

Guess what I Learned today?

Today I learned about Adam DeVine.

Before today, I knew Adam DeVine as one of those actors who seems physically incapable of entering a scene quietly.

He doesn't so much arrive as happen.

If you've seen *Pitch Perfect*, *Modern Family*, *Workaholics*, or *The Righteous Gemstones*, you probably know exactly what I mean. His comedy is loud, physical, ridiculous, and delivered with the confidence of a man who has apparently never once considered whether making a complete fool of himself might have consequences.

Naturally, I like him.

What I didn't know was that Adam DeVine has Nebraska roots. Nebraska's own list of famous Nebraskans includes him, which immediately gave me an excuse to investigate.

And then I discovered something about his childhood that made the rest of his story considerably more interesting.

When Adam was eleven years old, he was hit by a cement truck.

Not a bicycle.

Not a shopping cart.

A cement truck.

There are certain sentences that make you stop researching for a moment and reread them because your brain assumes there has been some sort of clerical error.

This was one of them.

The accident was catastrophic. Adam has said he broke nearly every bone from the waist down except his right femur. Doctors considered amputating his legs, and he ultimately underwent 26 surgeries. For a long time, walking normally again wasn't something he could take for granted.

Suddenly, the story wasn't about a funny guy from Nebraska anymore.

It was about an eleven-year-old kid whose entire life changed in seconds.

I kept thinking about what eleven feels like.

At eleven, the future is supposed to be enormous and mostly theoretical.

You might become a professional athlete.

Or an astronaut.

Or a movie star.

Or possibly all three, because eleven-year-olds have not yet been properly introduced to scheduling conflicts.

You're not supposed to be wondering whether you're going to walk again.

But Adam eventually did.

And somewhere during that long recovery, humor became important.

That makes sense to me.

We tend to think of humor as something frivolous—the thing we use when nothing serious is happening.

But sometimes humor shows up precisely because something serious **is** happening.

Sometimes laughing doesn't mean something isn't painful.

It means pain isn't getting the entire room to itself.

Years later, at eighteen, Adam made another decision that fascinates me.

He moved to California.

He has described moving to Southern California without knowing anyone there, hoping he could build a career in comedy and acting. Nearly twenty years later, while talking about taking chances, he looked back at that leap as one that worked.

I love that because there is a tendency to look at successful people backward.

Once we know the ending, everything that came before it starts looking inevitable.

Of course Adam DeVine moved to California.

Of course he found other comedians.

Of course they created *Workaholics*.

Of course Hollywood noticed him.

Of course he ended up in *Pitch Perfect*.

Except none of those things were “of course” when they happened.

At eighteen, he was just an eighteen-year-old moving somewhere he didn't know anybody because he believed there might be a life waiting for him there.

That's considerably scarier when the ending hasn't happened yet.

Adam and fellow comedians Blake Anderson, Anders Holm, and Kyle Newacheck eventually formed the comedy group Mail Order Comedy. That collaboration helped lead to *Workaholics*, the Comedy Central series that turned Adam into a recognizable television star.

Then came movies and more television.

In *Pitch Perfect*, he played Bumper Allen, an aggressively confident singer whose personality could probably be detected by radar.

On *Modern Family*, he played Andy Bailey, giving viewers a surprisingly sweet romantic character.

Later came *The Righteous Gemstones*, more movies, voice work, producing, and other projects.

The career that looks obvious in retrospect was actually built one strange opportunity at a time.

And apparently that is something Adam understands.

When asked about taking chances, he compared his own move to California at eighteen to a character pursuing a dream and essentially pointed out that somebody's dreams have to work out—so why not yours?

That is an extremely optimistic philosophy.

Possibly dangerously optimistic.

I approve.

But there is another part of Adam's story that makes all of this more complicated.

The childhood accident didn't simply disappear because he became successful.

Decades later, he has continued dealing with physical effects connected to those injuries. He has spoken publicly about painful muscle spasms and a frightening period when doctors suspected he had stiff-person syndrome. Further testing eventually determined that he did **not** have the condition, and doctors believed his symptoms were instead related to the long-term effects of his childhood injuries.

That part stayed with me.

Because we like transformation stories with tidy endings.

Something terrible happens.

The person overcomes it.

Triumphant music plays.

Credits.

Life, unfortunately, has shown very little respect for movie structure.

Sometimes you overcome something and still carry pieces of it.

Sometimes you heal without returning to exactly who you were before.

Sometimes the victory isn't making the difficult thing disappear.

It's building a life that becomes bigger than it.

Adam became an actor.

A comedian.

A writer and producer.

He got married.

He became a father, something he has described as bringing enormous joy into his life.

And he became successful doing something that seems particularly meaningful when you know what happened to him as a kid.

He makes people laugh.

I don't want to turn his accident into one of those inspirational stories where suffering gets wrapped in a bow and we're expected to be grateful something terrible happened because it supposedly made everything else possible.

Sometimes terrible things are simply terrible.

An eleven-year-old being hit by a cement truck doesn't require a silver lining.

But what happens **afterward** still matters.

Adam couldn't choose what happened to him that day.

He could choose what he did with all the days that came after it.

Maybe that's why I ended up liking his story much more than I expected when I started researching “famous people from Nebraska.”

I thought I was going to learn about the guy from *Pitch Perfect*.

Instead, I learned about an eleven-year-old boy who had to learn how to walk again, an eighteen-year-old who moved to California without knowing whether anything would come of it, and an adult who is still dealing with consequences from something that happened decades ago while continuing to build a life filled with work, family, and laughter.

Turns out resilience doesn't always look heroic.

Sometimes it looks ridiculous.

Sometimes it's loud.

Sometimes it sings a cappella.

And sometimes it makes an entire room laugh.

Guess what I learned?

You don't always get to choose what happens to you.

But you do get some say in what happens next.