

Duchess Milan, 69, Los Angeles, CA, 2017

I just know I'm me. I don't think in terms of names and forms and all that. It doesn't matter. I'm just myself and that's who I am. I am at peace with myself. It is the most wonderful feeling in the world because you're never in a hurry to get somewhere, you know, to prove to anyone that you're who you know you are. I know who I am, and what other people think about me is none of my business. So that's who I am. I identify as the Duchess.

I knew that I might lose family, that people might reject me. But I weighed that, and I thought, "If I lose everything and everybody, but I keep me, that's all that matters. That's all that matters, because I'm not going to live a life that I'm not happy in, for other people. Why? It doesn't make any sense." So I put my money down and took my chances. My family accepted me. They came to accept me, and I've had kids around me, I've gone to all the weddings, all the funerals, and it's a situation that everybody just thinks of me as who I am. It's not even an issue anymore. "Oh, you mean her? Oh, that's just Auntie."

My grandmother was a country woman, and she had a lot of sayings. I always heard all my life, "This is how it is. This is what it is. If you plant tomatoes, you're going to pick tomatoes. Okay? Don't plant bell peppers and then look for tomatoes. Okay?" And so many people do that! And then they end up with the bell peppers and say, "Well, I don't like this." Well, of course not, honey, because you were going for tomatoes. So always go for what you know you feel!

My mother said when you die, you stand there before the light, and you say, "Was I worthy of myself to know that I have liked me?" Okay? I like me. Okay? And I will tell the whole chorus, honey, "I like me." I don't hurt anybody, I don't do anybody wrong, you know. I've dealt with everything I can, as much as I can. So just find that inside yourself and take time with that person. Faults, flaws, wishes, all of it, it doesn't matter. We're not going to get it all. None of us gets it all. Okay? But what we do have, we can polish. We can polish it, honey, till it blinds them.