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By Katti Gray

An Ex-Model Gives Inner Beauty Tips

Of her own free will, a young Audrey Brashich, competing in a magazine photo shoot, consented to have herself wrapped in a green windbreaker, yellow knee-length pants, striped socks, polka-dotted gloves and quilted sneakers and have her winning photo plastered across the pages of a highly circulated teen magazine.

She looked ridiculous but this was the era of the supermodel and, in the early-1990s, the start of Brashich's own small fame. Modeling for a few years during high school and college earned her money and favor with boys. Her newfound admirers included a young man to whom she'd been introduced and, afterward, by whom she was ignored - until he discovered she was anointed as having a face and body fit for magazines. This aspect of her power over him startled her.

To those inclined toward a certain aesthetic, Brashich cuts an enviable image. She is blond. She stands 5 foot, 9 3/4 inches tall. Her ice skating coach in high school complained that she was too skinny and had her scarfing down Big Macs. And a fashion photographer was telling her to commit to more sit-ups, said Brashich, 35, and author of "All Made Up," which is a guidepost for girls on rejecting narrowly drawn conventions of beauty - and which also tells the story of how Brashich jumped off the fast-running fashion train.

Fashion is the axis on a wheel with many spokes. What, for example, supermodels Naomi, Tyra, Giselle and company wear, eat, whittle off their waistlines and rear-ends, inject into their lips and breasts has a ripple effect. What they do becomes the standard for, say, movie stars. (With much ado made over her ample, enviable derriere, an acquiescent J.Lo chose to reduce that asset to better resemble other Hollywood stars whose looks are their currency.)

Arriving at these conclusions was a journey in itself for Brashich. She traces her transformation, in part, to weekends and summers spent at her grandparents' North Fork home from the time she was a teen until she was in her 20s. The television was rarely on. No frivolous, fashion-focused magazines arrived by mail. Forays from their old Victorian near Cutchogue to the otherworldly South Fork, over time, magnified what was askew.

"It's an amazing amount of pressure being on the East End. You feel like you're constantly on a runway," the Manhattan-born Brashich said. Her "Turn Beauty Inside Out," a leadership retreat for girls, will be held June 21 through 24 at St. John's University in Queens.

Brashich left modeling more than a decade ago to write and edit for teen magazines. She fielded an unending torrent of letters from girls from city, countryside, housing projects and gold coasts on how they, too, might stand in the spotlight, their outer appearance as a calling card. No matter their region or circumstances, the inquiries, distilled, were all the same.

"I have already spent thousands of dollars on the John Casablancas School of Modeling," wrote Cassie, 19.

"I have already taken glamour shots. If you can help me, let me know," wrote another girl, who was 15.

A black girl railed away at her physical appearance. "She's got a big bum and big breasts. She asked me, 'Aren't I beautiful, too?' And that just made me cry," Brashich told me. Holder of a master's degree in American studies (with a focus on the history of popular culture and gender) from Brown University, she has made the media and body

images centerpieces of her brand of crusading journalism. She no longer works for teen magazines, preferring to write freelance for a variety of publications.

In relation to her own self-image, Brashich says the distance between that modeling girl and her adult self is long. Yet she still has further to travel on that front. She is almost free. Almost, she said.

She is concerned that in some ways things are getting worse, what with push-up bras and revealed décolletage the rule of thumb for newscasters on Fox and UPN. Those strictures seem both self-imposed and foisted upon women by outside forces.

"The onus isn't just on us to figure this out by ourselves," Brashich said. "It's a question of shifting the spotlight. It's a question of sharing the fame and high salaries with women of other accomplishments, CEOs and successful politicians."

Cycling and recycling of the objectified female form is sadly constant, she said. "It's so hard to escape from that, especially when that is all that so many girls and young women see."

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