



Eagle Scouts Can Be Drag Queens Too

2006-2012

Daegen (pronouns she/her) was a new student at our school. Although she dressed like the other boys, she definitely didn't act like them. She was sassy and always singing showtunes for everyone to hear. Rather than playing football or tag, Daegen found my friend Emily and I as playmates at recess. Seeing as Daegen was two years older and a wonder to us 9-year-olds, we felt honored. As soon as we got out of lunch, we'd sprint to the far side of the playground, where other kids played four-square. We would make up dances each and every 30-minute recess. One of the most notable involved the song "A Thousand Miles". We strutted as we sang, "*Making my way downtown*" as if we were on the streets of New York rather than a blacktop in Missouri. We even tried to make a production of *Grease* with just the three of us, but there were just too many characters, and none of us wanted to be Danny.

In high school, Daegen grew out her hair and started dressing like the rest of us teenage girls. She received some weird looks, but I don't remember our principal making her change. Looking back, I'm surprised at the openness of the faculty. Unbeknownst to her classmates, Daegen began doing drag in junior high after attending a drag show with her aunt.

[Her]story

Up until the past two years or so, drag was not something seen unless purposefully sought out. In Ancient Greece, as the existence of dramatic plays became popular, male actors would play female roles. There were male Antigones, male Clytemnestras, and—later on down the road—even male Juliets.

Interestingly enough, the act of drag (men dressing up as women) also has its root in religious practices. Roger Baker, author of *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts*, writes that churches would 'put on' plays of Biblical stories, and sometimes alter them to increase intrigue and

excitement. Women weren't allowed to star in the plays, and instead, the more petite men or choir boys would take the female roles. "To find a woman acting in a public playhouse would have offended not only on religious grounds," Baker explains, "but also be seen as a shocking example of inappropriate behavior." How ironic.

In Japan, similar things were happening. Men would dress in traditional robes and wear masks painted with feminine features when performing Noh and Kabuki dances, connecting the performers and audience members to the spiritual world. At this point in history, there was no established connection between drag and individuals part of the LGBTQ+ community—rather, those individuals didn't even have the luxury of a community.

The word drag, in reference to a drag queen or the act of performing drag, was first used in the early 19th century, according to Trixie Mattel, *Drag Race* winner and television personality. Mattel shares that its origin probably came from "the theatre of the late 1800s, where male performers wore petticoats to perform as women. Their petticoats would drag on the floor, and so they referred to dressing up as women as 'putting on their drags.'" The first known printing of the word came from a UK publication, *The Reynolds Newspaper*, in reference to a themed party. It read: "We shall come in drag."

Drag became connected with LGBTQ+ individuals in the 1930s, with performances usually happening at private parties. Around the 1950s, gay bars would start popping up, as would laws that "criminalized wearing clothing articles from the opposite sex" and dancing with the same sex, explains Mattel. To combat this, usually half of the patrons within a gay bar would be dressed in drag so it appeared to outsiders that same-sex dancing wasn't occurring.

Drag and its culture and queens would go on to thrive in New York, beginning in the late 1980s. Coco Peru, a drag queen who began performing in the West Village, recounts her experience. "I was going out in full drag to sing at open mics, to pass out my postcards. I would spray paint on the sidewalk, 'Miss Coco Peru, she knows,' just to create buzz. There was no internet back then." Another queen of that time,

Varla Jean Merman, remembers performing with Coco. “[We] performed in bars like The Pyramid, The Brake, and The Works,” shares Varla. “That was right behind the Natural History Museum; they’d put a piece of plywood on [a] pool table [...] and we’d beg people to come to the show.”

Spring 2016

The first drag show I attended was actually one I performed in. My dance program was holding a fundraiser for a future conference at Martha’s Vineyard, a local gay club, and we were the intermission show. Before and after our performance, I saw giant, beautiful drag queens with tall heels and tall hair and fake eyelashes going past their eyebrows. Each had fabulous names, many of them tongue-in-cheek puns. On stage, they lip-synced to popular songs, by divas like Diana Ross and Whitney Houston, and danced in dresses dripping with rhinestones. I couldn’t take my eyes off them.

October 2017

My friend Neil and I were both in Missouri State’s production of *Pippin* my junior year. Neil would come to dance class and rehearsal with remnants of drag makeup; foundation covering his hairline, and little grey balls of glue in his eyebrows. (Drag queens plaster their eyebrows to their forehead with glue sticks and then cover them with powder, to then draw new, highly arched and expressive eyebrows above where they originally were. This lends to more space for eyeshadow, glitter, and eyelashes.)

For our rehearsals on Thursday or Friday nights, Neil would come with half his makeup done, looking as powdered as Marie Antoinette, just without the blonde hair. His auburn hair was usually tucked up beneath a backwards pink ballcap with the word ‘Daddy’ embroidered across the front. Rehearsals would normally go from 5-10pm, and after that, Neil would rush out so he could perform as Lux (his drag queen persona) at either the Outland Ballroom or Martha’s Vineyard. His makeup skills were insane, much of them learned from YouTube tutorials. He was better at makeup than I would ever be.

We'd get breaks every so often to get water and rest, but Neil would use them to finish his makeup. Our director would say, "Take 5!", and Neil would contour his face. Snatched. "Take 10!" Neil would finish his eyeshadow. The color would depend on his outfit for the evening, and it always matched perfectly. Usually it was neon green, electric blue, or pink (the kind of pink found in highlighters). "Take 10!" Neil would finish with gluing on fake eyelashes. Lux was born; she was almost too pretty to look at. Lux also began performing at *Get Dusted*; consequently, so did Daegen, I would soon find out.

Get & Got Dusted

Created by Johan Collins and Cody Harness in 2015, *Get Dusted* is a monthly drag performance held at the Outland Ballroom in Springfield. A night of *Get Dusted* is usually themed (think Trolls, Yacht Club, Rave) and involves some sort of musical performance along with a drag show celebrating at least eight queens—usually more. In an interview for the *Springfield News-Leader*, Harness cites that before *Get Dusted*, there wasn't much of a drag scene in Springfield, or at least, not like the ones in New York and Chicago. "I wanted people to see drag in a way that I knew they hadn't seen before," explains Harness. "There are so many drag queens in Springfield now. I love it."

April 2018

It was Disney night and some friends and I went to see *Get Dusted*. As we traveled through the dark hallway to the mainstage, I could see the main *Get Dusted* queens posing for photos against a red carpet-esque backdrop; including Daya Betty, Crystal Methyd, Lux, and Daegen (drag name, Daegen Michelle).

I was already good friends with Neil, and I had a color theory class with Daya. We'd complain and paint and talk about how bad (really, not that bad) our paintings looked and how we didn't know what we were doing with our lives.

Thinking that Daegen wouldn't recognize me, I shouted a collective, "You all look gorgeous!" and hugged Lux and Daya Betty.

To my surprise, Daegen said, "Oh my gosh. Hi Katie!"

Completely taken aback I replied, “I didn’t think you would have remembered me!” We hugged and exchanged compliments—a normal interaction with a drag queen.

August 2015

I had my first college class with Jake. He a sophomore, I a freshman. We were both in 8am ballet, taught by a sweet older lady named Julie in a sweaty room with huge windows and no central air. Naturally, I was scared and nervous to be dancing in a collegiate setting. And especially scared of the tall and handsome Jake and what he would think of me. He had friends in the class from his previous year at school, and it seemed like a community was already formed, with no room or desire for the shy freshman. Dance can be cliquey like that. Larger than life, his personality was something to behold. He was outrageously funny and often got in trouble talking in class.

At the end of that first class, as we were changing from our ballet shoes to sneakers, Jake made his way over and sat down beside me.

“Hi, I’m Jake! Are you a freshman this year?” he asked.

He seemed so confident and so sure of himself. I almost felt like I didn’t deserve this recognition. As ballet class and time progressed, we’d be cast in the same piece for the fall dance concert, and our friendship became one of love, support, and laughter.

Fast-forward three years later, and Jake got into drag as the goddess, Kora Kay. I attended so many of his shows and his beauty and grace outshone all the other queens—plus, he had the innate ability to laugh at himself and others laughed with him. He’d soon get asked to perform at the *Get Dusted* shows, which was a huge honor, seeing as Crystal Methyd was in charge of the booking.

RuPaul + _____ = Fame

Crystal Methyd cannot be mentioned without the notable, fabulous, and tremendously successful, RuPaul and the major entity that is *Drag Race*. Already an active member of the New York drag scene, she had

multiple cameos in the “Love Shack” music video with the B-52s, a goddess in a tailored white top and skirt, paired with an afro and a choker to match. Ryan Roschke, writer and reporter for the pop culture media website, POPSUGAR, cites this as her “big break.” From then on, her popularity continued to skyrocket.

Drag became accessible to the general public in 2009, with the first season of *Drag Race*, hosted by RuPaul. Since its beginning, there have been 12 seasons. “It just had its most successful season yet,” writes Roschke. The first episode had nearly one million viewers. The premise of the show is a lot like *America’s Next Top Model*, with wild fashion challenges, catwalk competitions, and photoshoots. Each week, the queens are judged on their performance, by Ru, her panel of judges, and big-name celebrity guest judges—Lady Gaga and Miley Cyrus have made appearances. The winners in past years have received insane amounts of cosmetics and a cash prize of \$100,000.

Crystal Meth is Addictive

Remember Cody Harness, who started *Get Dusted?* That’s Crystal Methyd. Crystal Methyd, Missouri State University alumni, competed in the most recent season of *Drag Race* and wowed viewers with her outlandish style, quirky personality, and ridiculous costumes. Turns out, the judges were wowed as well, and she ended up receiving third place. As a season-favorite of Ru’s, Crystal’s mullet—reminiscent of El DeBarge’s—received a cult following when it wasn’t pinned beneath an extravagant wig. There are even YouTube compilations made by fans entitled, “crystal methyd being ICONIC for 2 minutes 28 seconds straight” and “Crystal Methyd giving off Chaotic Energy for 4 minutes” showcasing her outrageous and hilarious personality.

Crystal Methyd describes her drag persona as something that is “so special, so weird, so specific” in *Advocate*, an LGBTQ+ news source. “I would really like to inspire other out-of-the-box-thinkers and other types of drag queens to audition and get on the show because drag has no rules and it has no boundaries. [...] It’s more than just trying to look pretty and wearing a beautiful dress.” In an interview with the

Springfield News-Leader, Crystal shares that her many years as an eagle scout have given her the tools to be thrifty, especially when it comes to costumes—she gets nearly all of her clothing and accessories from the Goodwill.

Her type of drag is truly trailblazing. Most drag queens maintain a consistent and cohesive essence throughout any performance or costume. On the contrary, Crystal sees herself as a multifaceted individual who can be a kitschy teddy bear one day, a corpse bride the next, and a Miss America contestant after that. While on *Drag Race*, she took a rogue chance on a challenge and did Freddy Kruger in drag—it's worth a google.

Here to 'Serve' & Stay

A drag queen dares you to find your truest self and be that—she already has, so why can't you? She invites you to celebrate with her, to laugh with her, and to not care what anyone else thinks. A drag queen's triumphant openness not only allows but encourages others to be who they truly are. Vulnerability is strange in that way; when others are vulnerable, we feel that we have the space to be vulnerable too. From the closeted 11-year-old, choreographing instead of playing football during recess; to the senior dance major, nervous for their first drag show; to the professional from Missouri who's on a first name basis with RuPaul; *Get Dusted*, *Drag Race*, and countless other drag entities show them that they can be celebrated—not shamed—for their trueness.

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