

Fashion-Forward

From runway model to role model, Daisy Fuentes has built an eclectic, successful career simply by being herself. **BY JULIE JACOBS**



WHEN OPPORTUNITY knocks on Daisy Fuentes' door, she's there to grab it. The Cuban-born, New Jersey-raised television personality and fashion director admits to "falling into" modeling as a teenager, but she then successfully parlayed her runway stint into a weather and news reporting post at Univision. She later became a VJ on MTV; hosted beauty pageants, awards shows, and *America's Funniest Home Videos*; and served as a spokesmodel for such corporate giants as Revlon and American Express.

These days, Fuentes — who lives in Los Angeles with her fiancé, singer-songwriter Matt Goss — is focused on charity work, her clothing partnership with Kohl's, and the debut of her hair-care product line. Also in the works are a new fragrance and a book about women and body image.

New Jersey Life spoke with Fuentes about her childhood in Harrison, the turns her life has taken, and the lessons she's learned along the way.

You moved to the U.S. from Cuba when you were 9. Was that a difficult transition?

I learned the language from watching TV shows like *I Love Lucy* and *The Love Boat*. I have nothing but fond memories of New Jersey. We would go to Sandy Hook and Seaside Park every summer, and I felt so safe growing up in Harrison. I remember it being such a tight-knit community and all of us kids playing outside and laughing all the time.

Do you ever visit?

Some friends and my doctor are still in New Jersey, so sometimes when I'm in New York working, I'll take an extra day and visit my doctor or have dinner at one of the amazing Spanish restaurants in Newark.

MTV was your first big foray into entertainment. How did that come about?

One of the editors at Univision put together a reel for me, and my mom said to send it to MTV. Six months later, I got a call from a woman who was putting together a pilot for MTV Latin America. She asked me to audition, so I ran into New York the next day. It was rainy and cold; I wore a white leather miniskirt and jacket with fringe — that was what was hot then — and my hair was frizzy from the rain. The train was late and I couldn't get a cab, so I got there 45 minutes late and got looks from everybody. Fortunately, the minute I got in front of the camera, it all went well.

“
While my
core values
are the same,
I'm different
from my
earlier self.”

You do a lot of charity work. What cause is closest to your heart?

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital treats some of the most catastrophic, rarest childhood diseases without charging families a penny. I was invited to one of its galas and saw so many important people in the [entertainment] business. You can feel the love there. About five years ago, I started my own fundraising dinner in Miami for St. Jude's called "Fed-Ex Angels and Stars," and it's been very successful.

You're also involved in increasing breast cancer awareness.

I have a personal connection, so it's very close to home. I try to spread awareness everywhere. I've spoken to groups, but I think the best thing I can do is get in front of a TV camera and talk about where there are free screenings and the importance of self-examination. ➔

“I remember Harrison being a tight-knit community and all of us kids playing outside and laughing all the time.”



Tell us about your partnership with Kohl's.

We started the clothing line four years ago, and the feedback from shoppers has been amazing. I want women to look like a million bucks and feel great about purchasing something at a good price. It's designed after my own style: glamorous, fashion-forward, and elegant with a touch of trend.

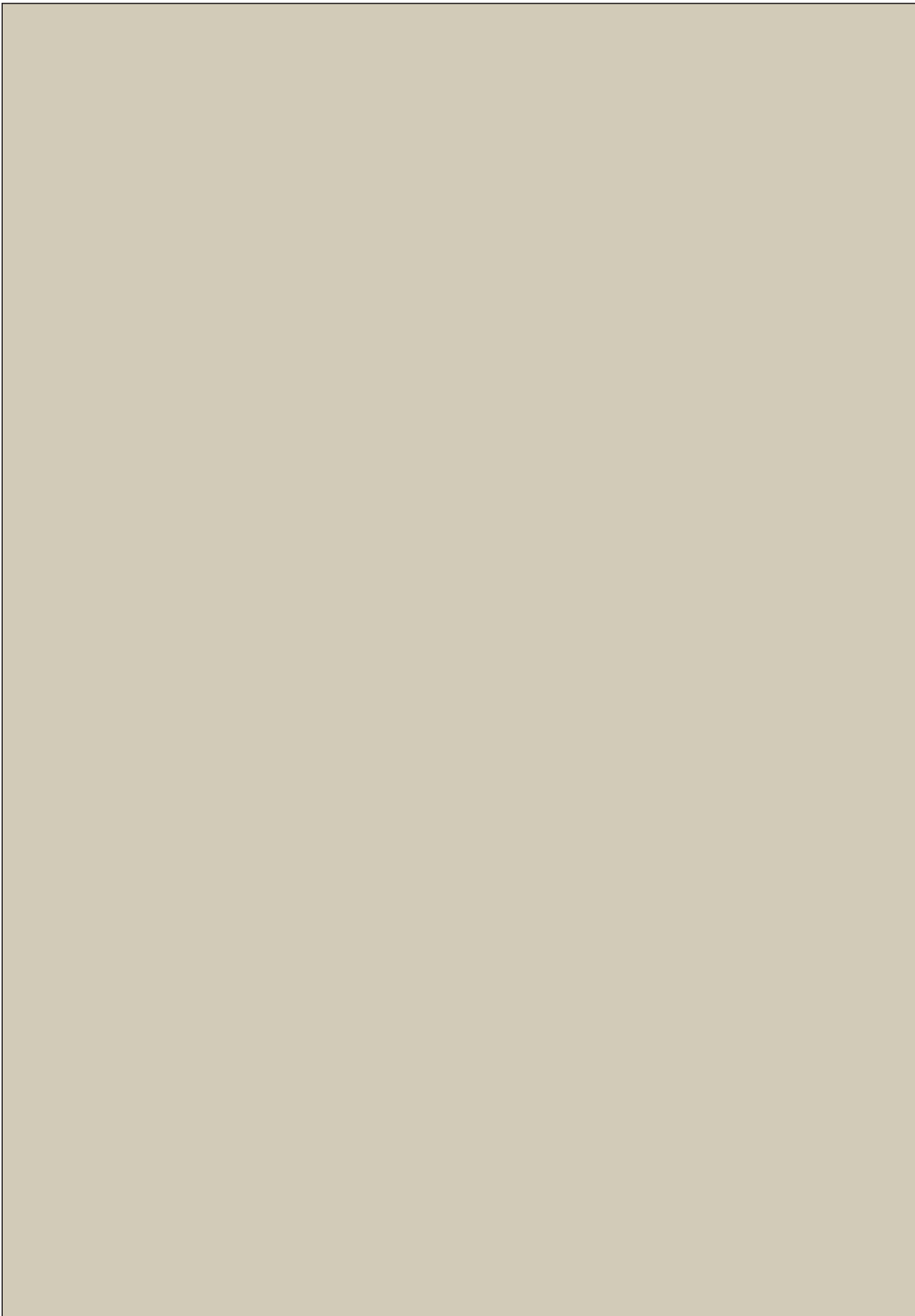
How do you react to society's emphasis on being ultrathin?

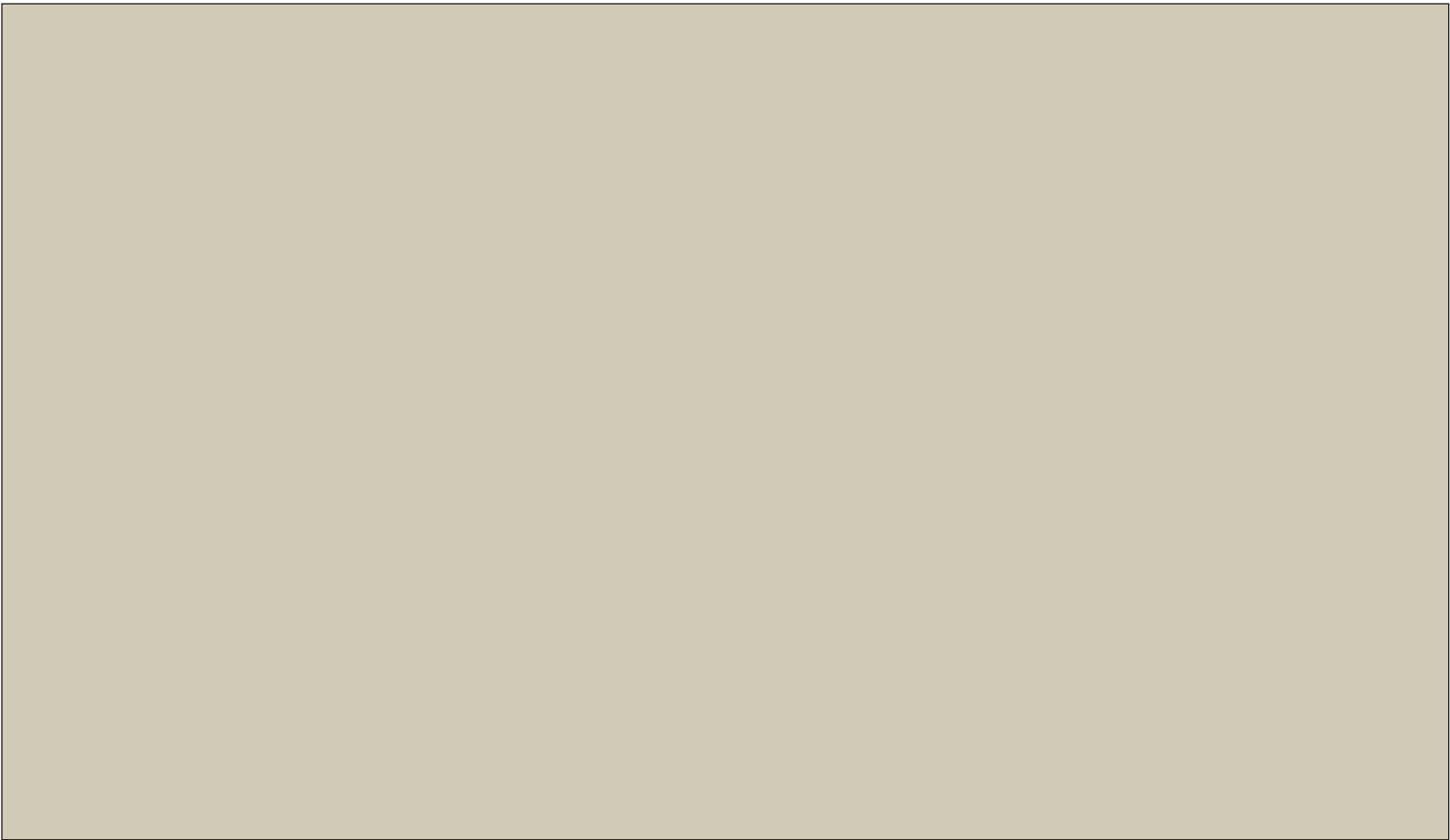
I know of girls who are 8 or 9 and are watching their weight, and I've talked to women who are torn apart by their self-image. It's very disturbing to me. We design for women of all sizes. A woman who has a sense of style knows what's going to look flattering on her, no matter her size.

Now that you're in your 40s, what are you most sure about?

While my core values are the same, I'm different from my earlier self. If there's one thing I could impress upon younger women is for them to listen to what older women have to say. We've lived it, and I think there's a lot to learn from people's joy, pain, and fortune.

I was afraid that once I was in my 40s there would be nothing for me to do in the business. But I'm finding that because of the way I conducted myself and the choices I made, I have more opportunities today than when I was 30. Life continues to surprise me. **NJL**





RUNOVER

