



CLEAVAGE: BREAKAWAY FICTION FOR REAL GIRLS

Edited by DEB LOUGHEAD & JOCELYN SHIPLEY

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SHAMELESS WOMEN

MARY-JO DIONNE: WRITER, DOG-LOVER, FUNNY-LADY

Every Thursday I profile a new incredible woman, each from a different walk of life. Different professions, causes, backgrounds, ethnicities, orientations, and anything/everything else!



So without further delay, let me introduce the wonderful Mary-Jo Dionne...



Mary-Jo Dionne is the founder of **TheFleasKnees tees** and TheFleasKnees Fund, created with the goal of helping fund no-kill animal shelters. A finalist for Vancouver's Funniest New Female Comedian and Vancouver's Funniest Person with a Day Job, she is also a regular contributor to **ModernDog Magazine** and a former Contributing Editor for *The Block Magazine*. As an advertising copywriter she has worked with brands like McDonald's Restaurants and Nike Canada. Mary-Jo tells us of the drive to spend "every ounce of talent" she has and why the world needs dreamers who are do-ers.

What drives you to do what you do?

I read something Hillary Clinton said once. Something along the lines of, when she dies and gets to heaven, her hope is that she has spent every ounce of



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- **L:** the guardian uk has a reg column, the new vegetarian.
- **MICHELLE:** Hahah, not only do I not have a sewing machine, I don't even have a ...
- **DIANDRA:** you could try by hand? I know it's more time consuming and more work, but ...
- **JEANI:** The ppk, as others have mentioned is just wonderful. You should definitely run out and ...
- **ANNIE:** i think its a beautiful makeup line

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talent she ever had. So that she gets there totally empty. I like that thought. For me, it really is about taking inventory every day. So that at night when I go to bed, I feel literally spent. If there's something that needs to be communicated or an action that needs to be taken that I believe in, then that's my motivation. The thought of wasting a single day makes me break into hives. Okay, maybe not real hives... but psychological hives, if there's such a thing.

How does being a woman empower / challenge you?

When I was a young copywriter just starting out in bigger ad agencies, I remember for the first while knowing deep down that I was playing small. Like, I actually could identify instances where I knew I was bowing down to the suggestions or opinions in my almost-all male creative departments. Trust me, that phase didn't last long, but it was definitely something I experienced. As soon as I really got that the feminine is every bit as powerful as the masculine, and that one doesn't have to trump the other so much as add to the other in a very holistic sense, things for me started to shift.

Now it's empowerment-ville every day of the week. (If you hear a roar in the distance, it's only me.) So no, today, not a challenge at all. And when it was, it was only because of my own self-imposed insecurities. Which have long-since been buried.

What advice would you give to young women who want to follow in your footsteps?

Watch out for dog poo! If anyone is following in my footsteps, be forewarned, wherever I go my 6lb, senior-citizen terrier Cowboy goes... I had the amazing opportunity of interviewing Ellen DeGeneres for a magazine piece last year. And I asked her the same question. One of the things she said, and I'd never looked at it like this before, is that too often people are focusing on other people's paths and not their own. Like we validate someone else's way of doing things, instead of really creating and honing our own way. It kind of made me think of things in a different way. Sure, there are women whose lives and careers I admire, but the way they got to their own place of "arrival" fundamentally was by following their gut, screwing up, learning lessons, refining their approach, and so on.

So for any young woman who would ever want to follow in my footsteps – as a writer or an entrepreneur – the one thing I would say is this: act from within. What I mean by that is make every decision based on intrinsic motivation and not necessarily the externals. Don't look through the classifieds for someone to suggest your next job. Decide what your life is going to be on your own terms. A friend gave me a card once that said: "She designed a life she loved." That's it to me, just go out there and design your own life.

Name one person, place, or thing every young woman should know about?

One person everyone should know about is: **Henry David Thoreau**. Not to get too deep, but his work in *Walden* says it all: "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you imagined."

He spent those two years living in solitude in a cabin on Ralph Waldo Emerson's pond and this is what he came back with. "Simplify, simplify." I think we all need to just chill a bit. Put the Blackberry down... Back away from the Blackberry.

One place every woman should know about is: Any place that makes a wicked soy latte. I've yet to have a professional challenge that couldn't be solved by stopping for a latte.

One thing every woman should know about is: **Pierre Marcolini chocolates**. Worth the trip to Brussels.

What is the most important thing we can do in order to change the world?

For me, it comes down to the wisdom of yet another First Lady. Eleanor Roosevelt said: "The world needs dreamers. And the world needs do-ers. But most of all the world needs dreamers who do." Anyone can have an idea, whether it's to launch a new brand or write an important letter or take a cool class or rescue a dog. But the actual do-ers... that's what we need more of.

Make sure to find out more about Mary-Jo's TheFleasKnees tees and TheFleasKnees Fund by checking out the website [here](#).

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POSTED BY **D. COLE**
APRIL 23, 2009

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