



Gossip and Pretending to know...

Last week upon learning about the tragic death of L'Wren Scott, a familiar heavy breath contained "itself" inside of me. We spent a very meaningful part of our lives together back in our runaway modeling days. L'Wren and I had shared the trials and tribulations of twenty-something dreamers following our hearts in a world of our own, where significance was everything, and girls like us had to prove ourselves at every turn. We were part of a kind of sorority and held each other up when the chips were down. I had to make a conscious effort to exhale upon the reality of this upsetting news, as I had not seen L'Wren in recent times.

The life of a model can be a lonely one when living out of a suitcase is de rigeur. You never know when or from where you'll get your next booking and meal. The competition is fierce. You are constantly being evaluated based on your looks. We ate away our own self-esteem like maggots on leftovers. In reality, we were just young women in search of love and attention at the cost of our own self worth. Yet L'Wren and I never gave up. Even when they told us "You aren't good enough" or "blonde enough" or in L'Wren's case... "You're just too tall."

As a young traveler and adventurer before the days of smart phone cameras, I was the one documenting everything! Backstage behind the scenes I was always taking pictures of my model sisters dressing and undressing, sleeping under racks of designers' clothes, or having picnics at the make-up mirrors. Most models were just trying to nurture their most basic needs. I searched through my collection of backstage photos to find those pictures I had taken of L'Wren, this lanky, raven-haired beauty, in happier times. Every image I have of her reflected light filled, glorious smiles and laughter. There were pictures of us kicking up our legs follies style during rehearsals for fashion shows in Düsseldorf, Paris and Milan. The outfits L'Wren wore then were stylishly edgy, and ahead of their time. At only 20 years of age, she had an inner sense of fashion and was a true fashion icon in her own right.

I read the speculations appearing as authority or 'inside scoop' in tabloids stating, "Why would a girl who seemingly had everything take her own life?" I suddenly found my own pain reignited. As the former fiancé of the late guitarist Steve Clark from Def Leppard, I had been asked that same question a thousand times about him. In my own quest to try and answer that question, it led me to write *Runway RunAway: A Backstage Pass to Fashion, Romance & Rock 'n Roll* a few years ago. My life experience in losing Steve through his own tortuous journey of self loathing, pain and consequent slow suicide led me to delve into 20 years of 12 -Step meetings, reading (or writing) multiple self-help books and ultimately earning double degrees in Spiritual Psychology and Consciousness Health & Healing from the University of Santa Monica. I currently volunteer with the Freedom to Choose Foundation, facilitating communication skills and self-forgiveness with the inmates at the Valley State Prison in Chowchilla, California. I really came to terms with what was bothering me most about L'Wren Scot's death during a session when one of the inmates practiced a technique called "perception checking" on me.

The prickly pieces of my pain were two-fold: One piece was that there was this "twenty something" part of me that needed to grieve, but I was not acknowledging the younger part of me still crying inside. I felt I had no right to grieve since I hadn't seen L'Wren in years. Those haunting irrational beliefs of unworthiness and insignificance covered me like clouds. I had been following her glorious career path, her glamorous love life and I was so happy for her personal and professional success in the world. I'd often smile thinking, "Wow, good for her, she made it!" You see many of the girls I knew didn't make it. They'd struggled with their own addictions or died and caused their untimely deaths as a result of those same feelings of insignificance in the fashion world. Memories came forth of L'Wren and I sharing musty hotel rooms on the road, whispering in the dark recanting stories of our childhood neglect and abandonment. L'Wren was an orphan adopted at birth and I a runaway teen. We fended for ourselves back then and now that feeling of being "alone in the world" was calling me back.

The second piece of my upset was the presumptuous press surrounding her death...what I feel is the act of *pretending to know*. Speculations appeared about her financial debt, possible issues with her boyfriend or cancellation of her fashion show and finally "her losing face" as the cause. No one has written about L'Wren's inner pain as a potential cause. It was as if her *outer world reality* is now defining her identity. In reality, to L'Wren it was her *inner world* that truly mattered. How can any of us ever profess to know what it felt like to have been abandoned by birth parents and then abandoned again when her own adoptive parents died? None of us will ever know her suffering or how she felt about herself. What we can express is our compassion and love for her and our own.

The tragic death of L'Wren taught me just how painful gossip can be. In pretending to know or make assumptions about another person, we are gossiping. To quote Dr. David Paul from the University of Santa Monica and Co-Founder of the Freedom to Choose Foundation who so skillfully mirrored back to me in my grief: "It is even more painful when we gossip to ourselves." In other words, every time I say negative things to myself about myself, I am gossiping inside myself. This is where the pain of "pretending to know" begins.

Me telling myself I wasn't worthy of grieving the loss of her and that our friendship was insignificant, only hurt that younger part of me who indeed shared love, laughter, runways and whispers in the dark with the beautiful L'Wren. Here I was, imprisoning myself from the truth of who I am as a worthy person. In that moment, standing in front of over 300 female prisoners and anchoring myself in my worthiness, I forgave myself for my own misinterpretations of who I am. I am so grateful to have shared even a piece of my life with such a strong and gentle soul such as hers. Thank you L'Wren, you made the world a more beautiful place and it is my intention to add to the sum-total of significant love and beauty in this world you left behind.

See you again up on the Runway in the Sky.

Forever and Ever,

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About Lorelei Shellist:

Lorelei Shellist, couture runway model and muse, is the best-selling author of Runway RunAway: A Backstage Pass to Fashion, Romance and Rock 'n Roll. She is also a Host, Speaker and Fashion Icon Stylist with degrees in Spiritual Psychology and Consciousness, Health and Healing from the University of Santa Monica. Spiritual Psychology and Consciousness, Health and Healing from the University of Santa Monica.

