

Hustling For Fashion

Benjamin Carrasquillo

There was a time long ago when I didn't have anything. We were poor. My father and mother didn't have any money. My dad was in the military, and he used to have flashbacks from the Vietnam war. My mom used to smoke crack. I didn't have

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We had grandma, my pop's mother, living with us; she used to help us and my parents.

It was hard for us to survive. Sometimes, I would ask my mom for money for us to get some sneakers, clothes, and other things that we needed. She would give us \$20 total. Twenty dollars wasn't enough to get anything! I remember that my dad used to give us a pair of shoes and those shoes had to last us for one year, even if the shoes were broken or old or had holes.

I went to high school, but they kicked me out in the 11th grade because I was fighting. I had my first kid when I was 18 years old, so I had to do what I had to do for me and my kid, and my brothers and sister. I played the streets, and I hustled to get by. I took the wrong route, but at that time I thought it was the right thing to do for me and my family. I had a job in an after-school program. I was making money, but that check was going to my kid. On the side, I hustled so I could buy all the things that my pop or my mom never gave me.

I was spoiling myself. I bought name brand things like Enyce, Mecca, Polo, Tommy Hilfiger, and Academic. Those were just the clothes I bought. For sneakers, I bought Jordans, Airforce, and all the new arrivals. The boots I bought were Timberlands, Asolo, 20 Belows, Vasque, and Dolomite. Some boots were made for mountain climbing. I wasn't a mountain climber, but that

what other kids had.

Sometimes my brothers, my sister, and I didn't know where our next meal would come from.

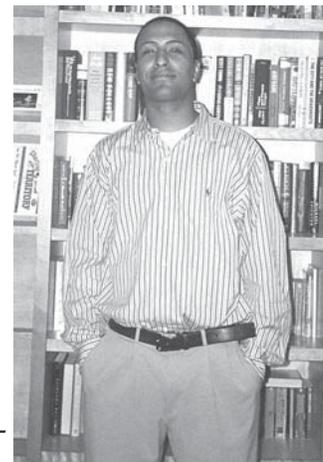
was the style. I had to be the first on the block to have them, so I paid the money. It can cost a lot to look good. Those shoes cost \$100 and up. For coats, I bought Avirex, Bear, and Northface. Back in those days, Northface cost around \$500. That's someone's rent money, and I was spending it on coats. If my dad knew I was spending that much on clothes, he might have made me pay my own rent.

Eventually I had to stop hustling. I had to get myself on the right path, but I told myself that I would never see myself in that way again—

poor and out of fashion. And I would do what I had to do so that my kids wouldn't feel poor and out of fashion either.

Before, people could see that we were poor because of things we wore; we didn't match or coordinate our clothes, hair-cuts, or anything. Now it's different because I'm different to my kids. They come first. I buy them the best. I work hard to make sure they get the exclusive things that my parents couldn't give me.

Sometimes when you wear the best, you feel like the best. Looking good and dressing well changes how you feel about yourself because it makes you feel special and gives you confidence that you're somebody.



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