

I want to be shocking,  
and vivid and  
wear a dress as intensely  
amazing as the person  
I so want to be.

On September 28, 2010, I lost my job. My 5th layoff, and the most painful by far. It was a job I loved, a company I would have worked for for decades if they'd let me. Because of the number of times I've been axed, you'd think I'd be used to it by now. That I'd be able to shake it off and move on, thick skinned and armor plating. If anything though, each layoff made it worse. The last one... I wasn't sure I'd make it through to the other side. It's been over a year and a half now and I'm just starting to feel the fog lift.

During this time of fog and darkness, I've spent a lot of time online. The mattress I bought with my severance pay from that job has developed a dent where I sit and tapity tap on my laptop for hours. The laptop itself, brand new just 2 years ago, needs a new battery, and the 7 is missing.

Months into my depression, I finally got to the point where I needed to see something funny online, and somehow I stumbled on to "The Bloggess" by Jenny Lawson. If you're looking for a laugh, a real honest to goodness "I think I'm gonna pee!" belly laugh, then I recommend you start with Beyonce, the Giant Metal Chicken. Follow it up with Copernicus "A hug is just a strangle you haven't finished" the Monkey, and commiserate with Victor, Jenny's long suffering husband.

I did all that, and read more and more. Then I noticed something- interspersed with the laughing and the side aches and the snorting, there were blogs to read about depression, self harm, bi polar disorder, about brokenness and fear and anxiety. I read them, and I saw echoes of myself.

One entry in particular caught my eye, and this is it's story in a nutshell.



In the Washington Post, Lawson suggested that readers who suffer from emotional pain or who want to support those who do sign on to the “traveling red dress” project she created last year. Her idea was to pass around a red dress that women could wear to remind themselves of their power, to wear at a time when they feel particularly high — or low.

In reaction to the post, the twitter hash tag #travelingredress exploded. Women as far away as Switzerland pledged to donate red ball gowns and formal dresses to the project.

Lawson responded to the offers with a typically opinionated line: “... I’m continually amazed at the goodness of people and that anyone who says social media is pointless can go ...” (you can imagine for yourself how the sentence ended).

To the author, she wrote, “There are people doing meet-ups, offering free photo shoots of people in their red dresses, even a red-dress marathon being organized for charity. Hundreds of women racing down the streets in red ball gowns and sneakers. Could you even imagine?”

I want, *just once*, to wear a bright red, strapless ball gown with no apologies. I want to be shocking, and vivid and wear a dress as intensely amazing as the person I so want to be. And the more I thought about it the more I realized how often we deny ourselves that red dress and all the other capricious, ridiculous, overindulgent and silly things that we desperately want but never let ourselves have because they are simply “not sensible”. Things like flying lessons, and ballet shoes, and breaking into spontaneous song, and building a train set, and crawling onto the roof just to see the stars better. Things like cartwheels and learning how to box and painting encouraging words on your body to remind yourself that you’re worth it.

And I *am* worth it.

And last week...? I got my dress. And it was everything I thought it would be.

But here’s the thing...*you* are worth it too. Which is why this week the red dress will begin a journey, traveling from city to city so that other people can wear it and love it and feel as special and vivid and dynamic as they already are. Because sometimes we all need a little red dress to remind us of that. So today, think about what it is you need and were too embarrassed to ask for. *And then go do it.* Wear a ball gown to the grocery store. Invite the neighbors to have a picnic on the front lawn. Get that novel out of your sock drawer and publish it yourself. Stand on a bus stop bench and belt out a song for the waiting strangers. Find a playground swing and remember how it felt to fly. **Find your red dress. And wear the hell out of it.**





According to Forbes: The Traveling Red Dress movement came back to life ... after Lawson wrote a powerful post “coming out” about her depression and anxiety disorder’s penchant to cause her to self-harm.

“I wrote about the fact that with other diseases (like cancer) when you survive you’re met with cheers and encouragement and sea of ribbons commemorating the struggle, but when you come out of a severe depressive episode we mostly feel shame,” Lawson said in an interview yesterday. “I wrote of how I hoped that one day there would be a sea of silver ribbons from people honoring the struggle, being honest about their flaws, and supporting those who support friends and family who suffer from mental illness. I could never have expected the response.”

Lawson said that thousands of people commented and even more contacted her privately. She encouraged people to make their own home-made silver ribbons and she even put some in her online store, promising to put any profits toward buying a new Traveling Red Dress since her earlier one was still traveling and tattered from wear.

“Within a day I’d accidentally raised \$100 toward a new red dress,” Lawson said. “When I mentioned it on Twitter I linked to the old red dress post and it hit a whole new chord. “

A square image with a red satin fabric background. The fabric has a glossy, wrinkled texture. Centered on the fabric is white text with a slight drop shadow. The text is arranged in four lines: "Karen," on the first line, "who CAN and" on the second line, "who WILL" on the third line, and "who WILL" on the fourth line. The word "CAN" is in all caps, and "WILL" is in all caps in the last two lines.

Karen,  
who CAN and  
who WILL  
who WILL



For Jenny, it was wearing a red silk dress barefoot through a cemetery. For you it might be learning how to canoe or owning a pair of white ice skates. The original post quickly picked up steam and soon women were wearing the dress as a symbol of conquering their fears, their limitations and sometimes even themselves, and Jenny vowed to bring the red dress to the Blogher conference so it could be worn by anyone who wanted. The comments shared on that post were *extraordinary* but Jenny's favorite was one so poignant that she ended up including it in the post:

*I can only hope like the "Traveling Pants", the "Traveling Red Dress" is magic enough to make it fit my size 18 self by mere magic. Honestly, being able to see it.. to touch it and be near it will be enough to prove I will be living my own Red Dress moment. I'm going to Blogher! I'm going to fly (!!!) to New York in 70 days and I'm completely and utterly terrified. But I'm doing it anyway dammit! This is a nerve-racking trip for most people, but for me? It's so much more than that. For me, this trip will be a catalyst to take my life back from the ruthless clutches of agoraphobia. Sort of extreme exposure therapy. Today I can't drive to the next town on my own, I can't be alone at home, I can't even take my daughter to the beach. I'm so much better than the housebound puddle I was 10 years ago, but I'm stuck. I'm so tired of CAN'T. In 70 days though (god help me), I CAN and I WILL. That red dress? Home plate. The finish line. And also new beginning.*

**Let's let Jenny take it from here:**

And this weekend I went to Blogher.

And I met Karen.

And we sat in my hotel room with her two friends and she slipped on the traveling red dress.

And it was amazing.

That's what blogging is about for me. The shared journeys. The people. *The hope*. The little victories that aren't really so little at all. The stories of our lives that entangle and cause strangers to suddenly become a community and a lifeline.

And as Karen stared out the window onto the teeming New York sidewalk below she took a deep, ragged breath and held her head a little higher and then she cried. Not the cry of someone crippled by fear but the cry of someone seeing the sun for the first time in far too long.

And we cried along with her. And it was good.



A square image with a background of red, shiny, draped fabric, likely silk or satin, with deep folds and highlights. The text is centered on this background.

Lollie,  
about Susan's  
party



**The magic of the Bloggess' traveling red dress was the way it made each woman feel.**

Later that night, after the dress had been put away, I was sitting next to Susan. She told me the story of the dress and how it had come to be at our party.

The dress has been shared with many women of various sizes, shapes, ages, and backgrounds, including a trip to BlogHer last year.

Recently, Susan, who has been battling breast cancer, tweeted about the constant pain she has been in.

The Bloggess noticed the tweets, and a few days later the red dress showed up on Susan's door step.

She knew she had to share it.

And so it was that the Bloggess' red dress ended up at a HomeHer party in Maryland. I'm glad I ended up there, too.

Susan Niebur passed away on February 6, 2012 after a lifetime of love, crusades, and strength. Over the last five years she lived with inflammatory breast cancer, a rare and aggressive form of breast cancer that presents without a lump.



Jami,

of red dresses

and rollerskates





I have no idea what this woman's story is, I just love the photo because she looks so much like one of the Fellowship's members.

A close-up photograph of a vibrant red, highly reflective satin fabric. The fabric is draped and folded, creating deep shadows and bright highlights that emphasize its smooth, lustrous texture. The color is a rich, slightly dark red.

Laura,  
at 40

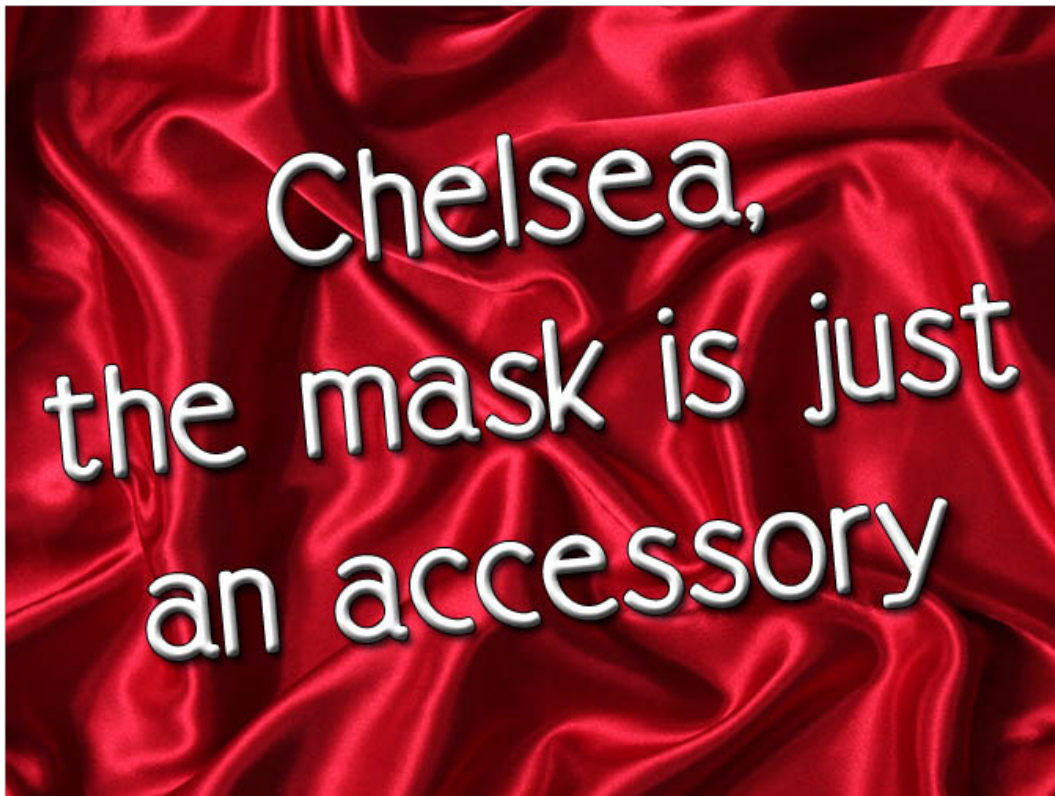


Jenny brought this dress over to my house on my 40th birthday and insisted that we do a shoot. I say insisted because she did insist, but also because I was uncharacteristically hesitant. It wasn't like I didn't want to do it...I really, really wanted to do it...but I was also really scared of it. The dress is intimidating. It's large. And it's red. And I was uncomfortable with that much energy being focused on me and actually on me.

But, if I'm really honest, I'll tell you I was afraid of what the photos would look like. I wasn't sure that they'd match up to the way I felt in the dress. Or the way I felt about myself at 40. It's complicated. But on about four levels, I would say, I didn't want to see myself. Because even though I still feel almost exactly like I did at 16, I know that I'm not. I'm not at all. The 16-year-old me was naive, and predictable, and safe. While my current self has lived enough and seen enough to know that life is anything but safe or predictable. Sometimes it's shocking, disappointing, thrilling, and really scary. Sometimes it's all those things at once. And sometimes the most shocking part is how you're able to handle it, and how you're able to wear it.

And that's the thing about The Red Dress. It's pretty intense to put on something so bold and really look at yourself, where you are, how far you've come.





But then this happened. When the original dress could no longer spread its magic, people began offering red dresses to strangers in the hopes that they could pass a little magic into the lives of people who were celebrating a milestone, battling an enemy, or simply in need of a shiny red ball gown to remind them how amazing they were. People around the world started giving out red dresses and offering to do red dress photo shoots for free. It was covered by Forbes and the Washington Post. There is a Facebook page, And it was awesome. And inspiring.



After weeks of struggling with insecurity, anxiety, and sleep deprivation, I wore my red dress to a costume masquerade. I felt creative and confident for the first time in a long time. The mask really was just an accessory.

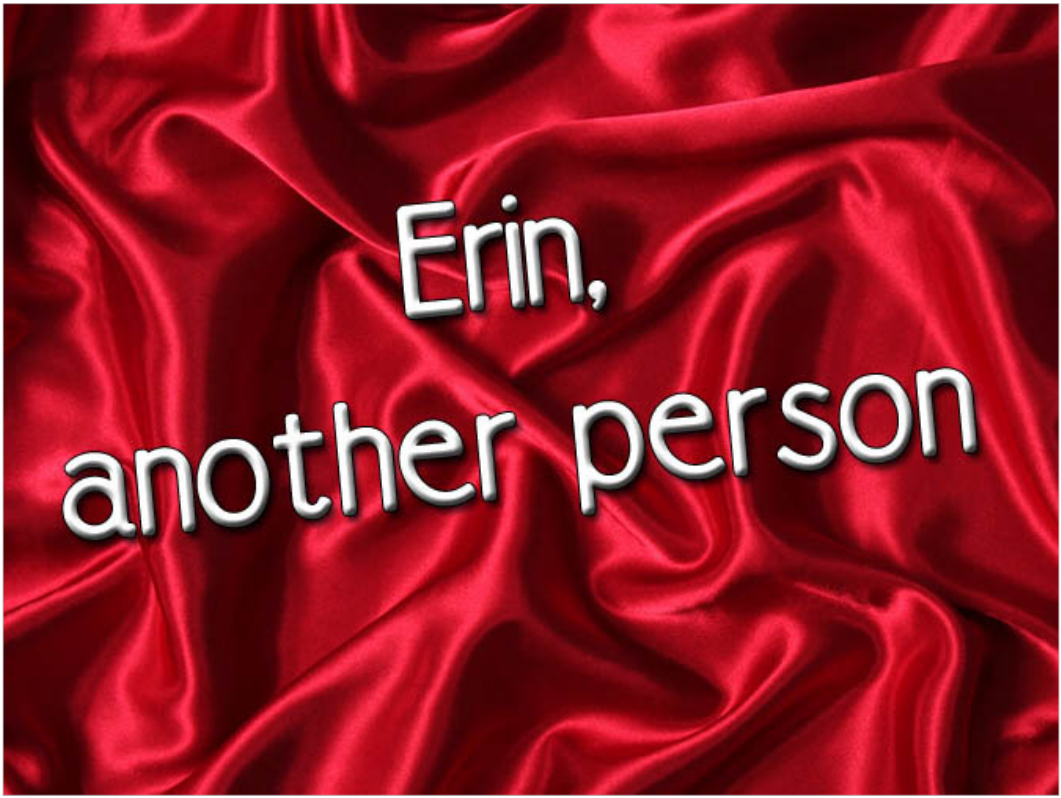
A square image with a background of red, shiny, draped fabric, likely silk or satin. The fabric has deep folds and highlights, creating a rich, textured appearance. Centered on this background is the text "Dawnfelice, severely in need" in a white, sans-serif font with a subtle drop shadow.

Dawnfelice,  
severely in  
need





This is one of my favorites from my Red Dress photo shoot today. I feel like I "wore the hell outta this dress". Thank you - as a mother of 6 (yes, all borne from my very tired womb) and the sole caretaker of my elderly (and crotchety) mother, I was severely in need of a Red Dress moment. Thank you for everything you do. -- DW



Erin,  
another person



Looking at pictures of me in this dress is like looking at another person. I never knew I was so beautiful.





Karen,  
it's good to be  
here



I have to confess: I was scared. I was so scared to put on that red dress. I'm used to being inconspicuous. I'm used to hiding, trying to blend into the scenery. I'm shy. I'm conservative out in public. I don't do wild and crazy things out of my own home. If I put on this red dress and go out in public, I thought to myself, I'll look like an asshole. Who am I trying to kid? Just because I exercised hard for a month? I still don't make the cut.

I came so close to saying ***FORGET IT***, and putting my shlumpy jeans back on.

But you know what? **FORGET THAT.**

I'm going to be 40 in a couple of hours. I can take care of my family. I am a mother. A protector. A warrior. Yeah, my post-baby stomach didn't lie smoothly under the dress. Who cares. That size 14 Calvin Klein dress fit these 48 inch hips.

And I took those pictures, because I may not be 20, but thank god, because I don't want to be.

It's good to be here.

A vibrant red satin fabric with a rich, glossy sheen and deep, flowing folds, serving as the background for the text.

Stirling,  
Happy Birthday  
Helen





On March 18th, I didn't particularly want glamour. I wanted adventure. I wanted audacity. And I wanted a red dress. A little over six years ago, my love and life partner died. Last year I decided I was done memorializing the day of her death and her loss. Instead, I wanted to celebrate her life. March 18th is her birthday.

On the afternoon of her birthday, I put on my red dress, took my camera and my dog and went on a walk through town and out to a rocky point that curved into the lake. I wore cowboy boots.

Just for the record, I only meant to go knee deep – but the dress had ideas of its own, filled with water and dragged me a bit deeper.

So Happy Birthday Helen. I love you. I miss you. And I still choose to be furiously happy.



The traveling red dress isn't always red. It isn't even always a dress.



I blame the Traveling Red Dress. Completely. Because of them, for the first time in my adult life, I stood in front of a camera without trying to hide. I can't remember the last time I didn't have a picture of myself (Aside from a very few costuming pics) that didn't make me cringe or want to cry. So I blame Jenny Lawson for this... a lot of pictures of myself that I love. Because of her I did more than one shoot. And I felt beautiful and amazing. And I damn near cried when I saw the photos. So it's all Jenny's fault.

Thank you.

This one is one of my favs that came after my Red Dress shoot.



A square image with a background of rich red, draped satin fabric. The fabric has deep, flowing folds and highlights, creating a sense of texture and movement. Centered on this background is the text "Sarah, improvising" in a white, sans-serif font. The text has a subtle drop shadow, making it stand out against the dark red fabric.

Sarah,  
improvising



After an abusive childhood, I joined the army at 18. Soon after I deployed to Iraq at the beginning of the war. I returned home, married one of my very best friends and had four children. I've been diagnosed with PTSD, depression and an anxiety disorder. Never in a million years did I think that I could pull off such a photo, much less a photo in the snow. This has been such an inspiration for me, thank you.

I would love to help another woman feel as beautiful as I felt. If you could put me in touch with someone that needs a red dress, I would love to purchase one for someone.

A square image with a background of rich red, draped satin fabric. The fabric has deep, flowing folds and highlights, creating a luxurious and elegant texture. The text is centered on this background.

Monroe,  
head to toe





I didn't have a dress... so, I improvised by finally taking my room from the accepted whites & light colours, to a fiery red. :) Sometimes, the sun hits just right & I am my own red dress, head to toe.

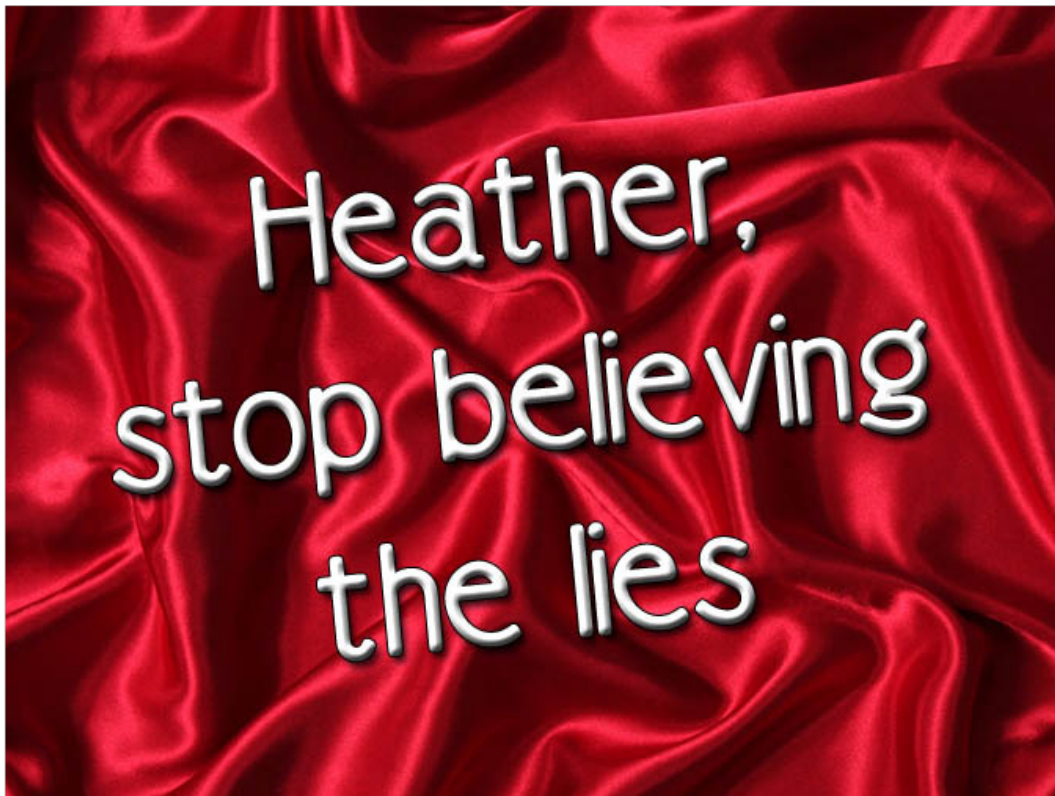
A close-up photograph of a vibrant red, highly reflective satin fabric. The fabric is draped and folded, creating deep shadows and bright highlights that emphasize its smooth, lustrous texture. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the sheen of the material.

Mahalia,  
4-legged  
dress



For those who need a little back story: Mahalia really wanted a horse but sometimes want and need are two different things in her husband's eyes, so what she wanted he didn't think she NEEDED, she ended up getting rid of her pickup truck to buy the horse, and that's why it's a red dress.





Thank you. You made a huge difference in my morning and life today. I have been fighting the battle on and off for a month now. Nothing seemed to help enough, little bits of sunshine but nothing strong enough to lift the clouds. Then I read about the Red Dress Project this morning. I had myself very convinced very quickly that I didn't deserve to spend the time to get/make myself a red dress much less borrow one when I realised that I had one and I ran, ran hard until I got to my closet and pulled down my wedding gown. The gown I had been made to feel bad about because I spent close to 1k on it. I put it on before I could think enough to be convinced out of it, wore it and I was furiously happy. I felt beautiful for the first time in I don't know how long and I got dressed after reverently putting it away, dressed for the first time in a week. My two year old thought I was so beautiful and insisted on wearing her pretty dress for the rest of the day (she had been a flower girl recently). The clouds have lifted, because I saw myself and remembered that I am beautiful. Thank you for posting this. I have decided to stop believing the lies and am going to make matching red dresses for me and my daughter for picking flowers and dancing in the rain and being furiously happy in.

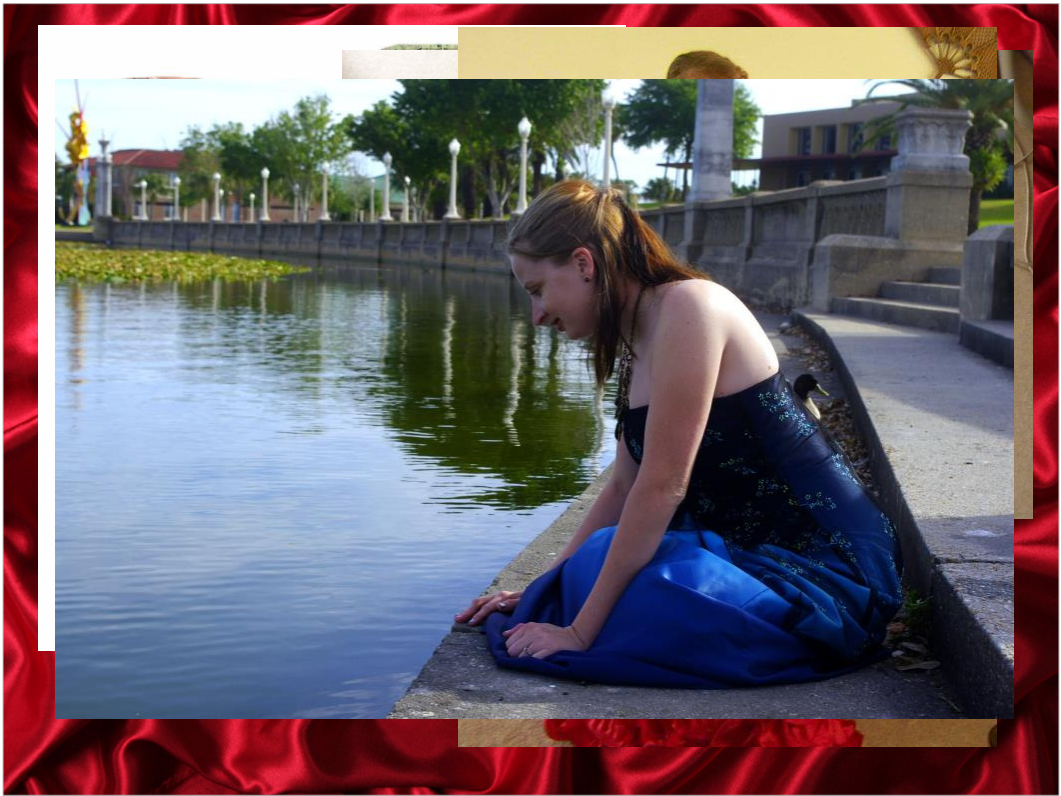


In January of 2012, Jenny again addressed the blogosphere about the red dress: Ball gowns are flying across the country and photographers are furiously offering free sessions, and honestly I may have cried a little.

In response, commenter “Plaidfox” wrote: When you said “Ball gowns are flying across the country”, the first thing I thought of was looking up in the sky and seeing scores of victorian dresses flying through the air. And a small child, who is walking down the street with her mother would look up at the sky and ask: Mommy, what are those things? And the mother would smile, look down and say to her child: That’s hope. ~ Plaidfox











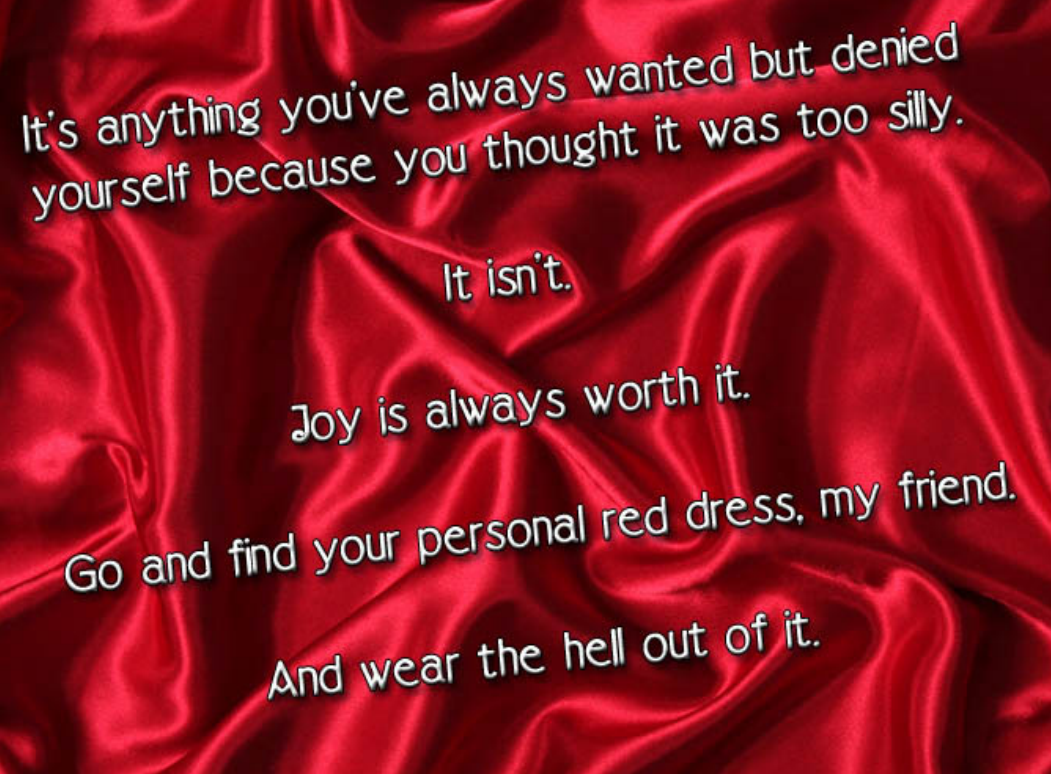
So here I am, in my own impractical, bright red and vibrant and shocking and “inappropriate for a woman my age” red dress. And, while I do have shoes to go with it, I prefer my Keens today. :)

I wore this dress to my 25<sup>th</sup> high school reunion, and to paraphrase “The Nanny” tv theme “I was the lady in red, when everybody else was wearing black.” It was terrifying, and exciting, and rewarding.

I then wore the dress to sing a torch song in public. Again, terrifying (mostly for the audience I think), exciting and rewarding.

I wore the hell out of this dress. Find yours.





It's anything you've always wanted but denied  
yourself because you thought it was too silly.

It isn't.

Joy is always worth it.

Go and find your personal red dress, my friend.

And wear the hell out of it.