

Becoming a Goth

by Maria Adelman

It's what is on the inside, not the outside, that counts.

— Unknown



Carrie, Amanda and I headed for the mall. We talked about the same things we usually did, went to most of the same stores and walked around in the same manner we ordinarily did. The only difference was our clothing and makeup.

We had become goths with simple adjustments to our appearance. Gothic, if you aren't familiar with it, is the mostly black, some red, chained garb that some people enjoy wearing. That day, Amanda was wearing a black skirt and top, black glasses, fishnets on her arms, striped knee socks and black shoes. Her hair was atop her head in two buns. I wore a red plaid skirt, fishnet stockings on my legs and arms, knee-high black lace-up boots, a black sweatshirt, headphones, with some of my hair pink. I even wore a small red nose ring, which was undetectably fake. My eyes were thickly lined, and Amanda and I both wore black lipstick. Carrie sported an incredibly short black skirt, ripped black stockings, a low-cut plaid jacket with black fur trim and a red sequined devil-horn headband. We were all adorned in chokers, rings and multiple pairs of earrings.

When I looked in my mirror, my first thought was, *I'm liking this look. Why don't I dress like this more often?* But I knew why—this outfit made me look like I was begging for attention. It was the clothing of a different group of people, a group of which I would never be a part.

Entering the mall, we initially noticed a few glances at our clothes. That was to be expected. Then there was laughing and pointing. At one point, a whole family watched us. Some, including adults, stared rather obnoxiously. A middle-aged man stopped beside us and gave a quiet “you’re-looking-good” whistle. It didn’t sound like a joke, it was rude—and serious. Our clothing made us seem less respectable.

As we walked through the mall, escalators full of people gawked at us. We found this funny most of the time, but once in a while our mouths fell open in astonishment at some of the ruder reactions. Some salespeople treated us the same, but in other stores they seemed disgusted by our attire. In a bookstore, Carrie asked for the poetry section. "It's in the corner, in the back," he told her elusively. She looked, but found no poetry.

Later, we returned to the store after we had taken off our makeup and dressed in our normal jeans and shirts. This time we began looking at journals. An employee came over and showed us which journal was her favorite. After she left, Carrie nudged me and said, "That guy at the register was definitely checking us out."

"Where is the mystery section?" Carrie asked. This time he said, "Oh, let me show you." He then politely took her to the section. Looking around, I noticed the store was just as busy as it had been before. Obviously, our clothing affected some people's reactions to us.

At one point, our gothic style had made a mother steer her kids away from us, and another woman had walked by with a look of utter disgust. As she passed, I heard a great, loathing sigh of disapproval. One commented, "Isn't that weird?" Her older companion replied, "I think it's cute." That was the best comment of the day.

We even passed three young military men. There are stereotypes that go with military men just as with goths. I expected the three to be stiff, but mostly respectful. That's why it surprised me when the man in the middle coughed and muttered "hoes" as he looked at us, and the other two laughed.

When it came time to change, I looked one last time in the mirror at an outfit I had come to enjoy, despite the comments. In some ways it was fun to get a rise from people and see how they responded. It amazed me that some seemed so mad when they had no idea who or what I really was.

Dressed in my usual clothing, I noticed an immediate change. I wasn't anything to anyone anymore, just another teenager roaming the mall. I was looking for people to stare at me in my jeans, but they didn't. I was looking for a whisper, a sign of my existence in someone's eyes, good or bad, but there wasn't any. One woman did stop and ask where a particular store was, and we politely told her as we would have in our other clothing, although I'm sure we never would have been asked.

As we were leaving the mall, I noticed a short, overweight man in a funny little poncho and almost whispered to Amanda, "Look over there." But I stopped myself as I realized that he, too, had probably been followed by whispers and stares all day.

The moral of the story is heard many times, but I'll repeat it because a lot of people don't get it: Don't judge people by the way they look. It's what is on the inside, not the outside, that counts. . .



Photo by Johnny Vukovic