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A Little Work, A Lot of Play

FOUNDER OF BRAND NOTBASICBLONDE
OLYASHA NOVOZHYLOVA (@NOTBASICBLONDE_) DOESN'T
 LIMIT HERSELF TO ONE PROFESSION. THE FASHIONISTA AND
 BUSINESSWOMAN OPENS UP ABOUT GROWING UP IN UKRAINE,
 HOW IT AFFECTED HER AND HER UNIQUE CAREER PATH.

BY MORGAN CALCARA

You grew up in Ukraine. What was that experience like and how did it influence your perception of the world?

Growing up in Ukraine definitely was different! I've had so many challenges. When I was growing up in Ukraine, we didn't have the same level of comfort like in the U.S., even though I grew up in a nice area. And because women in Ukraine were very competitive, growing up I definitely learned to take care of myself and be independent from a young age. My parents were very young when they got married, and they had to work a lot to build wealth and that taught me independence. I began my own entrepreneurial journey when I was young. I started networking, marketing and had a team of five employees when I was 13.

How has the conflict in Ukraine affected you?

It affected me terribly. I didn't have any communication with my family for six weeks and at that time I hadn't slept for a month and a half. I was trying to find someone who could evacuate my grandma and her husband from Mariupol. I spent days and nights in telegram chats trying to look for someone. Mariupol at that time was terribly dangerous, and since my grandma is partially paralyzed, she doesn't walk or

speak, and it was even harder. Finally, I was able to find a guy who had evacuated them from Mariupol. My grandma survived by a miracle as her building was split in half. So the guy took my grandma and her husband close to the Polish border. After that, I had to find someone to evacuate them from there again. I found volunteers; they took them from there to Lublin, Poland, and admitted them to the hospital. They were severely dehydrated and they starved for six weeks. After, my mom and I went there from the U.S. We picked them up and brought them from Warsaw, Poland, to Frankfurt, Germany, to get their visas. Grandma's visa was ready because we started hers one and a half years ago, but her husband's visa was delayed because USCIS made a technical error. We had to get Jon Ossoff involved to speed up the process. We spent a month in Germany instead of five days. It was terrible, especially with someone bedridden like my grandma was. My grandma lost everything; we had several condos. But now all my family is here in the States.

How did your upbringing influence your career choices and path?

My mom is a huge fashionista; I got it from her. I've had a passion for fashion from an early age. I started my modeling career when I was 13, but I had to transition and go to college. My family definitely wanted the best for me. They wanted me to get an education first. So, I graduated from Georgia State University with a BBA in managerial sciences. I even worked in corporate America for some of the most known telecom companies for over eight years, but now I'm doing what I love the most. I have a celebrity podcast where I interview public figures and the most successful entrepreneurs. I partner with world-famous brands; I model; I watch the latest fashion trends from the first row at the fashion shows; I've written a children's book that inspires our younger generation; and there's more to come.

Tell me about your NotBasicBlonde blog and podcast. How did that come to be?

NotBasicBlonde is not just a blog and podcast, it's a brand and it recently got trademarked. In 2017, when I finished my last project in IT/project management, I decided to start my brand. That's

how the NotBasicBlonde brand was launched. At first, I felt very lost. I definitely couldn't picture myself at the office any longer. Even though I had a great position and it was very lucrative, deep down I knew it wasn't my passion in life, and I couldn't do it any longer.

How did you become an influencer? Walk me through that journey.

I don't consider myself an influencer, I consider myself an entrepreneur because I have a lot of experience in entrepreneurship from my past career. Once I started the NotBasicBlonde brand, I started creating and posting content consistently every day, sometimes a few times a day. Brands started noticing me and offering me partnerships. One thing led to another and I've ended up partnering with world-famous brands like Cartier, Revolve, Too Faced, PGA, Nike, Amazon, Steve Madden, Drybar and over 100 others.

What has been your biggest accomplishment throughout your career?

Besides building a successful brand, launching a celebrity podcast, writing children's books, having a successful career in IT/project management, etc., my biggest accomplishment was that, because of my career, I was able to save my grandma's life. After she had a stroke last year, I was able to financially provide [for] and support her recovery. She had almost no chance. There is no health insurance in Ukraine and all the medicine for her and her recovery was very expensive. Also, because of my career and social media network, I was able to evacuate my grandma from Mariupol, Ukraine. Her building was split in half and she survived six weeks of starvation. I think these career accomplishments mean the most to me. ■

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