

# The Untold Memoirs of a Plus-sized Fashionista



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# The Untold Memoirs of a Plus-sized Fashionista



## Foreword

I met Denique during our freshman year of high school, I'm pretty sure it was in the cafeteria at lunch. Ever since then she's been considered my best friend, even though we had two different majors in school we tried to make sure we always had a few classes together each year. It's pretty crazy to think I've known her for fifteen years now. Throughout our decade long friendship I've become an honorary sister, finding myself at her house almost everyday. Although we haven't traveled with each other much one of our best trips was Las Vegas for a week.

Denique has such an out of the box type of personality that sometimes I have to look at her and say maybe we should take a step back you're going too far. Her creativity is what makes her who she truly is, and she's never afraid to be colorful with all her thoughts and ideas. She truly is the definition of creative, envisioning décor for any space, styling outfits for any occasion, and learning how to do makeup. All these things are an art that she is perfecting. All that said hopefully in 50 years we would be like the "Golden girls"

-Tiffany

Denique has been one of my best friends since high school. When I think of Denique I think of the quote "do not judge a book by its cover". Initially, I did not possess a liking to Denique as she appeared unfriendly and standoffish. As I got to know Denique it occurred to me that she exhibits a hard shell that once cracked, is full of the unexpected. Denique is kind and supportive. She has always demonstrated several other traits that are crucial in any friendship.

On a professional note, Denique possesses several crucial skills such as creativity and being a team player. Denique has always showed a great interest in the fashion world. She has a wonderful sense of fashion and is able to put together any outfit for someone regardless of body type. I have witnessed her create beautiful designs by hand in her drawings and help individuals pick or rearrange clothing styles. Aside from fashion, her creativity and out-of-the-box ideas are flaunted whenever she assists in decorating any events (e.g., baby showers, bridal showers, birthday parties). Denique's set of skills will help her get far and I hope to always stand by her as I watch all of her dreams and expectations come to life.

-Vicki (M.S. CCC-SLP)

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# Prologue

As long as I could remember I was always labeled the creative type. Any and everyone could turn to me for advice when it came to anything décor and fashion related. My passion for fashion emerged the summer of 2003, when my mother gave me allowance for the first time to shop for a birthday outfit on my own. Pulling inspiration from all the movies and music videos I've seen throughout the years.

It wasn't always easy trying to put together looks, especially being a plus sized girl into fashion. It's because of my struggle to find fashionable pieces that pushed me to create my own prom dress, and further aspire my dream to design a luxury plus size clothing line. Fashion can be described as an ever-revolving door and I am just trying to get my foot through.

I dedicate my memoirs  
to all those who helped me  
create such a beautiful life

My mother  
My sisters  
Shawn  
Vicki  
Tiffany  
Sahai  
Nicki

## IT'S MY PARTY AND I'LL CRY IF I WANT TOO

June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1993, school had ended and summer just begun, and it was the perfect day for what would be an awesome birthday celebration. You see growing up I've always had the best birthday parties compared to everyone that I knew. My mother always went above and beyond when it came to throwing these lavish affairs and my third birthday was no exception, which is why she had it video taped so I could always have those memories to look back on. From the balloons and streamers to the party hats and goodie bags, it was a kids dream come true. This year's party theme was *Barney*, which happened to be all the hype during this time.

The party was held in a family members large backyard at 303 Snyder Ave Brooklyn, NY 11203. Dozens of foldable chairs and tables filled the yard space, each decorated with a colorful happy birthday tablecloth and *Barney* centerpiece. The food and drinks were plenty with everything from hotdogs and hamburgers to chips and soda. My cake was a delicious chocolate sheet cake with white vanilla frosting that displayed a huge portrait of *Barney* and friends with my name "DENIQUE" in pink letters. My mother loved putting me in frilly little *dressses* at this age, but being that the party would be held outdoors this year she opted to go for a more, cute yet durable look. I was *dressed* in the cutest little outfit, which consisted of a light wash denim short overalls, with a *Barney* cotton blend t-shirt underneath. To tie my outfit together my mother placed pink jelly sandals on my feet, and cornrow braids that fell to one side of my face *adorned* with pink beads hanging onto the ends, and a pink flower headband.

My parents wanted to make sure me and all the other kids were well entertained during the party by hiring a magician, clown, and a *Barney* impersonator; which although

## IT'S MY PARTY AND I'LL CRY IF I WANT TOO

they made us laugh with their special tricks, songs, and dancing, it was quite the opposite for a few kids who thought *Barney* was scary and would hurt them if he had gotten to close. Once it was time to cut the cake and sing happy birthday, I was extremely nervous especially when seeing all of these faces staring directly at me. I too then began to cry, but as my mom soothed me and assured me that I was in fact alright by feeding me a piece of cake; I quickly got back into the celebrating mood and enjoyed the rest of my special day.





## THE LEAVES ARE FALLING

I believe the saying goes kids will be kids, well one day at the age of five I decided to do just that be a kid, a very bad kid to be honest. Growing up I was always a shy and quiet kid, never causing trouble or getting into mischief of any kind. As a kindergartener at Get Set Kindergarten School (located on 4423 Avenue D, Brooklyn, New York 11203), I was the ideal student always following the rules, and exceptionally well mannered.

Well as the season changed into fall so did my behavior. It started off like any typical school day, with my mom getting me *dressed* in my school *uniform*. Everyday she would put me in one of my many short sleeve marigold yellow poly/cotton blend collared button up shirts accompanied by a forest green, red, and yellow plaid print jumper *dress*, with a matching snap button tie that *attached to the garment*. To *accessorize* my *uniform* my mother would put me in a pair of black leather “*Mary Jane*” school shoes, with thick polyester socks that closely matched the color of my shirt. Placing my thick curly hair into two puffs with whatever barrettes she could find to match. I would always give her a hard time when it came to putting on my *uniform* because I knew if I was wearing these clothes I would have to go to school.

As we gathered for class today we were told that we would be taken out for a neighborhood walk in order to collect the fall leaves on the ground. Once we all piled back into class from our outside fun we were tasked with a project to trace the leaves we had collected. Unfortunately for me my project was not coming along as planned and as my frustration grew so did my patience. I was so vexed by my peers success and my lack there of I took it upon myself to scribble all over my classmates work.

## THE LEAVES ARE FALLING

Of course this did not go over to well with my teacher and I was sent straight to the principal's office to be disciplined, which resulted in me getting slapped on the hands with a large ruler by the school's administration, and my mother being called. Upon learning about the harsh discipline I've received my mom was indeed put out about my behavior, but more so the disciplinary actions the school used towards me. As a result to the incident I was transferred to the school's other location and the faculty had been reprimanded.



## DENIQUE AND THE GIANT PUMPKIN

A cool breeze blew throughout the air, and the crunching of fallen leaves beneath my feet made the most intriguing sound. The giggles and laughter of all the kids in the neighborhood echoed, while doorbells were rung and adults were greeted with an endless amount of trick or treat! I remember my first Halloween being able to trick or treat like it was yesterday, the day before I was so excited when I realized what costume I'd be wearing and how I'd get to trick or treat with my cousins. As the night arrived it dawned on me that I would get to walk around and collect candies at nighttime YAYYY!!!

That evening my mom helped me into my huge puffy orange pumpkin outfit, the round suit was made up of a basic orange felt material with black felt cutouts of a typical scary face you would see on a carved Halloween pumpkin. To assure I was equipped for the fall weather my mother put a black fleece fabric sweater and a pair of thick cable knit polyester, spandex stockings underneath my *costume*. To top off my *costume* my mom bought me a plastic pumpkin trick-or-treat bucket for my *handheld dress* to collect all those candies. My two cousins soon gathered at the house all as equally excited as myself to get the night started.

They were all *dressed* in equally amazing *costumes*, my cousin Shari was *dressed* as a clown with the face paint and red nose to go with it, and my cousin Amanda went as a princess, Cinderella to be exact in a sparkly blue *dress*. I was as happy as can be bouncing around in my *costume* and could hardly contain myself. As we started off down the block arriving at the first house I made sure to give the widest smile, as I yelled trick or treat, excited trickles of candy fell into my bucket. As we moved on nearly every house we visited I received compliments about how cute I looked in my *costume*, with

## DENIQUE AND THE GIANT PUMPKIN

adults saying, “That is the cutest pumpkin they ever did see!” and so on. Many kid’s outfits I saw ranged from power rangers to Disney princesses, but there were some older kids whose *costumes* would scare us by dressing up as Freddy Kruger and the ghost face killer from *Scream*.

We still made our way all over Mill Basin walking on every block we’d come by and I was amazed by all of the decorations people put onto their homes, some I found funny with characters like “*Tigger*” from *Winnie the Pooh* dressed as a witch, while others were so scary with statues of mummies, ghosts, and vampires making spooky noises, I could not bare to take a step closer. Before we knew it our candy buckets were full to the brim, and the streets began to dull as house lights went out. Other kids returned home to sort through their goodies, I was having such a good time I was sad that it had to end but I was happy I was able to spend the night with my cousins.

As I made my way back home I remember the images of kids in really scary masks and thinking back to a *Goosebumps* movie I saw where a girl bought a really scary mask and it ended up coming alive and attaching to her face, really scary stuff and I remember hoping that wouldn’t happen to those kids I saw tonight. When I finally reached home the night had caught up with me and I was just about ready to sleep but not before begging my mom for a couple pieces of candy first, which she eventually gave in too. After brushing my teeth my mom tucked me into bed and as soon as my head touched the cool pillow my eyes sunk low and I was out like a light.



## AN ELEMENTARY TRAGEDY

I remember it like it happened yesterday. The summer air was thick and stifling, and being stuck inside of a school was the last place any kid would want to be. The year was 1998, the month was July and I had just turned eight years old the month before. My mom had decided to sign me up for my school's summer day camp program since she had a busy work schedule, and I was not-to thrilled to go.

The day in question was a Friday afternoon, all my classmates and I were extremely anxious to leave what felt like a prison cell. The walls were cold and the color of cement, with fluorescent light strips that felt like we were being interrogated. All we could think about was when we were going to line up outside to get on the school bus. To be clear the day started off great because each and every Friday we were taken on a field trip, which was the highlight of my boring summer.

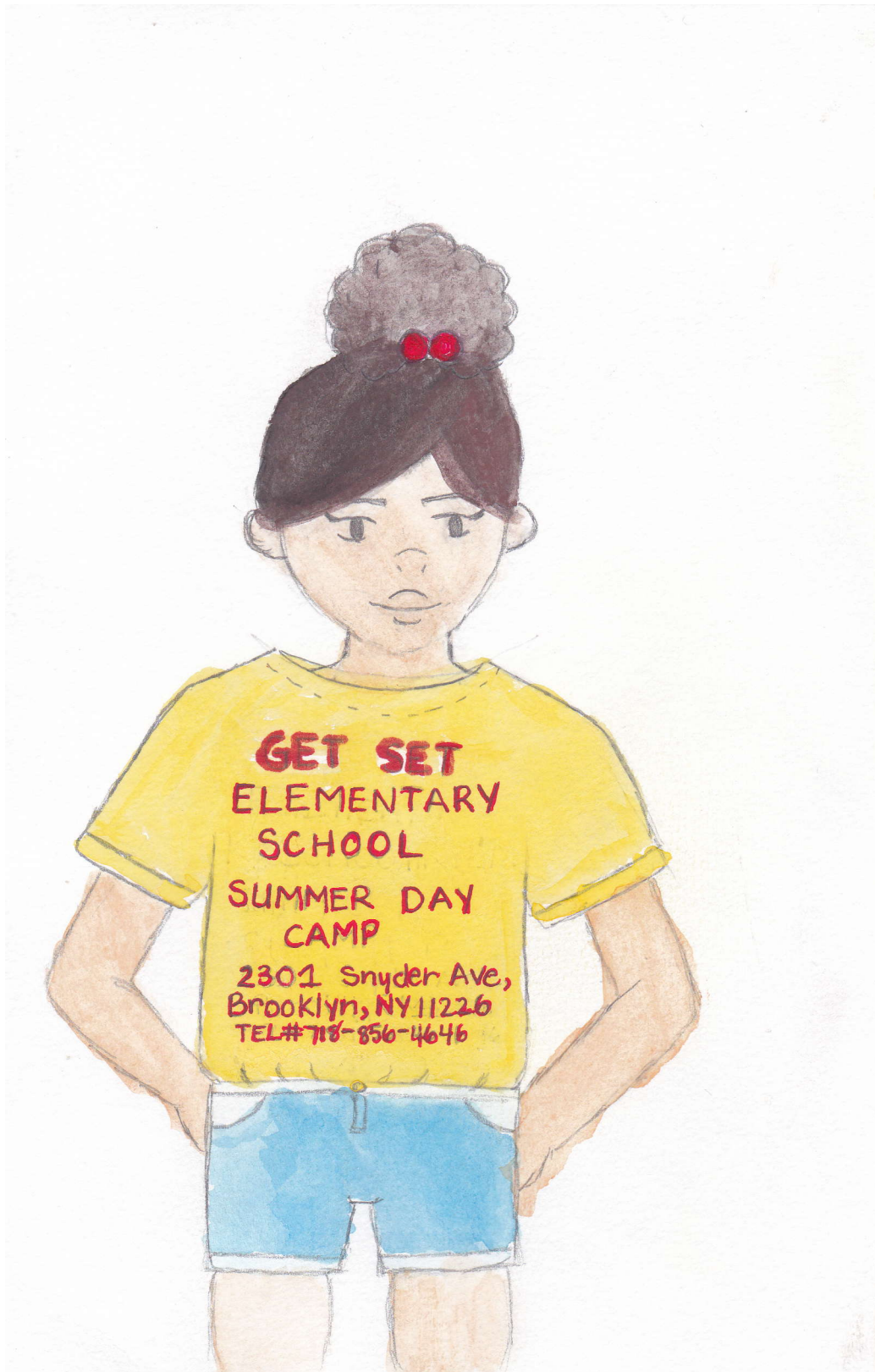
Our usual *dress* code was the standard summer attire, but Friday's we were obligated by the school's policy to wear our school t-shirts. The cotton shirts were a marigold color with red lettered writing saying (GET SET KINDERGARTEN SCHOOL SUMMER DAY CAMP, 2301 SYNDER AVE, BROOKLYN, NY 11226, TEL # 718-856-4646). I always paired my school shirt with either a dark or light wash denim shorts or capris but on this particular day it was shorts with a pair of white tennis shoes my mom had brought me from *Payless* shoe store. The trip was to Rye Playland it was one of the greatest trips the school has ever taken us on.

After what seemed like an epic day we had to go back to our designated classrooms to have a snack, in which we got to hang with our friends until we got picked up. It was a rule that before we went downstairs to the auditorium for pick up we had to



## AN ELEMENTARY TRAGEDY

put our chairs up on top of these heavy ceramic desks. As I placed my chair upon my desk so did another student, it fell into my desk toppling over onto my foot, crushing my big toe. The school had to call my emergency contact, my Aunt Jane, and she had to rush me to the nearest hospital, which was Kings County Hospital (located at 451 Clarkson Ave, Brooklyn, New York 11203). Ultimately, the entire toenail got crushed leaving me to have to go to a podiatrist to get my nail removed.



## N'SYNC

It was the summer of the year 2000 and as an early birthday gift my godmother whom I refer to as Aunt Jude surprised me with concert tickets to a sold out “N’Sync” show. Now “N’Sync” was a boy band that sung pop music but they were not just any typical boy band they were one of two top musical pop groups of my generation, the other being the “Backstreet Boys”. The band was comprised of five male singers named Justin Timberlake, JC Chasez, Chris Kirkpatrick, Joey Fatone, and Lance Bass.

The show was to take place the second weekend of June at Madison Square Garden with special musical guests “Sisqo” and “P!NK”. I was very ecstatic about going to the show so much so that I bragged to all my friends at school about how I will get to see N’sync in real life. This would be my first time ever going to a concert and because I was only 10 years old my mother had to be my chaperone. I desperately wished I were older so that I could’ve gone the concert with a friend instead.

The day of the concert June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2000 had arrived and my mom laid out an outfit for me to wear. At this time in my life my mom still viewed me as her little baby girl, which to be honest is no different from how she still views me to this very day, and that is exactly how she would *dress* me. The outfit was an oversized denim overall pants with two reflective stripe patches *attached to the garment*, vertically running down the legs. Paired with a short sleeve cotton “tweety” bird graphic T-shirt underneath, and a pair of chunky white, black and gray Skechers sneakers. The way she combed my hair was just the icing on the cake, you see I had thick curly hair that my mom would part into multiple sections and attach various colored bubble hair ties to accessorize it and then twist the

## N'SYNC

ends. I felt like a giant baby but I was just too excited about seeing my favorite group live to complain about what I wore.

As we hurried to catch the number “2” train to 34th street, I saw so many groups of girls *dressed* so fly in their *N'sync* band tees. We finally made it to Madison Square Garden and it was humongous there were so many people scurrying to get to their seats and I felt completely overwhelmed. The noise from the crowd once the Emcee introduced the group on stage over the microphone was deafening and the tears flowing from the girls in my sections row while they screamed the names of their favorite group members were indescribable. As the show was coming to an end and *N'sync* was wrapping up their hit single “*Bye, Bye, Bye*” from their “*No Strings Attached*” album, I was in complete disbelief at what I just witnessed and was so excited to tell everyone I knew about how cool the experience was.



## TWELVE PINS FOR THIRTEEN

Every little girl looks forward to her big day, that one special day of the year we all get, known as our birthday. June 27, 2003, I turned thirteen years old and I was officially considered a teenager. This birthday was specifically memorable being that this was the start of the many awkward years to come. The *body modifications* happening to my new teenage body was something I could've never imagined. I had never felt so insecure yet betrayed by my body like I did at that very moment.

Where do I start, well I got my first menstrual cycle just days before my birthday party and my boobs seemed to have filled in overnight. It didn't help the fact that I was a little chunky as well. I began to despise my body and became extremely moody, so much so that my mom noticed and felt that she needed to do something special for being that I was entering my teen years. So my birthday plans were already set my mom booked the deluxe party package at Gil Hodges Bowling Alley (located at 6161 Strickland Ave, Brooklyn, New York 11234) that allowed seven friends and I to bowl for 2 hours, food and drinks with a birthday cake. I was excited to hand pick three friends (Shaniece, Joseph, and Andrea) from my class to join me as my cousins filled the rest of the available spots.

This birthday was the first time my mom let me shop and *dress* myself, and by allowing me to pick out my birthday outfit it gave me the chance to not only embrace my creativity, but also made me feel more mature. I searched through King's Plaza Mall (located at 5100 King's Plaza, Brooklyn, New York 11234) in all the stores I always dreamed about shopping in, but my mother wouldn't have let me prior to now. It felt like complete freedom walking from store to store sifting through the numerous racks. I

## TWELVE PINS FOR THIRTEEN

finally stepped into Old Navy's women's section and there it was the perfect outfit, it was a matching co-ord set.

The outfit was comprised of cotton blend polyester Capri bottoms with a camisole top. The set had a beige background color with an olive green paisley print overlaying the entire fabric. I knew I needed accessories for my birthday outfit to take it up a notch and I knew just the place to go, once I stepped into Claire's and saw all the *costume* jewelry I was in heaven. I immediately picked up a silver jewelry set that came with a necklace, bracelet, and earrings. The necklace featured a heart pendant with diamond rhinestones outlining the heart's shape, a matching silver chain link bracelet, and diamond rhinestone heart shaped stud earrings.

Now I was unable to use the earrings because my mother wouldn't allow me to get my ears pierced because of her beliefs as a "Seventh Day Adventist", which really upset me because all my friends had theirs pierced, but luckily I found magnetic diamond stud earrings that I could use to replace the *body supplement*. Now fast forward to the day of the party and I was super excited about getting myself *dressed*, my hair was blow dried and straightened and neatly placed into a half up half down style. Once I was ready to go my parents surprised me with two birthday gifts. The first gift were a pair of diamond encrusted flip flop sandal heels that had a 2-inch silver wedge heel, it was my first pair of heels that really made me feel like a big girl now.

The second gift was a yellow Nintendo Game Boy Color with a Pokémon game cartridge, this was the hottest game on the market and I was shocked my parents actually decided to splurge and buy it for me. The sandals were the perfect addition to my outfit,

## TWELVE PINS FOR THIRTEEN

and as I confidently stepped into that bowling alley and saw all my friends and family waiting for me to start the party I just knew I had it going on.





## TOURING THE EIFFEL TOWER

January 3rd, 2007, and we had just returned back to school from winter break. When I thought about having to go back to classes I was not-so thrilled, because for me being in French class for majority of High School was an extreme pain; as it took me longer than most of my classmates to pick up the language. Until the day I was presented with the extraordinary opportunity to go on a trip to France with a few of my other classmates. So with the collective efforts of my parents, family members, and selling candy in school, I was actually able to attend this trip and I was beyond grateful and excited for it.

Two months later, April of 2007 and the beginning to spring break of my junior year in High School, and I was gearing up to catch a flight to one of the countries on my bucket list. While exploring the romantic city of Paris, one of the most memorable experiences I had was being able to see the “Tour de efeitl” (Eiffel Tower). Before even stepping off the metro we could see glimpses of the wonderful architecture from the windows, from the metro the walk wasn’t long before you could glimpse up and see it in all its glory. It quickly became more crowded as we got closer to the tower and we joined a very long line, but luckily because we were in a tour group we got to go ahead of everyone.

Once we got to the base of the tower it was then that I was able to fully appreciate its enormous size. I was an ant in comparison, as we stepped up onto a huge “Lift”(which is how the Parisians would say elevator) in order take us up to the top. The ride up had my ears popping but it was well worth it, for once we reached the top the view was indescribable, I could see all of Paris and more it was insane. We walked around the top of the tower stopping in the gift store to buy our selves and families souvenirs, and then breaking for a quick snack we tried some of the most delicious Parisian ice cream and

## TOURING THE EIFFEL TOWER

macaroons you would ever taste. When it was finally time to go down it was quickly turning night and the sunset from the top of the tower was unforgettable truly a sight one would have to see for themselves to really appreciate. Upon the end of the tour, it was officially dark and the Eiffel Tower began to shine like a star in the sky, with twinkling lights all throughout the landmark's structure.

I had my friend capture me in this moment, showing off my outfit I had brought in the United States just for this moment. I needed my outfit to say she is fashionable and ready for all Paris has to offer. The outfit I chose to wear for such a big moment in my life was a terra-cotta colored ribbed knit skater skirt *dress* from one of my favorite online retailers "ASOS". The *dress* displayed details of a bell-bottom flared extra long sleeve and a circular cut out in the lower back of the outfit. I completed my outfit with a pair of black knee-high knit socks, my brand new lace-up combat heeled boots from a store called "Call it Spring", with my black and charcoal gray lunchbox shaped purse that I also found at "Call it Spring".

The bag featured patches attached to the front of it with different symbols that meant travel, such as the Eiffel tower, an airplane, and a passport. My hair was placed in a neat fishtail braid leaving out two curly tendrils to frame my face, topping off my look with a black felt fedora hat I found at a vintage thrift store in Manhattan. I felt truly like a Parisian fashionista at least for the day. Exploring all the Parisian *culture* was truly an amazing experience and one I won't ever be able to forget for as long as I live, which just leads me to believe that what they say in Paris may be true "La vie est. belle journée "(Life is a beautiful journey).



## SING

Many of us grew up watching the *Disney* televised movie series “*High School Musical*” with Zac Efron and Vanessa Hudgens, well at my high school we lived the real life version of the movie. At James Madison High School (located at 3787 Bedford Ave, Brooklyn, New York 11229) we called our show “SING”. Now how it works is that all the grades within our school must split up into two teams, one team consisting of the “Senior/Sophomore” and the other “Junior/Freshman”. Each team is allowed to pick a topic to use as inspiration to create their show, and is tasked to rewrite songs both old and new to fit in with their theme.

This is a full coordinated musical production that brings the entire school together. It was approaching the beginning of spring, the year was 2008 and throughout the school everyone was talking about the upcoming “SING” auditions. I was especially thrilled because this was my senior year and I was determined to debut my fashion skills to everyone. During auditions I signed up for two roles, one being lead *costume* designer and the other being background in the musical’s chorus.

Everyone auditioning for the lead designer role was tasked with designing a creative *costume* piece that correlated with the musical’s theme, which this year my team the “Senior/Sophomore” chose “dollhouse”. I decided to reinvent the classic baby-doll image by creating an elastic waist skater skirt from a white cotton t-shirt and lining it full of various colored tulle like red, orange, white, and black in order to create the perfect effect I desired. I then cut patches from three old plaid flannel shirts my dad still had, and hot glued it around the body of the skirt. I also used the left over flannel shirt scraps to

## SING

create suspenders, adding two buttons to the front and back of the *dress* to *attach to the garment*.

Two weeks later I was so ready to show off my creation, that I decided to wear it into the audition with a white bodysuit underneath. As I *dressed* in my ragdoll inspired *costume* I just knew I was going to get the lead designer role, and that I did. The entire female chorus cast ended up wearing my custom design for the show. I felt such a rush walking onto that stage for the ending scene and taking a bow whilst my name was being called “*Denique - Senior Lead Costume Designer*”. Although we never won that year the experience designing for such a huge production especially one that would showcase my passion for fashion in front of my peers was well worth it, and ultimately pushed me into studying fashion.



## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

It was the summer of 2008 and the school was abuzz with talks of the senior prom. The James Madison High School (located at 3787 Bedford Ave, Brooklyn, New York 11229) Knights were gearing up for what was to be an epic night to remember. Every girl dreams of the perfect prom night, finding the most beautiful *dress*, and hopefully getting asked by the perfect guy. A night that is full of dancing, laughing, and somewhat inappropriate behavior.

Months prior to the big day I decided to take a different route when it came to picking out the right *dress*, and I was determined to stand out from the rest. So I decided to enlist an aunt that I knew was a seamstress to help me create my one of a kind “*Molly Ringwald Pretty in Pink*” type of *dress*, which happens to be an accurate depiction of how my *dress* turned out in the end. In my mind it would be perfect, in reality not so much. The custom designed *dress* top had a zebra printed sweetheart neckline made out of a muslin type fabric, flowing into a balloon bottom fuchsia colored skirt stuffed with a ton of tulle material underneath it to create a larger more dramatic look. This night would also commemorate the first time I got to make *modifications to my body* using hair extensions.

As the big night approached my date decided to work security at his Rite Aid job instead of escorting me to my prom, but promised to meet me after prom. A group of all my friends pitched in for a Lincoln stretch limo, and as we all piled into the luxury vehicle it started to pour down with heavy rain and winds with an accompany freak hail storm; which was extremely odd due to the fact that it was mid June. Although dateless,



## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

wet, and late to prom my friends and me made the most of our so-called “magical” night, as we danced the night away.

As prom ended me and my date met as promised we matched in our after party outfits, both wearing black, grey, and white. My gingham design print halter back *dress* from *H&M* was stylish and chic for after prom. We ended off our night driving through the city in our limo, strolling through sands at Coney Island beach as the sunrise, then finally having a lavish breakfast at our local Ihop restaurant. Now this prom night may not have been perfect by any means necessary, but all in all it was a night I would always remember.



## INCIDENT AT THE CAFÉ

The golden yellow sign illuminated the words *Au Bon Pain* (70 Myrtle Ave, Brooklyn, New York 11201), which told me I had finally arrived at my destination. I quickly jetted inside rushing past customers to clock-in for the evening shift. The cafe was packed with customers varying from Metrotech office officials to college students, all coming together in order to break for lunch. It didn't take me long to notice the somber look on all my co-workers faces. As I approached one of the empty registers to punch in my employee code; my manager Dwight informed me that there had been an incident at the café.

I hurried into the back office to get filled in on all that went down by my co-worker Sam. What followed next would change my world forever. On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009 at approximately 11 am my co-worker Eutisha, who was more than just a co-worker to me but also my training supervisor, friend, and a second time expectant mother had just died while working the morning shift in the café. After collapsing in the walk-in freezer on the job due to a severe asthma attack. Frantically seeking help for our dear co-worker and friend from two off duty “*FDNY EMT*” workers who were conveniently having lunch in the café during the life-threatening ordeal. Unfortunately they refused our plea for help at first due to them being on break, once persuaded to do their jobs resuscitation came a little too late and her condition worsened. Once rushed to a nearby hospital's emergency room she was later pronounced dead and shortly after following her was her unborn son.

After receiving the devastating news I entered the employee locker room distraught, full of tears, and reluctant to start my shift. Gathering the clothing in my

## INCIDENT AT THE CAFÉ

locker I preceded to *dress* in my *uniform*. The outfit consisted of a black slack trouser pants, accompanying my pants the company provided each employee with a black cotton t-shirt that displayed white printed lettering spelling out “*Au Bon Pain est. 1981*” on the front and “custom made fresh” on the back; also provided was a black canvas baseball cap with matching white writing on it. In order to tie together our *uniforms* we were all instructed to wear black tennis shoes and a deep marigold yellow colored apron with a white name tag clipped onto the *suspended dress* that spelled my name “Denique” in black.

As time flew by I hated being in the *uniform* because it smelled like a mix of stale pastries and dirty mop water, but I was already more than halfway through my shift making sandwiches and salads for customers behind the bar. Towards the end of such a gruesome shift while closing up the café with another co-worker, and still reeling from the horrific day I was ambushed by news reporters waiting outside of the café for details on the tragic events that took place earlier. I was full of mixed emotions, sad for my late friend and unborn child and nervous from being bombarded with bright camera lights and questions from eager news reporters. All I could say was “she was a good person that didn’t deserve what happened to her”.



## THE BASEMENT

It was a cool summer night and the weekend had just begun. It was June.13th, 2010 and I was going through my closet angrily trying to find the perfect outfit to wear to my cousin Sahai's nineteenth birthday party. I was so impatient that I started to fling clothes all around my room from both my closet and dresser drawers, tossing out anything that didn't seem to catch my eye. After turning my room upside down and trying to gather my patience that I had already lost, I finally found it. Luckily for me after almost giving up I was able to salvage an outfit out of the disaster I had created. I pulled together a look that I thought would be great for the occasion, it was a light wash denim mini *dress* from "H&M".

The *dress* fit perfectly shaping my figure just right. It had spaghetti straps *attached to the garment* that I tied up into a bow, which held the *dress* onto the body, and pockets on both sides of the *dress* to hold small things such as lip-gloss or keys. It was a casual yet cute outfit and I thought what better way to accessorize it, than with a pair of crystallized diamond sandals that I had purchased last year from a shoe store called "ALDO". I framed my face with an up do bun hairstyle, brushing up my recently red dyed hair neatly; finishing off my face by putting on my all time favorite nude lip-gloss by "NYX" cosmetics called "cookie butter". Once I was ready I met up with my cousin Nadine to drive to the house party, we entered through my cousin's backyard in order to get access into the basement where the party was being held.

Upon entering the party the sound *Waka Flocka Flame's* song "No Hands" filled the room. Everyone was dancing, girls bending over whining their waists on a guy and guys trying to dance their way behind a girl. The basement was packed and people were

## THE BASEMENT

going in and out of the party all night, while I was going to exit the party for some fresh air one of the party goers a young guy by the name of Alex came stumbling in, falling into my arms. There was blood everywhere as he was gasping for air and crying out for help. The party automatically stopped and everyone's attention was on me as many of the girls began screaming and crying. Before chaos ensued I yelled out at the top of my lungs "*SHUT THE HELL UP!!!*" and "*CALL 911!*" so that things wouldn't get so out of hand and everyone would calm down.

Once I found where all the blood was rushing out from I jumped into action and knew I had to be the one to help this guy stay alive. It had looked like he was stabbed pretty bad on the side of his head, and I knew I had to put all my weight on his wound to apply pressure in order to slow down the bleeding. My cousin's mom my Aunt Jane came to the door once she heard all the commotion from the basement as she was the chaperone for the party, and once she saw what was going on and all the blood she simply froze in shock. I had yelled out to her "*GRAB ME SOME TOWELS*" but still she was frozen, as it was all too much for her.

I had to let Alex's wound go and rush up the basement stairs pushing past my aunt like I was a football player tackling another player in order to rush and grab some towels to hurry back to him. All the young man kept saying to me was "*I don't want to die, I don't want to die*" and that "*a group of boys jumped him and stole his Prada sneakers*". I tried to reassure him that I got him and it would be okay because the ambulance is on the way. What felt like hours was about 15 minutes in real life by the time the ambulance came, they placed him on the stretcher rushing him into the ambulance.

## THE BASEMENT

Sirens and flashing lights filled the street outside as cops hit the scene. I remember the EMT asking me if I would like to go to the hospital with him but I declined. All I can recall after such a crazy night was the cops questioning me about the incident and crying a lot. It's still so surreal to think I literally had someone's life in my hands, praying that he would make it out of surgery okay and he did





## LIKE A VIRGIN

I still cringe when I think of it, although I was sure I was ready can any girl truly say they were ready to experience their first time. It was December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011 the last night before the start of a new year and I was determined to enter into 2012 as to what I thought my definition of a woman really was. Now this was no conventional relationship, not whatsoever, you see my boyfriend was just freshly released from Rikers Island, New York City's main jail complex. His name was Devine so you could only imagine how he smelled, he was tall and slim with a smile that'll have you put your guard down instantly.

The mood was set, my parents were away on vacation, and my "Love Jones" titled I-tunes playlist was playing in rotation. I have watched plenty of romance movies depicting what I thought the perfect first night should be like, and I was just sure I was ready. I slipped on the most sexually enticing outfit I had owned at the time, which was a neon pink full lace baby doll *dress* with the matching thong underwear. I purchased the negligee from an adult store in the city a month prior with one of my best friends Vicki. The lingerie set was extremely revealing which prompted me to throw on a *wrapped dress* over it. It was my favorite pink fuzzy *Forever21* robe that displayed white hearts all over it in order to surprise him of what's to come.

Once he entered my house I could already tell he knew what was on my mind for the night. As we made our way upstairs to my room my heart was racing, and my palms were sweaty, but as we both undressed staring into each other's eyes intently while Neyo's – Say It serenaded us in the background. We laid down to succumb to what was supposed to be a night of endless pleasure, but ended up being more like a solid five minutes of being poked and prodded at a doctor's office. OOUCHHH!



## CRUISING

One night during a family dinner my mother announced to us all that we would be going on a family vacation, as it was long overdue for us all. We were all so excited by the news that she didn't even get the chance to say exactly where we'd be traveling too. When we all settled down she explained that we would be catching a "Carnival" cruise ship from Manhattan, New York for 8-days and 7-nights, stopping at Turks & Caicos, Puerto Rico, and St. Thomas along the way. I of course saw this trip as an opportunity to shop for new summer clothes and went straight online to browse my favorite websites, such as "Pretty Little Thing", "ASOS", and "Forever21".

The day of our trip seemed to have arrived quickly, and before we knew it was August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and we were boarding the ship. The "Carnival Glory" cruise ship was massive in size with over 13 decks and holding just under 3,000 passengers. As we made our way to our staterooms I was in awe of how truly glorious this ship was. Two days traveling at sea enjoying the food, drinks, and music we had finally docked at our first stop Old San Juan, Puerto Rico. My parents decided to schedule an excursion through the cruise ship, which was a bus tour.

The tour was of the local landmarks and hotspots in Old San Juan, and towards the end of the tour we were taken to a popular beach called "Playa Peña Beach". So automatically I knew what type of *aesthetic* I wanted to go for. I quickly pulled out one of the many new *dresses* I purchased just for the trip. The "Forever21" dress featured a deep teal, orange, purple, and navy blue multicolored fabric. It was a layered chiffon strapless maxi *dress* with a detailed ruffle top and bottom.

## CRUISING

Adding to the tropical vibe, I created a fun hairstyle placing my extensions into a fishtail braid. All the locals complimented me on my colorful choice of *dress*, which made me feel so confident and chic. I captured a plethora of pictures and videos in front of the crystal clear blue waters at the beach that day, with my *dress* flowing from the summer breeze. After a full day of taking in all the sun, fun, and *culture* Puerto Rico has to offer, we made our way back onto the docked ship ready to see what next adventure was in store.



## WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS...

The saying goes what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas but the memories I have will last a lifetime. August 8th, 2013 the night before my first ever-adult vacation with my girlfriends, it was such a big deal for me to be out of state on my own as I have always traveled with my family or chaperone. I was packing last minute pieces within my overweight suitcase because I just could not decide what I would want to wear while I'm out there. The day of traveling was a complete disaster, first half of the girls luggage's were over the max weight limit and we needed to disperse our things around between each other suitcases, and then rushing to our gate we found out that we missed our flight and had to wait four hours for the next flight out there.

Arriving at Las Vegas airport it was like stepping into a casino people playing slot machines and drinking all throughout. We all checked into "Harrah's Resort and Casino" and upon arrival were offered shots from a group of guys at a bar within the resort. Out of our entire five day, 4-night trip one night in particular stood out to me the most. Our second night in Vegas my girls and me decided to go to a popular nightclub called "IOak"; we all knew we had to **dress** our butt off in order to get in the trendy spot.

My friend Vicki opted for a mini leather tube top **dress** with a black sandal heel with gold embellishments on the straps. While my friend Tiffany went for a more colorful look wearing a short deep teal colored chiffon romper with cream-colored platform pumps. On the other hand I decided to wear a sexy little black **dress** I found whilst shopping at Forever21, the black mini body-conscious **dress** featured a sweet-heart neckline with black mesh long sleeves pairing it with black sandal high heels that had matte black spikes on the back of the heel; creating **body modifications** by adding in long

## WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS...

wavy hair extensions that were dyed a deep brown color. I felt so sexy and confident in my outfit that I just knew I would turn a few heads in the club that night, especially once I put on a new *M.A.C* cosmetic lipstick I had called "*Flat out Fabulous*" that was a fierce shade of hot pink to make my lips pop.

Throughout the night the music was bumping and my girls and I were dancing the night away. Before we knew it we got asked by a group of doctor's that were out there for their friends bachelor weekend to come over to their V.I.P section to mix and mingle. Towards the end of the night the celebrity guest the club had booked was "Neyo" and he performed some of his hits "Sexy Love" and "Ms. Independent" and because we were in V.I.P, and so close to the stage Neyo came up to us and even held my hand while singing my sexy love. I felt like I was on top of the world, blushing so hard and dancing on the way back to our hotel room I just knew Vegas nights yet to come would be just as vibrant and bright.





## UNFORGETTABLE

Once upon a time there was a young girl who was looking for love in all the wrong places, and what she found was way more than she bargained for. It was October 20th, 2013; my friend Vicki and I were always hanging out together wherever one was you would most likely see the other. Now when I say we did everything together I mean that, if my friend Vicki or I were going out to let's say the movies or the mall we would always meet up and be each other's company, and the same would be said if one of us meets a guy. My friend Vicki met a guy from her neighborhood in the Fort Greene area named Deon whom she had decided to go on a date with and asked him if he had a friend to bring for me so we could all double date.

Vicki's date offered to bring along one of his closest friends for me to meet. His name was Josiah and let's just say we hit it off real well. Vicki and I decided to get *dressed* together over by her house, as we liked to help each other put together cute outfits especially for something so exciting like a double date. She went for a casual chic look picking out a 3/4-sleeve burgundy knit tunic top with black leggings and black leather thigh high riding boots. I told her to tie her look together with a Moto leather jacket as I was going to do the same; my outfit was similar but had different details.

I decided to wear an emerald green long sleeve knit sweater *dress* that came down to my knees, because I was big on color at this time. I paired my black leather-riding boots with my brand new leather jacket from *Forever21*'s plus size section. The jacket fit perfectly it featured silver metal spikes on the top of the shoulder pads and a zippered sleeve detail on the cuffs, I loved and practically lived in this jacket and I was so happy

## UNFORGETTABLE

with my purchase. Once we finished *dressing* we fixed our hair, hers being placed straight back with a middle part and mine neatly brushed into a high ponytail, we then glossed our lips and went outside to meet our guys.

The date went as follows we went out for a late dinner at a local 24 hour diner called Lindenwood Diner and we all shared a couple of appetizers like mozzarella sticks and buffalo wings and had a some drinks, we then proceeded to my friends house to all hangout and get to know one another better. It started off with some awkward silence then turned into great conversation that lasted into the early morning as we flirted the night away. Josiah and I continued seeing each other after this night and hung out casually for a couple of months. I was blinded by what I thought was a budding relationship, until he ghosted me one day and never returned any of my calls.

Two weeks later February 9th, 2014, a couple of days before Valentines Day I felt ill, my stomach cramped up and I was having irregular bleeding during what I thought was my menstrual cycle. I felt so bad and nauseous I decided to see my doctor who directed me to consult my OBGYN where I was told I was approximately 3 weeks along with an ectopic pregnancy, which is a pregnancy where the fertilized egg implants outside the uterus. This was one of the scariest days of my life knowing that I was not only pregnant but it was an abnormal one. I had no choice but to let my mother in being that Josiah ghosted on me, after trying to reach him several times and ultimately having to call from another number I reached him.

## UNFORGETTABLE

Once I spoke to him he sugarcoated me with reasons why he had disappeared and promised he would go with me to my follow up appointment to determine the next steps with the abnormal pregnancy. That being said I went in for my follow up appointment and no Josiah in sight. I had to go through the non-evasive procedure alone and the doctor had me take a type of medication that would flush out the embryo from the outside of my uterus. Not more than a week later a friend of my friend Veronica had found a wallet filled with cash, a driver's license, social security card, and more left on the city bus and surprisingly it belonged to Josiah.

My friend had it passed along to me, a prime example of how karma works wouldn't you say? Now I had the upper hand, I thought of so many ways to get back at him for the hurt he caused me, but instead I tried to get in contact with him to return his belongings, needless to say he never came to get his stuff because he was such a coward. All in all I took this as a lesson learned and all I could do is forgive but I know I will never forget.



## OKAY CUPID!

People like to say that on dating websites, you won't be able to find true love. The stigma around this form of dating is that everyone on there is just looking for a good time and no type of serious relationship can be formed. So when I tell you how I ended up with my boyfriend of now five years and counting, you may find it pretty ironic. We met on "Okay Cupid", a dating app that was launched in 2004, one of my best friends Veronica, was introduced to the dating app by a fellow classmate and she somehow persuaded me to join with her.

A variety of dates in and it was going pretty smooth, now don't get me wrong I've met some real characters on this here-dating app that I was convinced the stigma around online dating was in fact true. Although this last date I went on turned out to be everything I was looking for and more, his name was Shawn and we were the same age, he was 6 feet 4 inches with an adorably cute smile. Our first date was the beginning of January and heavy snow began to fall, so gearing up for this date would be no joke. I carefully *dressed* picking out the perfect outfit to not only impress him, but also to stay warm. The *fitted dress* of the garments I chose helped create a curvy figure for my body type. It consisted of a pair hip hugging leather leggings with a black and gold glittered trimmed leopard print chunky knit sweater made up from acrylic and lurex. To tie it all together I wore a pair of brand new suede black thigh high-heeled boots.

Despite the winter weather warning advisory we decided to meet up and grab dinner and catch a movie. As I was finishing up getting ready the doorbell rang, it was him nervously I hurried my sister to open the front door for me so I could make my grand entrance of course. My sister greeted him and rushed to tell me how scared she was when

## OKAY CUPID!

she first saw him because of the winter ski mask he wore to protect his skin from the harsh cold elements, but other than her first impression of him she really seemed to take a liking to him. As the evening progressed the vibe between us was undeniable, and I don't regret stepping into that cold evening with him to this very day.





## LET'S GET AWAY

It was my first real and genuine adult relationship and the start of summer 2015 and I was gearing up for my twenty-fifth birthday celebration. As a gift my boyfriend decided to surprise me with an all-inclusive trip to sunny Puerto Rico. I have never been so excited to get away with anyone before, in fact this would be my first trip ever with a guy I've dated. Everything was set for what was to be one of the most romantic vacations I've ever experienced in life.

As we boarded the plane my nerves began to set in and my stomach became increasingly weak, partially due to my fear of flying and worrying about being away and alone with this guy. By the time we landed I was more than ready to get the vacation started. The Gran Meliá Golf Resort of Puerto Rico was nothing short of magical, from the huge Roman inspired columns, coy fish ponds, and spectacular views of the ocean from our bedroom, it was all simply heavenly.

That evening for dinner I ***dressed*** in a black curve hugging spaghetti strap maxi ***dress*** that featured a trumpet skirt bottom with a deep V-neckline, paired with crystalized ***body supplements*** such as sandals and diamond costume jewelry to match. Detailing my outfit I made ***body modifications*** to my hair adding in red dyed hair extensions creating a pop of color in this classic look. But the best was yet to come I remember the night vividly, the sun setting behind the crystal clear water, and the smell of Caribbean delicacies lingering in the air. He yet again surprised me with a candlelit dinner on the beach, imagine me feeling like all the girls I've ever seen in those romantic movies.



## A FASHION WEEK FAIL

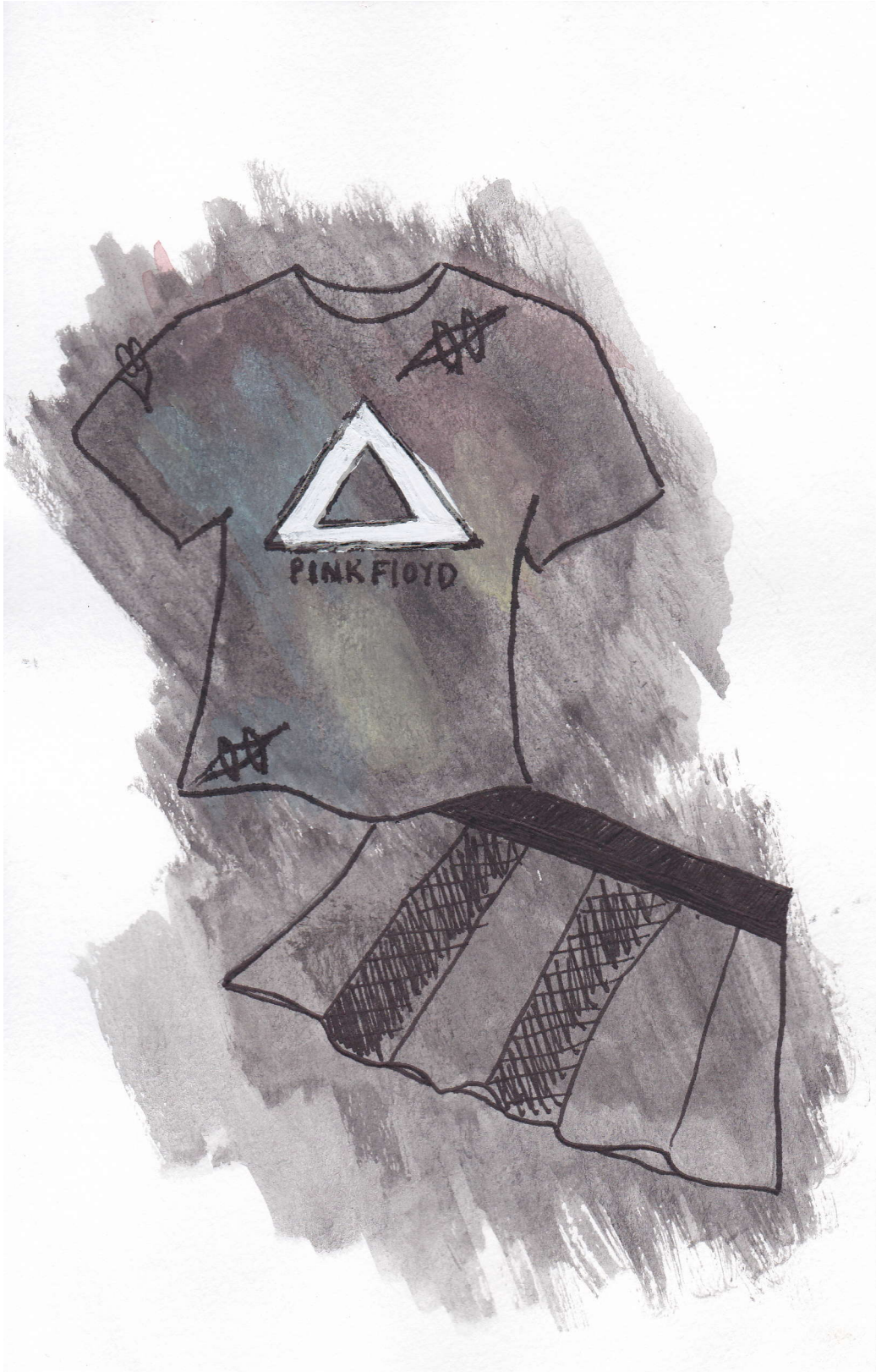
Many young aspiring fashionista's dream of the opportunity to attend a fashion week event, and I was definitely one of them. It was 2016 New York Fashion week and I've spent days prepping and planning for my big fashion week experience. I started by searching for a New York Fashion week show that was exciting and opened to the public. The next step in my plan was to put together the most fashion forward street fashion I could, and I mean I looked everywhere searching for the right fit.

The outfit was simple yet chic, I *dressed* in a leather pleated baby doll skirt, a graphic Pink Floyd "Prism" band tee in black from a local store in my mall called Spencer's. *Attached to the garment* I custom designed the cotton shirt creating bleach splatters, rips, and clipping on safety pins throughout. I finished off my outfit with my favorite light wash vintage denim jacket over my shoulders. I watched a ton of YouTube videos trying to perfect my makeup skills, and opted to wear my new bright orange M.A.C lipstick called "Lady Danger" for a bolder look.

My boyfriend decided to go with me to the show since I had no one to accompany me, as we hopped into a fifty-dollar Uber car to city and approached our destination we saw an enormous line before us. As I glanced the crowd I knew I was not in Brooklyn anymore. Ladies had on the most jaw dropping *dresses*; with their faces "beat" so much they'd probably be unrecognizable underneath all that makeup. Guys in only the most physique forming threads, with jewelry and watches so shiny I thought I'd be blinded! I quickly wondered glancing down at my own outfit which one of us received the wrong invite and it definitely wasn't them, but nevertheless I trudged forward with my head held high. My seemingly cool demeanor all but deflated as a worker of the fashion show

## A FASHION WEEK FAIL

informed the line that guest capacity had been met and no one else would be allowed to enter. I waited in line hopelessly thinking some chance. I might make it inside, sadly to say that didn't happen, but I don't regret putting myself out there because I got to network with some pretty awesome people.



## DINNER IN MIAMI

Who says romance is dead! It was August 7th, 2017 and I have been dating my boyfriend Shawn for three years now. I have never been so content being with someone before like I do with Shawn. I was thinking of what to get him as a gift for our anniversary, and thought what better idea than to buy him a pair of these expensive Jordan sneakers he has been eyeing for quite sometime. The sneakers were half forest green and half white with a logo of the jump-man in gold on the side, which let you know it was an authentic buy. I called him over super excited to surprise him for our anniversary thinking I had outdone him with my gift for him, well boy was I wrong.

Once he entered my house I presented him with the shoes and his eyes lit up once he saw the retro kicks I bought him, and he in returned gave me a envelope with my name on it. The card read “Happy Anniversary my love, time for a mini getaway”. I was as giddy as a kid on Christmas Day, once he shared the details of the trip with me; that we would be staying at the “W” Hotel in Miami, Florida for three days and two nights. A week later it was time for us to catch our Jet blue flight to Miami and I was packed and ready to go. Upon arrival we checked in and hit “*The Shops at Midtown Miami*” and shopped at a few of my favorite stores like *Forever21* and *Urban Outfitters*.

That evening in the hotel we **dressed** for dinner, he wore khaki trousers with a short sleeved white cotton/polyester blend button up **dress** shirt that featured tiny navy blue anchors throughout, and the brand new sneakers I got him. I wanted to go for a more grown and sexy look for the evening and opted to wear a matching charmeuse skirt and camisole set I ordered on *ASOS* website. The set was in a black satin finish, the skirt featured a midi length with a ruffle detail at the bottom and the peplum bottom on the

## DINNER IN MIAMI

camisole top helped to create a sleeker shape for my full figured body type. My *dress* would not be complete without adding *body supplements* in the form of a bubblegum pink lipstick with an envelope clutch to match. I chose to wear a pair of clear Perspex block heels on my feet that I order from a UK shoe retailer called “EGO”. I added extensions in my hair styling it with a middle part and big bouncy barrel curls.

Once ready for the evening we called for an Uber, which sent us a Lexus to take us to our destination. He had surprised me by getting a reservation to a popular restaurant that I always wanted to try called “*Barton G*”. When we were seated our waiter greeted us and informed us of the specialties and how theatrical the restaurant really was. I ordered lobster pop tarts that came in a green vintage toaster and truffle macaroni and cheese that came placed on a giant mouse trap with a block of fake cheese on it; to wash it all down I chose a drink called the “Sabrinatini” which is their signature martini mixed with orange vodka, watermelon liqueur, and adorned with a nitro-champagne swizzle stick that created smoky cloud upon arrival with a chocolate monkey hanging off the side of the glass. Shawn’s meal was a popcorn shrimp with french fries meal and it came in a smaller version of an old-fashioned popcorn machine with real popcorn filling the bottom of the machine and the shrimp and fries nestled on top.

At the end of such a beautiful evening the bill came in a tiny envelope labeled “*The Damage*” and was approximately \$338 dollars, which is the price you pay for the theatrical *aesthetics* they provide you with. This was such a memorable experience, which proved to me the effort he was willing to put in to keep our relationship strong.





## HALLOWEEN 2.0

The weekend before Halloween, Saturday October 25th, 2019 the night was supposed to be an uneventful one, but turned into one of the most eventful nights I had in quite sometime. My cousin Sahai, Nicki, and Savannah called, telling me to come out with them to a Halloween party. At first I was hesitant because all of my cousins already had their *costumes* planned out and I definitely did not. But after much begging they eventually forced me to come along. So I got to work, quickly rushing to my vanity gathering all the cosmetics I owned.

While watching “*YouTube*” videos for inspiration, I decided to create a spooky yet chic *body modification* to my face. I went with a glamorous skull look, carefully using black eyeliner to draw the detailed strokes and harsh contouring. I went for a dark smoky eye shadow topping it off with a gunmetal silver colored glitter pigment. I had somehow managed to complete the look powdering my entire face with white eye shadow to create a ghastly effect. I went to my closet and searched for an all black look.

I pulled out a black shaggy sweater from “*Forever21*”, leather pants I had ordered from an online retail store called “*SheIn*”, a black graphic t-shirt with orange writing that spelled “*Calabaras*” from one of my favorite online retailers “*Pretty Little Thing*”, and black and white vans. I proceeded on to tackling my hair, my long twenty-eight inch weave extensions were in a half up ponytail and half down in loose curls that I fluffed up to make bigger. As I searched for the perfect bag to match I chose a clear Perspex clutch that featured a brown snakeskin detail on the top and quickly jetted into the car, as I was already late.

## HALLOWEEN 2.0

My boyfriend dropped me off at this bar in Bedford-Stuyvesant; Brooklyn called “*The Corners*” (located on 395 Nostrand Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11216).

I could hear the loud blaring of the music before I even got inside I sent a quick text to my cousins letting them know I had arrived so that they could come and find me at the door. Upon entering the bar it was really dark and packed with people inside, neon flashing lights strobe behind the bar where the bartenders were mixing all of the alcoholic beverages. Everyone looked amazing in their *costumes*, especially my cousin’s, Sahai *dressed* as a sexy clown wearing a tutu skirt and clown makeup; while Nadine chose a cute professional boxer outfit, and Ciara got fierce going for a leopard look.

Once they saw me in my last minute skull makeup they could not stop complimenting me on how good I looked. I looked great and felt even greater as I spent the night sipping on mojitos; laughing and dancing with my cousins it was amazing. Especially thinking how I’d probably just end up being at home bored for the hundredth time. I’m glad I went out and enjoyed myself because it’s the little moments like these that are always the most memorable.



## About The Author



**Denique Spencer** grew up in Brooklyn, New York with her parents Winsome and Devon, and younger sisters Danielle and Deanne. She currently is a senior attending New York City College of Technology and is studying Business and Technology of Fashion. She intends to further her education and obtain a Master's degree in Business, all while kick starting her entrepreneurial career in event planning and starting up her very own luxury plus size online fashion retail. Denique gained her passion for fashion the summer of 2003 when she turned thirteen, and her mom allowed her full creative control of her dress. Purchasing a matching beige camisole and capris pants set at Old Navy that featured a forest green paisley print detail. Despite not being the average size her confidence and creativity always shines.

“You can have anything you want in life if you dress for it.”

- Edith Head



