

I Was Told there Would Be Cake

Essays.

By Daniela Henry

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Acknowledgements

I had a hard time deciding how to list and acknowledge all the important people in my life. I was going to list people in alphabetical order, but I didn't think that would be fair to my friend Zeena. Then I thought maybe I should list everyone from shortest to tallest or thinnest to heaviest, but that didn't seem right either. So, I decided to list everyone from smartest to dumbest. No, that's not true. This list is in no particular order. Just because someone is first doesn't mean they are the most important. It doesn't mean they are not the most important either. I am grateful for them all. So, I would like to thank:

My mother... my father.... My brother...my sister....

Even though I did mention earlier that this list is in no particular order, there are two persons who are the most important in my life – my son and my partner in crime.

Thank you.

Ring the bells that still can ring.

Forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything.

That's how the light gets in.

– Leonard Cohen

Each day I remind myself how fortunate I am to be the master of my own ship, with the sustenance to prevail.

“Es gibt weder moralische noch unmoralische Bücher. Bücher sind gut geschrieben oder sie sind schlecht geschrieben. Weiter nichts.“

– Oskar Wilde

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An Introduction

Welcome to my sixth book. Inside this book you will find an assortment of wonderful things – words, advice, tidbits, morsels, shenanigans, and, in some copies, four hundred euros cash. So, you might want to buy a few. I don't have enough room to tell you all the reason why you should buy this book, but I can tell you this and it is a guarantee: If you buy it, you will feel better, look better, lose weight, get a promotion at work, have shinier hair, and fall madly, deeply in love.

You probably just picked up this book thinking, What is this all about? And frankly, I am right there with you. All the work is done and you, on the other hand, will only see the finished product. Shiny and edited and pasted together with the tears of copy editors whom I have sent to an early grave. Will it be worth it? No damn idea. But I can't stop because writers write always. Not well, necessarily. But they write. And you are a reader. So, you read. This whole introduction is a pretty good indication of the baffling wordsmithery that you can expect here, and that's a good thing because 1) now you have been warned, so you can't blame me if you hate this book, and 2) you are going to feel so much better about yourself in comparison. I am not just saying that to flatter you. Truly. I have managed to fuck shit up in shockingly impressive ways and still be considered a fairly acceptable person. In some ways I have actually made it my living. And because I am so good at being publicly terrible, other people feel comfortable telling me about how awful they are at being an adult, and then I try to top them with a "Oh, you think that's bad? Let me tell you how I tried to rescue a decapitated human head at work," and then they are like, "Nah, HOLD MY BEER," and in the end I end up with a new best friend because how could you not love

a person who couldn't understand where those terrible farting noises were coming from on the bus but then she realized that she was leaning on and everyone looked at her and so she ended up shaking a rubber foot at them while yelling, "I am not farting, it is my dog's foot." Answer: You can't. You love them. Hard.

It is weird because we often try to present our fake, shiny, happy selves to others and make sure we are not wearing too-obvious pajamas at the grocery store, but really, who wants to see that level of fraud? No one. What we really want is to know we are not alone in our terribleness. We want to appreciate the failure that makes us perfectly us and wonderfully relatable to every other person out there who is also pretending that they have their shit together and didn't just eat that onion ring that fell on the floor. Human foibles are what make us, and the art of mortification is what brings us all together.

A lot of people read my books because they love to laugh about all the terrible things you maybe shouldn't laugh at. I hope you find this book just as funny, but there is some really serious and raw stuff in here too. If I could choose the themes of my life, I assure you this book would be all about my successful otter rescue and how I became a sexy vampire who isn't allergic to dairy. But we don't get to pick who we are.

But fuck that. Fuck feeling bad about eating floor onion rings. Fuck the shame that comes from wearing your clothes to bed, so you are technically never (or always) in your pajamas. Fuck the people who make you feel bad for glorifying the odd behavior and questionable decisions that make you who you are. Those things are perfectly acceptable.

I want to thank you for buying this book. We are about a beautiful journey together – one that is unique and special. Through this book I

will tell you what is going on in my life and what I am thinking about. But I bet a lot of you are probably thinking, Daniela, why are you writing another book after already proving yourself by penning five wildly, wildly tomes? Well, the truth is, since I wrote my last book a lot has happened in my life, and I have a lot to share. So, I hope that you will take a moment to sit back, relax, and enjoy the words I have put together for you in this book. I think you will find I have left no stone unturned, no door unopened, no window unbroken, no rug unvacuumed, no ivories unticked. What I am saying is, let us begin.

Be good. Be kind. Love each other. Fuck everything else. The only thing that matters is how you feel and how you have made others feel. And I feel okay (for the moment), and I make others feel okay by being a barometer of awkwardness and self-doubt.

Hello and welcome to my book (and now yours). Thank you for your interest in my thoughts, my words of wisdom, and my recipe for French toast. Throughout the year it took me to write this, I wrote in solitude, recording my thoughts as they came to me, digging up old memories, pouring out my heart and soul. Then, at the end of the process, I hoped and prayed that there were a few people out there who would enjoy it.

As you may have noticed, my mind does not work the same as most. That is to say, I am sort of, well – different – and yet it seems to have worked for me. So, as you read this, I hope it does what I intended it to do when I decided to write it. I hope it entertains you, inspires you, makes you laugh, makes you think, makes you smile, makes you feel better about yourself, makes you more aware of your feelings, makes you love your brothers and sisters, makes you more successful in life, makes you wealthier, makes you exercise more, makes you eat healthier, makes you stop smoking, makes you taller, thinner, more

beautiful, more fluent in Spanish and French! Or at least makes you not regret buying it.

Daniela Henry

July 2023

.Just Another Last Message.

Hello, and welcome to my new book. Please make yourself at home while you read it: Take off your shoes, loosen your pants, make those funny at-home faces that we all make. Be comfortable. On the other hand, if you are reading this in a more public place – a plane, a train – it might serve you better to be a little less comfortable. Oh, and if you are reading this while you are driving, PUT THE BOOK AWAY! YOU ARE DRIVING! But wherever you are reading this book, please remember to turn off your cell phone and that the taking of flash photographs is strictly forbidden.

Now, you may want to know why I am writing this book. Well, there are a number of very good reasons, most of which I forgot the moment I sat down to write. I have a vague recollection of losing a bet to someone, so that may be one of the reasons. I love to write. The fact is, I would rather write a book than read a book. It is like reading, only you get paid for it. Otherwise, it has all the same elements. I don't know what is on the next page. It is suspenseful, yet I can control where it goes. It is like interactive reading. Besides, I have already read books. A lot of them. Well, definitely more than seven.

One thing that you should know if you ever get tired of readings books and decide to write one on your own (I would suggest doing this only and I mean only after you finish this book): writing a book is hard work. You can't just sit there staring at the computer screen and wait for words to magically appear. Believe me – I tried doing that for five months and I didn't get a single word.

Suddenly, all this talk about “writing a book” is making me feel overwhelmed. I need to take a break. Excuse me.

Okay, I am back. I went to brush my teeth (just three of them – I never do them all at once). That, by the way, is an excellent way to pass the time. Hygiene is important anyway, as we all know. So, take your time and brush, then floss. Flossing is key. You must floss. Don’t even think for a second that you can get away with not flossing. Always floss. I can’t stress it enough.

If you get nothing from this book, I hope you not only think to yourself “I must floss,” but pass it along to loved ones and acquaintances – floss, floss, floss. Now, what was I saying? Oh yes, Why another book?

Seriously, why? There are so many books already. What could I possibly have to say that needs to be read by millions or at least hundreds of people? Perhaps you are reading this to get never-before-revealed insights into who I am as a person. If so, here is a good one for you, right off the bat: If anyone knows me at all, they know I enjoy the smell of a freshly washed dog.

Or perhaps you are hoping to learn a thing or two. I have no brand-new words to put out there, no insights on the meaning of life or even how to be content most of the time. I have been interested in some deeper meaning of this existence for a long time. I assume we all are, judging by the sales of books devoted to helping us find the answers. I have all of them, but I haven’t found one that says anything very different. They all sort of say the same thing.

I suppose I could put down my own ideas of what I think would be at least a good start for happiness, if you are interested. Oh, you are? Okay then.

1. Be nice to everyone, even though you don’t want to and may not like certain people. Be kind, friendly, and respectful even if people are not nice to you. That way, you are not dragging down

to their level. Also, there is nothing that annoys arrogant jerks more than people being nice to them.

2. Floss, everyday floss. As discussed. In addition to aforementioned perks, flossing encourages healthy gums and makes your teeth feel secure when they are eating something difficult like apples or corn on the cob.
3. Try to have some quiet time every day. I know it is hard, don't tell me. It is getting to be near impossible to find silence, what with the TV, radio, kids, leaf blowers, helicopters, traffic, birds, dogs barking.
4. Exercise. Any form of movement will do. Stretching keeps your limber, young, and energized. My favorite exercise is walking a block and a half to the corner store to buy fudge. Then I call a cab to get back home. There is never a need to overdo anything.
5. Drink lots of water. I cannot function unless I drink a lot of water. My favorite way to drink water is to put it in a tray, make ice cubes, then put one of those cubes into a big old glass of scotch. Let's have some now, shall we? Thinking back (a good thing to do while drinking scotch), I knew I wanted to write this book because I have always loved writing, especially cursive. It is so pretty, all the loops and whatnot. I thought about having this entire book printed in capital letters, so, as the narrator, IT WOULD SEEM LIKE I'M SHOUTING THE WHOLE TIME. I LIKE THE IDEA OF ME SHOUTING INSIDE OTHER PEOPLE'S HEADS. IT MAKES ME FEEL POWERFUL.
You know, it is hard work to write a book. I cannot tell you how many times I really get going on an idea, then my quill breaks. Or I spill ink all over my writing tunic. No wonder I drink so much!

6. Know you are special. How do you know that? Because you bought this book. You are already two steps ahead of the losers who didn't buy this book. They aren't special. When they finally do buy this book, then they too will be special because they have chosen this book, but you will still be two or three or even more steps ahead. Just know when you buy this book, you are ahead. Imagine being the last person to buy this book. I pray that doesn't happen to anyone. If word keeps spreading about the magical powers of this book, the joy it gives, the wonders, the life-affirming, the life-changing results of reading this book, no one will ever be last. It will be sold forever and ever and that will make me happy.

7. The key to life is balance. Think of a seesaw. On one side is Give, the other side Take. If you just give and give and give, you have got nothing left. You are empty. Which means you don't weigh anything because empty equals weightless; so, Take is just sitting on the ground bored out of its mind saying, "I am bored, I cannot take anymore of this," which is a pretty strong statement since that is what Take's job is. It is to take. And if Take cannot take anymore, then well, I think you see my point. And the same goes for taking too much. If you keep taking and taking and taking, you get loaded down. Taking equals heavy. So, Give is stranded way up in the air saying, "Hey, I am way up in the air." And then Take is like, "So?" And Give is like, "I hate you. All you do is take." And Take is like, "You are the stupid idiot for giving all the time." And Take gets off the seesaw to leave and Give goes crashing to the ground and then Take feels bad and rushes over to see if Give is okay and then they hug and start crying and both apologize for beings so selfish. So, you see, it needs to be balanced.

8. Minimize stress. When I am stressed out, I get so stressed. When I am relaxed, it is a whole different story. I find that life can be difficult. Also, when certain events occur, it can bring on stress. Small things – a car accident, let’s say – can change your whole mood. Everything can be going just fine. You are home feeling cozy, watching TV. You suddenly remember you are running low on ice cream, and you are singing along to some classic Hall & Oates song and Bam! into the back of some idiot’s car. What are they doing stopped there anyway? It is a stop sign, not a red light. You are not supposed to sit there forever. And all the questions start flying at you. Do you have insurance? Have you been drinking? Why are you in your pajamas? Wow, people are nosy. No wonder I rarely leave the house. It is a jungle out there.
9. Start thinking positively. You will notice a difference. Instead of “I think I am a loser,” try “I definitely am a loser.” Stop being wishy-washy about things! How much more of a loser can you be if you don’t even know you are one? Either you are a loser, or you are not. Which is it, stupid?
10. Don’t look in the mirror.... Ever.
11. Work, but have playtime. Recess. We lose our play, our fun, all of our joy. We used to say, “Mom, I am going out to play.” Now it’s, “Honey, I am going off to work.” We don’t see a forty-five-year-old man saying, “I am going out to play.” If he did, his girlfriend or boyfriend would say, “What the heck does that mean? No, you won’t.” You don’t see a grown-up squatting on the ground with a stick poking at ants. If you do, you cross the street. You walk far away from them. You don’t see adults lying in the grass staring at the sky saying, “I see a bunny rabbit.” That is, unless you are on drugs.

.Things To Be Grateful For.

I had read somewhere that it's good to keep a gratitude journal. We forget how many great things there are in our lives and when you start jotting them down and really get introspective about even the littlest of things, it is amazing how all the terrible things in life don't seem as bad. Gratitude can surprise you. Once you start seeing things in a positive way, you can make almost anything seem like a gift. At first it is difficult to get to the things that matter. My journal started off like this:

I am grateful for air – I need it to breathe.

I am grateful for food – I need it to live.

I am grateful for water – it is what my body is 80% of.

Then, after listing five pages of life-sustaining needs, I became angry with my journal (as you probably already are) and decided I needed to dig a little deeper.

Animals don't talk. At first, I thought, Oh, that's a shame, poor things cannot communicate to us. But then I thought, If some people are annoying, think about how bad it would be to come home from work and listen to your dog or cat tell you what it did all day long. First, your pet would berate you for not paying enough attention to it. "Well, it's about time! It seems like you have been gone forever. I have no concept of time and I am aging faster than you; you would think you would want

to spend as much time with me as you could. Why did you even get me? To pet once in a while? Oh! Thank you, master. Look, I am bored. I have this one flea that is driving me nuts. I give and give and give. I am your best friend, I love you unconditionally, and what do you do for me? Oh, you feed me. That same boring food every day. I see what you eat. You think I am stupid? I know there is variety in your meals, but I, for some reason, don't deserve anything but this monotony."

Then the animal would go into a longwinded, boring monologue about the day. "Okay, this morning there is this bird outside chirping and chirping and chirping and so I start barking, right? And the bitch woman who walked by screams, "Shut up" to me. She doesn't tell the stupid bird to shut up, just me. So, I barked a few more times just to piss her off. I mean, she cannot tell me what to do, you know what I am saying? I hate her. Then, I heard something a few streets away, so I started barking again- and guess what? Yep, she started yelling at me again. It is not like she doesn't make noise of her own. She has this loud music playing on this thing called "phone" I think. They yell constantly and when they do people cheer and applaud. Give me a break. I am supposed to just lie around and make no noise? Oh, I don't know. Maybe I am just in a bad mood. I think I will just have a biscuit and head to bed... Hop to it! I can't get it myself!"

It turns out the main reason I love dogs is that they don't talk.

Before my gratitude journal began, there were things out in the world that I wished never existed, like mosquitos. Mosquitos, especially at night, are the most annoying thing I can think of. I know there is some scientific explanation for why even the mosquito plays a part in balancing out nature but doesn't make up for the fact that many times I have spent the better part of what was supposed to be a good night's sleep hunting those bloodsuckers down. Then I thought, "Wait a

minute... that's what being grateful is all about. It is about the mosquito and the fly and other bothersome creatures. If we didn't have them, what would I complain about?" Who wants a world where there isn't a reason to complain?

There are people in this world who never complain. "Hey, you know Chris's girlfriend, Anna? She never complains about anything. Isn't that great?" What am I supposed to talk to her about? Eventually, that is how people bond. What a boring relationship if every conversation went, "You like humidity? Me, too."

"I love when mosquitos bit me, it reminds me I am alive!" "You know what doesn't bother me? Frostbites... Yeah, it makes me forget I have fingers for a while."

Small talk would be impossible. Small talk is something I used to dread. Now, since I have found ways to be grateful, I realize that without small talk people at parties would just stare at each other and eat twice as many chips. Now I love to start up a conversation with someone and discover, through small talk, where they live. How fascinating.

"How long have you lived here?"

"Oh, for about five years."

"Isn't it nice?"

"We love it."

"Great. I am gonna go talk to that guy over there about how unseasonably cold it is this summer."