

Fashion Statement

MODEL ALEXANDRA BOOS WORKS TO HELP CANCER VICTIMS HEAL INSIDE AND OUT

by Kristy Demas

AFTER GRADUATING IN 1989 with a psychology degree, Alexandra Boos left Ann Arbor for the Big Apple to pursue a career in full-figured modeling. She says she was “lucky to be signed to the Ford Agency,” but that she quickly learned “plus-sized models were treated as second-class citizens” in the industry.

“Ours were the first shots of the day and we did our own hair and make-up,” says Boos. “After our photos were done, we’d see the regular-size models being treated like queens having their make-up and hair done. They’d be paid double what we made.”

The disparity was hurtful to Boos, who says she realized that in the midst of talking about hair, makeup, and dressing to flatter your figure, she was “espousing half-truths.”

Boos explains on her website, “There is value in those beauty secrets but there is so much more that the beauty and fashion industries aren’t addressing, such as the notion that beauty is, in large part, about self acceptance.”

Boos began speaking out about the unrealistic body expectations in the media, volunteering as a motivational speaker in schools, and developing her own program, A Model’s Recipe for Happiness, to encourage people to develop their “authentic selves.”

Boos’ mission to help people feel beautiful—no matter what size, what shape, or what they’ve been through—was crystallized when her mother was diagnosed with stage-four breast cancer six years ago.

After losing much of her hair through chemo, Boos’ mother needed a wig—a cost the insurance company wouldn’t cover. “It was a wake-up call when we saw how much the wig cost. We’re talking \$1,200.”

When Boos discovered that most insurance policies don’t cover women’s post-cancer cosmetic items including wigs and skin care products for those undergoing radiation, she decided to help raise the money herself by founding the Luminous Breast Cancer Foundation. In its mission statement, Luminous says its goal is to “provide products, services, and educational programs for

the un-insured and under-insured breast cancer patient in order [for her] to look and feel like her pre-cancer self—[or] even better.”

“These ‘extras’ might seem frivolous but they can make a real difference to someone dealing with a life-threatening disease or disfigurement,” Boos says. “One woman I know couldn’t afford inserts for her mastectomy bra so she filled the cups with birdseed. Her dog smelled the seed and ran off with the bra in his mouth. We had to laugh, but we laughed until we cried.”

Today, Boos uses her connections in the fashion industry to help Luminous achieve its goals. “Through my contacts as a model and with help from my friends . . . I have been able to help get women wigs, makeup, extra bras, whatever they can’t afford without insurance.”

The stories of the women who need her help continue to motivate her, and Boos’ goal is to see Luminous expand. “I hope one day we’re an organization big enough so that I’ll never have to turn a woman in need away.” ■

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