



“My mother’s friends say that I’m just like her. She died of breast cancer when I was two years old. I had to grow up fast because my father was always working and seldom around. I was doing my own laundry at the age of seven. I figured the puberty thing out on my own. During high school, I’d leave for entire weekends without my dad even asking where I’d been. Then one year at Thanksgiving, my aunt told me that my mother had left me a letter and a video. She got so angry when I told her I’d never gotten it. I confronted my Dad about it, and he said that he ‘remembered something like that.’ He drove me to a safety deposit box—but the box was empty. He couldn’t remember what happened. He had one job. One thing that would mean more to me than anything else, and he couldn’t do it. My mom’s friends always tell me: ‘She would be so proud of you,’ or ‘She was so in love with you. But that’s not the same. It’s not the same as something directly from her. Something she made especially for me. Just one thing that actually says: ‘This is how much I love you.’”

Write about a time when you forgot something really important. What were the consequences?

Have you ever given someone something that represents your love for them? Describe it and explain how this object shows your love.



“I was late to the delivery room when she was born. But as soon as I walked in, her eyes started tracking me. Like she knew I was her Dad. Even the nurses were laughing about it. She’s always been my road dog. She never went through a ‘teenage phase.’ She never stopped wanting to spend time with me. We could always talk about the problems she was having at school. Even as she got older, we’d still go to the park on Saturdays or find some exotic place to eat in Brooklyn. It’s a little tough now that she’s away at college. I miss spending time with her. But I trust her completely and I want her to enjoy these years. I just hope that when she falls in love with some dude, I’ll still get to see her.”

What stories have you been told about your birth? Did anything funny, bizarre, scary or sweet happen?

What has changed in your relationship with your parents as you have grown older? What has stayed the same?



“I don’t think I’m going to miss eighth grade. It’s been a tough year. A lot of my friends are struggling with depression and self-harm, and it’s hard for me to watch. I just care about them so much. Growing up is so hard for some people. It’s such a big thing. It’s your foundation, I guess. You’re becoming you. It’s such a big thing and we’re going through it right now. Some of my friends are struggling with loving themselves and loving life. I think they forget that we’re still learning. They think that they’re already who they’re going to be. They think they know the future. And it’s going to be horrible. And they’ll never be able to fix it. But that’s not true because we’re still changing. And we’ll always be changing. Even when we’re old, we’ll be changing.”

How do you feel about growing up in the world today? Is it difficult? Easy? Complicated? Explain.

What lesson have you learned while growing up that you feel is important to share with the world?



“I grew up outside of Miami. It wasn’t easy to be young, black, and gay in my neighborhood. It was a very masculine space. All the guys played basketball or football. They wore oversize clothes. There was a clearly defined idea of what it meant to be a man. And I spent a lot of energy trying to meet that standard. I didn’t like sports but I played anyway. If I ever got bullied for acting feminine, or hanging out with girls, I’d take it to the extreme and insist on fighting. The black man is expected to be a rock. I think it comes from our history. We were abused for so long, I think there’s a resistance to ever being vulnerable again.”

Describe a time when you didn't fit in. What did you do to survive?

What standards do you try to live up to in your life? Why?



“My grandmother got me a violin when I was thirteen. Whenever people were fighting, and I wanted to get away, I’d just go in my room and play. Sometimes I’d play for four or five hours per night. It gave me a lot of confidence. I started playing in front of the church, in front of the school--- it made me feel good about myself. But my mom struggled a lot. She made a lot of mistakes. She got in some bad relationships and we lived in a lot of different places. Sometimes we’d go weeks without having power. One time it got really bad and we had to start selling our stuff. She didn’t ask me to sell my violin. But we’d already sold our TV. And she just asked if I had any ideas. I ended up selling it to a friend for \$145. I was really upset for a while. I’m a Christian, and God knew how much I loved the violin. So I was confused why he’d make me sell it. For a few months, I tried to keep playing in the music room at school. But eventually I had to stop so I could focus on paying the bills. I got a real job at the grocery store.”

What do you do in your life to make yourself feel good when times are rough?

Describe an activity you love to do. Why are you so passionate about this? What does it bring into your life?



“I want to empower women through dance. I think you can build confidence through movement. When a woman starts moving her body, and becomes comfortable with herself, and realizes that she can do the steps—it connects back to life. Because all of life is movement. Technically we’re dancing every day. And it doesn’t matter how you look. It matters how you move.”

How do you react to the statement: “It doesn’t matter how you look. It matters how you move.” Do you agree or disagree? Explain why.

In your opinion, what does it mean to be empowered? Are you empowered? Explain.