



A Love Letter to Yourself

A few weeks ago, I found myself in an apple orchard with a good friend and a new friend who happens to be an amazing photographer, who loves taking pictures of women. She had two dresses I was wearing the white one and my friend chose the blue one. Both dresses were the embodiment of femininity. Not because it was tight, in fact, it was the opposite. It was long and flowing and had a deep V in the center. The material was thin enough to let sunlight through but not sheer enough to show everything.

In other words, this was not a situation I find myself in often.

This tapped into my secret fantasy to live on an orchard in an undiscovered town in California and have chickens and the boys would only eat the food we grew and raise them all free-range style. The boys... and the food. I wouldn't wear makeup and walk around barefoot all day, read books, listen to music, paint, drink wine for lunch and wear long flowy dresses.

My reality is quite different. This orchard was in Goshen, Indiana which is about 45 minutes away and the only reason I go to Goshen is to visit my grandparent's grave site. Ironically, this orchard was a stone throw away from that.

The dress required some strategic undergarments because of its material. In my California fantasy, I'm not taping things to my nipples to cover them up, because, in California, nobody cares, but we were taking photos after all and thought it would be a good idea.

As I was walking through the orchard, picking apples, I felt a deep and unequivocal connection to my roots. Whether it was because I was in nature or because I was near my grandparents, or just because I slowed down. Whatever the reason, I felt at peace. And that is what comes through in these pictures.

I shared with my friend that I had done this and she asked me why. She couldn't imagine getting photos taken of herself for the sole purpose to get pictures of *herself*.

First, I told her about a photo I have of my mom. It was taken when she was a new mother and it is by far, the most beautiful photo I have ever seen. And not just of my mom, but of anyone. My heart actually throbs when I see this picture of a woman who was doing exactly what she wanted to do. I treasure that photo.

Next, I told her that she is worth getting her picture taken. So many women don't feel that way. Or they worry what other people will think, or that people will say they are vain, or even worse, that people won't like what they see. There is nothing vain in celebrating yourself.

When I was walking through the orchard I felt radiant. Not because of my makeup or hair or dress, (which were all fantastic and not done by me) but because I was doing something for myself, and I was with girlfriends who were positive, fun, and supportive.

I'm not going to apologize for that.

When she sent me the photos, my first reaction was to find my flaws. I was worried other people that would see them too. I worried that if my sons saw the pictures they would be embarrassed. That is when I had to make a hard stop and ask what in the hell my problem was. This is who I am. I am a woman who for the most part, is comfortable in my body. There is beauty in that. Think about the time when you felt the most beautiful. For me, it was immediately after I gave birth to my first son. In the photo, I'm laughing through tears and sweat, my hair is a mess and all over the place. I'm 40 lbs heavier and I'm natural, primal, and gorgeous. Of course, I can't recreate that every day. But if you feel most beautiful in sweats and a T-shirt, then you celebrate that. If you feel most beautiful with amazing makeup and your hair done up, then celebrate that.

Because when you feel beautiful, you are beautiful.

When you do things for someone else, (like when I cut my hair really short because my boyfriend liked it that way) then you are looking good for someone, but not feeling good. The point is not to chase beauty but to be an example of it. From the inside out.

In college, I learned that when you attach your worth to what other people say about you, then you are giving your power away. So it only feels natural and good to write a love letter to yourself, or just do something that makes you feel really good. Maybe that is food, maybe that is a hike, maybe it is sex, maybe it is sleep. maybe it's spending time with friends. Maybe it is all of those things combined. Whatever that is for you, just do it.

In my case, it was doing this. These photos embodied so much of what makes me feel beautiful, and I don't think hiding my true self from my boys will make them better men, in fact, I think it would only perpetuate a stereotype of what a woman should or shouldn't be. At the end of the day, I'm the only one who can give the boys an example of a happy mother who is squeezing the most out of life, or at least trying to, on most days.

I won't display the photos above the mantle. I'll keep them with the rest of our family's pictures.

This entire day was more about celebrating myself and the pictures are just a result of that.

Someday I hope my sons will stumble upon them and see me for more than just their mom. But as a woman who loved life even when things weren't easy. A woman who could be a mom, wife, daughter, sister, or friend, but also own her sensuality, has a desire to learn more, to excel in whatever she takes an interest in, and to take care of the ones she loves, including herself.