".
8. If your sister hits you, don't hit her back. Parents always catch the second person.
9. Don't be afraid of daily exercise. It's better to be uncomfortable for one hour every day, than to be dead for 24.
10. You'll always think of clever stuff to say after an argument than during one.

Day #23: Heartache and Disappointment

As we grow up, we learn that people will let us down. We will have our hearts broken and we will break some hearts too. We'll lose people that we love too soon. So, take too many pictures, try new and challenging things, love unconditionally, have no regrets, learn from every endeavor—good or bad—and forgive easily.
Day #24: Creativity
If you can't find exactly you want, make it. If you can't find the picture you want, paint it. If you envy your neighbor's garden, plant your own. Try new things, you may just find your hidden talents.

Day #25: Winning and Losing
I love to run. Running isn't necessarily hard, it just takes practice and patience. Defeats are another chance to obtain a victory; a chance to work harder and push beyond your comfort zone. That's when the victory is the sweetest because you know that you genuinely worked hard for it. There will be wins and losses in every journey throughout our life. Without defeats, there would be no victories because we would simply stop trying to be better.

"You were born to run. Maybe not that fast, maybe not that far, maybe not as efficiently as others. But to get up and move, to fire up that entire energy-producing, oxygen-delivering, bone-strengthening process we call running."—Florence Griffith-Joyner

Day #26: Confidence
You can be at your peak performance one day and your lowest ability the next. Just one muscle-pull away. Never give up on a comeback!

"Pain is weakness leaving the body. The question isn't how much more can you take, but how much more can you give. Just when you're ready to quit, your mind says push harder. You listen sensing an inner strength that wasn't there before, and suddenly you discover you no longer feel the pain."--Unknown

Day #27: Forgiveness
The moment you forgive someone, you may also give them a second chance. By doing this, you are challenging both of you to grow and become better individuals, because of what you've learned. Your ego might tell you to "let this person go" but what does your heart tell you? Listen to your heart. Forgiveness is not for the offender, but for you.

"People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered; forgive them anyway."—Mother Teresa

Day #28: Setting Goals
Everyone should have a Bucket List in my opinion. It's actually pretty easy to come up with 100 things that you want to achieve. Give it a shot then get busy marking items off!

Day #29: Parenting
Once your kids are grown, you are now in an all-adult relationship. You no longer tell them what to do or how to conduct their life; you've taught them to be good and to do good, while having given them the tools and space they needed to become their own individuals. The choices are theirs alone and no matter what they decide, you are merely in a supportive role, giving advice only when asked for, loving unconditionally, and making a mess in their house every chance you get to get them back!

"Parenting is a job that you will never resign from, yet you only have to be the boss for a short time, then you get demoted to a volunteer."—Debra Roberts (me)

Day #30: Love and Marriage
True love is passionate, fun, exciting, and organic. It's not something you look for, it's something that finds you; often when you least expect it. "Marriage" is about being best friends and truly enjoying one another's presence, no matter where you are or what you're doing. It is not about the things you do on an obligatory basis, like birthdays or anniversaries. It's the little things you do each day to make one another feel special and loved; that are spontaneously from the heart. Love is not forced. There is a difference between being married and having a marriage. Ponder that.