

SM Sj MAGAZINE

FALL/HOLIDAY 2017
ISSUE NO. 19

Image

My Story:
The Way It Is

Lifestyle

Affairs of the Heart:
How to know if your
Online Dating Mate
is serious about
YOU

BUSINESS

MICHAEL STUCKEY:
Reworking his
Glass Awards Dream

feature:

FURNE ONE
Debuts in Canada

Coverage of Two Shows

The Amato Couture Look Book
Background and In-Person Stories

SMJ WINTER 2017: CANADA \$4.99



A Precious Story

By Andrew Terry Pasiaka

Sometimes a coming out party and a recognition happen at the same time. For Abiola Abinsiku and her line **Precious Threads by Abiola**, her first award as Emerging Designer of the Year at the 5th annual African Fashion Week Toronto Industry Awards was also her biggest platform thus far in her young fashion career. With a shaky voice and her mother beaming from the audience, an emotionally overwhelmed Abiola said that the trophy was confirmation that there was value in what she was doing, and she knew that God had greater things in mind for her.

How did she get to this momentous moment? Well, it did not transpire the way that it does for many designers; either being inspired at a young age by family, or having an apocalyptic event that immediately changed their life. Abiola is of Nigerian descent, and belongs to a culture that thrives on bold patterns and colorful prints.

"It's a part of who I am. Our family always dressed Afro-centric going to parties, and we never wore black at funerals, because we were there to celebrate the life of the one who passed on. However, no one in the family had a background in fashion."

She got her start at age 11 from a Jamaican housekeeper, who taught Abiola to stitch and to make Barbie clothes. Then in middle school she decided on Family Studies as her option rather than Cooking. She touched a sewing machine for the first time and made her first outfit.

Despite this, Abiola pursued a career in IT in college and learned how to build websites. She enjoyed the work at the beginning, but didn't enjoy it as much after a couple of years because she is a people person, and she felt isolated in this career. Seven years in she was able to transfer her web designer skills to a position as a volunteer co-ordinator. She felt this opportunity was destiny calling in the sense that it talked about being a community partner, and she realized that she needed a job where she could interact daily with other people.

Fast forward a few years and her daughter, who once she was old enough, always asked her mother what she could buy her for special occasions, would not take the standard 'just be a good girl, etc.' answer, and kept on insisting

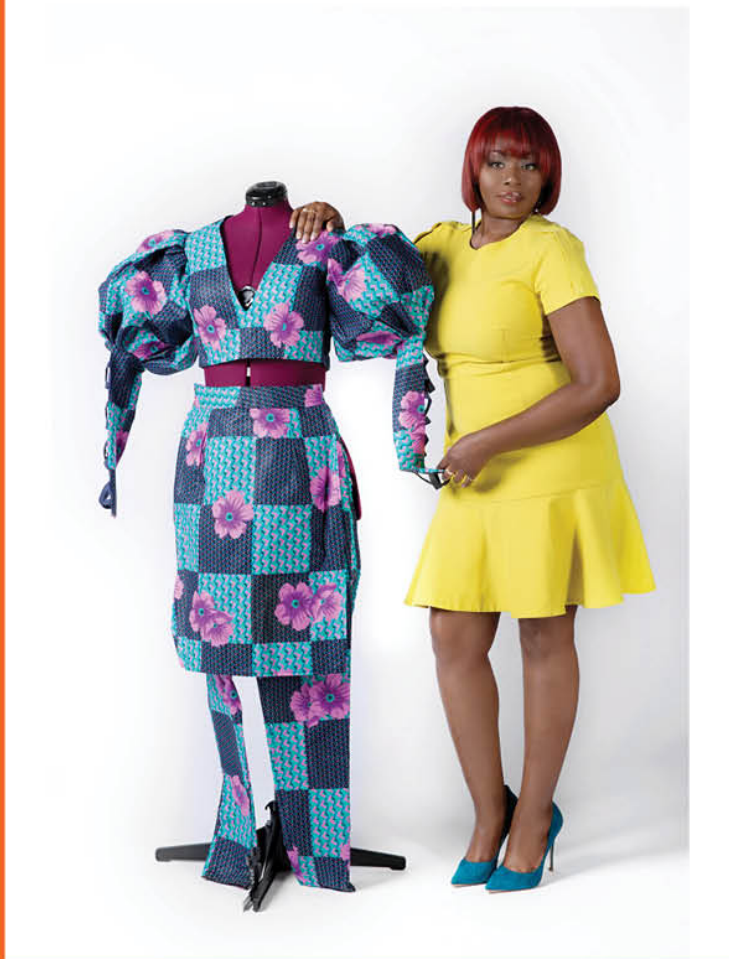
until Abiola mentioned a sewing machine. Well, a sewing machine appeared in the living room on Christmas morning, and there it stayed, the wrapping paper off but the box unopened, for six months. A few months later Abiola was shopping with her mother when a beautiful piece of fabric jumped out at her. There it sat in the living room beside the sewing machine for months.

One day she got up and realized she had both ingredients. Why not just make something? A skirt was the result, and when she wore it to work, people raved and asked her where she bought it. This was the summer of 2014, and she sewed things for family and friends into the fall, through the winter, and into the spring of 2015,

"When I finally opened that sewing machine and when I finally got out that fabric, I never envisioned being where I am now or having all these lofty goals. I just wanted to make beautiful clothes for my friends and family."

Coming into the summer of 2015, Abiola had come to the admission that she may be on to something and this could be the start of something bigger. Her daughter was





about to enter first year of post-secondary education, and she decided that a good test would be to use this new skill or gift to pay for her daughter's education. A meeting with a banker ended with the happy discovery that there was enough equity in her condo to do just that, so once again, the sewing machine sat unused while she mused if she really needed to upgrade her 'pastime' to a business. Still, something gnawed away at her, telling her that she had to do this.

What turned it around for her was that she could see that she could help other women with this project. Abiola has been the victim of two abusive relationships, and while she has become stronger because of them and has become the person she is today, she knows that others may not be that strong, and need a helper or a refuge to get them through a difficult period. Two months after her daughter started her first year, she woke up one morning with the resolve 'I've got to do this!' which became the soft launch of Precious Threads (named after her daughter) in November 2015.

Her breakthrough came the following January when she was asked to showcase a collection at the University of Windsor. She is averse to using social media, but realized she needed to advertise for models and for accessories, and week and a half before the show, a lady from Ajax called to say she was interested in the offer. They wound up talking for two hours

on the phone that day, and met for the first time at the U of W the day of the show.

Abiola said it was an amazing experience. Her final piece elicited such a tremendous reaction from those in attendance that she came on the runway crying. She just found it hard to believe that all the accolades were for her. She and the jewelry designer have worked again since then, and Abiola has used 4 to 5 of the student models from that breakthrough show on subsequent runways, including African Fashion Week Toronto. She says she fell in love with their spirit.

She also has an admission to make. So much of her journey as a designer has been stalled by procrastination or last-minute finishes that to her, it wasn't surprising that she was stitching the final piece backstage at AFWT right when her collection was being walked on the runway.

Looking back on her victory at AFWT, she didn't even know she was going to be nominated until a couple of weeks before the event, so she understands that even now she still has doubts. However, she takes heart from the Biblical passage, 'to whom much is given, much is expected.' She knows now that this is her passion, and a burgeoning career.

In a way, that Family Studies course she took so many years ago in middle school has come around full circle. That is the nature of the organization she wants to form from what she hopes will be growing revenue from Precious Threads.

"Too many single mothers are living below the poverty line. I want to help them with funds so they can take their kids to the zoo and not worry that they are taking the money from somewhere else. I want to assist women in exploring their skill set to find their true purpose."

With a goal like that, it is evident that Abiola Abinsiku may be changing her primary career in the not-too-distant future. She has got lofty goals; first moving into seasonal collections by the end of this year, going mainstream in 2018, and eventually making it to the top runways of the world like London and New York. And then?

"I want my brand to be the Versace of Canada!"
Methinks the woman has found her calling!!

For more information, go to: www.preciousthreads.ca