

Greater Lowell Tech grad from Dracut turns infatuation into action

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*Lowell native Tayla Marie, 26.
(Alejandro Poveda)*

DRACUT — At 12 years old, Tayla Marie spent much of her time flipping through fashion magazines, “infatuated” with the styles and the creativity of the models on their pages.

“I would study them and I would rip them out, and I would put them on my wall,” she said. “And I didn’t know exactly how that was going to help me, but I just kind of — it was like a reminder. Like, maybe one day.”

It would be several years before that day came, but it did indeed arrive — she’s now building a successful professional modeling career, splitting her time between New York City and her childhood home in the Greater Lowell area.

To date, Marie has walked in fashion shows for brands like Kate Spade, Brooks Brothers and Desigual, been featured on the pages of magazines such as Vogue, Harper’s Bazaar Hong Kong and Martha Stewart Magazine, and even appeared in a music video that premiered in Times Square.

The 26-year-old Lowell native — whose given name is Tayla Mayo, though she now primarily uses her middle name, Marie, for modeling — spent her early childhood in the Highlands before moving to Dracut and later attending Greater Lowell Technical High School in Tyngsboro.

At first, she declared a concentration in fashion, she said, but wasn’t sure she wanted to go into design, so she switched to the cosmetology program. She pursued modeling off and on throughout high school, occasionally walking in fashion shows at local malls, and when she was 17, she was signed by a modeling agency in New Hampshire. That led to a few modeling jobs in the Boston area, but the work wasn’t consistent, she said.

Marie said a big part of the reason she’s where she is now is the support of her family and friends. For example, when she made a trip to New York to sign with her current agency, Fenton Model Management, she had the support of her friend Dawn Stickney, a substitute teacher she had in high school and later worked with in Stickney’s salon, who was staying there on a business trip.

Like her other loved ones, Marie said Stickney has been a “cheerleader” throughout her modeling career.



Tayla Marie, 26, now splits her time between New York City and Dracut. (Alejandro Poveda)

“It’s one of those things where sometimes it’s so hard to have the guts to step outside the box,” Stickney said. “And I just really, really gave her a hip check into that like, ‘Come on, you can do this.’”

Now, several years into modeling full time, Marie’s days are often hectic, filled with castings, shoots and shows that are sometimes scheduled to overlap or assigned to her on short notice. But she said she likes the unpredictability and the opportunity to do something different every day of the week.

“You’re working with all of these creative artists, and you’re meeting someone new each day. ... I think you kind of just thrive off everyone’s dream,” she said. “ ... You’re all there to make art. It’s not getting a pretty picture.”

Though Marie said she enjoys the thrill of the fast-paced lifestyle, the industry is not without its pressures. When she traveled to Italy for Milan Fashion Week, she was met with “brutal” criticism about her weight and was told to lose a certain number of inches by the next morning. It was frustrating, but she resisted the urge to let it eat at her — and booked several shows despite the critique.

She said she’s been happy to find that the culture in New York is more focused on promoting models’ health rather than size.



Tayla Marie, 26, has dreamed of modeling since the age of 12. (Alejandro Poveda)

“One thing I’ve always had to kind of keep close to my heart and remind myself is that you have to be true to yourself in this industry,” she said. “Because it’s very easy to lose yourself.”

That’s part of the reason she chose to continue her education after graduating high school, she said, first earning an associate’s degree from Middlesex Community College and then returning to school at UMass Lowell after taking a year off to pursue modeling. She graduated in 2017 with a bachelor’s degree in English with a concentration in creative writing and a minor in psychology.

The cosmetology license she'd earned through the technical high school's program helped her put herself through college, at times working multiple jobs while studying full time, she said.

Stickney said seeing her friend on the pages of magazines makes her "just so proud."

"The perseverance, I think, is remarkable. Because the modeling world isn't as glamorous as everybody thinks. There's a lot of hardship, a lot of doors in your face, a lot of sneaky backhanded things that happen," Stickney said. "Our favorite quote between the two of us is 'Your reaction determines the outcome.'"

As accomplished as Marie is, she said she's not putting pressure on herself to meet certain goals. Though seeing herself in a music video broadcast in Times Square — for the song "Runaway" by Sebastián Yatra, featuring the Jonas Brothers, Daddy Yankee and Natti Natasha — was certainly a bucket list worthy experience, she admits.

For now, she's just taking each day — hectic as they may be — as it comes.

"I've always been a dreamer and I've always wanted to accomplish everything I said I wanted to do," she said. "I kind of just had this mentality, like if you really want it, then you'll make it happen."