

Transcript for The Who's Dat Phat Girl Podcast - With Brooke Hoover **SEASON 2 EPISODE #14- The Bearded Lady**

Hey y'all, I'm Brooke Hoover. A Louisiana native, actor, writer and comedian. I've lost 100 pounds through diet and exercise or shall I say "lifestyle changes". My twenty year and counting health journey has taught me that just like taking a diet pill for weight loss, body positivity doesn't magically happen overnight. I'm working on re-gaining my self esteem and re-kindling my love affair with Cajun and Southern comfort food in a healthier way all the while juggling eating as clean as I can, re-establishing myself in the entertainment industry which, as we know, is historically fat phobic all the while showing my inner phat girl some love - that's phat with a PH - pretty hot and tempting. Let me tell y'all a tale or two...

Step right up, folks. Step right up. Come witness the biggest freaks of the freaks you've ever seen. They say two heads are better than one, well right here we have the two-headed man! He sure is freaky! And if you're looking for a lobster roll, don't go down the boardwalk. We got something better right here - lobster boy! He's got claws for hands. But those two freaks don't compare to the freakiest freak you've ever seen. Behold, ladies and germs, the bearded lady!! A woman's not supposed to have a beard! How can a woman grow hair on her face?!?! She tried shaving it, she tried getting the lobster boy to claw it off, she's tried everything but it just keeps growing back! Isn't she a freak, folks?!?!

So, y'all after seeing this documentary called Luna Park about the whack job of an amusement park at Coney Island back in the day, I knew that in a past life I was Carnie folk. I thought I was probably a mermaid being that I love mermaids or maybe lobster girl, the closest equivalent to a mermaid because you can't always get what you want. But, while watching this movie in American History class sophomore year at Episcopal High School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana I knew that I would be relegated to the bearded lady. See, my hormones and my PCOS (before we knew it was PCOS - Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, where your female body produces too much testosterone - that's it in a nutshell, I have more episodes dedicated to PCOS) - they were out of control. And, while I didn't have a beard, I had side burns. Almost like mutton chops, really. And, a few hairs on my neck and chin that also made me feel like I did belong in a freak show. But, I didn't have a way to market my talent to be a female who could grow unwanted facial hair.

This plagued me and my mom tried to help me figure out ways to remove it. I've also discussed hair removal in past episodes. Back in the day we tried waxing it unprofessionally - didn't work out so well, we tried Nair - let's put it this way, it may help you wear short shorts but that shit should never be used on your face and we tried waxing it professionally which worked...temporarily. Laser hair removal was new and hence expensive but my mom used some of her savings to help me get it. Laser hair removal is best on light Caucasian skin with no moles and on people who have dark hair. It's gotten better since then. But, in the late 90's, it was screwing over a great deal of the population. My skin is Caucasian but I have moles and

freckles and my hair was more dirty blonde. Had my facial hair just been like platinum blonde “peach fuzz” I would have never minded. But, along with being at least two times the size of most of the girls (and boys) in my school, having the ability to grow this facial hair was a sore spot for me.

The laser hair removal worked somewhat. Figuring out that I had PCOS and being able to manage my symptoms helped some more somewhat. Being able to get to the right flow for myself (and yes I mean weight wise also but that wasn't the sole purpose) with a very clean eating system and exercise was what really helped. But, despite my ability to swim in the ocean even with riptides, I still felt more like the Bearded Lady than the mermaid.

And, they say life imitates art or maybe art imitates life. But, one day, I got an email from my agent while I was on another set to audition for the one and only Ryan Murthy's “American Horror Story” to portray...get this y'all...The Bearded Lady. They wanted someone who could do like a mid Atlantic accent (so while on the one set, I started doing my best Jacqueline Kennedy voice in my head and on breaks) and it was due the next morning at 9am. So, I rushed home (and got a speeding ticket in Piermont, New York - not kidding - it's one of the most beautiful quaint towns, too y'all) and my momma had the self-tape stuff ready so when I got home at 11:30pm, we taped the audition. God bless Momma for doing that and every single one of my auditions. Despite me giving it my all and most importantly, swallowing my pride of never wanting to be a Bearded Lady, when Ryan Murphy wants you to be a Bearded Lady, you jump on that freak show opportunity, I didn't book the part. I found out later it was for flashback scenes for a younger Kathy Bates, who, as we know was The Bearded Lady in that season.

The second time I was asked to audition for A Bearded Lady Role (That's right folks, this freak has been invited to audition for not one but two bearded lady roles cause she's just that much of a freak) I was kind of over it. It was for a SAG short indie film and it sounded wonderful. But, it kind of sucked out my joie de vivre and I wasn't really feeling the role. But, I'm always one for an acting opportunity and it paid and it was union. And, my manager said, “Brooke you're doing this.” So, I said to myself, “Brooke you're doing this.”

I auditioned for the role and I booked it. The film is called “Crocodile Boy” and it's about a Crocodile Boy who is retired and entrapped with two other retired Circus freaks who can't really reenter the real world. There's the Strong Man and then of course the Bearded Lady. I entered this project begrudgingly because I felt defeated. Now mind y'all, I didn't have a beard. Like I said, I never have had a real beard just bad sideburns. And, at this point, my sideburns have been fried off and never (really) came back thanks to me being loyal to laser hair removal. But, that fear and negativity and SELF CONSCIOUSNESS were (and are) still inside of me. I get to rehearsal and the director Ruben Gloria is a wonderful, kind soul. As well as his partner who is portraying the lead, the Crocodile Boy himself, Jett. And, cast as my Strong Man is the one and only Olan Montgomery, a friend of mine from sets of yore.

Olan asks me if I want to rehearse on the side. I tell him I'm super busy.

We arrive to shoot the film and it's actually pretty cool. It's an Air B n B in Sheepshead Bay on a legit Houseboat! Olan's dog Mr. Al has also been cast as our circus freak show dog. The makeup artist, who has an extensive portfolio of FX makeup starts applying the "beard" to my face and it feels surreal. All the hours, all the creams, all the wax, all the laser, all the smells of hair burning and frying, all the MONEY I put into getting this shit off my face, I'm putting back onto my face...for the ART of it. I'm allowing this to sink into my pores literally and figuratively and I keep telling myself, "Brooke get over it. You're getting to act with wonderful people on a wonderful project on a HOUSEBOAT. Brooke you're getting to act. Get over yourself." But, my fellow actors may feel me, that's often not easy and the makeup chair can oftentimes make or break you (at least that's what happens to me.) And, we shoot the film and we wrap, and that's that. And, I'm mad at myself afterwards as the makeup artist helps me remove the hair from my face that's actually going to be able to be gone for good (unlike all the other facial hair in my life.) I'm mad at myself for not enjoying the moment more.

Remember how I told y'all Olan had wanted to put in some additional rehearsal time? Well, in April 2020, I realized I should have said yes to that. Olan passed away due to COVID-19 complications. He was healthy, mindful of his body and had so much talent. And, I could have had some additional fun times with him. But, I was so involved in my own prison that I didn't allow myself that.

Now, I've moved on from laser hair removal because it doesn't work on all the types of hairs I have. Coarse blonde hairs, wiry dirty blonde hairs, mole hairs, oh my! I have begun doing electrolysis. And, while it's slowly working...it does cause bruising which oftentimes is probably more noticeable than the hair I was trying to have removed in the first place. But, my skin feels like that of a porpoise and maybe, just maybe, somehow I'll get closer to being mermaid girl.

Y'all, I think the moral of this hairy tale is that there comes a point when we (and by "we" I mean I, of course too) just have to let a lot of caveats and hangups and past fears and things we hold on to as baggage or badges GO in order to live in the moment.

I took being cast as a Bearded Lady personally because I was worried about my own health conditions which caused me many years of being called "Sideburn Lady" (which is a rip on an Adam Sandler movie so not very original of the guy who called me that), many years of touching my face to find a rogue hair to go pluck, many years of telling myself I wasn't beautiful or worthy because I didn't look like the hair free girls in the magazine ads. When maybe I should have just looked at it as, you're being cast as The Bearded Lady, Brooke because, step right up, step right up, you're the best Bearded Lady in the world. You're the best Bearded Lady there ever was. Take THAT Kathy Bates. Only kidding. I so admire your work.

Thanks so much for listening, y'all. It is my hope to inspire, uplift and entertain you

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