

Just a T-Shirt

Written & Illustrated by

Gerard Allison

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## **Preface**

**Growing up I wore many different uniforms, some I liked, some I didn't like, some I still have till this day and others have come and left. Wearing uniforms made the dressing experience a bit different for me. I knew what I had to wear everyday, but what I didn't know was how I would add my own personal style and flair to it. Accessories, bracelets, sneakers and other small fashion items added to my uniforms made it feel a bit more personal for me. Throughout the years these different uniforms have credit for me becoming the person I am today and I would wear each and everyone all over again.**

## **Baby Feet**

The last days of the summer leading up to school were always the same for my sister and me as we got ready to go back to school. My most memorable year at the school was second grade, which meant my sister was in kindergarten since she is three years younger than me. The school we attended at the time was called PS 72, a few blocks away from our house in East New York, so we were able to walk there every morning. On the outside of the school was a schoolyard that we didn't play in that much, a garden, and a big sign that said "Welcome back to PS72 ", the sign was getting us ready to go back to school in a few weeks. Before we started school again we had to go school shopping, my parents made sure of this every year.

For our ages my sister and I were a bit smaller than all the other students in our grade, no, matter what grade we were in we were always the line leaders. Most of the time one would find us in the hallways together and ask if we were twins (we weren't) and it may have been due to the way our mom dressed us in similar styles. My parents loved to dress us in tracksuits, all different colors, blue, red, green, striped, from brands like Rocawear, Fubu, Coogi, Sean Jean, and a lot of the "hip-hop brands". These sweatsuits usually fit us baggy in the pants so we would have to tie the string extra tight or roll up the bottom of the pants so they won't drag on the floor,

The most memorable of these tracksuits was a royal blue tracksuit my mom and dad brought me. My dad was always wearing some type of sportswear so that is why he likes dressing me in tracksuits. My mom said it was the easiest thing for us to put on and it could match a lot of things like jeans or pants. This blue tracksuit was from Rocawear, it was a suede sweatsuit and pre-shaped to fit a third grader, the cuffs had blue, red, and white stripes on the pants and jacket, as well as the turtle neck collar, which was one of my favorite parts about the sweatsuit. The last part of this sweatsuit was the matching headband, it was the same style as the cuffs a red, blue, and white stripe that hugged my forehead every time I would put it on, no matter how many times I put this headband on it was always tight and hugging my head as if it couldn't stretch too much.

The last component of my outfit was my haircut. At the time my dad was a co-owner of a barbershop so getting haircuts was very normal to me and something I wanted to do every weekend even if it wasn't necessary. The barbershop was located on Jamaica Avenue in East New York and called "3G's" barbershop, there were about 4-5 barbers in the barbershop so it had a lot of personalities. I would modify my hair too much, at the time I would get my haircut in a fade style so there would be more hair on top compared to the sides, this did make me look a bit taller just because there was a "hump" on my head. I never chose to do this hairstyle so once I did get more self-conscious I opted for a regular dark Caesar haircut, this was the haircut most of my cousins got and the one I saw most popular in the barbershop so it stuck with me, and is still the haircut I get till this day.



## First days

Shopping for this first day of school outfits was always an experience, my mom and my sister would go shopping all over Brooklyn but one place we went to a lot was a local store called Asqui's. This store was in East Brooklyn on Fulton Street, it was a small shop from the outside but very spacious when you walk inside. On the outside was see-through glass with a door in the middle, this glass was only see-through on the bottom half, and the top was covered with a reflective material that mimicked a mirror. On the inside, the left and right walls were full of sneakers with clothing racks in the middle of the store. This store had the most popular name brands at the time like Nike, Polo, Adidas, Nautica, and others, my dad also use to work here so he knew when new clothes were coming in and never missed it,

This store was a family-owned store, the mom and dad had the last name of "Aashiqui" which was also the store name, surprisingly one of my classmates, Oswaldo, was the son of the store owners but I never saw him when going to shop at the store. Being that my dad worked here in the past anytime we walked in we were greeted warmly and shown all the new items, the store had a welcoming feel to it, and since it was small and family-owned most customers were catered to, making sure the clothes fit them exactly how they needed, measured with measuring tapes to match sizing charts or having their feet measured in the sneaker section; one couldn't walk out of this store without doing some sort of shopping because Asqui's had all you needed even shoelaces

Walking into this store was a sight to see, everywhere one would look there was a different sneaker, piece of clothing, belt, sunglasses, hat almost anything one can wear on their body. One of the most popular items people would shop for at Asqui's was jeans, they had almost every brand you can think of even the upcoming ones. In the third grade, my main concern was not a cool pair of jeans but this store had a pair that caught my eye, a black pair of

jeans with a “G” on them. From far away all I saw was a white and yellow “G” on a pair of black jeans but when I looked closer this was a pair of jeans from G-Unit I knew I had to have.

These jeans were not the most comfortable pair of jeans but I liked them so much because of the design printed on them. From folding the pants you can tell they were very stiff and not the softest denim, putting them on made my legs feel very boxy, these jeans were extremely straight fit, it was as if they were drowned in starch. Even though these jeans were uncomfortable I wore them all the time because they had the letter “G” on them which was the same letter my name started with. The G on the pants was a unique design, a bold G sliced into 4 pieces, three of them were white and the last was yellow, on the black denim this stood out very brightly making it visible to anyone in the room.





## Public to Private

After the third grade, my mom decided to switch our school from public school to a catholic private school named St.Michaels. This school was still in our neighborhood just farther away, my sister and I weren't able to walk there as easily so we had to take the school bus which would pick us up from home. The biggest change for us was the way we had to dress, no more "regular" clothes we now had to wear a uniform to school every day, my sister and I were not excited about this and had no idea what we were in for. We enjoyed going shopping for school clothes and picking out different outfits in the morning so wearing a uniform did not sound exciting at all

Instead of going to Asqui's for school shopping we now had to go to the department store "Cookies" which was known for selling school uniforms. Being in Cookies and trying on pants and shirts was an experience I would never forget because it was tedious, my mom didn't want to have to go shopping every other week so she made sure she would be enough uniform clothes to last through the season changes, this meant I had to try on long sleeve button ups and short sleeves. These button-ups were *pre-shaped* and since I was smaller than the average student these shirts would always have a lot of extra space and look pretty big on me when tucked into my pants. Aside from fitting me big I wasn't a fan of having to button the shirt up all the way, having a collar *wrapped* around my neck was so uncomfortable.

We traveled to Cookies on the train which was very different from just taking a walk to Asqui's so this was already a new experience. Arriving at the store was very different than our old shopping experience, this store was at least 3 times bigger and we were left to find our own clothes. Our uniform consisted of navy blue pants (or a skirt for girls), a white button-up shirt, a navy blue tie, a navy blue vest or cardigan, and black dress shoes. My sister and I went from wearing jeans and sweatsuits to school to dressing up, we weren't the happiest but it wasn't the end of the world.

The boy's uniform wasn't terrible, my favorite part was the pants. We had to wear navy blue pants at St Michael's, as long as they were navy blue we could wear them to school so I made sure this was a comfortable pair. The simplest pair I could find was a blue pair of Dickies pants, they were slim fitting, *adhered* to my legs a bit, and were not long at all. Since there were different options for pants I would have to try on at least 4 pairs in the fitting room. There was a boot cut, tapered, slim fit, and straight fit, I decided to go with slim fit since they were the most fitted and weren't too long for my shirt legs. Compared to Asqui's this was a boring process, there weren't too many people helping us out making sure we had perfect fits, no colorful sneakers on the wall, no "New Arrival" signs no new clothes just button-up shirts, pants ties, and sweaters in boring dull school colors like Navy Blue and Forest Green.



## Special Days

In this new elementary school, St. Michael's which was located in the cypress hills section of Brooklyn on Liberty Avenue, we had to wear our uniforms daily. Uniforms were mandatory because it was a catholic school and a part of the dress code. If a student did not have the complete uniform the school would oftentimes have extra uniforms available for us. The school was relatively small, with no more than 400 students ranging from kindergarten to 8th grade. Every so often we had "dress down days" which were days we got to wear regular clothing or just not our uniform.

Dress-down days were pretty simple, a student received a permission slip stating that a specific day was dress-down day and the rules that went along with it, these slips then had to be signed by your parents. Students weren't able to wear ripped jeans, excessive jewelry, anything that was too graphic or offensive, and anything revealing. Even with these restrictions we made things work, students would wear sweatsuits, jeans and t-shirts or sweaters, and other simple outfits that went along with the rules. Two friends, Jesus and Kenneth, and I would wear matching hoodies for a few dress-down days when in sixth grade.

We decided to wear these hoodies because coincidentally the 3 of us had the same hoodie. This hoodie was from Old Navy, it was a Kelly green fleece zip-up hoodie with black lines on it for graphics and pockets on each side. This hoodie fit me a bit big as if it was *draped* over my body but it wasn't long just a bit baggy, this hoodie also fit Jesus like this since he was very skinny and a bit tall at the time about five feet with inches but these hoodies still fit us very loosely. I would usually wear black or dark blue jeans with this sweater since it was so bright and bold there were not too many jeans I could wear with them, most of my jeans at the time were *fitted* jeans, some would say almost skinny jeans but I did not enjoy wearing jeans that did not almost adhere to my legs. Since these days were a bit more special I made sure my hair was brushed down by adding a shea butter and olive oil paste to it and brushing it down and

also moisturizing my skin, making it shiny since one would usually be wearing a t-shirt while in class on a dress down days.

This green hoodie was special to my two friends and me while in the sixth grade and even the seventh. We made sure whenever there was a dress-down day we wore this hoodie, not every dress-down day but at least 2-3 times a year. It was a sign of our friendship and also an early passion for being fashionable, even though we all 3 did not match from top to bottom we at least matched up top and that gave us all a good belonging feeling. When we didn't match people asked us when we were going to, we wore these hoodies together so much that our classmates expected Jesus, Kenneth, and I to match in some sort of way, and years after we did whether that was through sweaters or sneakers



## Standing out on the field

A few days after school at St. Michaels I would have to go to baseball practice later in the day to practice for the games on the weekend. Luckily the baseball field my team practiced in was in the same neighborhood as my school and house so I was able to go home, eat and change clothes before going to baseball practice. The baseball field we practiced in and played all our games in was called Highland Park, this park was also in the Cypress Hills area of Brooklyn and started on Jamaica Avenue but the park is pretty big with more than 1 section so it also is a great place to explore.

Practice days were a bit more fun for me than game days because it was more relaxed and later in the day which was better for me than the early morning weekend games. For practice days we were able to wear whatever we wanted, at least once a week I would wear my New York Mets baseball jersey. This was a black polyester jersey with blue stripes running down each side, a Mets logo back on the right sleeve, and the back a number 7 and the name "Reyes" for the player who wore this number at the time, Jose Reyes. Along with this, I would wear a *fitted* pair of sweatpants rather than shorts like some of my other teammates, the reason for this was because we did a lot of running and sliding and sliding on the baseball field with shorts was not fun for me and would often time mess up the skin on my legs.

These baseball jerseys never fit me how they were supposed to, they were usually always loose fitting and had sleeves that were too long. This jersey could've fit me way better but since it was just for baseball practice so I didn't mind it being a *loose fit* and seemed like it was *draped* over me. The sleeves on this jersey should've ended around my bicep on my arms but rather would end below my elbows, this jersey was a bit too long for my liking and the only way I make it "shorter" was by tucking it into my pants which was what happened to most baseball jerseys. Along with this, I would wear arm sleeves as protection for my skin if I had to dive or slide for the ball to avoid my skin getting cut or scratched, moisturizing my skin helped

with this a bit as well so before any game or practice I would make sure I put on the portion on any exposed part of my skin

Even though this jersey was a bit too big for me it was something I made sure I wore at least once a week. I made sure I wore it because it was the same jersey my favorite baseball player wore, Jose Reyes. I had posters of him in my room, read books about him, and even wrote a report about him for a paper in 7th grade. This wasn't just a jersey to me but more like a representation of how good of a baseball player I would like to be, Jose Reyes was relatable and played the same position I did. I make sure I always have this jersey in my closet even if I outgrew it, it is a special part of the many years I played baseball for.



**Favorite uniform**

After graduating from St. Michaels I went on to high school and attended Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School, also another catholic school. This school wasn't in my neighborhood so I did have to take the train specifically the c train to Lafayette Avenue as the school was located in Fort Green on Vanderbilt Avenue. I would usually take the train with my mom, Julie, in the mornings as she also works in the Fort Green area in The Brooklyn Hospital, the train ride was no longer than 30 minutes.

This school also had a uniform for students but with different colors and garment options. Before the start of the school year students would have to travel to a store named Ideal, which was a school uniform store. I did not mind wearing this uniform because they're were different options one could wear. All students could choose from a pullover sweater, sweater vest, cardigan, polo long sleeve or sleeve, or a button-up shirt. The button-up shirts had to be white but the polo tee could have been either white, baby blue, black, gray, or beige. For pants, we could choose from black, beige or grey.

I liked wearing this uniform because they're were so many different options. Getting ready would look the same most mornings, I would brush and floss my teeth, brush my hair down with some shes Butter then also moisturize my skin with the same Shea Butter. After this comes the hard part deciding what uniform to wear. I always found myself favoring the polo and cardigan because the polo shirt was the lightest option but the cardigan could still keep me warm, a simple black fleece cardigan with pockets, buttons to close it, and our school logo.

This was my favorite option because it made me feel cozy and comfortable, I didn'tt has to worry about my shirt being too baggy or always being tucked in because I could just cover it up with the cardigan, It was also easy for me to take on and off which was important to me because my free periods in high school turned into sessions of catch with teammates and these times were when my cardigan came off to go outside in the schoolyard. I liked wearing this cardigan so much I even brought two of them, some people probably thought I wore the same

sweater all week but I would simply switch them one from Monday to Wednesday than the other Thursday and Friday.





### **Another special day**

Every Wednesday felt a little bit special during my time at Bishop Loughlin Memorial highschool, this day was a mixture of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors merging in different “house” home rooms. These “houses” represented different saints as Bishop Loughlin was a catholic high school. This house system was Bishop Loughlin's way to get different grades of students to interact with each other and have freshmen interact with seniors per se. There were 4 houses, Solomon, Bonilla, Augustine, and Drexel, Solomon used burgundy for representation, Bonilla used orange, Augustine used navy blue, and Drexel used olive green. Houses were separated by floors as well, unfortunately, I would have to travel to the fourth floor with my homeroom teacher Ms. Ceracola who was the art teacher as well, she wasn't the most sociable teacher but her class was interesting, she thought us how to draw in 2D and 3D perspectives and how to turn a sketch into a painting.

My house was the Solomon house meaning I got to wear my burgundy Solomon house t-shirt along with any pair of pants and also sneakers, so one day a week I got to leave the school shoes at home which was good enough for me. Black or beige pre-shaped fitted slacks were my go-to on Wednesday so colors would clash too much. In the wintertime, I would wear a heavy cotton black thermal shirt since I would be cold in just a t-shirt, in the spring and fall I was fine was just the regular cotton jersey t-shirt. One interesting trend that the girls in my school would do with their t-shirts is turning them into crop tops or fringed tees, but eventually, the faculty would frown upon it. Getting dressed these days felt lighter than the rest of the week, I simply had to put on my socks which at the time would be like elite basketball socks that were usually bright colors that didn't match my shirt like orange or yellow; putting on my black pre-shaped slacks and a black leather Polo RalphLauren belt that *suspended* from my waist and then simply putting on a medium weight cotton t-shirt that was a graphic tee, this was way easier and less time consuming than having to iron and put on a button up shirt and a fleece sweater. On my feet high schools in the usual basketball sneakers, since Bishop Loughlin was

one of the top 3 schools in basketball within the Catholic High School Athletic Association. Most of Bishop Loughlin loved Wednesdays because it was our most casual dressing day, students got to show a bit of their personality whether it was through their sneakers, accessories, or customizing of their t-shirts.

Wednesdays at Bishop Loughlin MHS felt a bit more lively than other days, we didn't get to come in our "best dressed" but we did come in our best sneakers to go along with our house shirts. While getting ready in the morning for school did feel more relaxed, on Wednesdays I would put in a bit more effort in my morning routine before going to school. A shower would always start my mornings off, in my house we were always trying new soap products but one I loved using was a black African soap made by Shea Moisture, I liked it because it left my skin smooth and shiny as if I had already moisturized it with lotion but I would put on shea butter on my arms, legs and face to add moisture to it and shine since my arms would be exposed in just a t-shirt on Wednesdays. While in high school I did have braces on my top row of teeth, this caused me to take more time on brushing my teeth in the morning, besides brushing my teeth to clean them I would also have to clean my braces making sure every tooth was clean of any foods. After all of this, I would get ready to get dressed.

Besides Wednesdays being a more relaxing and sociable day In Bishop Loughlin it was also memorable due to how much school spirit surrounded "house days" and eventually pep rallies and other school celebrations Bishop Loughlin had for their students. From freshman year to senior year a student was attached to the same house, by the time students got to their junior or senior year they began to take a bit more pride in their houses. Being one of these students I believe I felt a bit more representative of my house due to the house system giving me the freedom to not have to wear my uniform for a day, it was refreshing not having to wear a full uniform all week long. These shirts were nice as well, it was  $\frac{3}{4}$  T-shirts with just the word "Loughlin" on them, and each T-shirt had some sort of representation of what the house stood for such as its values.



## Lions

After being a “Loughlinite” all day in Bishop Loughlin Memorial high school as a student, after the last bell for the day and I turned into a “Loughlin Lion” in my sophomore year of high school playing for the baseball team. Being on the baseball team in high school was one of my goals as soon as sophomore year started since a student wasn't allowed to play varsity sports as a freshman. Tryouts for the baseball team were in March at a baseball field under the Brooklyn Queens expressway in Downtown Brooklyn called Tillary park. I had been preparing myself all summer and fall, once Marc came a meeting was held by Coach Kelly Williams who was the baseball coach at Bishop Loughlin, he picked 6 new players for the team and I was luckily one of those six.

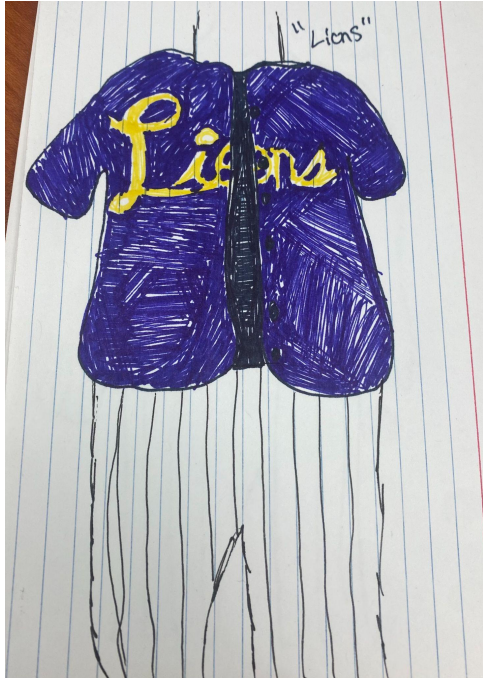
Luckily tryouts were on a Saturday morning, I used to wake up early on Saturdays for baseball games already so I took this as a great way to start tryout day. To start the morning before tryouts I started my pregame ritual of listening to music, nine times out of ten it was a song from Drake’s album “Nothing Was the Same” while putting on my baseball uniform, the

only uniform I didn't mind wearing for years and years. At this time I had an obsession with wearing this one specific pair of baseball pants which were white with black pinstripes and an open button. These pants were my go-to because they were a very heavy cotton polyester blend which made them look like straight leg open bottom jeans, they were also more comfortable and loose fitting than other baseball pants I owned at the time which were cuffed bottoms; these pants were pre-shaped but form-fitting or looser than other baseball pants which were usually stiff and cuffed at the ankles, I was not a fan of those. For my shirt, I would wear an under armor compression shirt but specifically one of their winter tech shirts which were supposed to keep you warmer in the fall and early spring playing sports since the inside was lined with light French terry cotton to add warmth

On days that I played baseball my morning routine would look the same except for how I handled my hair for the day. Since I anticipated getting my uniform dirty and would most likely end up diving in the sand I made sure I removed my jewelry and "protected" my hair. I removed my two earrings from my ears because those were the easiest things to lose while diving for a ball and over the years I have lost tons of earrings on the baseball field. I did keep on my bracelets and necklaces which were a black threaded lanyard bracelet and a St. Michael gold pendant, I viewed these as my good-luck charms. I would protect my hair because it was very easy to get sand from the baseball field on it and I hated that, I made sure I would lay my hair down by using a brush and shea butter brushing it forward then wrapping a silk durag around my head to make sure my hair stays flat but also protected from sand and it also kept my head a bit warm since it was still a bit cold in March in Brooklyn,

I remember this day every March because it was something I had hoped for while being in middle school. I played baseball since the age of 8 and knowing that it was something I enjoyed a lot I wanted to play it as much as I could. A goal of mine was always to be a varsity baseball player and I was able to make it come true and add on bonus was a great coach and team. Unfortunately, I would only get to experience this greatness for a year as Coach Kelly

passed away in 2014. This was a sad moment for our team, Coach Kelly was a lively, humble, funny, and relatable coach, he related to the culture of our team and made sure he thought us about life after high school, he was a coach but also a mentor to most of us and wasn't afraid to show us, tough love. In the ears, after passing the baseball jerseys all came with a circular embroidered patch that said "Kelly 12 Williams" in remembrance of a great coach.



### **Uniforms swap**

The last uniform I wore for Bishop Loughlin was so much different than the first one, even the team and coach were different. In my junior year of high school, my team received a new coach, his name was Coach Pedro, Coach Pedro was an older guy, I never knew his age but if I had to guess I would say he was in his sixties because he had two sons Pedro Jr and Louis who were in their 20s. Pedro had a distinct look to him that he never switched up, he would always wear his hair slicked back as if he combed it for 30 minutes every morning and it was also all white, he used to coach at a school named "Beacon" so he had a navy blue polyester coach jacket with an orange "B" he would wear on it from there; he always had in

baseball pants I found this very strange because he would never have to physically do anything that required him to wear those pants, maybe he just enjoyed the style.

The uniforms that Pedro brought in were a purple one and a grey one. The purple one looked exactly like our oast uniforms, a full purple button-up baseball jersey with the word Lions in the front, my number didn't change, it was still # 14. The second jersey was a grey button-up vest jersey, this was one of the first times I'd seen a sleeveless baseball jersey and I personally wasn't a fan of it. These grey baseball jerseys fit everybody else and me horribly, it was the most loosely fitting jersey I have ever worn. It was a heavy polyester jersey and not breathable at all, we also had to wear a purple t-shirt underneath the jersey since it was a sleeveless jersey, and this made things look worse. Every time I wore this jersey it would be as if it was draped on me, rather than it being a fitted jersey that would fit me way better. The buttons were larger than usual and stood out more than they should, it was honestly just a bad choice for a uniform.



**Raffles**

Throughout high school the times I wouldn't be in uniforms were mostly on the weekends, this is when I would hang out with friends, cousins, or my sister, Precious, who is 3 years younger than me but people normally think we're twins when we are not. I was always one who loved a nice pair of Nikes, Adidas, or Reebok's but my sister took it to another level, she LOVED sneakers and still does. If a sneaker came out and she had to stand in a line to get it she was, if she had to wake up at 7 am to get to a store at 8 am to get it she will. Precious would travel all across Brooklyn and Queens hunting down pairs of sneakers, her favorites were Jordans specifically the Jordan 11 which is still one of the most popular and hardest to find. Jordans were always released on Saturday mornings and this morning was one I will always remember because it was raining so hard as my sister and I waited outside Modell's sporting goods for a raffle ticket to purchase the "Gamma" Jordan 11s on Atlantic Avenue where the Barclays center is today.

Since it was raining outside I already wasn't in the best mood to go sneaker hunting but this was something my sister and I did often so I didn't mind being tired. Whenever it rained and I had to go outside I would always wear all black even until today. This day's black outfit was a pair of black cargo pants, during high school I wore a lot of cargo pants because I would always walk around with different types of markers or pens to draw with and keep them in my cargo pockets, on top of this I would wear a black pullover Nike hoodie and a black coach jacket. I liked wearing coach jackets or anything with a satin-like material because it could get wet but my clothes under the coat wouldn't be soaked. On my feet I would wear an older pair of Nike blazers which I considered old thus turning them into rainy day sneakers, these were also all black sneakers with a white Nike Swoosh, quite simple but still one of my favorite sneakers. This was enough of an outfit for me to go stand in a line for an hour or two, my goal was to be comfortable.

This day was memorable for 2 reasons, we searched forever for sneakers my sister ended up buying online so easily as well as it was the day I got my second ear pierced. At this time I was in my junior year of high school and I only had one earring which was my left ear pierced, for some reason that all my mom allowed, but on this day I set out to have both of my ears pierced and this day I did. I wasn't expecting much, I already had one earring so another seemed like the normal thing to do, I had been asking my mom to get my ear pierced from a very young age and she always opposed it because "it was for girls" but my dad wore earrings at the time so her explanation never made too much sense to me. I wanted earrings because of how much I liked and still do like jewelry. My sister and I found a piercing shop and had my second ear pierced in less than twenty minutes. I couldn't take out the earring for two days as it healed but once it did I inserted the matching earring into my right ear and finally had two earrings, I always felt so weird with just one.

Most of my rainy-day outfits have come and gone but the Nike blazers I wore this day are still in my closet even though they no longer fit me. I keep these shoes because they remind me of all the times I've run around with my sister looking for sneakers we could barely afford. Getting the sneaker was, of course, the goal but it was kind of fun going from store to store trying to find one pair of sneakers and then there are 15 people behind you looking for the same thing. My sister still has these Jordan 11s and even though they don't fit her she can tell you every detail of how she got it, the lines we stand in, the number of raffles she entered online, then add the end of the day all she had to do was buy the sneakers online.





## **Making a tee**

Once high school finished I decided to go to a CUNY college to play baseball and eventually play semi-professionally, this dream was a bit short-lived after I found out that John Jay Collee of Criminal Justice had a division three baseball team which was not the best option if you wanted to play baseball seriously, luckily I did learn a skill that is still useful to me today, screen printing. Before starting at John Jay which was about an hour away from my house on the train I spent the summer with my dad, Gairy, and his friend Micheal screenprinting t-shirts in a garage in the Cypress Hills part of Brooklyn. They taught me how to take a hand-drawn sketch and turn it into a silkscreen, going into it I never thought I would enjoy it as much as I do, Micheals's garage was like a mini production house, he had heat presses, and embroidery machines, screen printing equipment, everything needed to take a blank canvas or t-shirt from blank to an artistic masterpiece. After learning this skill I went back to two of my friends and teammates in school, Wilson and Mathew, and asked them to help me make a t-shirt, they didn't want to do the labor but they said they would give me the money to make this and that was all I needed.

Once we came up with a name for our t-shirts it was designing time, we came up with the word "luxury" and decided we would make a bunch of t-shirts saying "luxury" in different fonts and colorways and it was essentially my job to get it done since I proposed the idea. Since we played baseball we decided to make  $\frac{3}{4}$  sleeve t-shirts which would have white sleeves and a black torso, these were a bit thicker than your normal long sleeve shirt and had a smaller neck hole and what some would call "cropped sleeves", we then went onto the design stage. I was in charge of making graphics since I was the only one at the moment who could, Wilson, Mathew and I would sit at lunch and brainstorm some designs, we settled with an Asian-looking font which we printed in gold text, on the left sleeve we placed a hand with the thumb and index finger sticking out to depict an "L" for "Luxury". After this, we would attempt to make at least one

t-shirt per week. I wore my shirts on our dress-down days, I was prideful of being able to make my shirt and eventually I wore them so much another student would randomly call us luxury; the first time I hear this I was surprised, my classmates and other people within my school actually noticed what I was doing enough that they remembered to call me by the name of "luxury" rather than my actual name; this was astonishing to me; I took six dollars Calvin Klien T-Shirt and printed words on it and wore t enough people noticed and responded positively which still brings a smile to me face

In school is where I got to show how my morning and nightly "routines" benefited my hair, I tried to do these routines daily but every other day is also okay. Every night or every morning I would rush my hair with a boar bristle brush to create the wave pattern I have in my hair to this day. Creating the pattern in my hair was a bit easy after a few consistent months of brushing my hair to flatten it down using a hair pomade and then wrapping a silk scarf or durag around my head to make sure the hair stays flat while sleeping. Every part of the routine was to enhance my hair pattern, olive oil added sheen, the butter helped lay the hair down and moisturize it and the butter doesn't have a heavy scent which was good since it was going in my hair.



## Work and Clothes

I continued printing up t-shirts and going to John Jay College as I worked as an after-school teacher after being a student in the mornings, I was in charge of sixth graders at PS 7 an elementary school in Cypress Hills Brooklyn. While at P.S 7 I was in charge of activity planning and teaching for the sixth graders which would consist of things like vocabulary building, algebra games, and their favorite virtual game Kahoot! At the start of every school year, I would introduce myself to the class and share with them some of the work I have done as a designer and visual artist, since I was also able to teach art lessons this was an enjoyable job for me and working with youth always brightened up my less energetic days.

I always made sure I dressed in things that my students can relate to, whereas sneakers, socks, or a hat with a recognizable brand that most of you would know, I did this so they could feel like I was someone they can relate to or talk to and not just a teacher and this did work. Since we had to wear work staff shirts from PS 7 which were a regular cotton jersey tee with "PS 7" in the front and "STAFF" in the back which was a bit boring. Adding my personal touch I would try to my better-looking sneakers and or top options of fitted hats because these sixth graders were going shopping and knew their brands. Wherever I would wear my Yeezy foam runners the sixth graders I taught would be so surprised saying things like "my omg how many jobs do you have" But in 6th grade, a \$200 or more pair of sneakers may seem close to impossible to get, I simply wore my Yeezy foam runners because they were the easiest and fastest show to put on, they're secure like sneakers, soft due to the foam they are made of and have no laces to tie, a very convenient piece of footwear.

The first body modification that 6th graders in PS 7 noticed was my nose ring. They as if it hurts, they ask why I got it, they ask if "I don't think it is girly" and with all their questions I simply answered that I like it. These days I forget that I have a nose ring until I wash my face with a face wash and an exfoliator and I accidentally knock the ring out I believe nose rings are

one of the hardest to insert leaving me in the mirror for 15 minutes trying to properly adjust the piercing.

I still have every one of my work t-shirts because they all hold different memories for me. Most of the students I have been a teacher to our kids from the same neighborhood I live in are neighborhoods not too far away, I enjoyed being someone they can relate to, talk to, and at all times ask questions about. For some of these students, I may have been the only person they knew as a college student or as an entrepreneur so I encouraged my class to not hesitate to ask me anything about high school, college, or just general school activities. In the future I do hope to teach again, it was something I enjoyed, and connecting with youth is vital, especially at their early stages of personality growth/



**First day of class, again.**

After attending John Jay College of Criminal Justice which is very close to Central Park in New York I transferred to City Tech in Downtown Brooklyn, a few minutes away from the famous Brooklyn Bridge. John Hay was great but I only went there to play baseball and once I discovered how “bad” the team was I made the switch to study fashion and business at City Tech starting in January 2020. Transferring from fraud examination to fashion was a big switch but it was not something I wasn't ready for, with my prior experience in screen printing as well as getting to work for an industrial screen printing shop I decided studying fashion would be the perfect fit for me since it was an interest and hobby that would soon become a business.

It was very clear to me who was the fashion and business students compared to other students in City Tech, in my first semester there I noticed those in fashion came to class as if it was a mini fashion show and so did I. For the first few weeks, I would wear various pullover French terry sweaters from my fashion label, Lumiere NY, I wore it s much as one of my professors pointed it to output this was simply my every other day routine. Getting dressed these days were easy, I would come to class in some type of Lumiere hoodie but one that got noticed the most was when I wore red. I would repetitively wear a red French terry cotton hoodie with the word “Lumiere” printed on the front of it, a simple 4mm braided chain for an accessory, black denim jeans from Zara, and my Airmax zooms which were red and white.

Leaping into entrepreneurship has made me more conscious and consistent with my morning and night routine, there are days when I can be talking to one to three people and another when I can have to pitch my business plan in front of hundreds of people, for this reason, I am more conscious about my skin and how I take care of it. I try to thoroughly wash my face every night, using a face wash for removing dirt or debris, a moisturizer to add shine and hydration to my face which also smells like lavender, and a serum to remove any dark spots

I may have gotten recently. I do this because I have found myself being in more moments in front of cameras



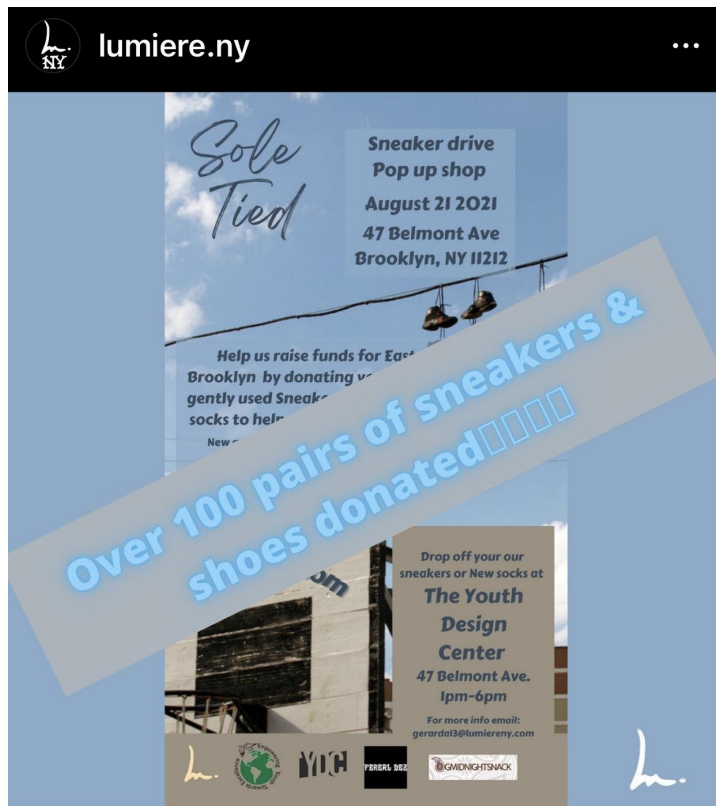
### **Clothing cycles**

As the years have passed by since I have been in college I have collected a lot of clothes over the past few years. In my younger days when people could still fit my close I would send all the “old” clothes I owned to younger family members in Ecuador which is where my moms side of the family is originally from. Every spring my household made sure to give all of our unwanted clothing to my grandfather who would then travel to Ecuador with the clothing or ship. Once the clothing arrived in Ecuador it would be given to whatever relatives wanted it, unfortunately in recent years this has not been able to happen since the relatives who would have received the clothing have outgrown them.

Parting with my clothes was always a happy but sad time for me, I knew I was losing clothes but I also took it as a way to make space for more, but my only problem was there was no one to take it, this is when I did some research and created a solution through my Fashion Label, Lumiere. The simple solution was a clothing drive, along with a few other businesses and nonprofits we held a sneaker and clothing drive in Brownsville Brooklyn. This day was special to me, it was a pop up shop day but also a sneaker drive. My main priority was receiving sneakers

so I was not hung up on my outfit. That day I wore a black pair of shorts with an apple graphic on the left leg and a logo on the right side, these were french terry cotton shorts which in the summer may be the most breathable pair of shorts they are, these shorts suspended from my waist easily with a drawstring tie. On top of this I wore a graphic tee I made for the day to represent sneaker collecting along with a black and white 5 panel hat .

Having a natural love for art I couldn't wait till i got to the age where I can get tattoos anytime I wanted, a good amount of my family are tattoo enthusiast so it came natural to my parents and other family members once I did start getting tattoos, but this next tattoo was different than the others, it was actually an art piece made by me which is the logo I use for the brand Lumiere. I was a bit hesitant to get this tattoo but I then realized my goal was to start and grow a fashion label and I have been able to do just that for now about 10 years,



### About the Author - Gerard Allison



Gerard is a fashion designer, commercial fashion photographer & filmmaker born and raised in East New York Brooklyn. Gerard creates breathtaking photos and films for fashion brands that help them grow and maintain their digital presence and print advertisements. His work introduces new narratives about Black and Latinx beauty, desire, and fashion, embracing nostalgic themes of the past and creating fictional moments of the imagined future. Gerard's work is characterized by a visual representation of Black and Latinx life that emphasizes empowerment, play, and

self-determination. He is often inspired by his upbringing in Brooklyn NY In 2020, he produced a fashion editorial for Pitkin Avenue BID in Brooklyn NY that served as an advertising magazine for over 10 businesses.