

I am writing my own story...

"My purpose is to inspire and motivate. My passion is fashion and creativity. My determination is without limit."

-Maritta Viola

What does 'being different' really mean? Being different does not mean that you are better or worse than anybody else. Being different simply means that you ought to find the path that is custom-made for your needs, wishes, and the fulfillment of your life goals. A world, in which everyone is just the same, would be an uninteresting and monotonous world. However, being different has its challenges, as we may believe that we "just don't fit in".

Fashionista. Business Woman. Over-achiever. You may have different names in mind for me but little do you know that I also started at the bottom. Growing up in a small town in Germany I found myself lost in an environment where I did not feel that I fit in quite like others did. Despite feeling out of place, I completed my tasks as I was asked to do, but felt empty and alone at the same time. In school, I managed to achieve highest grades and be in the top of my class. In sports I ran track-and-field and competed Germany-wide. I won German art contests in my art classes and even played Keyboard to a broad audience.

However, with all my efforts to satisfy others and please mainstream norms, I seemed to lose myself more. Seeing the saddened eyes of others upon my increasing feeling of nostalgia not knowing what I was missing and longing for, made me anxious and ready to break out. But at the same time, I found myself caught behind the bars of society and social norms. Trying to overcome the struggles of growing up, the struggles of controlling and somewhat hiding my creative self and fitting into a 'normal' world. I was looking for ways to form my own path. My desire for independence grew stronger as I felt misunderstood in this environment. By greater guidance, a door opened and turned my vision towards an opportunity I had not previously imagined. This opportunity gave me hope, focus, and the chance to start 'MY' life.

At age 16, I left my home country of Germany on my own and traveled all the way across the ocean to the United States of America, not really knowing what to expect and leaving my siblings, friends, and family behind. As I arrived in Mississippi, one of the Southern states of the USA, I was welcomed as an exchange student for a one-year high school program, which turned my life around. Not only was I blessed with a wonderful and warm-hearted host family whom I am still in contact with today, but I also grew as a person. I developed my skills, priorities, and explored all talents I had to offer. The well-known hospitality of the South allowed me to feel free, welcome, and home. This greater peace of mind created an unbelievable twist in my heart, which allowed me to find myself and embrace my own desires, dreams, and goals. I developed an unbreakable sense of determination and ambition simply by changing the way I looked at life and its purpose for me.

After completion of the high school year in the USA, I returned to Germany for two more years to finish my high school education there, keeping my personal goal in mind to go back to the USA sooner or later. I took measures into my own hands and began working while in school. At age 17, I accepted a job as sales associate at a fashion boutique in Calw, Germany. My deepest inner creative nature always placed me close to the fashion industry. Learning its ins and outs by developing an overall understanding of fashion boutiques and its operations, as well as visual merchandising and color coordination, I soon knew to follow my passion for the fashion industry with a bachelor's degree in such field. The idea crossed my mind to leave Germany again in order to strive for an international degree in the USA. Knowing the expenses awaiting for me when going along with this idea, I started saving every cent I earned at my job to make it happen. After many sleepless nights and lots of preparation for my application to Mississippi State University as well as simultaneously finishing and graduating from my high school in Germany, I was still determined to continue walking 'MY' path in the United States. This idea motivated me to strive for the best in all my tasks and activities because I knew there was an ultimate goal and purpose, and no turning back.

At Mississippi State University, I studied Apparel, Textiles, and Merchandising with a double minor in Business Administrations and Marketing. Aside from classes, I was very engaged in honor societies and other organizations such as MSU Fashion Board. As part of Fashion Board, I organized, planned, and participated in fashion shows. Hereby, I learned how to lead the planning of show productions and the coordination of models backstage as well as on-stage. The years at university allowed me to fully embrace my creative drives and combine them wisely with my growing business sense. I soon decided to become an independent fashion stylist during my second year of university. My ambition to always strive to do the absolute best derives from the idea of a successful outcome that satisfies the clients, the staff, as well as myself. My work included but was not limited to creative projects such as directing photo shoots, editing magazine layouts, and producing fashion shows. Shortly after spreading the word about my entrepreneurship as fashion stylist and creative director, I was asked to assist the fashion director of the Atlanta Apparel Mart and the Jasmine Enterprise showroom in Atlanta with their seasonal fashion show production and model styling. This chance allowed me to conduct actual hands-on fieldwork in the fashion industry aside from the academic studies.

With this fashion and business background in mind, my dream grew into the idea of driving national and international awareness of my work. Being independent and striving for something that seemed to be beyond my understanding at that time was only possible with consistent financial stability. Thus, I accepted a job as financial manager at a private airplane company called Accessible Aviation in Columbus, MS, as well as managing the finances of a local boutique, Fabriholics, during my years at university. My knowledge in finance and business turned out to be of great asset to these companies and also helped me to develop an even broader business mindset.

Thanks to my high level of experience in diverse fields throughout fashion and business, I was offered an executive position by Target right out of university. I accepted the executive team leader position with the role of managing eight different fashion departments in Metairie, Louisiana. Hereby, I was presented with many new challenges and grew as a leader, knowing how to lead a team, how to lead statistical data analysis, and also how to conduct successful store operations to drive sales, increase profits, and control productivity. This opportunity was a great learning experience to truly grow as a person as well as a businesswoman in our business world today. However, I was still missing the creative outlet in my work field. Thus, I decided to audition for the John-Robert-Powers Acting Academy in New Orleans and develop my acting skills after work hours. This creative outlet allowed me to audition for different film events, which I acknowledged more as a hobby. Soon, I was called to act in a few Hollywood movies such as the extra in "Get Hard" (2015) and one of the featured actresses in "The Whole Truth" (2016). My wish to create an opportunity wherein I can combine the creative drive with a business environment grew stronger over time.

In October 2014, I decided to accept a job opportunity in New York City and made the big move to the fashion capital of the world. Working for a luxury designer as well as growing my freelance business in show production in NYC has opened doors in all directions. In addition to working full time and overtime, I decided to start my Masters degree as an e-Learning student at the Savannah College of Art and Design. The Master of Arts in Luxury and Fashion Management will indeed help me fill in any missing pieces in my fashion business puzzle. My determination to grow and my willingness to deliver high-level work with great ambition spread the word about me as a trustworthy, hard-working, and creative person. My involvement in the community has allowed me to share my story and inspire other artists and entrepreneurs to keep striving for their own goals and to never give up. I myself have gone through many ups and downs on this interesting path: financial struggles, heartbreaks, doubts, health issues, accidents, and more. But the key to success is to never stop believing in yourself, your dreams, and to realize that there is a greater purpose for each and every one of us. We may or may not have found it yet, but from experience I can tell you that once you find this greater purpose for life, the feeling of fulfillment is indescribably peaceful.

At this point in life, I have developed my freelance occupation as show producer amongst many events such as Brooklyn Fashion Week, New York Fashion Week (NYFW): Style Fashion Week, Couture Fashion Week, Los Angeles Fashion Week, and of course NYFW: The Shows by IMG. I am very driven to continue meeting designers to produce for, establishing a network to collaborate with non-stop, and developing brands on international level. I work for different fashion labels and enjoy each and every task I do, accepting any challenge that may present itself.

Many years ago, I was convinced that I first needed to achieve 'something' in life before reaching out to other kids, students, young adults and help motivate them

for greater success and to find their purpose in life. It was always put on my heart to help others without asking for anything in return, just as I had valued people in my life showing me the light in the darkness. I now understand that there is a time for everything in life; patience is one of your personal best friends. However, along the way, I had always tried to be there for others, care for others, help in need, and develop an inner strength to truly inspire people around me. Over time, I learned 'MY' true purpose in life: **To give back to others!** My passion in fashion and creativity will never change because this is who I am. My purpose is to utilize all my experience, strength, knowledge, and talents to inspire and motivate people around me, people who need it, people who want to be helped. As I have done so within my immediate environment, I am now increasingly reaching out by holding nationwide seminars at schools as motivational speaker for personal and career development. I enjoy giving back to society and I have reached a level; whereby, my path is more than just 'about me'. My determination is without limit...