

Fuck your comfort zone
by Wendy Hopkins

I was 35, an actress, living in Toronto and I was, to put it simply, in a slump — in every area of my life. In my personal life I had recently had my heart broken by a man who made his living as a clown (True story. Unfortunately.) while in my professional life I had done nothing for the past two years except these 1 or 2 line roles in US movies-of-the-week or Canadian TV shows, and I would ALWAYS be playing a doctor, a lawyer or a police officer. (A.K.A. Tall women with bad news) I told Judith Light she had cancer. I shoved Melissa Gilbert into a prison cell and told her to “disrobe”. I yelled, “There’s a tornado coming!” at Chris Cooper.

I just wanted to get out of Toronto, do something new, see something new, no clowns! And that’s where I was mentally when I saw the t-shirt. Perhaps you saw it too? They were very popular in the early 2000’s. On the front it said *No Fear* and on the back it said, *Fuck your comfort zone*.

Now as a 35 year-old actress I had skimmed my fair share of self-help but none of it ever made more sense to me than this simple statement.

No fear. Fuck your comfort zone. It became my bible.

If I wanted to get out of Toronto, NO FEAR! If I only had \$3623.18 in my savings account, FUCK MY COMFORT ZONE! And six weeks later, I was in Cape Town, South Africa starting out on the first leg of a six-week truck safari.

A truck safari, in case you’ve never had the pleasure, is a very low-budget camping excursion. You travel around in an open sided truck, you see the sights during the day and sleep in tents at night. Sometimes campers just left and we’d pick up new campers. It is, in a word, basic. And after five weeks of basic I was certain I’d fucked my comfort zone: I’d eaten bugs and I’d pooped in public. Comfort zone, fucked!

And that’s when we picked up the two Australians.

I can’t remember the other guys name but MY Australian’s name was Dan. He was in Africa for a year working for Coca Cola but at that moment he was taking a week’s vacation.

It was the second day when I felt the attraction. We were standing on the shore of the Zambezi River watching a Water Buffalo on the opposite shore. A light rain was falling and Dan was shivering so I lent him my jacket. I liked him because he took it.

As the week wore on the sexual tension grew but we couldn’t do anything about it because there were always other campers around. And, you know, it’s Africa, you don’t just wander off into the bush. (So to speak)

So we waited until we got back to Dan’s place. It was the night the safari ended and the day before I was supposed to fly home. Dan had roommates so we went to his room. He didn’t have

any condoms (and it seemed crazy to have unprotected sex in Africa!) so we settled for everything else.

Once we were “done” I finally had a chance to look around Dan’s room. And that’s when I saw the Soundgarden poster, and the skateboard, and the hacki sack and the bong. And it suddenly (and for the first time) occurred to me to ask Dan his age.

22. Twenty-frickin-two! If you flip back to the top of this story you’ll see I’m 35! And that is 13 years difference! And that’s exactly what I started doing right there in Dan’s room — math! When I was 14, he was 1. When I was 20, he was 7. No matter how much math I did, the sum always worked out to *I am CREEPY!*

The next morning I was still doing math when Dan said, “Are you sure you can’t stay?” and that’s when I suddenly remembered, *No fear. Fuck your comfort zone.*

An hour later I’d extended my visa while Dan had arranged for us to live in Coca-Cola employee housing together. We lived on the outskirts of Harare, Zimbabwe for four weeks. Just me and Dan and bucket of condoms. It was bliss.

Back in Toronto as I told Tom Arnold, “You have the right to remain silent”, I couldn’t help but feel like a phony! I hadn’t fucked my comfort zone, I was right back in it. I mean, what if this was true love? What if Dan was “the one”? I had to find out. So when Dan called one night and said, “You should visit sometime”, I did.

A month later I was in a stall in the bathroom of the Sydney airport changing into a dress and trying to make my hair look as good as it could for what I was certain was going to be the world’s most romantic reunion. It wasn’t. Dan took one look at me and said, “This is weird”. And as much as I wanted to deny it, it was. And all the way to Dan’s house, I did math.

That night instead of the romantic evening I had imagined, seven of Dan’s friends came over and got drunk. And one of his friends, a kid whose nickname was Dirt, got TOO drunk and ended up spending the night on the sofa (which, from the “this is weird” moment, it was clear I was going to be sleeping on) so I slept on the floor in my sleeping bag.

But it wasn’t until the next morning when I am sitting in Dan’s driveway and Soundgarden was blaring from cheap plastic speakers and Dan and Dirt were skateboarding on homemade ramps behind me — it wasn’t until that moment that I realized the difference between 35 and 22 is not 13, the difference is that I was willing to fuck my comfort zone, and Dan didn’t have one yet.