

Dutch de Carvalho: Reflections in an empty bathtub

Dutch de Carvalho, or @dutchdeccc on Tiktok, has over 1.5 million followers on the social media app. Since rising to internet fame in 2020, de Carvalho, 26, uses his platform to post about his everyday life as a preschool teacher, nanny and comedy/lifestyle content creator. As a native New Yorker and advocate for affordable housing, de Carvalho has even gotten himself into hot water for being vocal against gentrification and other issues that disparage NYC communities. With student journalist Nikole Rajgor, de Carvalho sits down to talk about how he approaches brand sponsorships without a manager, debunking harmful myths about New York City culture, and how he began reflecting in the bathtub. This interview has been edited for clarity.

Where does the name Dutch come from?

Dutch was my mom's friend's name. And she just really liked it. She thought it was different. She thought it sounded good with my last name. And she also says that it didn't rhyme with anything bad. So she tried to think of different things that kids could make fun of you for with your name. And she was like, oh, there's not a lot that they can say about Dutch.

Tell me a bit about growing up in New York, and your life before TikTok.

I grew up in Yorkville, which has totally been gentrified over the years, but I loved it. I grew up in a single parent household and my mom raised me. School was fine. I was not very good at traditional school. I did really well in English, but math and science were a struggle. All my Regents were a solid 65 or less when it came to those subjects. But I started taking dance classes my freshman year of high school, due to a free public arts program. So I did that all through high school. And then I ended up going to SUNY Brockport, where I got my BFA in Dance and a Bachelor of Science in Public Health Education, which was really cool.

It was really fun being away, but by the end of the four years, I was ready to be back in New York. So I moved back home. And I started dancing. Initially I booked freelance jobs, which is sort of how you get into the industry. And then I started booking company jobs, which are more steady pay. But about a month before the pandemic, the studio that my company was housed in burnt to the ground. I joke that my career went up in flames. Because it literally did go up in flames. When the pandemic hit, all performing things were put on hold, so I stayed in the city because I didn't have anywhere else to go. I taught, and still teach 3k and pre-K at a public school. I started dancing again, which was really nice, but I've been making my way back from a recent injury. And then I started Tik Tok in about August of 2020 on a whim, and it just sort of took off from there.

What inspired you to start a TikTok account?

Mainly because I was like, oh, this could be fun. So I posted something and I was like, 'it'd be nice if this will get 500 views' or something. And the first one that I posted, ended up getting 800,000 views and I was like, whoa. Let's see where this goes. And I just sort of kept going from there. One of the reasons why I have kept going is because I really like sharing funny stories and things like that. But I also like showing a different aspect of New York that I don't think is highlighted. I consider myself very lucky to have a platform, and to be able to talk about issues like mental health, depression and anxiety, which are things that very much affect me and people in my community. I love being able to talk about those things.

On your account, you frequently post about sitting in your tub and reflecting at the end of a particularly long day. How long have you been sitting in the tub and reflecting?

Probably my whole life, honestly. Before Tik Tok, I was living with my mom in a one-bedroom apartment. And she'd be working from home. The way our apartment layout is set up, the farthest place from where she was doing work was the bathroom. It truly started because I would go and sit in the empty bathtub and get on the phone with my friends, and then you end up sitting on the phone, scrolling or whatever for another 20-30 minutes. So I would find myself just sitting there in my bath. And then the first time I made a video there, I was like, I

should make this video because I'm really just here, thinking about my day. I might as well talk about it.

As a native New Yorker and affordable housing resident, how does the current housing crisis concern you?

I'm very lucky that I already live in affordable housing. That being said, the housing crisis is insane. The median rent in Manhattan is \$5,000 a month. That's just ridiculous. And recently, just last week, there was the rent guidelines board hearing, which is a board that votes on the rent stabilized increases that happen every year. And this year, they are proposing increases of two to five percent for one year leases, which is just astronomical. The majority of rent stabilized tenants are working class. They're Black or brown, they're immigrants. They're disabled. It's absolutely diabolical what they're presenting, I see it firsthand. Everybody else that I grew up with, for the most part still lives at home. I talked to my mom about it. When she was my age, she was able to live in a one bedroom apartment by herself, not working 50 million jobs and not making an insane amount of money.

What is something about New York you wish more people knew or understood, especially from your perspective as a native?

I wish people realized that New York was a community and not an amusement park. There are real people with their families here. I remember I saw this TikTok once of a girl being like, 'why are there children in New York?' Meanwhile, New York City public schools have over a million students and we're like, the largest public school system in the country. So it's insane to me that people think that there aren't families and generations here. And I wish they treated where they lived as more of a community and less of a pitstop to whatever it is they're going to next. Because a lot of people move here, and then they leave after a few years, which is okay. But while you're here, I think it's really important that you contribute to your community. And I feel like people don't do that. And that's part of the reason why I post on TikTok.

As an early childhood educator, content creator, part-time nanny and even a past dancer, how do you feel these identities intersect in your everyday life?

Oh, gosh, I think in the obvious ways, a lot of my content is influenced by my career. So I'll talk about teaching, I'll talk about being in the classroom, I'll talk about being a nanny, and working in childcare. I never talk about dance, because out of all my careers, it's always been the most important thing that I've done. And when you put yourself out on the internet, there's so many people watching you, so I was like, I'm going to keep this to myself, because I didn't want to be perceived. But in a funny way, dance has influenced my content the most in terms of the creativity aspect, and formulating an idea and figuring out where to go with it. I would also say that who I am, as a person, is intersected in all those jobs and identities. I love working with people. I could never work a job where I'm alone, because then I'd be with my thoughts all day. With content creating, even though I'm doing it alone in my room, I'm still connecting with lots of people. I think it's important to me that who I am online is representative of who I am as a person.

You recently did a brand partnership video with Rite Aid. As a content creator whose content is centered around your regular life and being an average New Yorker, how do you go about choosing brand deals that are exciting opportunities but also authentic to you?

Brand deals are definitely something that I've gotten more into the past year and it's a very different world than any other world I've been in. I don't have a manager, so I do it all on my own, like negotiating the contracts. I've said no to quite a few brands, because it's important to me that the brands I work with represent me and the type of content that I make. For example, I've had a body care brand that's geared toward men, reach out to me with a very lucrative offer. But as a queer person, who is not really into the whole gender binary thing, I don't really feel comfortable making a whole post being like, 'get this face wash for men.' That's not something that's authentic to me. So I always try to make sure it aligns with my beliefs as much as I can. Obviously, when you're working with large corporations, and you're somebody who believes in corporate greed and that all corporations should be taxed more, I have to balance the two. The

type of content that I make doesn't always get brand deals, it's often beauty influencers. Comedy influencers or lifestyle, like in my sense, don't always get the same type of brand deals. And it's even harder for queer creators of color and Black creators to get brand deals, there's such a hierarchy to the deals, it's insane. So, anytime I do get to do a deal, it's always very important for me to make sure that the brand aligns with my values.

Since starting your account, what are some of the highs and lows of having such a big platform?

Some of the highs are definitely being able to talk about mental health and creating spaces where people feel safe and seen. The messages that I get from people have made my day time and time again. When people say, 'I was having a really bad time and you made me laugh' or 'I was really struggling.' That means a lot to me. It's hard for me sometimes to receive praise. But if I really sit with it, and as my therapist says, allow myself to be vulnerable, it really does mean a lot and those are definitely some of the highs, for sure. I'm very humbled by all of that, it never gets to my head. I'm always constantly in awe of it.

Some of the lows are definitely the hate that you can get. Last June, I posted a video in response to this individual who was in the Bronx and making degrading comments about the neighborhood. And that video got to the complete wrong side of the internet. I had literally thousands of death threats, saying things like 'shouldn't you have died in the Holocaust.' To truly see the level of vitriol that exists in the world on such a massive scale was awful and gave me a lot of anxiety.

Something I struggle with is constantly being perceived. People will see 30 seconds of you and have 15 points about who you are, where you're from, and what you've experienced. And sometimes it's true, but sometimes it's not. If there's anything I've learned, it's that everybody on the internet always has something to say, and they'll say it. So I've had to really know who I am and be confident in who I am, what I know about myself to be true.