

Ashley C. Ford is a Brooklyn-based writer whose work addresses social issues like race, gender, and sexuality. She writes for web and print publications, including ELLE, the Guardian, Slate, BuzzFeed, Design\*Sponge, The Rumpus, and others. She is currently writing a memoir about growing up with an incarcerated parent and is co-editing an anthology with fellow writer, Roxane Gay, titled Not That Bad: Dispatches From Rape Culture.

*"The minute I allowed myself to admit that this was the life I wanted, that I was prepared for, and that I would work hard to sustain, everything started to fall into place."*

writer. Ashley C. Ford





## **Tell me about your path to what you're doing now.**

What I'm doing now is finding ways to tell stories that allow me to connect to others. That all started when I was about four years old and went to go live with my grandmother. My mom was having a hard time, so she and my brother stayed in Fort Wayne, Indiana, while my grandmother took me to Columbia, Missouri, to stay with her and my great-grandfather on a little farm. That was the first place I felt like my imagination had no bounds.

Everything I wanted to do had an element of storytelling to it. My grandma taught me how to read so I could understand what stories were and how to tell them. She used the Bible and celebrity tabloids to do so, and I once wrote in an essay that, for a long time, I thought Jesus looked like Billy Ray Cyrus. (laughing) I fell in love with storytelling and entertained myself and my grandmother with made-up stories. When I was in high school, my favorite classes were English and history, but I also liked chemistry and biology, because I felt like they told stories about the body and chemical reactions.



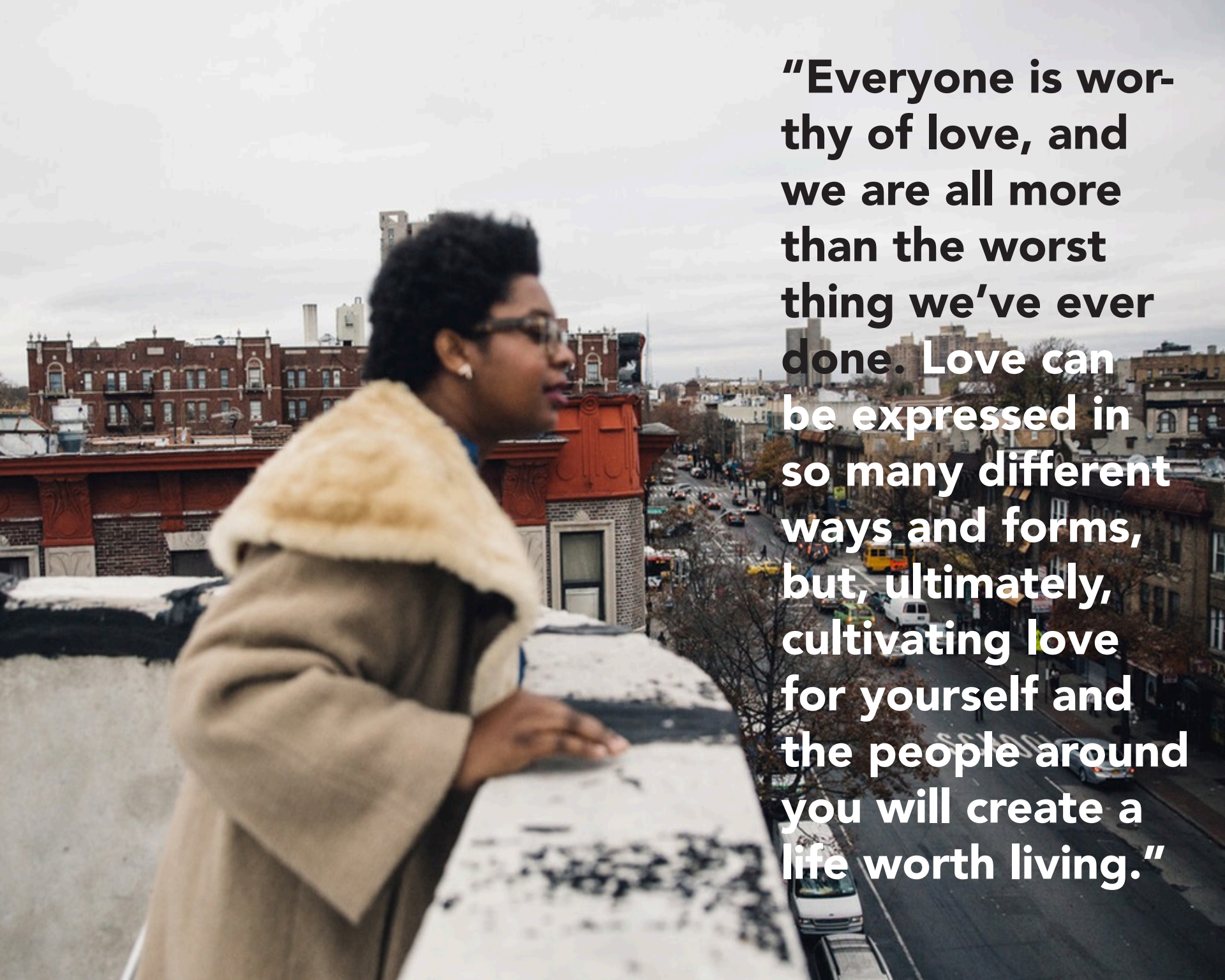


**Did you grow up in a family that believed doing something creative wasn't practical if you want to make a living?**

I've had some ideological differences with my family, but my mother never told her children we couldn't do something. I think that part of the reason I changed my major six times in college was because my mother didn't push me to make decisions based on what my family wanted. She told me: "Ashley, you're the only person who has to wake up in your skin and live your life every day. If you want me to tell you how to live, what job or career to have, or what to do for the rest of your life, I can't do that. I might have an idea, but I want you to be happy more than I want you to be safe." And my father, who is in prison and has been my whole life, regularly sent me letters with flowery and dreamy sentiments like, "You can do anything and be anything—you just have to do the work."

I come from a family that values hard work, and even though a lot of us are working-class or barely in the middle class, no one ever said, "You'd better find something practical to do." My grandma wanted me to be a nurse, but mostly because her mother was a nurse. That was a goal of mine for a while, because I love science and people, and I'm not grossed out by anything. Ultimately, writing was what I wanted more than anything else, but regardless of what I chose to do, I always planned to give it my best shot.



A woman with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a light-colored fur-trimmed coat, stands on a rooftop or balcony. She is looking out over a city street filled with cars and buildings. The sky is overcast. The quote is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**"Everyone is worthy of love, and we are all more than the worst thing we've ever done. Love can be expressed in so many different ways and forms, but, ultimately, cultivating love for yourself and the people around you will create a life worth living."**