

Transcript for The Who's Dat Phat Girl Podcast - With Brooke Hoover
SEASON 2 EPISODE #19- Uniformity

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...

Limited Too. Esprit. Gitano. Spumoni. Those were the uniforms of my childhood. Thankfully my private yet non-religious affiliated school (an oddity in South Louisiana in the 1980's) was BIG on us wearing whatever we wanted. And my momma was BIG on making me BIG bows to go with my outfits - yes, because back in the day, you didn't wear clothes, you wore OUTFITS. But they had to be comfortable. And, luckily, at the time, we could afford those brands that also had clothes that were super cute but ALSO comfortable. I was really big on COMFORT when I was young - so much so that I didn't even own a pair of jeans until I was 15 years old. I was also BIG on expressing myself with a lot of color and just being me, through my cute perfectly matching clothes - sometimes involving baby leopards (I'm looking at you Gitano! Or was it Spumoni?! Those Italian designers, man!)

Until my dad rudely uprooted me to a college preparatory snobby school that required...UNIFORMS. Which happened at one of the crappiest times ever for a uniform on a young guhl...PUBERTY. Travel back in time with me to late summer of 1992. I'm 11 years old and we have been sent a very regimented list of school supplies (NO cute Lisa Frank shit allowed - I later learned I could kiiiiind of sneak some of it - depending on the teacher) but surely NO self expression when it came to free dress days - which oddly enough weren't free. We had to bring in a dollar to donate to our school, which already cost more than most liberal arts undergrad programs. If I had a dollar for every time I heard my momma protest about that, I'd have enough dollars to pay for all the kids to have a free dress day - or to pay for something a whole lot better and more meaningful.

But, I digress. Late summer 1992. Momma and I have plowed through the regimented back to school supply list. And, now we must tackle the uniform situation. This is obviously before online shopping. We are at the peak of catalogue shopping though, even if there was a catalogue option for the Episcopal School uniform, we've missed that deadline. So, we are forced to go to the place that supposedly knows "how to get the uniform right" because you CAN piece-meal your uniform by going to various department stores, which I'll later learn is what most kids did - but because we are rookies, we go to this over-priced boutique that carries snobby school only uniforms called Carriages in Bocage Village. In terms of Baton

Rouge bougie, this is THE ULTIMATE BOUGE. And, this phat guhl is NOT having it.

Momma practically pulls me into Carriages and there are two ladies who look like Baton Rouge, Louisiana perfection. Non-frizzy hair on a day with 100% humidity, lips, fingernails and toenails in a matching vibrant yet tasteful pink and collared shirts with sweaters strategically tied over their shoulders. IN SOUTH LOUISIANA. IN LATE AUGUST. ON A DAY WITH 100% HUMIDITY. I already mentioned that but I'm mentioning it again to channel my anger. And, I think it goes without saying but I'm going to say it, these ladies were thin, like no more than a size 0 or 2. They swarm over to us and ask what school I'm go to as they usher us over to the counter where they have "the book". The book isn't the Bible, but it's more like a catalogue (again, before internet days, y'all) of all the private and parochial school uniforms in the East Baton Rouge Parish area.

One of the ladies says, "Oh since you're a girl, you have a choice of uniform. You can wear the plaid dress in this darlin' blue and green plaid OR you can wear the boy's uniform which is a white collared shirt and blue zip up pants, but don't forget you have to wear a belt with it." (I swear she was eyeing me up and down and noticing my chubbing waist as she said that.) I take one look at the "darlin' Tartan plaid number" that's really a shapeless drop waist unflattering polyester block of fabric look back at Momma and we both say, "we'll do the boy's uniform."

Now let's pause right here y'all. I SO wished our uniforms were those cute skirts with knee socks and patent leather Mary Jane's like you see in the movies. But, knee socks in the Louisiana heat and humidity ain't cute. And, religious college preparatory schools make SURE the guhls do NOT dress like any sort of sexual fantasy, that's for damn sure.

The other lady, in hopes to maybe cheer me up or up-sell me says, "Don't worry honey, next year you'll be in middle school and you can wear this cute number" - she points to another polyester frock but this one is gingham plaid, has a kind of cute flair skirt and oh la la how risqué you Catholics and Episcopalians, it has a V-neck. Then, looking at my rounding shape, she adds, "Um-maybe." I roll my eyes and Momma and I gather up three white collared shirts and three navy blue shorts (I won't need the pant option, it's South Louisiana, y'all.) Momma promises to buy a belt ("We'll get one at Maison Blanche or somewhere else, baby, much cheaper. This place is a rip off.") And we pay over \$200 and sell our souls to uniformity.

On our way out, one of the ladies says, "Oh and don't forget the shoes! They can be blue shoes, white shoes, brown shoes or black shoes. Just no shoes with logos, no shoes with pogos, no shoes that show personality and definitely (they say this together) NO OPEN TOE SHOES." (They look at my Birkenstocks and Momma's Tevas as they say this. I swear I am not paranoid. Suburban Louisiana is JUDGEY. And this was before most of the population wore Birkenstocks or Tevas came back for their come back.)

Momma says, "Baby, I need a drink." So we get a Diet Coke which is Momma's version of a stiff one and we head to the newly constructed Tanger factory outlet mall in Gonzales, Louisiana (on the outskirts of Baton Rouge, off 1-10 on the way to New Orleans) to go find a belt and some Episcopal School approved shoes.

We find a belt and then we go to the Bass outlet and look up and down for shoes that will maybe be approved but also have some personality. We come upon the cutest pair of tennis shoes that are Keds in shape but Navy blue with nautical flags all over them. Momma says, "Baby, these will match your uniform perfectly." And, thanks to Momma, now it's an outfit.

While I don't like the white shirt (because it means I'll be one step closer to having to wear a bra and if y'all have listened to my other podcast episode "Do Your Boobs Hang Low?" You KNOW how I feel about bras) and the shorts don't fit me right because they're a man's cut and I have NEVER WORN A BELT IN MY LIFE, I still do feel a little good about my uniform because I do love my nautical tennis shoes (yes, down south we say tennis shoes even if we're not fixing to play tennis - see what I did there? Fixing? Anyways.) I really, really love the blue, white and red bow Momma has made to accompany my uniform and still give me SOME sort of Brooke flair. I should mention, I already have a LOT of Brooke flair going on because my unruly hair is EXTRA frizzy. It's late August in South Louisiana, y'all.

Momma drops me off in the carpool circle and I go over to where the sixth graders are lined up. I'm new to this school, new to uniforms, new to everything but I'm trying my BEST to hold my shit together. But of COURSE, I hear some boys pointing at me and laughing and saying, "Bad Hair Day? What's with those shoes?" I just want to crawl in my locker (which I can't even open because I have never used a combination at this point in my life) and die a slow death. Momma will make me a beautiful black bow for my casket, I'm sure. But, then a magical creature in the shapeless Tartan plaid polyester shift with blonde hair and braces comes over to me and says, "Hey, I love your shoes." I say, "Thanks, I got them at the Tanger Outlet Mall in Gonzales." To which the blonde guhl responds, "Oh, I live in Gonzales." And, boom, we become instant friends. Flash forward to a few years later and we're Romy and Michelle in high school. I'm Romy because I have the deeper voice.

Uniforms are something I started getting used to. And, leave it to me, I learned how to "break the system" of the uniform over the years. By Christmastime, Momma and I were no longer uniform rookies and we knew how to look at the Maison Blanche men's wear sale rack for blue shorts and white collared shirts (NO LOGO of course) in the winter time to make our own uniform. Express had some lovely white collared long sleeve blouses with what Momma told me were, "French cuffs, baby" that needed cuff links. I used my dad's monogrammed RDH (Robert Dean Hoover) ones and made it fashion.

Middle school hit and I was still NOT a fan of the jumper (the polyester dress) but they just came out with a new line, straight from your uniform factory, where you

could instead wear just the gingham SKIRT and the white collared shirt instead of the blue shorts. This, y'all was a Godsend because I worried I'd spent my whole middle school and high school career figuring out how to hide my camel toe situation in those made for men blue pant things. Also, in the winter, you could wear a NON LOGO jacket - it didn't have to be white or blue. AND you could ALSO wear a sweater or a long sleeved shirt, but that had to be white or blue. Because I was still avoiding the bra situation even at the age of 13 (judge not lest thou be judged y'all) unless the weather was 82 degrees or above, I figured out I could layer a blue long sleeved shirt under my white collared shirt and get away with it, even though I would sweat like a beast.

In high school I sucked it up and started wearing a bra. If you want to hear about boob woes, again, there's a whole episode about that. In junior year, you could wear the sweatshirts of the colleges you were applying to. And, that was a Godsend on days I didn't want to wear a bra. Too bad I wasn't applying to our local college LSU (Geaux Tigers) because to me, they still have THE prettiest college colors (purple and gold, two thirds Mardi Gras, y'all.)

Like a good loophole seeker, I also read their "NO open toe shoe" policy and took it to mean NO toes showing. To which I said, "Screw it, I'm wearing my Birkenstocks." The Bostons not the Arizonas. You know the ones that are closed toe, clog-like and resemble the face of a duck bill platypus? Every morning, the math teacher, Mrs. Wench (who looked and sounded like her name - a living breathing onomatopoeia) would stand outside of chapel and JUDGE us, yes the irony of going to a school named Episcopal and send us back and slap us with a detention if she didn't approve of our uniform. She didn't like the way I tucked my shirt (I was trying to hide some fat rolls and look slim, and um fashion) but Mrs. Wench didn't appreciate a French tuck. I ended up figuring out how to just roll my shirt to cruise on by her, which started working. But, then she must've gotten new glasses because she noticed that my Birkenstocks were "OPEN BACK" and she didn't think my loop hole discovery was clever (she was the math teacher, not the civics teacher, after all). She just thought I needed detention. So, I spent most of my high school mornings trying to avoid the Gestapo, have my size 0 friend (the Michelle to my Romy) sometimes "block" me but it didn't always work and created a LOT of anxiety before chapel, where we prayed for our sins - and I prayed to just get out of this uniform situation.

Senior year was free dress YEAR. And you didn't have to pay a dollar a day like in all the other grades to do so. But, the clothing restrictions were almost more difficult to match than the uniforms themselves. And, I was faced with even more issues : finding cute clothes that wouldn't repeat for a girl who was a size 18 to 20 in South Louisiana in the late 1990's. Delia's, LL Bean and J Crew were my faves because I refused to shop at the big lady stores. So, ironically, despite hating uniforms, I only did free dress maybe one or two days a week. And, otherwise, I was a sheep. But, a sheep in a uniform I tried to make my own (when the Gestapo would let me get by with it.)

My mom used to say, and I do agree with her that there is an upside to uniforms. Less agony picking out an outfit in the morning. It helps children whose parents aren't able to afford new clothes or the latest in fashion stand out less. But, ironically, in my case, I felt it made me stand out more because the uniform was so ill-fitting on a chubby frizzy haired girl who just wanted to be a hippie and express herself.

And, it's funny because while I do love shaking up what I'm wearing nowadays and wearing different things, I find that my usual daily outfit of choice is Birkenstocks (the Arizonas) well the Skechers version of Birkenstocks - who am I kidding - they're cheaper, leggings and a longer shirt to cover the camel toe. That's a phat girl's uniform.

Thanks so much for listening, y'all. It is my hope to inspire, uplift and entertain you with this Who's Dat Phat Girl podcast. So, if you're HUNGRY for more, you can book me to speak or perform my solo show that inspired this podcast Phat Girl Costumes written by yours truly and directed by my best bud Brian Lady at your virtual or in person event. Please visit BrookeHoover.com/fluffybuttproductions or email me at contactbrookehoover@gmail.com for more information. And, let's follow each other on instagram - I'm @Br00keH00ver and those O's are not the letter O but they're ZEROS. Not because I want to be a size 0 but because I guess I'm just so clever with my late 90s Yahoo! self

And, if you like this podcast, please give me a five star rating and write a review on Apple Podcasts and, please, most importantly, share with your friends, family and other people you may know who are as phat as we are - that's phat with a PH.

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