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“The Voice” Found Her, and She Found Her Voice

CEDRICE'S JOURNEY TO DISCOVERING
(AND LOVING) HER AUTHENTIC SELF

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There are many words you could use to describe Cedrice [Webber]: *intelligent, kind-hearted, beautiful, talented*—but the one she would probably agree with the most is *authentic*.

But this authenticity didn't come naturally to the singer at first. At the age of 10, the same time her parents were going through a divorce, the singer was diagnosed with alopecia areata, an autoimmune disorder that caused her hair to fall out.

"When I lost my hair, I was looking for something to identify with," she explains. "I looked in the mirror and didn't like what I saw. My hair was falling out in clumps, and everyone was teasing me. I didn't look like I belonged anywhere—I just kind of looked like this little awkward being."

Cedrice retreated into the desire for normalcy.

At the time, she was enrolled in a performing arts school to sing. When her parents divorced, she stopped singing and began paying more attention to what wigs she was wearing to deflect attention from her hair. "I learned how to fit the mold of everyone else in order to not stand out," says Cedrice. "I didn't start singing again until I got past the wigs and the autoimmune disorder."

For years, the singer wore wigs to fit in, but she found that in the process of concealing her alopecia, she was concealing herself as well. She noticed that whatever wig she was wearing that day would dictate how she expressed herself in other ways, including how she spoke.

"I really used hair to cover myself up. My hair determined how I spoke to people, how I moved my body and how I dressed," Cedrice says. "I used to wear a particular style—long, straight and dark." While this wig resembled her Filipino mother's beautiful locks, Cedrice knew that this look strayed from her natural hair.

"Back in the '90s, there wasn't a lot of promotion of natural hair—which is deeply rooted in me because I'm also Black," she explains. Growing up during a time where natural hair wasn't really supported (it wasn't until this year that the CROWN Act, which forbids discrimination against natural hair, was passed in California), Cedrice was often teased when she wore a wig that resembled her natural hair texture. "So the hair that I chose to wear was appropriate for the larger

scale of society," she continues. "It was long, straight hair, and that equaled feminine."

While the wigs made her more comfortable with her appearance, they were itchy, hot and high-maintenance. So, when she was older, she decided to join her mom on a quick errand to the store without a wig or headscarf just to see how she would feel.

"I hated it," she says. "I was like, 'Everyone is staring at me; what's wrong with me?' Everyone stared and my mom kept whispering to me, 'Everyone thinks you're so beautiful.'" Despite her mother's encouraging words, she still felt the need for her wig.

She kept working on going wigless, though, with small steps like going out to get the mail, walking the dog and eventually going back to the store. "I would take all these little quick trips in order to inch my way out of feeling uncomfortable without my wig," Cedrice explains, "so as I gradually stepped away from the wig, I started stepping into myself."

"I didn't have a choice when I was 10 years old to keep my hair—it just came out," she continues, "and I had to face myself in the mirror and decide how long I was going to keep this act up."

Something that helped Cedrice with this transition was music. "With music, when you're on stage, people don't care. They expect you to be different and unique," she says with a smile. "It's a different expectation when you're an artist—you're free to be whoever the hell you want to be—so I gave myself the permission to do that when I became a singer."

Cedrice's journey into her musical career began when she was 24 years old. Although she was enrolled in a university with a major in communications and a minor in theater, she didn't feel that she was on the right path. "I didn't really feel the calling to do anything in particular," Cedrice explains. "I was kind of searching for something to be passionate about."

Then one day on campus, Cedrice was humming a tune when a musician approached her, asking if she was a singer. She told him that she sang, but didn't consider herself a singer—but he wanted to hear her sing a few bars, which, of course, she nailed. ■

Extra Ordinary People

• After her audition for "The Voice," John Legend told Cedrice: "No one else looks like you. No one else sounds like you." "I die a little bit every time I remember he said that," she laughs.



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Team Player

- In her time on "The Voice," Cedrice blew the judges away—she was on John Legend's, Kelly Clarkson's and Blake Shelton's teams!



"I wasn't given these gifts and these challenges to act like everything's great and dandy and that I'm perfect. I'm here because I'm supposed to be sharing my struggles and giving other people inspiration to share theirs and to be okay with that."

—Cedrice

“I feel like I have the responsibility to turn the narrative around for my people.”

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He invited her to join his band, which was a welcoming opportunity for her. Before this, she had joined a Pacific Islander music club, a gospel choir and theater on campus, but had never quite felt that she truly belonged to any of them.

In her 2017 TEDxSan Diego Talk, “Tell Me About Your Identity Crisis,” Cedrice recalls this experience of trying to figure out where she could really fit in. “I was confronted with more obstacles: I didn’t speak Tagalog, so I wasn’t Filipino; I wasn’t dark enough to be considered Black; I certainly didn’t look White,” she explains. Like most people with “multiethnic ambiguity,” Cedrice felt that she wasn’t enough of one thing and struggled to find where she belonged.

This new band, however, was a mixture of genres—R&B, jazz, hip-hop and soul—and that helped Cedrice find her rhythm. She was able to see the universality of music, and that has helped her communicate and share herself with the world ever since.

“In a way, I definitely identified with music because I was looking for something to identify with. I was looking for something to hold me above water, and music was that for me,” Cedrice continues. “And it’s elevated me to so much more than I expected.”

This newfound authenticity opened Cedrice up to new opportunities, including her time on “The Voice” (Season 18), which allowed her to grow as an artist. “As far as my music goes,” she says, “I would be a lot less interesting if I hadn’t gone through the identity challenges that I’ve been through.”

“You know, everyone can front like they’re perfect on Instagram and social media,” notes Cedrice. “I think there’s something really powerful about the anti-hero—I’m not necessarily the anti-hero, but I most certainly am not perfect, and I’m okay with sharing that.”

Cedrice reflects this in “Woman,” a song she wrote two years ago, particularly in the line: *If I am the only one / I am the only one telling the truth.* “If I wasn’t going through any challenges at all, no one would be able to identify with me,” she explains. “I’m human. I have to have some sort of substance behind my music—behind what drives me.”

Now with her music, her presence on “The Voice” and her growing social media platform, Cedrice is doing her part to share her story in hopes of helping others who have experienced or are experiencing similar challenges. “Sharing my struggles keeps me accountable for who I am and what my journey is,” she says. “I wasn’t given these gifts and these challenges to act like everything’s great and dandy and that I’m perfect. I’m here because I’m supposed to be sharing my struggles and giving other people inspiration to share theirs and to be okay with that.”

In a time when content is so easily accessible due to the internet and social media, representation is a powerful and necessary element, and Cedrice has become an honest and empowering representative to several types of individuals, including people with alopecia, multi-ethnic individuals and new musicians.

“It really does humble me when people say that I’m a role model or that I’m interesting,” says Cedrice. “I know my life, I know what I’ve gone through. The fact that I’m growing from all of that and people appreciate me sharing my adversity, it’s really, really humbling and it’s really great.”

With a career that’s only just beginning to fully blossom, the singer and actress is happy and ready to bring her talents, authenticity and sense of identity with her into the spotlight.

“I feel like I have the responsibility to turn the narrative around for my people... I love that I represent myself as a person who is confident, for the most part, in my own skin—to walk out without hair—and to help be a role model for those who are struggling with alopecia. I love that I can be a Filipino woman and a Black woman on TV and represent someone with poise, grace and eloquence,” Cedrice says. “I really do see myself as a vessel: there is so much that I have to learn...and I choose to identify with someone who has been given gifts, a platform and opportunities to communicate with people, to have fun and to live my life unapologetically and inspire people through that.”



New Tunes

• Cedrice’s upcoming music project will have a Spanish-reggae flair, while her latest song, “Don’t Go,” is “a moody version of a breakup song.”

In the Works

• Along with new music on the way, Cedrice is also working on a podcast and writing a children’s book.



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