

Fish & Fashion – Memoir by Mari Lorraine Kimura  
Book Sample

*Arnold and Alyssa*

During the prime of my career as an image stylist, I met a photographer through Margaret named Michael O’Conner. He was extremely interested in working with us after watching our work on the Earth, Wind and Fire music video. Michael and I connected pretty well and started our working relationship by doing a test photo session in his studio. Very often, photographers and image stylists connect with one another on an artistic level by seeing how each works with the other. These are test sessions conducted apart from paid jobs to build working relationships and portfolios.

Images on TV commercials are generally on the conservative side because of the need to appeal to the general consumer. It’s a “must do” for the sake of the product. Commercials can’t always provide an artist the freedom to produce the kind of creative images that artist would like to have in his or her reel or portfolio. Therefore, creative test sessions provide that opportunity. However boring a commercial job can be, the day-rate for advertisement is the highest. There is always more creative control for an image stylist when working on music videos, album covers, and promo shots for performing artists. An active artist involved in the business of making money has to update his or her image whenever possible, because fashion trends get old and continually change with the seasons. The same goes for music, movies, and the printed image. Everyone wants to see something new and different, because people get bored easily.

The initial test shots we worked on with Michael O’Connor came out very well. He liked my work and promoted me as a stylist on various jobs on which he worked. On one occasion, Michael called me to see if I might be interested in dressing Alyssa Milano for a Japanese magazine. When Alyssa was

about fifteen years old, her popularity as an actress was climbing in Japan. She was voted the most-popular actress in *Roadshow Magazine*, which is well known in Japan for providing updated information on international movies and popular celebrities. As a result of Alyssa's popularity, as demonstrated by fan vote, the publishing company decided to make and market a special magazine entirely of Alyssa for her fans in Japan. Michael was chosen to do all the photography with Alyssa for this project.

The magazine project was a big deal for Michael because he had to shoot one hundred different images of Alyssa. He worked closely with Alyssa's mother, Lin, who was managing all of Alyssa's business affairs at that time. Michael and Lin decided to choose ten different stylists, and each was to provide ten different images for Alyssa. The schedule was a ten-day shoot over a one-month period. It was a rather tight working schedule for both Alyssa and Michael. During the process of selecting stylists for the magazine, Michael had highly recommended me. As a result of Michael's recommendation, I was chosen to be one of the stylists to provide images for Alyssa for the magazine.

The budget on this project wasn't at all attractive, but I was flattered to be selected. Michael gave me total creative control over the wardrobe images, which made up for the low budget in some ways. I decided to design most of the clothes, so I could give Alyssa a customized, one-of-a-kind image. As a stylist and designer, I had always been inspired by Hollywood fashion designer Edith Head. Her work was always custom-made and unique. I was always inspired to give celebrities new and unique images instead of doing what most stylists did, which was to take the money in the budget and go shopping. Making stars look like everyday people was too easy, so I'd challenge myself to create something new whenever possible. I liked to be different and took the time to provide one-of-a-kind images that made whomever I dressed stand out. Being different and working hard was always my style. I preferred to design, construct, and stylize one-of-a-kind images to set trends, because I was never a follower of trends. Preparation time was

always the challenge for me when I would design and construct the images. I would work like a maniac, without sleep, to complete the work because preparation time was always limited. Custom images took incredible sacrifice, because the process came from an idea, which had to be turned into a wearable outfit in a matter of days or even hours. When time and budget didn't allow me to design and construct, I would reluctantly hit the stores to make due. But even with store-bought clothes, I always added my own special touches in some way. It's amazing how you can transform a garment by adding accessories or even by sewing in a few darts. Creativity is making changes, too.

As a first step for the assignment, I went to meet Lin and Alyssa at their home. Lin greeted me at the door when I arrived. Alyssa was not at home when I got there. When Alyssa did arrive later, her mother introduced me as she walked in the door. Alyssa wasn't very friendly nor did she seem interested in her images. She just said hello as she passed us and walked to her bedroom. During my visit, Alyssa didn't pay much attention to our meeting, as she was busy talking to her friends on the phone. Lin told me that Alyssa was dating a popular hockey player at that time, so her mind was on boys, not clothes. For Alyssa, this magazine was just another job to do on top of her busy schedule co-starring in *Who's the Boss*, the long-running popular sitcom. Alyssa co-starred with Tony Danza, who played her father.

On the other hand, Alyssa's mother Lin was very attentive and polite to me. She was totally focused on this project. We talked for a while over coffee and she handed me a list of Alyssa's measurements when I asked for it. We spoke about the budget and Lin explained that they had very little money for the wardrobe to start with. I was thinking of customized images, which are very labor-intensive and costly. I explained to Lin that I would design and construct new images for Alyssa as a special favor on behalf of Michael O'Connor. Lin seemed very appreciative and was delighted with my ideas and suggestions for the magazine spreads. I wasn't pleased about the low day rate for the stylist and the ultra-low wardrobe budget being

offered on this project, especially since I was earning top rates working on commercial productions, but I was given total creative control on the wardrobe images, which made it fun for me. I liked adding creative pictures to my portfolio whenever possible, so I accepted the job. If I were to design and make ten images, I had a lot of work ahead of me. Sometimes, what looks easy can be hard to achieve.

The photo session with Margaret and me was a one-day shoot. Shooting ten different images in one day is a lot of work. Alyssa's schedule on her TV sitcom was tight, so I was given two weeks to prepare, which was great for me because I liked to have as much time as I could for preparations instead of rushing to get things done in a matter of a few days. Michael decided to shoot the pictures of Alyssa using our home as a location. This was convenient for me because I didn't have to take my equipment and wardrobe to another place. On the day of the shoot, we worked pretty fast, creating one image after another. It was a long, productive day, as we all worked hard, even Alyssa. I found her to be very cooperative and pleasant to deal with. The only hard time she had was when she was required to shave her arms. Not her armpits, not her legs, but her arms. The editor told Michael that Japanese people didn't want to see any hair on the arms. Alyssa's arm hair was dark, possibly because of her Italian genes. I didn't think her arms looked bad, as some people are just hairier than others. Lin, however, made a big issue about shaving and Alyssa reluctantly went to the bathroom to comply. After watching how Alyssa interacted with her mother, I would say Lin had a wonderful and obedient daughter.

As Margaret was taking care of Alyssa's makeup and hair, I watched quietly from behind and realized what a beautiful face this young girl had. Alyssa was short and petite, but her facial beauty stood out strong. I gave Alyssa ten different images that day. I dressed her in some vintage sixties styles and a few different fantasy princess styles. Michael shot roll after roll of film. All of the images were original, very stylish, and classy.

Months later, when Alyssa's magazine came out, Lin didn't give me a copy for my portfolio, although I had requested one.

Since it wasn't sold in the States, I had my uncle in Tokyo purchase a copy and he sent one to me. I took the prints of my work out of the magazine and put them in one of my portfolios. I was very happy with the images, as they looked nice. Magazine editorials don't pay a lot, so it's normal for photographers and stylists to get credited for their work. I noticed the pictures in Alyssa's magazine didn't credit me as the stylist. I didn't say anything but wondered why. The pay was so low I should have at least received recognition for my work as an artist. That was the only thing I was disappointed about after seeing the printed images I gave Alyssa.

A few months after Alyssa's magazine was published and distributed in Japan, I received an unexpected phone call from Alyssa's mother, Lin. She wanted to meet with me about an upcoming project with Alyssa for Japan. I had no idea what this would be about, so I went to meet Lin at her house. Alyssa was out on set, shooting her sitcom, and wasn't around. As I walked into the Milano home, I could smell the fragrance of peach potpourri in the air. Lin offered me coffee but I chose to drink water. As soon as I sat down, Lin gave me a small gift, which was from Alyssa and herself, a gesture of appreciation for my past work. I opened the box and found a gold heart-shaped pin. I thought that was very nice of them and thanked them as I put the pin on my blouse. Lin told me that the magazine we worked on months ago had brought about a record deal for Alyssa from Japan's Pony Canyon Records. Alyssa was already recording her new album for Japan and they were planning to produce a music video for the title song. Lin went on to explain that there were a hundred different images of Alyssa in that special magazine we had worked on and that the record company wanted to promote Alyssa with the princess image I had created. That's why she had called me to work with them again to create more princess images for Alyssa's forthcoming music video. I asked to hear the music on Alyssa's new album. I wanted to see if her song might inspire me to create something better in sync with the lyrics. Lin stood up and went to the cassette player, as she said that Joey Carbon and Alyssa's father had written the song. When Lin played Alyssa's music on the

tape recorder, I wasn't at all impressed with her voice. I thought the girl should stick to acting instead of singing. My facial expression must've given me away because Lin stressed that she needed me to work on the music video. I was so uninspired with Alyssa's voice that I didn't know what to do. Lin mentioned again that the record company planned to market the album through image. Obviously, the Japanese pop market doesn't seem to be picky about vocal talent, as songs and artists are generally promoted by strong images, unlike the old days. That explained why they needed the princess image.

I asked Lin about the wardrobe budget. I was expecting a bigger budget on the album, as compared to the measly budget I had gotten in the past. When Lin explained the budget, I had to decline the job because the pay was as low as that for the magazine job. The first job was a favor for Michael O'Connor, and I bent over backwards on it. I was expecting better this time around, at least half of what I usually made on commercial production work, as it was a second request. At that time, my work was in demand. I was working on top-paying commercial jobs and turning down music video assignments, as I was into making money after years of working to gain experience and pay my dues. My work was difficult to do and time consuming. Low-paying jobs were like insults after a while, although I was always flattered to be requested.

After I had declined to take the job I apologized and stood up to leave, telling Lin that there were plenty of other good stylists in Hollywood who would probably accept her low rates. Lin couldn't accept a "no" and raised my fee and the wardrobe budget, as she pleaded for my help. Lin said she'd pay the difference from her own pocket. I was surprised to see her response after I had declined. Ultimately, I decided to work on the music video because I realized how much it meant to Lin that I create another princess image for her daughter. Aside from the low budget, I was somewhat reluctant to take this job because I wasn't inspired with the song at all. The music and the lyrics to the song weren't bad. I simply felt that Alyssa's voice wasn't as pretty as her face.

Seven days prior to the video shoot, I was running behind schedule in constructing the costumes and realized I needed to work faster. I had unexpected visitors from out of town to attend to, which sidetracked me from my work for a few days. There were many details involved in some of the dresses I had to construct, so I was working fifteen hours a day. During the week I was prepping for Alyssa's video, my sister was working with Arnold Schwarzenegger on a Japanese soup commercial. Arnold adored Margaret and they had known each other for a long time. At home, Margaret always boasted about how nice Arnold was to her, and she was always grateful and loyal to him.

As Arnold was being supportive to Margaret's career by requesting her often on photo sessions and TV commercials for Japan, I put aside a set of "his and her" Towelkets I had designed and put them in a carefully wrapped package. I handed Margaret the gift and told her to give it to Arnold as a token of the family appreciation for all his support for her. Our family did appreciate Arnold for helping Margaret's career and for giving her a lot of work and opportunities. Margaret liked my sisterly idea and took the package to give to Arnold. She gave the Towelkets to Arnold and he seemed to like them very much. Next thing I knew, Arnold wanted to meet me. I received a call from Margaret while they were working on a project and were hanging out together in a motor home on location somewhere in Hollywood. They were shooting that day and were booked to work together a couple more days for the soup commercial. I didn't talk to Arnold over the phone but I could tell he was sitting next to my sister. I heard him tell Margaret what to say in his thick European accent. Arnold's accent is a big giveaway. Margaret asked if I would come down to the film location to meet Arnold at five the next day. I was flattered that Arnold wanted to meet me, but as I was behind schedule with Alyssa's wardrobe, I declined to meet him until after my project was done. Margaret was persistent on the phone and asked me to come and give Arnold a therapeutic *onkyu* massage because he had back pain. Margaret said, "I told Arnold about you and your massage, please help me out here. Please!"

When Arnold was complaining about having mild back pain she must have told him about my Japanese massage therapy. *Onkyu* is a unique massaging technique that has been practiced in Japan for centuries. The treatment is a deep-heating shiatsu massage using special black incense that is burned in a ceramic holder. The ceramic holder is used to distribute the deep penetrating heat as the pressure is applied in the shiatsu style. The massage is not commonly practiced in the United States and few people know about this technique. The instrument for the *onkyu* massage is found only in Japan. The massage is extremely relaxing and therapeutic. During one of my trips to Japan, I found this therapy to work well on back pain. It has helped me a lot, so I perform it to help people when they have back pain sometimes. I am not licensed, nor do I do this as a profession, but perform the treatment only privately, for a humanitarian purpose.

Although I tried to get out of meeting Arnold on this occasion due to my overload of work, Margaret was persistent. So, what happened was the old story of the big sister who spoiled her little sister by giving in. I reluctantly agreed to go meet Arnold the next day, knowing it wasn't a good idea for my work situation. I seriously thought Arnold was suffering with back pain and felt bad for him. In the background during the call, I could hear Arnold mumble something to Margaret and she told me that we could meet at five the next day. Margaret said Arnold would send a car to pick me up before five. I thought that was cool, as I didn't have to drive or find parking at the studio. I agreed to the plan and hung up the phone to go back to work.

The next morning, I was in deep sleep when I got a call at 4:00 a.m. sharp. The driver who had been sent by Arnold to pick me up was parked in front of my home and gave me a quick wake-up call from his vehicle. The driver urged me to come out as soon as possible. He also mentioned not wanting to catch traffic and be late for his call time. I hung up the phone and freaked! I couldn't believe this was happening. I had started the day with a rude phone call before sunrise and now was being pressured to hurry out of my house. The night



before, I had worked past midnight and went to bed around two a.m. I had had only two hours of rest. I didn't expect the driver to come at four in the morning, because I thought our meeting time would be at a decent hour, like five in the afternoon!

This wasn't funny to me. My meeting with Arnold wasn't a job. It was a favor for my sister. "How could they do this to me?" I thought. As delirious and shocked as I was at that hour, I got up, washed my face, put on some clothes, and went out the front door as quickly as possible, almost at record speed for me. When I got outside, I realized I was being picked up in a white pickup truck with a middle-aged white man driving. A limo would have been nicer, but I didn't care, as I was so tired. The driver didn't talk much so I fell asleep without knowing where we were going. I was so tired I must've snored in front of the driver. I didn't care.

I had no idea how long it took or how long I was asleep in the truck, but when we got to the location, the driver parked and woke me up. I opened my eyes slowly and raised my head. I freaked out at the view of the landscape. The sky was still dark and we were in the middle of nowhere. There was nothing but desert all around, with a highway running across. I wasn't expecting this and was shocked. I thought, "Where the heck is the studio?!" I thought we were going to a stage somewhere civilized in Hollywood. I turned around and asked the driver, "Where are we? What the hell are we doing here?!" He replied, "This is the Mojave Desert. Arnold is in there." He pointed behind me and started to laugh. I later learned that the driver was Arnold's private chef.

I got out of the pickup, stretched, and realized how windy it was outside. My hair was flying in the wind, and I could feel specks of sand hit my skin. I saw two motor homes that were parked side by side and out of the way of the set behind the truck. When I turned around, I saw a huge crane with a red Ferrari hanging on a chain and swinging in the wind in front of a desert background. The camera and lighting equipment were in place. I could feel the desert atmosphere, as the climate was different, compared to being in Hollywood. I saw some of the production crew well covered up and walking around the

catering truck. Breakfast was being served in the sandy wind. Some people were going inside a motor home that appeared to be used as a production office, or in their cars for shelter. I followed the driver/chef to another motor home and he climbed some stairs and walked inside. As I entered the motor home, I looked around, and towards the back I saw Arnold sitting on a folding director's chair as Margaret applied his makeup. I noticed that when I walked up to Margaret, Arnold glanced at her and they both held back a big laugh. Arnold and Margaret thought it was funny to see me at such an early hour. I went up to my sister to announce my arrival, although it was obvious that I had arrived. She was smirking and introduced me to Arnold. He smiled and we shook hands as I said, "How do you do." Then I turned to Margaret and said, "I thought we were meeting at five in the afternoon at a stage in Hollywood. You never told me it would be in the Mojave Desert at five in the morning. Are you nuts?" Arnold and Margaret started laughing.

I insisted that I had made a big mistake in coming and had to go back as soon as possible because I was in the middle of constructing some outfits for a music video job. I also explained that I was behind on my work and couldn't stay long. I didn't have a car to drive myself back, so I started thinking about how I could get home as soon as possible. We were quite far away from Hollywood, and I really started getting concerned about the time rather than excited about meeting Mr. Muscleman.

Arnold saw that I was upset about the joke and he told me to relax. He said that I was there now and I could go back with the cook later on. As we were discussing my return, one of the Japanese producers came inside the motor home and said they couldn't shoot any scenes until the wind died down. Everyone had to be on standby. After the producer left, Arnold turned around to me and said, "Now we have time to get to know each other. Sit down and relax." Margaret explained that the commercial scene was to show muscleman Arnold walking in the desert carrying a red Ferrari on his shoulder. Such a Hollywood image, I thought. I spent the day in the motor home with Arnold, his bodyguard named Sven, and my sister

Margaret. I watched many people come and go from his trailer. There was even a busload of people that came to see Arnold. I was hoping to go home with the driver who brought me there, and was beginning to feel pressured on the time issue. I felt like an idiot for being tricked into coming.

After the cook served Arnold his lunch around noon, he disappeared from sight. I was looking for the cook to catch a ride back, and the moment I turned around, he was gone. I didn't care about giving Arnold his massage therapy. I didn't feel he deserved or needed the treatment. I asked everyone around where Arnold's cook had gone, once I noticed that he wasn't around. Arnold's bodyguard Sven replied that he had gone home a little while before. "What?" I said, shocked. I told Arnold that I had to go back to L.A., and he said I could go back with the chef. Nobody was listening to me or cared that I had to get back. I went outside and asked the production staff if anyone would be going to L.A. for a run so that I could get a ride back. No one was coming or going after lunch. Arnold kept telling me to relax and stop being so uptight. He told me to enjoy the moment. Apparently, Arnold didn't care about my career or paycheck while he made a cool three million dollars working on this commercial for Japan. I had to work for my money.

After a few hours Arnold said that the local weather was becoming too dangerous to drive in and there was a sandstorm warning on the news. The chef had left early because he didn't want to get stuck in the desert with us. Arnold and my sister were on standby all day and they didn't shoot an inch of film because of the strong winds. The visibility got worse by the hour as we waited, and I realized I was being detained somewhat against my will at this point by Mother Nature and the lack of a vehicle to get home. Out of frustration, I went to smoke a cigarette and realized how windy it was getting when I stepped outside of the motor home. Visibility was getting worse, too. I could feel the sting of sand hitting my face in the wind a lot harder than before. At least I felt privileged to have shelter from the wind inside the motor home, as many of the production staff had to stand outside and deal with the

windstorm or wait in their vehicles. I felt sorry for them, as the weather was uncomfortable. I saw the red Ferrari swinging side to side wildly like a pendulum. I could see that the stunt was too dangerous for anyone to perform with so much wind. This unexpected windstorm caused a mess for the entire film production. Everyone was hoping the wind would die down and waited patiently, hour after hour, just standing around. In the afternoon, the wind got worse, and we couldn't go home that night.

When I had left my home, I had put on my favorite coat, made from one of my Towelket designs. I was glad I had brought the coat to wear, as it was so windy. The coat was made of bright red cotton corduroy fabric in the front, and there was a huge Asian female face design made from the Towelket material on the back. I had designed it, figuring it was a way to promote my Towelkets. It was very unique. My coat drew a lot of attention because of the loud design and bright colors. I often got compliments on it, and lots of people in the production crew came up to comment on my coat. Even Arnold noticed my coat and asked me to take it off so he could examine it. I removed the coat after he asked me to take it off for the second time, and watched in disbelief as Arnold carefully inspected the tailoring of my coat. I hadn't seen anyone inspect my garment the way he did. After Arnold inspected the inside of the coat and pockets, he commented that one didn't find many garments with lining like this in the United States. Arnold let me know he was impressed and complimented me on the design and quality craftsmanship. In his heavy Austrian accent he said, "You are going to make a lot of yen with your designs." I was flattered by that and told him I was working on creating various images for Alyssa Milano. I also reminded Arnold that I didn't have much time to work on Alyssa's outfits and had to get back to my studio as quickly as possible. Arnold said he knew Alyssa and asked how she was doing. Arnold mentioned that he had worked with Alyssa in one of his movies called "Commando" and commented that she was a cute little girl. I didn't know Arnold and Alyssa had worked together until he told me because I had never seen any of his films.

The producer came to our motor home in the late afternoon to release Margaret and Arnold for the day. Arnold decided to spend the night in Palmdale and said I had no choice but to stay because it was too dangerous to drive back to L.A. Arnold informed the producer of his plan to stay at the local hotel overnight and asked him to book a room for him and Sven, his bodyguard. Margaret said I could stay in her room for the night. The producer gave everyone the call time for the next morning, which was very early. Arnold said he wanted to go to the hotel and exercise for an hour. He invited Margaret and me to have dinner with him after his workout. When everyone was released for the day, a limousine took Arnold, Sven, Margaret, and me to the nearest hotel in Palmdale, which was a very short distance away. The visibility on the highway was poor and the desert wind was strong. The limo drove very cautiously, and I realized that I couldn't go home even if I took a bus, because of the bad weather. When we got to the hotel, there was noticeably less wind and flying sand in Palmdale, probably because of the surrounding trees that shielded us from the wind, as compared to being in the middle of the open desert.

Arnold and his bodyguard left the limo and went straight to the gym. Margaret and I had the limo driver take us to a nearby store to pick up toiletries because I hadn't brought anything for the overnight stay. Margaret decided to make a pair of care packages for Arnold and his bodyguard. She picked up a few things like toothbrushes, deodorant, and underwear for them. We went to the hotel and dropped off the care packages, in brown paper bags, at the gym. Arnold was sitting near the Jacuzzi getting a shoulder rub from a middle-aged lady in a bathing suit. Arnold immediately opened his bag and started to smile as he saw what was in it. He was touched and thanked Margaret for her thoughtfulness as he explained that he wasn't prepared to spend the night there and was wondering what to do about getting clean underwear and a toothbrush. Arnold invited us to take a swim in the pool. We hadn't brought our bathing suits, so we left the gym. As we were walking out, Arnold announced that he would be out of the gym soon. I went to

Margaret's room to freshen up before dinner. I looked and felt tired and needed to get some sleep.

When Margaret and I went to the lobby, we found Arnold and Sven waiting. They looked energized from their workout. We went to the hotel restaurant as Arnold led the way. The restaurant host recognized Arnold instantly and walked up to show us to a table. As we approached a private booth on the side of the dining area, I could see that all eyes were on Arnold. We passed the Japanese clients and production executives, who were dining at a huge round table. They were surprised to see us there and invited us to join them, but Arnold declined and insisted on sitting at a different table. However, Arnold did offer to join them for a glass of wine afterward the meal. The host sat us at a private table and gave us menus. We took some time to decide on what to eat as Arnold told me he was trying to build a new image of himself as an actor and wanted to lose some weight. Arnold asked Margaret what she was having and he ordered the same thing. His bodyguard ordered liver and I ordered a chicken dish. We had a nice conversation during the meal, as I noticed Arnold behaved more like a grownup when in the public eye. Arnold was either serious or funny, and he was nice most of the time. He was always cracking jokes and making people laugh, as he seemed to be a true entertainer at heart.

After dinner, Arnold suggested that we go and sit at the client's table to share a couple bottles of wine. I thought this was appropriate, as, after all, they were paying him millions to be the spokesperson for their soup. Arnold was amazed that the Japanese would pay so much money to have him as a spokesperson. I was amazed too. When we walked over to the big table where the Japanese group was dining, they were excited to have Arnold join them at the table and grabbed chairs for us from other tables. Arnold ordered a couple of bottles of fine wine. When it arrived, the waiter opened the bottles and had Arnold taste it first. When he approved, the waiter served everyone a glass. I put my hand over my glass and asked for water, as I don't drink alcohol. Arnold spoke to the group and made them laugh as I sat by quietly. When Arnold's bill

arrived, the producer insisted on paying for it. Arnold insisted on paying his own bill as he had invited Margaret and me to dinner. He made that clear and paid his own tab. I realized that Arnold was not cheap.