

BRAVE HEART

Diane Guerrero shows us that it pays
to be true to yourself

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STYLIST: LUCY WARREN FOR THE ONLY AGENCY

It's an uncharacteristically warm, sunny day in mid-May—for New York City—when I meet Diane Guerrero. She is early and already seated at the lobby bar of The New York EDITION Hotel with a silver pot of tea when I arrive. The 31-year-old actress is donning a *Baywatch*-red one-piece swimsuit (I find this out as she removes her jacket and warns me, with a smile, “This is not the look.”) paired with black, white-striped track pants. Her face is free of makeup (she just had a facial) and her chin-length locks are styled in a deep side part. An unquestionable natural beauty, I remember the part in her 2016 book, “In the Country We Love: My Family Divided,” (which I’d finished reading the night before our interview) where a studio manager tells her, “I don’t know if you’re pretty enough for this business” and think to myself, *Well, she couldn’t be more wrong.*

The New Jersey-born artist, who normally splits her time between Los Angeles and New York, has been on the east coast for a month now. “I’ve been traveling. I always think that I’m going to do my last book tour. This is the last month or this is the last school I’m going to visit and it always does not turn out that way, which is actually great for me,” she says with a smile, adding that she’s happy to have the work. “In the Country We Love”—which will be released in a young adult version titled, “My Family Divided: One Girl’s Journey of Home, Loss, and Hope” on July 17th—chronicles Diane’s life leading up to and after her parents and older brother were deported to Colombia when she was only 14 years old.

The idea for the book came about after her op-ed, “My Parents Were Deported” was published in the *Los Angeles Times* in 2014. “I had no idea that it was going to catch peoples’ attention the way it did, and that just made me realize the dire need for this story to be out there.” Though Diane always thought she would eventually tell her story, she was not prepared to share something so personal this early in her life. On top of that, her plate was pretty full with her recurring-character roles on Netflix’s multi-award-winning series, *Orange is the New Black* and on The CW’s hit TV show, *Jane*

the Virgin, and her quest to find stable work. But once the calls from publishers and book agents came pouring in, she knew she could not pass up this incredible opportunity, and made the pivotal decision to share her very personal experience so that others dealing with immigration situations like hers could identify and be inspired by her story.

Given the polarizing subject matter, Diane expected negative feedback, but the positive responses she continues to receive after visiting myriad universities and via social media far outweigh the bad. “Sometimes you get some racist comment here and there, but at the same time, it lets me know how much more I need to be doing this and how many more people need to be part of the conversation.” It has become her mission to highlight that the immigration system is broken. “There is no back of the line that you can go to. No, there is no path for citizenship. It’s extremely unbalanced. The visa system is outdated and the system is essentially biased. And I am really simply just sharing my story... If America is the country it says it is, then it needs it live up to that. You value family, the home, and human lives? Then you should act like it... If enough people participate, maybe we can change some minds and actually make a difference in Washington and finally reach some reform and some relief.”

Red Ali Cropped Top - A.L.C.
Red Oman Pant - Rag & Bone
Rainbow Hoop Earring - Vintage

With the telling of her story, she hopes to humanize what happened to her, and show that there are lifelong consequences when you separate families like this. "I literally have this trauma for the rest of my life, and it's something that I have to work on every day and I felt like it was important to bring attention to. It's not just about, 'Oh, your parents came here illegally, therefore you must suffer the consequences.' What kind of rhetoric is that? You're talking about another human being."

The bartender places a small wooden bowl in front of Diane. She pokes at the paltry salad. "What is this? It's just like, two big beets. Umm, love it. Where's the, where's the chicken? It said it had chicken. Well, perhaps I am wrong. Maybe I had to order that on the side. Anyway," Diane breathes as she digs in. [You were not wrong, Diane! I looked it up. The menu description reads: Salmagundi, Endives, Pickled Baby Beets, Lemon, Chicken. They owe you some chicken.]

As a teen growing up in Boston, Massachusetts, after her family was deported, Diane went from one friend's home to another without the U.S. government ever checking on her whereabouts or well-being. She struggled financially and emotionally throughout her adolescence, and later on, experienced suicidal thoughts. In her beautifully honest memoir, she recounts the cold night she went to the top of her 8-story building contemplating whether to end it all. While sitting on the wall-less landing, she fell asleep and when she awoke, a sudden misstep served as her wake-up call. She immediately knew she wasn't ready to die. "I shared that very personal part of it, because I wanted to talk about mental health and how little of mental health we get in our communities, especially the Latino community, where you're really not allowed to feel like you need therapy. You're not allowed to feel feelings. You're not allowed to be upset at anybody or upset with your current situation. You're really taught to be grateful, and you're taught that mental health is for the rich, for the privileged, and you don't deserve that... I still need serious therapy like every week, and in a good way."

What kept Diane moving forward was her love of entertaining. Since she was a child, Diane loved to tell stories, sing, act, and dance. Performing made her feel free, she tells me. Growing up, she participated in choir, performed in school ensembles, and regaled her parents with songs. Diane's mother believed so deeply in her daughter's talent that she'd often call her "a shining star, destined for Hollywood." But this only upset Diane. "I yearned to become a singer, to find my way into the limelight, as much as my parents wanted that on my behalf. And yet the sheer improbability of that desire made it painful to linger on such a long shot. So I placed a tight lid over the top of my dreams," Diane states in her memoir. In high school, she found her people while attending Boston Arts Academy, a public high school for the visual and performing arts. Here, she felt at home.

Though her affinity for the arts far surpassed every other career field she considered while at Regis College, it took a long time for her to believe in her talent and finally pursue her dream of being in the spotlight. Getting to where she is today—a successful actress, author, and influential activist with a 1.8 million-following on Instagram—was a challenge and continues to be a challenge for her, which is why she hopes to inspire others to see their potential and realize that they too can change the trajectory of their lives with hard work, by being resourceful, and believing in themselves. "Young aspiring actors have often asked me whether I ever wanted to quit. Yes. Sometimes daily. But like it or not, and I do like it, I rolled up in this world as an artist. It's who I am. The alternative to continuing in my struggle was returning to the way I felt after I left high school. In my heart of hearts, I knew I'd veered off the career path I was meant to take, and that's in part why I almost ended my life," she shares in her book.

Once Diane gave herself a chance to pursue an acting career and began to achieve some success, she felt a responsibility to let her community in on her journey. "It's not easy to compete in Hollywood with everybody who is doing this, especially when you come from very little. I hope to let people know, 'Look, I was in that same situation. I was suicidal.

Cigarette Pants - OFF-WHITE c/o VIRGIL ABLOH
Floral Striped Cropped Shirt - OFF-WHITE c/o VIRGIL ABLOH
Earrings - Versace





I thought my life was over. I thought I meant nothing. I thought I had nothing to live for. But that's not true. I'm worthy. I'm worthy of love, success, a good education, good, positive, healthy relationships, and I'm freakin' worthy of having a very, I guess, interesting job where I get to call the shots and where I get to make my own story. So, if I can inspire others to see themselves in that way, then I'm happy."

An advocate of self-care, Diane urges others to take care of themselves and stop caring so much about the unknown, and failing, and what people think. "Even going to therapy is brave... We spend so much time trying to hide these truths from people, when you know you can just make a simple decision to say, 'I need help' or 'I'm hurting.' The best thing that I did, was realize that I didn't have it together, that I needed help, that I was hurting." Gone are the days that Diane feels the need to appear as though she has it all together. She no longer wants to hide who she truly is. "I don't want to live like that anymore. I want to be transparent. I want people to know my heart. I consider myself a person who cares a lot about others and if that's too much for some people, so be it. On my tombstone, it will say: 'Diane Guerrero, she gave a fuck about others.' Pretty good. I'm really happy about that. I admire that in other people," she says matter-of-factly.

Diane's tenacious work ethic and keep-going attitude have served her well. When things don't work out as planned or as she hoped, like when she doesn't land that TV show she really wanted, her thoughts now are, "OK, what do I do from here to build on that? And almost every single time, things get better. Sometimes they don't and it just takes a little longer." This is not to say that not getting what she wants has become easier to accept. "I'm tired as hell, I'll tell you that much," she sighs. Tired of what? "Tired of working so hard. Although, that's just going to be it, for the rest of my life, just always going to work hard —that's my MO. Just for once, I would like something a little easier. But see, you put that in perspective to people who are really

struggling and it's like, you *do* have it easy. Y'know? I'm comparing myself to people who I see. *I would love to be them and would love to have their career* and it's like, God!"

She repeats the sage advice she received from a yoga instructor recently: We should stop comparing ourselves to others, and acknowledge that we're in a better place than we were last year, and if we're not, we will be next year. "Comparing yourself to others is so futile and a waste of energy and time. You've got to remind yourself that you have something that others would be very happy to have. Be good to yourself because you've worked hard and you should be proud of those accomplishments. We always want to be better. We always want to be great. Let's keep working. Right?" she says between bites.

Since her book's release, the opportunities have continued to roll in —from a litany of public speaking invitations to potential series, like *Aftermath*. "I got an opportunity to make a series out of my story that hasn't yet worked but I'm in talks to try again. It's just a matter of getting the right story together and then producing it." The docu-series, which she is collaborating on with immigration rights activist, Julissa Arce, will take a look at the aftermath and consequences of specific events and issues. The first season is slated to focus on deportation and life after that. Her fearless activism also garnered the attention of Reese Witherspoon's media company, Hello Sunshine, who recruited Diane to host their podcast "How It Is." On Season One of the podcast, she interviewed Gabrielle Union, Tarana Burke, Krista Tippett... about deep issues like anger, freedom, their voice, and power. "To be in the same room with a lot of these women is just a huge accomplishment for me and that definitely wouldn't have happened if I wasn't so active politically, so engaged, I guess, in this way... It certainly pays to be honest, truthful, and unapologetic, which is exactly what this podcast is," says Diane, who will host their second season as well.

The night of our interview, *Superior Donuts* —the CBS TV show on which Diane portrays

Floral Button-Front Cotton Dress - **Dolce & Gabbana**
Patent Nude/Clear Pump - **Schutz**
Silver Hoop Earrings - **Vintage**

food truck-owner, Sofia— aired its series finale after two seasons. Saddened by the news, Diane tells me that she would've liked another season to flesh out her character's storyline. "It's very rare that you go to work and you like every single person and that's exactly what I felt on the show. I loved everyone so much and I learned from every one of them." She smiles. "This salad turned out to be pretty good. Not even a real salad—what fancy people eat. Here's a salad. Here's two beets," she quips.

While working on *Superior Donuts*, Diane had the chance to provide input on the episode "The ICEmen Cometh," where Sofia asks Franco for help hiding her undocumented brother from being deported to Colombia. Was that hard to film since it hits so close to home? "No, that's the whole point of why I'm doing this, because I want to tell stories like that, that are difficult. When I first signed onto the show, I talked about my book a lot and I was like, I would hope to see an episode that touches on immigration. There were so many things that I wanted to do with the episode, but literally we only had 22 minutes. I was very proud of it. Not many shows are talking about immigration...and I'm happy to say that it was definitely something I had to do with. I was happy they did that."

Though Diane left *Orange Is the New Black* to play Sofia on *Superior Donuts*, she does not regret it at all. Could you go back? "Who knows? I mean, if they call me, I could pop in. I have no qualms about that. But I don't know how many seasons they have left, but I would love to come back." Her character Maritza Ramos went to another prison, so it's possible for her to return to Litchfield. Would you ever have your people reach out to them? Be like, Hey, well you know... "No, I think that they would know if I would be available or not, or if they would want me in any episodes or even as a quick comeback. That would be great." She speaks affectionately about the family she made during her four years on the show, and credits *OITNB* for giving her her first real break. "I still go to so many places and people are like, '*Orange Is the New Black*

is my favorite show!' I'm like, that's so wild," she beams.

The women on the show are strong and have endured so much, is there any scene or season, that pushed you out of your comfort zone? "I don't think anything was out of my comfort zone, just because I feel like I'm very comfortable in the mess of things, except for sexual things. I'm always really kind of weird about onscreen kissing and stuff like that." She laughs. "Only because I haven't done much of it. I think that once I get more used to it, it will be fine."

Being a part of TV shows that break the mold have become a trend for Diane, who also starred in the critically-acclaimed TV series, *Jane the Virgin*, as Jane's bestie Lina Santillan. "I don't mind being a part of history. No biggie. Or being the first to try things," she says with a smile. She relished her role as Lina, and loved working with a predominantly Latino cast, she tells me. "It was great being a part of something that had never been done before. Hopefully, this will bring about more. When we see it now with shows like *Vida* and *On My Block*, that, I'm so into and so supportive of. So yeah, just kinda continue telling those stories."

As for what's next for Diane, that's up in the air. "Right now, I'm focusing on what the hell my next job is going to be, because as soon as I heard that my show wasn't getting picked up, I was freaking out. I'm like, 'Ohmygod, that's it! My career is over!' Of course, my agents have to remind me, 'No, you're OK...You're not starting from zero... You're a professional and you can handle this.' So right now, it's just setting up my plan to try to get a new job or to see what my next project is going to be." Diane begins another short book tour for "My Family Divided: One Girl's Journey of Home, Loss, and Hope" in July—her birthday month, she points out. But what she'd really like to do right now is take a nice, relaxing break. "I'm dying for a vacation—you have no idea. I want to go to Miami. I want to go to Colombia. I want to go to the South of France or Italy. I want to go explore and get into an adventure." We're all about self-care too, Diane. Take that vacay stat! **ML**

Plaid Double-Breasted Blazer - **FENDI**
Plaid Pant - **FENDI**
Silver Ankle Strap Sandal - **Schutz**
Large Silver Hoop Earring - **Vintage**

"I thought my life was over. I thought I meant nothing. I thought I had nothing to live for. But that's not true. I'm worthy. I'm worthy of love, success, a good education, good, positive, healthy relationships, and I'm freakin' worthy of having a very, I guess, interesting job where I get to call the shots and where I get to make my own story. So, if I can inspire others to see themselves in that way, then I'm happy."



WE WANT MORE!

Who are you listening to right now?

"I'm such an oldies girl. I listen to like, 70s rock. I was just listening to Elton John yesterday, it was on repeat. I was into Erykah Badu's new joint, it's not that new. It's literally a whole record dedicated to the telephone. I like Sza. I love Childish Gambino. I love Kendrick Lamar. I have my old-school favorites: Sarah Vaughan, Frank Sinatra, Chet Baker. I was listening to Carmina Burana, like the entire score, the other day —one of my favorites still. I got season tickets to the opera starting in September. Excited for that. I just saw two shows on Broadway: *Three Tall Women*, which is actually pretty good and *Lobby Hero* with my friend Brian Tyree Henry. Kind of wanting to go see *The Iceman Cometh*, it's the Denzel [Washington] play."

Do you ever get down to Miami?

"I love Miami. Any time I can go to Miami, I'm freakin' there. I just like going to the beach. Restaurant-wise, I just go wherever my friends take me. I'm so open to just hang. I love that everybody speaks Spanish. I love the Caribbean air. I love it. The art scene there is great. I haven't been to Art Basel yet because I'm always just doing something else, but maybe, hopefully, this year I'll make it out there."

What do you think fans would be surprised to find out about you?

"Though I've shared so much with my life story, I'm very private. I don't like everything being out there about myself, even though it is. I like my personal time. I like to spend my time wisely with people that I love. I don't really like going to events. I don't like dressing up all the time and going on the red carpet. I dread it, to be honest. I'm a very spontaneous person... I don't like the planning of the hair, makeup, and outfit. *What if the outfit is not right? Is this going to advance my career? Is this picture sexy and cute and hot at the same time?* I can't. So, when I do those things, it really stresses me out. It's to the point that it makes it hard for me to take a damn decent picture. Everybody is like, 'Why can't you just relax?'"

All of your pictures look amazing.

"Thank you, that's because I've literally told myself to look at everybody and imagine them naked."

Keep up with Diane on
Instagram: @DianeGuerrero_
Twitter: @DianeGuerrero__ and
Facebook: @DianeGuerreroOfficial.

BACK TO SCHOOL

"I actually just gave the commencement speech for my alma mater, Regis College, and received a doctorate. It's exciting because I actually did not graduate, I literally have a semester to go. I talk about that in my book...it's one of my biggest regrets." Diane didn't complete her last semester as she was going through a "really, really bad time," she tells me. "Then I get this honor, which is great, totally motivating. All of my old professors were there... One of the professors was like, 'Well, you have life experience, call to book your thesis and you're done.' I was like, 'Well, who do I talk to?'"

Fuschia Mini Dress
Dolce & Gabbana

Silver Ankle Strap Sandal
Schutz

Diamond Earrings
Vintage

