

DEAR JILL

Pack or Pack It In?

Dear Jill,

How long should it take for a model to *make it*? I've been struggling for a year in New York, and I feel like I'm treading water. Should I quit?

Down & Out, NYC

Dear Down & Out,

I just received an article submission from an old roommate who has been where you are (most of us models have). When she was down and out, I gave her a kick in the butt and sent her to Europe. And what happened? Read her words of wisdom; I think you will find them inspiring. (Remember: You will probably never regret trying and failing, but you will regret never having tried.)

Audi's Answer:

Ask a supermodel, "Was it tough making it to the top?"... and expect to be disgusted by the pretentious response. They must be coached on how to answer: "No! I don't really remember how it happened. It was all so fast. One day I was making cheese in Wisconsin, when Steven Meisel drove down the street and spotted me, and the next day I was on the cover of Italian *Vogue*." Usually the truth is she struggled for eight years, she's really 26 and not 19, and she *finally* got a lucky break.

While we hear the glamorized overnight-success tales all the time, the real story of perseverance paying off is rarely told. Perhaps my own unembellished account will encourage you to keep plugging along!

I started in a midwestern town, moved

to New York, worked ten jobs in six months and never got a decent tear sheet. That's when I realized my editorial look was not suited to my mostly catalog agency. However, my book wasn't strong enough for an editorial agency to sign me on, so I changed markets. I moved to Miami where I worked successfully as a runway model, but yet another commercial agency failed to bring in the print bookings. Frankly, I sat on my ass for ten months and only made \$3,000.

The doubts set in: "Who can live like this? Is this what I left Loyola University for? Am I pretty enough? Have I just been fooling myself? Should I just quit?" My roommate at the time, Jill (yes, Editor Jill) encouraged me to try Europe, assuring me that my look was in there. I decided to go just for the summer; if it didn't work out I would quit...

I got an agency in Greece and flew there in mid-May with my husband of eight weeks. From the plane Greece seemed like paradise: beautiful islands, the blue sea, towering mountains. Upon our descent, my dreams of a market made for me started to crumble like the pillars of the Parthenon. The closer we came to the city, the more I was reminded of documentaries I'd seen on Calcutta. On the ground, the situation only got worse: total pollution, obnoxious men literally attacking me on the streets, no subway, maps not to scale, and unprofessional clients who often did not show up for the castings which required two hours travel time.

The Greek taxi--now this is an experience. First, drivers of empty cabs will not necessarily

he does not want to go in that direction, he nods yes, which means no. When speaking Greek, yes is Nah! Yes is no and no is yes. Confused yet?

After 11 days, I knew that Athens was not my market. After retrieving my passport (the agency and hotel held them so models couldn't leave the country) and calling the agency's bluff on fabricated upcoming bookings, I left for Paris. Paris is known to be the toughest market in the world. I expected to be rejected and return to the U.S. with my tail between my legs.

My husband and I arrived at the airport in Paris after midnight, and the buses had stopped running. To save the \$50 cab fare, we slept on the airport floor. The next day I cleaned up and primped at a friend's place and went straight to Ford Agency, aiming high and planning to work my way down. I met all the bookers, who stared at my face and made me nervous. Finally one commented, "Tres jolies yeux (very pretty eyes). Okay, we can use you." I was high! They liked my different look--my less-than-perfect nose, thin lips, and platinum hair.

I went to castings for three days straight and suddenly I heard, "Your chart is filling up. The clients are really responding well to you, and Thierry Mugler loves you!" I worked ten days straight and then three or four times a week after that--even with my

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awful book. For two months I made a living in *Paris*, the city known for starving models! I wasn't rich, but I wasn't sleeping on airport floors!

stop for a potential customer. They only stop if they feel like driving the direction you are going. Therefore, you must scream your destination at the moving cab. If

At one of my last bookings before summer holiday, I was sitting in the makeup chair, looking over the makeup artist's shoulder, and in the chair across from me sat a girl I recognized, even without makeup. It was Naomi Campbell. More models arrived: Shalom, Yasmeen, Helena, Caroline, Stella, Crystalle, Jodie, and the last to stroll in, nervously humming the tune to "Black" by the Rolling Stones, Carla Bruni. I was intimidated, but I realized that without their makeup they weren't much different from me or any of my friends in the biz. The shock started to wear off. Since I had arrived in Paris it did "all happen so fast." Maybe success would have come easier if I had found the right market in the beginning, but for me this was fine. I was backstage at the haute couture press show for Givenchy. Voila! I had arrived.

In this business, *where* you are can be as important as *who* you are (or what you look like). Once you're the flavor in one city and your book proves it, you can work anywhere. If you're down and out and ready to quit, stop feeling sorry for yourself. Everyone has his or her own look and is uniquely beautiful. You are pretty! Don't change. Keep your chin up, go for broke, and MOVE!

Audi Martel



ILLUSTRATION: René Santana



Givenchy