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Ever since I was a little girl, getting dressed up has been one of my favorite things. I have always lived by the philosophy that “it is better to be overdressed than underdressed,” and have flipped through magazines like *Vogue* and *Women’s Wear Daily*, my eyes wide looking at how our bodies are canvases for the art of fashion. So, when I have a chance to meet a fashion icon, I not only jump at it, I run as fast as I can in my stilettos without falling and making an ass out of myself. Let me be clear—the chance to meet a fashion icon does not present itself often (okay, fine, ever...), so when I had the chance to not only meet with, but also sit down with, Donna Karan, I had to refrain from responding with an e-mail that read, “OH MY GOD, YES PLEASE!!!!” and send back a cool and professional, “Yes, thank you for taking us into consideration for this opportunity. We would love to chat with Ms. Karan about her new book.” For a week, I planned on what I would wear. I tried on an ungodly number of outfits, and my closet soon looked like a department store threw up inside of it. I knew one thing was for sure — I had to wear my hot pink leather Donna Karan jacket I had purchased at Saks. Everything else would be built around that. Should I go for the cool, sleek, I’m-A-New-York-Editor-That-Smokes-Cigarettes-and-Drinks-Coffee-All-Day type of outfit, or the more West Coast, fun, bright, I-Like-Fashion-But-I-Also-Instagram-My-Quinoa-Salad type of outfit? I decided to go for the latter, though let it be known that I do not like quinoa, nor do I Instagram it.

In the week leading up to it, I read Donna Karan’s book, *My Journey*. Not knowing what the book would be like, I went in open to all sorts of possibilities. I quickly realized this book was a page-turner. Ms. Karan jumps right in with her upbringing, childhood, and life pre-designer. She is funny, intelligent, and instantly feels like your new best friend. This book offers a heartfelt look into a woman who was named the “Most important designer of all time” by *Vogue*, and

brings her to a human level that is—dare I say it—relatable. Ms. Karan takes you on her journey filled with whimsy, heartbreak, tragedy, triumph, strength, courage, insecurity, love, lust, and ultimately, a spiritual awakening, particularly through her foundation, Urban Zen. Reading this book prior to meeting Ms. Karan made me feel like I wasn't meeting her for the first time, but rather, that we were old friends just grabbing a cup of coffee. Obviously, she didn't know that, but in my mind, we were already best friends (maybe I should see a doctor about that).

Marie: First of all, thank you so much for taking the time to sit down with me and answer some questions. I read your book and it is completely amazing.

Donna Karan: Oh, you read the book?!

M: Yes!

DK: Oh, great! It's much better when you read the book, then you have good questions.

(Me: feeling like the prized student in the class)M: Well, I guess I'll get right into it then! What inspired you to write *My Journey*?

DK: I thought it was a time in my life to reflect back, and there were so many things happening in my life. I just felt like I wanted to get it down before I forgot.

M: You've always been a force to be reckoned with in the fashion industry; what would you say has been your main inspiration to keep going and make moves in the fashion world for over four decades?

DK: Being a woman and mother. Realizing, "What do I want to wear?" and my category, "What would they want to wear?"

M: I know that the Battle of Versailles in November 1973 was a major point for you. What else has been your most proud moment in the fashion industry?

DK: *(Laughs)* Oh my goodness, there have been so many! I think the first collection that I did for Donna Karan was pretty extraordinary. There's always those beginning moments when you start up something and have no idea what you're doing and, all of a sudden, it just appears. With DKNY, all I wanted was a pair of jeans, and look what happened! When I started Donna Karan, I really wanted a small, little company for my friends and me, and obviously I found out that I had a lot more friends than I thought.

M: As someone who has dealt with her own insecurities, I almost died reading about your

interaction with Anne Klein when she thought you were auditioning to be a model and told you to go home because your lower half was

“too large.” Did you ever bring that up

again with her, or was it the elephant in the room forevermore?

DK: Oh, yeah! You know when someone thinks you’re something, but you’re not that person?

Most people say to me, “Oh, you’re Donna Karan?” I go, “Yeah, what did you expect?” (*Laughs*)

It was that kind of thing. I think people are surprised when they meet me and I am who I am.

M: Tell me more about Holiday 1972. That had to be one of your most liberating collections, as Anne Klein took her leave of absence and you did the holiday collection by yourself.

DK: Oh my God. I loved that collection. I still love that collection. It was so funny, a few months ago, somebody found one of the pieces that I had done. It was a felt skirt, and I don’t have an, of my Anne Klein work, and it just appeared. It was from that collection; it was a red, white, and black felted appliquéd skirt. Each piece was unique; it wasn’t about a whole collection. It was about each classification being something special.

M: That had to be so cool for you to get that piece back.

DK: Oh my God, it was amazing! I have it in my bedroom!

M: In a world with so much creativity, who would you say is someone you look up to?

DK: Every designer who does it, because I know what it takes to be a designer, and God bless

them! I don’t think people realize how hard it is to be a fashion designer. **M: I went to FIDM, and I did not do design—I did merchandise marketing. I watched the**

design students and remember the color draining from their faces and the bags forming under their eyes as the trimesters went on. I felt so bad for them.

DK: No sleep! It’s a hard time! People think it’s all about glamour and all of that, and I’m like, “What’s so glamorous?” It’s not as glamorous as people think it is; it’s a lot of really hard work.

M: Which designer has blown your socks off?

DK: Well, there are so many that have affected my life. I loved Halston’s work when he did it.

Later on in the years, I loved Yogi and Issey Miyake. And Ralph [Lauren], seeing what Ralph has accomplished.

M: You failed your draping class at Parsons, which, as you say, is a great punch line given that drapes and ties are such key elements of your designs. Did that change anything for you in the way you thought of your talent?

DK: No, I never thought about it. I never put the two together because when I failed draping at Parsons, it was about pattern making as much as it was about draping. That's where the free spirit of me just taking fabric and working on a body makes it so much easier.

M: Though fashion has been an integral part of your life, your philanthropic work has been just as impressive. What has been your crowning achievement in your work?

DK: I think Seventh on Sale was quite remarkable when it all started out with the AIDS epidemic, and pulling all of those designers together for an equal cause. I think the philanthropic world is one of the most challenging worlds I've ever been in. It's hard to get people together to want to create a difference in the world, like with Urban Zen, we try to change healthcare, and try to change the education system. Every person is a patient, and every person is a loved one. We're all going to go through this, so something has to happen. That's how I created the Urban Zen Integrative Therapist Program, after personally having that experience with my husband and several friends who have been in the hospital.

M: Speaking of which, you were one of the first people to be involved with the AIDS movement. What made you want to jump in?

DK: I couldn't accept that all my friends were dying. I was looking around me in an industry where so many of my friends were being affected by it. We had to bring attention to it.

M: Tell us a little more about the Urban Zen Foundation.

DK: Urban Zen is a place where I can dress and address people. Not only can I dress them on the outside, but also I can address them on the inside. I can find out what their life is about with healthcare, education, and culture. It's what conscious consumerism is all about. The thing that I love about Urban Zen is creating clothes in season, which is very different than what a lot of collections do right now, as it is really talking to the consumer.

M: You describe yourself as having these impulses take control.

“childlike impulses.” Give us a time when you letDK: *(Laughs)* Oh my goodness...I would say when I did a men’s collection for the first time. I

never thought twice that this was a company that I had to worry about and everything else, I just kind of did it! Then I told my partner that we were now in the menswear business. Another time was when, all of a sudden, my husband created a fragrance business. You know, it came from the gut; it didn’t come from analyzing and figuring it all out. It came from what was naturally my husband just creating a fragrance in a bottle for a fragrance company. Then, when I did the ten-day seminar on healthcare, I don’t think I’ve gotten over it yet. I was like, “Oh, this is a piece of cake! Right? Yeah, sure...”

M: So what has been the most important factor to finding your “calm in the chaos?”

DK: Yoga and meditation!

M: What triggered your quest for self-improvement?

DK: When the time comes, the time comes, and you can’t even explain it. Why, all of a sudden, does that bother us? Why all of a sudden does that dream come out? When all of a sudden, Urban Zen came into me, I wasn’t thinking about it. It just kind of was, you know, channeled to me.

M: You’ve gone above and beyond in your efforts in Haiti. How has that experience impacted your life?

DK: Enormously. I didn’t even know where Haiti was. When I saw it, I was just blown away by the potential that was there, by the creativity, by the people, and there are so many people that I want to take there. Now that we’ve built them the DOT (Design and Organization Training) as a Parsons School of Design, I see how much can be done there. Like, this necklace is from Haiti! *(She shows me the most amazing necklace ever.)*

M: I was eyeing that; it’s amazing!

DK: These cuffs are made in Haiti! This is made in Haiti! It’s taking Haiti to another dimension. When you have creativity and potential, it’s never ending.

M: What piece of advice would you give others to live their best lives?

DK: To find in their soul what the most important thing is to them. Not looking around at what

other people are doing, but finding what touches their heart and soul. And really, that can be anything! Generally, the best thing is giving. You receive so much by giving.

M: Lastly, what's the single most important life lesson you have learned for yourself?

DK: I don't think I practice what I preach. I think you keep on saying it, but now you have to do it. Taking more time for yourself. I don't think people realize that it's not a joke; you really do exhaust yourself. It's so much easier to do than to be. Being is probably the hardest thing that I could ever do. You can say, "How do you meditate?" or "How do you do yoga?" but trying and taking that into your everyday life as breath work as every minute of the day and not just sitting on a mat. It's like, how do you take that into your life? You can purchase Donna Karan's book *My Journey* directly from www.amazon.com