

My childhood was spent immersed in music, dance, fashion and Irish culture in Butte, Montana. I remember visiting An Ri Ra, an annual Irish festival, at three years old and watching the Irish bands play with their bouncing rhythm and genuine joy across each player's face. This was one of my first, and most impactful interaction with the abundance that international cultures can bring. Then as the music grew, the Irish dancers leapt onto stage. Dressed in beautiful vibrant fabrics and intricate embroidery that always came together into a pattern that resembled the Celtic knot, I was in awe of the detail and expression that these dresses could hold. They were a community of dancers that used dresses unique from each other as a celebration of their individuality. Soon after this first experience, I joined the Tiernan Irish Dancers, that same dance team that wore those ornate garments. Only a little girl, I started out in what we called "fairy dresses". These were flowy dresses made from tulle, sequins, and elastic with each specially made to express the personality of the toddler. I was ecstatic to show mine off along with my team of other giddy toddlers knowing it was made just for me as a physical representation of myself. Separate from the standards set by American fashion, I felt the truest form of myself in those elaborate dresses. This was my first encounter with clothing that could hold value in its capability for expression and community.

Though I value the experience of plus size women in America, I want to explore the collective female experience around the world. I caught a glimpse of Irish Culture that migrated to Butte during its initial boom and fell in love with its rich culture. I can only imagine the impact living abroad could provide. American fashion is deeply connected to American culture, I want to explore how women from cultures other than my own experience the fashion industry. Then, I can create a clothing company built off diverse perspective. Much like America, England is a melting pot of cultures. With easy access and plentiful connections to the rest of Europe I can connect to women throughout Europe. Starting in London and traveling around Europe, I can have real conversations with women who may give me greater insight on how my clothing can fit their needs. Maybe I'll find various groups of women are searching for high quality basics that will stay in style through fashion trends or maybe I find they are searching for clothing that caters to the current trend. I will create a company that listens to diverse female voices to create a community that caters to their needs regardless of the industry standard.

That penetrating sense of authentic expression I felt with Butte's Irish dancers is something I will continue to pursue. This time I plan to create a community of my own. I felt included in many ways throughout my life, but the older I get, the more I feel limited in the clothing I use to express myself. Before, when getting made a fairy dress, I knew that garment was made without judgment to size. Now, as I get older, I don't have to option of custom-made clothing. Instead, as a plus size woman, I must search through hundreds of shops just to find one that offers my size in styles that I enjoy. That's not because I am alone in my search, it's because the fashion industry is designed to be exclusive. The average American woman is between size 16 and 18 but the average retailer sells sizes 00 to 12. Though the industry has certainly made inclusive progress with many retailers offering extended size ranges, I don't see the progress that women need. Even within those extended size ranges, fewer style options are offered compared to those in standard sizes. I am determined to create quality clothing for all sizes that encourages a community of inclusivity and authentic expression amid an industry that standardized exclusivity. Community can be built from clothing and much like how Butte's Irish culture inspired self-expression and community, I plan to produce clothing that builds a community for every body.