

Mama Used to Say... Be Your Own Brand

Volume I

You know "common sense" ain't common...

Hmmmm...

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A Little book of Common Sense on Style, Self and Body

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WHAT MAMA USED TO SAY ABOUT “STYLE AND SELF”

To know yourself and have your own sense of style can be a life long quest. I thought my mother carried herself in such a manner that she had to be born with those qualities. How do you find your style? How do you learn to appreciate your individuality and not follow the crowd? How do you “DO YOU” no matter what? Well, let me share some insights below that my mother shared with me. Now, I won't say these things are miracle workers but I will say, I have worked with a lot of “Wealthy” individuals and entertainers who have money but don't necessarily have the “Style” or “Class” that we assume comes with possessing money.... and believe me, I have shared many lines from “What mama used to say” with them to get them to see the light!! Needless to say, during my career in the Music business there were many album covers, videos and performances that benefited from the advice below....

A. You can't buy style and you can't buy class...either you have it or you don't! Money can buy you a better suit but it won't buy you style!

Have you ever wondered why some folks with money still can't dress right? Haven't you said to yourself, “If I had that money, I would be clean!” Well, this proves my mother's point. It wasn't until I was in the music business that I fully understood this statement. My job was to help market and develop talent, which included making them look the best they could. It's amazing how many folks just wanted the latest designer frock no matter if it was really their style or looked right on them. Today's youth is so label driven that they've lost all sense of “What works for them...” It's all about what's the “IN” thing. Well, I've always been into clothes and style. While, I do love some great designer labels, I am also known to mix a thrift store dress with a great pair of designer shoes or take some thrift store 501's and make my own designer jeans!! Style doesn't come from money... it comes from knowing how to work what you have. Don't get me wrong, I've made some outfits that only a mother could love...and she did...and I've also wore some things that I still don't know why! However, what I appreciated was that my mother always allowed me to do “ME” and emphasized that I should do what works for me and not follow the crowd! Again, money will allow you to buy a better quality of clothing but it can't give you style. I've paid tons of money for stylist for artists and wondered many a day, “Don't you know that don't look good on you? Why are you listening to someone who doesn't even know you?” However, I've learned that natural style isn't natural to most...but if you would just take the time to find out what works on you and be confident in that, you're half way there! I won't begin to discuss how “CLASS” doesn't necessarily come from having money because we've all seen folks with money make “Fools” of themselves. Class is class... it's the way you carry yourself and you don't have to have money to have class...if anything, money should only enhance it.

B. Don't let the clothes wear you...you wear the clothes.

Simple enough...right? This statement works with the one above as well. If you're wearing something and you're not comfortable in it...the clothes are wearing you! This automatically disqualifies you from being on point. My mother shared this with me when I was “Trying” to wear something because it was the latest thing but not necessarily meant for me. She looked at me and quickly made the statement “Don't you let the clothes wear you...you wear the clothes!! Basically, she was saying...that outfit ain't working for you! I wish I could say that I've never made that mistake since

then...but that would be a bold face lie. All I can say is that this simple piece of advice has saved me from making some really crazy purchases and lots of money.

C. Everything they make isn't meant for you to buy.

No story needed...just don't buy something because you see it if it doesn't work for you.

D. It doesn't matter if someone else thinks you're cute if you don't it for yourself!

This can pretty much apply to most things. Cute, pretty, smart, wise etc. If you don't believe it first someone telling you this may make you feel good for a minute but it's not going to stick. Growing up I was depressed a lot for all kinds of reasons. I always felt like I should look better, be better needed to do a little more... Thank GOD for a mother who constantly told me how great I was and for the great teachers and employers I had who really saw more in me than I saw in myself. (Hat's off to one of my elementary teachers Ms. Hatcher who was one of those) While the encouragement definitely helped to boost my confidence level from time to time...it wasn't until I grasped certain beliefs for myself that they began to take hold. So, believe certain things for yourself and that's the foundation...the compliments will become the "Icing" on the cake and not the cake itself!! You're all that because you're a child of the KING!! That's it!!

E. There's nothing cute about being dumb.

When I would try to downplay my intelligence to blend in or not offend someone this comment would quickly come out of my mother's mouth. What benefit comes out of playing dumb? It just isn't cute.

F. Don't lose your walk...you have a good walk.

My mother had the ultimate strut!! When she passed, Pastor Heights, my mother's pastor commented on how my mother would walk around the church when it was time to put her tithes and offerings in the tray. (That's old school church) He said, "Ms. Coates had a way of walking that made you pay attention". Well, my mother said I had that same walk but she also said my walk was sexy. Don't lose your walk Sheila; it's nice to have a strut...she would say. Again, one of those little things that can go along way. I've had people tell me that I enter a room like I don't need nobody or with such an air. (Little did they know I was scared a lot of the time and hoping that I didn't look stupid) So, strut...it's free and it's sexy!!

G. You have nice legs...show them off!

See what happens when you fall on your hands!!?? As I got older my mother would be the first to say, "Wear this miniskirt" and the first to buy me one. She was all about showing or using your best assets. If you lack one thing that's because GOD gave you something else to use. She constantly told me I had pretty legs. Legs that didn't require nothing more than lotion or cream because they weren't full of scars, burns or discoloration!

I remember when I was working at a radio station in the Bay Area and I was the Promotion Director. I was in charge of this event/party and was running around in a miniskirt. One of my peers

commented that they were going to call and tell my mother about my skirt because of how short it was. (Everybody knew my mother) I immediately started laughing and said, "Please call her...because she's the one that bought it for me!!"

H. If you can smell yourself, you're funky.

Hygiene was of the utmost importance to my mother. She had her daily and weekly rituals...none of which included a spa until I was able to expose her to it much later in life. She didn't understand how women didn't know when they smelled or people in general for that matter. But if it got to a point where you could actually smell yourself...you've gone too far. I'm sure we've all had that friend that carried a constant body odor. Well, be a friend and let them know. If you can smell it, they can to...unless they have a medical disorder.

I. On job interviews remember to cross your legs at an angle, put your purse inside your briefcase and carry an extra pair of stockings.

My first job in the record business I obtained using this rule. I remember the person interviewing me asking...do you always present yourself like this? Well, to say the least, I got the job so the way I presented myself must not have been too bad. By putting your purse in your briefcase, you eliminate extra clutter and look more professional and streamline. The extra pantyhose was because she said that's the worst thing is to be headed into an interview and get a run in your stockings. Better safe than sorry and carry an extra pair in your briefcase.

J. Always look people in the eye.

What better way to do business or gain the trust of someone? I've found that people are still amazed at this simple trait. While I'm hoping that you're gaining a sense of who I am with constant eye contact, I am definitely trying to gain a sense of who you are (or are not) by looking into your eyes/face. You don't always need a sixth sense to know if someone is hustling you...just keep looking into their eyes. Sooner or later they'll give themselves away.

K. Someone copying you is the biggest form of flattery.

I still have a little problem with folks copying me and not even acknowledging it. That includes clothing, home interiors, work styles etc. But, in the end, my mother used to always tell me don't worry about people copying you because it just means they like what you're doing. And if they copy you – they didn't originate it so they can't do it again. 'Nuff said!!

L. Be glad you have breast...when you're 21 you'll have something to prop up on the bar!

What are you talking about was my response when my mother said this to me in the 9th grade. I was flat chested until the summer before the 9th grade. It seems like over the summer I blossomed with the chest that I have today. Well, that was way too much too soon and I didn't want it or appreciate it. So during my complaining stages my mother this comment and I'm looking at her like she had two heads! What do I care about being at a bar at 14 years old? 21 seemed like a lifetime away. I can hardly keep a straight face about this now because she was just trying to say her in own way...hold on, I know you don't appreciate it today but you will eventually. She said, "one day you'll

have great cleavage and will love it". Well the wisdom about the bar is that when you're sitting at a bar in a club etc. you can only see from the chest up. You can see your legs or a great butt...just from the chest up. Well, many years later, my girlfriend and I were happy to be what we considered "GROWN" and sitting at a bar. When I went to order a drink the bartender said, "Oh, the guy at the end of the bar would like to buy you a drink"... naturally, I was thrilled and smiled to "Thank" him. Well, right at that moment, I smiled and looked down...and low and behold, I had on a low cut top and great cleavage!!! Wow!! I finally got it and to this day appreciate it!! The wisdom again here...is that at the time (when we're growing up) we just need to have a little patience before we can understand that it's going to all be okay. My mother knew that and shared it in her way...

M. Walk with your head up.

Holding your head down show a lack of self-confidence. What are you looking for on the ground? If you hold your head down you can't look people in the eye. If you hold your head down you can't "Strut your stuff" so what's the purpose to hold your head down?

N. There are day people and night people. You're a night person. You come to life as the day and night goes on. You look better after 12N.

This comment hurt my feelings when my mother first said it. How can you tell your precious daughter she's not cute before noon? She actually said that my sister was a day person and so I thought, wow, she's cuter than I am before noon? Well, truth is truth.... My mother loved me... so much so she was the first one to tell me the truth. Good or bad. I've learned over time that this statement is so true. I am a night person. I don't look the same when I wake up as I did when I went to bed the night before. I have actually seen folks (who knew me) and they didn't recognize me at the gym if it was early in the morning!! But something does happen during the course of the day that brings a night person to life. I've had more people tell me I light up a room at night. Don't get me wrong, while I'd love to be cute all day.... that's just not my reality. My sister is one of those naturally cute people and when she wakes up she looks just like she did the night before. It doesn't take her a period of transformation to get it together.... that's what my mother was talking about. I've met other people that are day folks and night folks... Which one are you?

O. If you can hold a pencil under your breast you need to wear a bra.

The ultimate test. After gaining my breast, it didn't stop me from wanting to still wear halter-tops and the like. I wore them for a while and then one day my mother came to me and said, "You know if you can hold a pencil under your breast it means you need a bra". Well, I laughed and thought, hold a pencil? She got a pencil and I put it under my breast and it didn't FALL. She said, "See, that means you're hanging and stay up you need a bra...at least most of the time!!" The joke became when we could hold a pencil, pad and a pen!! I guess that meant I should sleep in a bra!

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