

Confessions of an Impatient Patient



Courtney Whittamore is a young actor-turned writer who is currently working on her first book about her long journey with Crohn's disease. Diagnosed in 2006, she has gone through years of aggressive medical treatment to try and "tame the beast." In December of 2013, she had her first surgery, and was ushered into the world of an ostomate. Follow along as she navigates this new world: sometimes with frustration, usually with grace and always with joy.

Bag of Honor

I love Superhero movies. Heck, I just flat out love Superheroes. Honestly, who doesn't? The combination of being super *and* a hero is just plain irresistible. Add in some spandex and some quippy one liners and you have a tried and true recipe for success. It's actually a fact.

While I am not biased to any one superhero in particular, there are certainly some that have stayed with me more than others. As a writer and admitted word addict, my favorite quality of these films is their ability to capture extremely profound and honorable ideals in one or two sentences. Not all movies are so obvious with them, but they are always there, jammed in between sarcastic comebacks, bullet dodging fight sequences and cliché love professing.

Quotes such as, "With great power comes great responsibility," from *Spiderman* or "Would you rather die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become a villain?" from *The Dark Night* instill a feeling of integrity and yearning for the idealism of good versus evil and the hope that good will somehow, against all the odds, win. While I am a lover of these famous quotes, it has been the lesser known lines that have seemed to stay with me the most.

When I was bedridden, Marvel's *The Avengers* had just been released to play on cable: it was literally on at least one channel every single night for several months. Being that I was bored out of my mind, a huge comic book fan, and a warm-blooded female with no intention of turning away from the opportunity of watching muscley men in spandex fighting to save the world, I always seemed to land

on watching this particular film at least a few times a week.

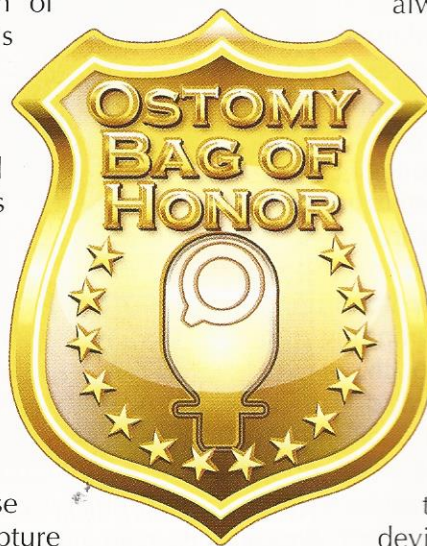
There is one scene in particular that no matter what time I tuned into the movie, I always seemed to flip to it in time to see this particular exchange on a regular basis. After the novelty of the hunky men with gleaming smiles wore off and I actually listened to what they were saying, I knew that it couldn't be a coincidence that this was on a loop for me to hear.

There is a scene in which Iron Man and Bruce Banner are working together on decoding a device that is rather complicated, but they are so smart that they are able to multi task and start chit chatting with one another in the process. Being that superheroes have no time for small talk and seem to speak in proverb with the wisdom of Gandhi all the time, Iron Man brazenly begins to chastise Bruce Banner for being so negative about his condition.

Yeah, because being exposed to gamma rays that should have killed him and constantly turning into a gigantic, stupid monster at any given moment is something to be innately positive about. But just when you think there isn't anything to be positive about, the usually deflative, humorous playboy billionaire who's serious moments are fewer and farther between than a superhero without his cape, says something so profound that it has stuck with me.

"You know, I've got a tiny cluster of shrapnel trying every second to crawl its way into my heart. [Stark points at the mini-arc reactor in his chest] This stops it. This little circle of light. It's part of me now. Not just armor. It's a... terrible privilege."

Profound right?! I know that I have listened to that exchange a hundred times



over and yet each and every time I get the chills and those little bumps that rise up on your arms and the back of your neck when something really special happens. I can't help but relate that to the life of an ostomate. We all had something horrible inside of us that was not meant to be there, that every second of every hour of every day of our lives was crawling its way toward our demise.

So we had to have a mechanism placed on us to stop our physical, mental and spiritual demise. We were given an ostomy. It has saved our lives. And it is so much more than the adhesive and the plastic and a sometimes nuisance of which it is comprised. It has become a part of us. It has become a physical appendage that we have adapted to and it has become a source of identity which is rooted in challenge, perseverance and bravery all in equal measure. A lot of the time it seems like a terrible thing to go through, especially in the beginning. This is not something that anyone would willingly sign up for if there were no medical necessity.

However, once you get past the terrible part, even though it is ok to fall back into that feeling of frustration over the terribleness of the situation no matter how long

you have been an ostomate, you can't live there. You have to look past that first word and get to the second. It is a privilege. We are privileged – we get to live. And for another we are so much stronger for it. Stronger than I even knew a person could be.

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It is honorable to enter a struggle and to fight for what is right. But sometimes in real life, sans capes and superpowers and perfect hair even while kicking some serious butt, what is right is so much harder to pinpoint than

it is in the perfectly scripted world of Hollywood. It's exhausting for our imperfect bodies to valiantly fight just to meet the status quo, much less do it with gusto and enthusiasm. Maybe what's right is simply the choice to fight. The choice to make the best of things. The choice that no matter how crappy things get, literally and figuratively, we won't stop. And maybe it's that this bag isn't something that always needs to be hidden. Maybe it's something that we can start conversations about and bring awareness to so that maybe this won't be such a taboo thing to discuss anymore. That maybe it's time we start seeing our ostomy as a badge of honor. As a bag of honor. Because that's exactly what it is. ☂