



EPISODE NO. 335

My Top Life Lessons Learned from Being Raised in the South

From yes ma'am, and no ma'am to bless your heart. Here are my top lessons learned from growing up in the South. Enjoy.

Welcome to the School of Self-Image, where personal development meets style. Here's your hostess, master life coach, Tonya Leigh.

Hello, my beautiful friends. How's your week? How are you feeling? I am feeling so incredibly blessed, and full of gratitude. Do you know what I'm so grateful for? Well, there are a lot of things, actually. But right now, I am so grateful to be back home in the South, and I never thought I would utter those words. I was that girl who said to myself, if I can ever get out of here, I'm never coming back. Be careful what you say you'll never do, because chances are that's probably going to be what you do, but I am so happy to be home. Sometimes, you have to leave to find yourself. It's why I talk about environment, all of the time, within the School of Self-Image, because when you are in an environment that is triggering your old ways of thinking and feeling and being, sometimes, it's hard to change in that environment.

It's not that we can't, I've changed a lot in very familiar environments. But leaving the South allowed me to really get a perspective on the world, and myself, and the next version of me, and who I really am. Now, I'm back as a very different woman, and I'm just so happy here. My friend Casey, she flew in for the weekend, and all I could talk about with her is how much I love the trees here. I am seriously blown away by the trees in Charlotte, North Carolina. For those of you who live here or you've been here in

My Top Life Lessons Learned from Being Raised in the South

this time of year, it is stunning. The amount of greenery that is here, I just cannot get enough. I feel so incredibly blessed. I find the South to be such a charming place. If you've never visited the south, I highly encourage you to put aside what you may have heard about it and give it a shot, whether it is Charlotte, whether it is Charleston, or Savannah, or even parts of Georgia, even Louisiana.

There are some beautiful, beautiful places, and people in the South. It's also going to be where I host the next SOSI Live. For those of you within the membership, you've probably been hearing the buzz around SOSI South, which is what we're calling it, and we just opened it up to members, and it will sell out very quickly. If you are a member, and you want to have the most incredible, luxurious experience, me and my team throw the best event in town. In fact, one of my team members has been to over 100 events, and she says there's nothing out there like it. It is impactful, it is life-changing, it is fun, it is inspiring, and it's happening in New Orleans in November. Get your ticket, and come join us for SOSI South. The theme of this year's event is called The Charmed Life.

I am going to be teaching new concepts about magnetizing the life you want, how to create your own luck, how to be charming, and it's going to be taking place in the South, first weekend of November, so get your ticket. I cannot wait to see you there. Since I've been back home in the South, and we are getting ready for SOSI South, I've been thinking a lot about being raised in the South. I've talked a lot about my upbringing, and the things that have shaped me. Sometimes, it may seem that I have a terrible upbringing, and I want to apologize, because I don't ever want to tell that story. I try to tell the facts of the story, and the facts are I grew up in a trailer on a dirt road. I grew up with very little money. I grew up being raised in a Pentecostal Holiness Church. However, we get to decide what we make the facts of our lives mean. The past or the future doesn't even exist. It's just a story in our minds. I've been thinking a lot about the wonderful stories that I have about my upbringing, and how being raised in the South has shaped me to be what I consider to be a very good human. I wanted to share some of those lessons with you. It's not that you have to be raised in the South to have these lessons, and some of you may share some of these, no matter where you were raised, but these are things that I was taught. I do find that it's a general way of thinking, and living, and being, when you're raised in the south. I hope it doesn't go anywhere. There's so many beautiful things about the southern way of life.

The first lesson that I want to share with you is one that was drilled in me as a child. For a long time, I used this in a negative way, meaning I think the way that I interpreted it, and some of the ways that it was presented to me, I think can hold you back. But in

My Top Life Lessons Learned from Being Raised in the South

other ways, it can allow you to go forward in a really big, and impactful way. That lesson was don't ever get too big for your britches. Did you overhear that growing up? My mom, and my grandmother would tell me this. They'd be like, "Don't get too big for your britches. For a long time, I thought that meant to play small, but now I understand what they really meant. What they meant is, don't ever think that you are too good, don't ever think that you are better than anyone.

That was drilled in me as a child, and I am so grateful for that lesson, because I was telling my team the other day, I'm like, "Listen, if I'm at my own event, and a toilet needs to be scrubbed, and I'm the only one that can do it, I'm going to be in there scrubbing that toilet. I don't think I'm above anyone, and I'm not beneath anyone. I like to see us all working together for a common cause. And sometimes that means you got to get down and dirty." I grew up working very hard. My first job was at eight-years-old. I worked on the farm. I worked picking strawberries every summer. I worked in the tobacco fields, and so I know what it's like to work hard, and it was really instilled in me. Don't ever think you're too good to get dirty.

Don't ever think you're too good that you can't roll your sleeves up and get things done. Don't ever be too big for your britches. I now know that that did mean don't think highly of yourself, because my mom always drilled into me believe in yourself, but she also didn't want me to ever think that I was better than anyone. Today, that means that I can roll anywhere. You can take me to the trailer park, or you can take me to the penthouse. I know that we are just all people doing the best that we can, and no one is better than anyone else. I don't care how much money you have, I don't care what car you drive, I don't care what kind of designer clothes that you're wearing. It does not make you better than anyone. You are not above or beneath anyone.

If we could all just walk through the world with that knowing, we would be so much happier. Listen, I love nice things, but I also am okay with getting in a shuttle. My friend will laugh at this. She's like, "Girl, you're putting us in a shuttle." I'm like, "I can ride in a shuttle just like I can a limousine, because I know that my happiness is within me. I know that I can be, again, in a trailer around people I love, and have an amazing time, or I can be in a penthouse of people that I don't care about and be miserable. That's not what matters. What matters is who you are and who you're with." Don't ever be too big for your britches. The second thing I learned from being raised in the south is, can't never could.

My mom, and my grandma used to tell me this all of the time, can't never could. I never heard my mother say she couldn't do anything. My grandmother had 10 children, and her husband was disabled, and she was a sharecropper. She would work that land on

My Top Life Lessons Learned from Being Raised in the South

her own, with all these kids. Can't did not exist. Can't would've gotten her killed, probably. Can't would've caused her not to be able to provide for her children, so it was not even an option. As a child, I was raised to believe can't never could. My mom did not tolerate I can't. My mom always, always told me, "Where there's a will, there's a way." She was a walking embodiment of that. I've talked about her on this podcast before, but my mom had polio when she was three, and a lot of people thought that she wouldn't be able to live a normal life.

My mom, instead of being a victim to that, she used it as fuel. She used that doubt, and that criticism of her as fuel to become stronger. My mom, to this day, she's almost 80, and to this day, if you tell her she can't do something, just because she's so stubborn, she's going to go out there and do it, just to prove you wrong. She might be miserable trying to do it, but she is going to try to prove you wrong, because her belief system is can't never could. That is something that I have found to be a very common philosophy with Southern people. Our work ethic, and our stubbornness, and our tenacity causes us to not believe in the can'ts, because we know can't never good. Another thing that I learned from being raised in the South, is never be too busy for what matters the most.

Being raised in the South, what always mattered the most was community, your family, and your friends. There was a time in my life where I forgot this. I was so caught up in growing my business, and working, and being a mom, and providing that I was on this hamster wheel of overwhelm, and I don't have enough time. And then I thought about my grandmother who, again, raised 10 children, worked hard, but she always, always had time for her family, and friends, always. Things didn't fall through the cracks, things still got done, but she was never too busy for what mattered the most. What matters the most are the people in our lives, our relationships. Without that, what do we really have? In our pursuit of extraordinary goals, which I also love, and remember, can't never could. We believe in our goals, especially at the School of Self-Image.

That's the work that we do, believing in, and showing up for our extraordinary goals. But I don't want us to ever sacrifice what's most important to us, in the pursuit of that. As someone who, a few times, I can remember being so obsessed with the goal, that I forgot this way of life. I can tell you that you're not going to be happy, if you sacrifice your relationships in the pursuit of a goal. Now, that doesn't mean give up the goal, never. It means figuring out how you can pursue your goal, and take time for your relationships. Your brain will help you come up with the answers as to how to do that. I

My Top Life Lessons Learned from Being Raised in the South

just know that if I'm ever in a rush to reach a goal, then the energy that's fueling my action is not going to help me get the result that I want.

I've said many times that the way you create something is the way you experience it. If you create something out of anxiety, and fear, and rushing, when you finally possibly create that outcome, you're going to be full of anxiety. You're going to be rushing still. You're going to be worried, can I keep this up? We have to remind ourselves of that. When I think about my future self, she always makes time for her family, and friends. I need to bring that knowledge back to today, and ask myself, what am I going to do about that in my life right now? For me, that means scheduling lunches with my friends, scheduling weekends that I get to see my parents, scheduling getaways with my girlfriends, calling up friends, just making that a part of my everyday routine. Another lesson that I learned in the South is, always use your best.

This is something that I have to thank my mother for, because even though we grew up in a very modest home, my mom always used her best. She didn't save it for special holidays. She didn't save it until some grand event. My mom would pull out the China every weekend, on Sundays. We dressed up on Sundays to go to church. My mom had beautiful country curtains, do you all remember those, in our little trailer. My mom did the best with what she had, and she really taught me a beautiful lesson that I didn't realize was so important, until later when I noticed that a lot of people around me had a lot of fear around using their best. For me, I was like, "This is just what we do." Maybe it's because we didn't have a lot, that my mom was like, "If we don't do it now, when are we going to do it?"

She was always just making the ordinary extraordinary with what she had, by refusing to save it until one day later, and by making the most of what she had. That leads me to another lesson that I learned in the South is, appreciate what you have. My mom, she was really big on giving me a good talking to, or it's she would say, "Yeah. Come to Jesus meeting," when she would see me not express, and feel gratitude for what we had. Because it was very easy for me to get caught up, especially as a kid, and what all the other kids had, because I was wearing hand-me-downs. I didn't live in town with the other kids. I lived out in the country, on a dirt road. I found myself, as a child, always thinking that their life was better, and always talking about how they had more than me.

My mom was not having that. She would force me to look around, and really take in what I had. It may not have been a lot to some people, but now looking back, you all, I am so grateful for my humble beginnings. I'm so grateful for the way way I was raised, because it taught me these lessons. Even back then, we always had food on the table,

My Top Life Lessons Learned from Being Raised in the South

always had shoes on our feet, and we had a lot of love in our home. I realized that that... I mean, what more could I ask for? Appreciating what you have was something that was instilled in me, as a young child. To this day, I have to remind myself, stop, and look around. Of course, there's always going to be people that have more than you, but there's also going to be people who don't have as much as you have.

Just focus on what you have, and actively appreciate it, because if you're not careful, you will spend your entire life wanting what you don't have yet, and failing to realize all the things that you currently have, that at one point in your life you probably wished for. I mean, that car you're driving, the home you live in, maybe that outfit that you're wearing, there was probably a time in your life, or even your children that you dreamed of having what you have now. Are you actively appreciating it? It feels so good to do so. Spend some time appreciating what you already have. Another lesson that I learned from being raised in the South is, don't be ugly. This has nothing to do with your physical appearance, just so you know. But it's something, if you're raised in the South, you get it.

You hear this growing up like, don't be ugly. What they meant was, don't have ugly behavior. Don't be rude, don't be impolite, don't go around gossiping about people, just don't be ugly. Be kind, and respectful. When I was growing up, we had to say, yes ma'am, and no ma'am, yes sir, and no sir, no, thank you. There was a level of expectation as to how you treated each other. Now, I realize it's one of the things that I appreciate about the French culture, and I didn't realize it at the time, but ma'am and sir, come from the French madame, and monsieur.

There is a level of civility, and respect for one another in how you communicate, and how you address people, and how you talk. I think that is a beautiful thing. I think, quite honestly, it's missing in a large portion of our society. People need to stop being so ugly, and mostly to themselves, because some of you all are ugly to yourselves, and that's where this work has to start. That's where I was the most ugly. I was the most ugly to myself. When I worked on that, it was so much easier to be nicer to other people, when you're being kind to yourself. The other thing that I learned from being raised in the South, and this one is so important, and that is to slow down, slow down, take it in, be here, be present, enjoy this moment, enjoy this day.

This goes hand in hand with what I was talking about earlier about never being too busy for your family, and friends. Never be too busy to sit down, and take a break, or to watch a sunset. For us, it was sitting on the front porch of my grandmother's little trailer. She had this screened-in front porch, and there were about six rocking chairs. We would all go to her place on Sundays, and she would cook every single Sunday, after

My Top Life Lessons Learned from Being Raised in the South

a church. There were like five families, so there were at least, on some Sundays, there'd be 20 people there. We had to eat in shifts, because her trailer was so tiny. The adults always ate before the kids, which is very different now. We would just run around and play. But I just will never forget, just sitting on her porch in those rocking chairs, talking with each other, sipping sweet tea.

There was a beauty to that slowness, to that hereness, that we lost in this day and age, where we're always rushing to the next thing. Sometimes, people say to me, "But you talk about your future a lot." What I say to them is, "Yes, it is a guide. It can help focus us." But when we think about our future selves, is she in a rush? Is she panicked? Is she trying to hurry up and get there? No. She can guide us. Who is she? How is she being? Does she take time to sit on a front porch in the rocking chair, and talk to her grandmother, or her mother? I hope so. Now, there will be times when you will want to rush. I think about the French. They are experts in living the slow life, but they will also get in their cars, and drive like bats out of hell, to get to their country home.

They know when to speed up, and when to slow down. But a lot of us are living in full speed, and we're taking very little time to slow down, and enjoy our children, and to enjoy our spouse, and to enjoy this day. That was something that was drilled into me as a child. It was something that was so beautifully displayed. Even to this day, when I go home to visit my parents, this is the way of life. You sit down, and you eat, and you chat, and you relax, and you talk some more, and you watch some football, and there's just a slowness to it. Me, by my nature, I tend to go very fast. It's about finding that balance for you. I'm not saying everybody needs to go, and buy a rocking chair, and start drinking sweet tea. What I am inviting you to consider is that maybe there's an opportunity here for you to be a little more present, and to really look around, and take in your life today, appreciating what you have, while you are in the pursuit of what you deeply, deeply desire.

I have so many more lessons, but the final one that I want to leave you with is the lesson of bless her heart. Growing up, this was a very common saying, oh, bless her heart. Poor thing, poor Betty. She is over there trying the best she can with that grandchild of hers, bless her heart. That was the kind of language, and the way that we used that saying. But there was also, underneath that, underlying those three words was a true desire to see the people around you blessed, for you to really want to see your neighbors prosper, for your community to do well, and I've taken that with me. I love, I absolutely love to see the people around me doing well. I love to see them blessed. I love to see people succeeding and winning, and I talk often about how life is a boomerang. What you throw out, comes back at you.

My Top Life Lessons Learned from Being Raised in the South

The more I have not only been excited about people being blessed, but helping them figure out how they can be more blessed, the better my life has become, the more blessed I've become. It really does go back to my upbringing. My mom, and my father, and my grandmothers, they all drilled in me to love your neighbor, to never wish harm to anyone, to be kind. That has really allowed me to create this charming life, living by these simple principles of just loving people, and loving life, and being grateful for what you have has had such a tremendous impact on my life, and has truly allowed me to access the daily magic, almost. I can now trace it back to the beautiful lessons that I learned, from being raised in the South. There are many more that I did not even cover today. But I hope at least one of these blessed you, and that you can take something away from today's podcast, no matter where you were raised, and apply it to your life. Have a beautiful week, everyone. I will see you in next week's episode. Cheers.

Hey, have you grabbed your free copy of the School of Self-Image Manifesto? If not, what in the world? Head over to schoolofselfimage.com/manifesto, and get a copy that teaches you how to think, and show up in the areas of mindset, style, and surroundings, so that you can transform your self-image.