

## **Lessons I Learned from Donna Sumlin** **By Robin Sumlin-Cowing**

...I've come up with a sort of "Life's Little Instruction Book" as she would have authored it or "The World According to Donna" if you prefer...

1. Get past the obstacles in your life. Mental or physical, go through them, around them, over them, but never let them snare you or hold you captive.
  2. Never let others decide what is best for you, not doctors, counselors, parents or "experts". Be the expert in your own life. You and only you get to decide. You may seek advice, ponder it, mull it over and then throw it away or use it but YOU and only YOU decide.
  3. Be involved in a cause near and dear to your heart. It will keep you from feeling sorry for yourself and you'll help someone else in the process. You'll make the world a better place.
  4. Accept yourself as you are with all your warts and foibles and imperfections. Then strive to be the best version of yourself you can be. And not just on the outside, but on the inside-where the real important stuff goes on.
  5. Never pass up the opportunity to go on a trip. You'll get a new perspective and, most importantly, some new decorating ideas.
  6. Speaking of shopping, whenever you go shopping, buy a present for somebody else. Treasure hunt on your shopping trips and never pay full price.
  7. Be generous. Have a "what's mine is yours" philosophy with friends and family.
  8. Keep in touch with distant relatives. They're family and family is important.
  9. Use your imagination and your vocabulary as much as possible. Be articulate. Never use a two-syllable word when a three will work better. Don't be vulgar-that takes no imagination.
  10. Don't be afraid to ask questions, be inquisitive. Remember, ask and ye shall receive. Get the info. Be resourceful.
  11. Plan parties, go out to eat, go out and hear live music whenever possible. Enjoy the company of others, but be your own best friend. Spend some time getting to know yourself. Learn to enjoy solitude and silence and peace of quiet, reflective times. Strike a balance.
  12. Be a good listener. Be supportive of others' dreams and aspirations. Don't enable whiners. Encourage action. Be there for your family and the people you love.
  13. Spend a week at the beach every summer and include cheetos and hot dogs.
  14. Buy fresh flowers for your home regularly.
  15. Have a sense of humor.
- And Most Importantly:
16. Carpe diem. Seize the day. Make the most of it. Get out and see the world.

Today I feel a tremendous sense of gratitude and happiness breaking through the sadness of loss. I am grateful I had such a resilient sister who gave me an example of how to live life. I can choose to gather some of that energy, that zest, that spark, that spunk, those ideas, and claim them for my own life blueprint. My happiness comes from having known such a smart, witty, creative, fun-loving individual.

Each day, in her honor, I vow to complain a little less and laugh a little more. I want to take things a little less seriously and, if need be, utilize an “eye roll” and, if absolutely necessary (just to keep everybody sharp), a little well placed sarcasm (just a little). Because it was not in Donna’s nature to be a complainer. She used her energy resources to focus on the positive, not being wasteful of precious breath or time on the negative. She aspired to make things better, for her, for her family, and for everyone who knew her. She got involved, she got resourceful, she asked questions, and she made things happen. Now, let’s get busy and celebrate. Mexican, anyone?