

# **Make Me**

**By Rhiannon Holte**

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*Make Me* contains references to pictures of Anya, Rhiannon, and the rest of the inner circle doing the makeovers voted on by the fans. If readers want to see the pictures, please visit the website [www.makemeover.us](http://www.makemeover.us) and click on the “Media” tab on the menu. Click on “Pictures” to see Rhiannon’s Production Diary for the project or click on “Ria’s notes” to see a list of the images in the order that they appear in the book. Feel free to check out the rest of the website for additional information on the people behind this website and the fans who made it a phenomenon.

*This book is for  
Maren, the sister I lost,  
and Anya, the friend  
I hope I will never lose.*

# Chapter 1

## The Trial Run

Like most of us, Anya Allen knew that beauty is the fairy dust of fate. She also knew that if a girl wanted to be a star, she would need something more precious than beauty, something rarer than talent. She needed luck. And if that girl was a former child television star who had earned a reputation for being “difficult,” she would need a miracle. Or at least her own YouTube channel.

Anya’s TV show, *Extra Points*, was about a group of gymnasts learning lessons about friendship and competition that parents don’t have time to teach—kind of like *Glee* but with uneven bars. Anya played a ten year old who rocked the balance beam and America loved her, but by the time she turned 14 the show was cancelled, and Anya fell through the cracks of Hollywood Boulevard. While she tried to find her next thing, she did what most kids too young to be famous do—she picked up a DUI, went out with jerks, and let those vampire types who bleed celebrities dry have their way with her.

According to the magazines, when she did get work, she came in late and mouthed off to directors. At seventeen, her career was practically dead; producers hired her in case the audience wanted an update on the wreckage. She’d even accepted a few infomercials, drinking antioxidant shakes that looked like puke and doing those seven minute workouts for hard abs. By the time I met her, she was working at H----- to pay for acting classes. I was eighteen, a recent escapee from Connecticut, and ready to start over. H----- trained us both on the same day, if you could call it training; they barely gave you a chance to learn the computer system before throwing you on the floor. It’s every girl for herself in that cathouse, but somehow we became friends.

Maybe we got along because we were the same age or maybe it was because I was one of the few waitresses there who didn’t dream about being in the spotlight. Secretly I hoped when my parents heard I was working at H-----, it would shock them back to life like those paddles paramedics use to get

someone's heart beating. But when I told them it didn't make a dent. I could've been working at a book store.

Anya needed to make a change or accept the depressing reality of living a normal existence; it must be hard to deal with the fact that the most exciting moments of your life are in the past. That's how she came up with the idea behind *makemeover.us*. (We couldn't afford the .com or the .net. It would've cost about \$1800, which was a lot to us back then.) Looking back, what's amazing is not that it brought in millions of fans in six weeks—it's that we didn't try to stop it sooner. But in the beginning, when there were about one hundred thousand people following the website, many of them diehard fans of *Extra Points*, it seemed that lightning had decided to strike twice. For once, Anya's destiny wasn't in the hands of some casting agent with a French manicure.

Three months after our first day, she quit H----- and convinced me to go along for the ride as associate producer for the site. Our first step was to find some start-up money, so Anya asked this assistant cameraman she knew, Javier, to help us put a video up on *Kickstarter*; if people like what they see they donate money and if the project gets enough donations, you get to keep the money. I don't think about the last few days of the website unless I've doubled down on my Lexapro, but in the beginning it was fun. And exciting. And soooo cool.

From the hips up Anya looked like a ballet dancer with narrow shoulders, small boobs, muscular arms—but from the hips down she had the round firm butt and powerful legs of a Latina. (I say “looked” because that was before the fans got a hold of her.) Back when she was on *Extra Points*, she had to practice about three hours a day and keep her weight under 105 pounds; it was in her contract. I don't know what all that exercise and dieting did to her, but from the time she was ten she learned that her body was a tool you could mold like Playdoh.

She has big hazel eyes and lips that are full but not scary thick like some actors I will not mention. You'd think anyone who had been in the acting business since second grade would know how to dress to make the most of her looks, but Anya had zero fashion sense, which didn't help her in auditions. She had this thing for—I don't even know what to call them--jumpsuits? rompers?

She liked to wear them because they were easy, and she didn't have to think about matching anything. For Anya, it was all about how quickly she could get ready rather than what she actually wore. She'd brag that she could shove her hair in a bun and get out the door in under fifteen minutes. [Picture

of Anya hanging out in one of her rompers ([mm1ab](#))]. The only problem is that it looked like all she took was fifteen minutes, which is fine for a guy but doesn't work out so great for a girl, especially one who wants to make a comeback. (The first thing I did once the site started making money was max out my credit card on clothes and makeup because I knew that for once I could pay it off.) This is what gave her the idea for the website. She knew she needed to reboot her life and the best way to do that was with a complete makeover. Why not give that job to somebody else and maybe get some media attention along the way? Anya came up with four basic rules for the site. Unfortunately, as her new associate producer, I came up with number five.

## **Makemeover.us**

### **The Big Five**

1. At the beginning of the week, a category would be announced. Examples included hair style, clothing, tattoos, piercings, etc.
2. Fans would have 24 hrs. to upload makeover tips to the website *makemeover.us*. After 24 hrs., the makeovers would be frozen. Fans would then have 48 hrs. to vote or "Like" their favorite makeover.
3. The suggestion with the most "Likes" would win. A video of Anya doing that makeover would be posted on the site and our YouTube channel—if it was clothing for an event, she would be taped trying on the clothing and going to the event; if it was a tattoo, footage of Anya getting the tattoo would be posted, etc.
4. If at any time, Anya chose not to adopt a winning makeover, the website would be terminated.
5. Every four weeks fans would be allowed to come up with the category. After 24 hours, fans would be able to vote for the category of their choice. Once the category was selected, the fans would have 24 hrs. to upload their makeover tips as usual. Anya would have 24 hours to decide whether she would accept the winning makeover or terminate the project.

### **Week One**

Javier wasn't just good with a camera, he was also a major computer nerd. He made us an awesome website and created a free app that featured an avatar of Anya. When I first met him I thought no way would he be any good because he definitely didn't look like somebody who spends hours in front of a computer screen, but it turned out that he knew what he was doing. He lived with his parents (he was saving up for this Epic Red camera and some Diva lights) who rent half of this cool brownstone with a little workout room in the basement; he and his buddy Austin practically live down there when they're not shooting something. The way I see it, the only thing that's fun about working out is distracting someone else from working out. [Pictures of Javier and me working out. [\(mm2abc\)](#)] [Would it kill him to eat a donut? [\(mm2de\)](#)]

Getting back to the site's Apps, users could dress Anya up, change her hair and make-up, give her piercings, pretty much anything. We put up a video on YouTube of Anya explaining the rules and Javier made it so that as she talked her appearance changed—different hair, clothes, piercings, tats—it got the point across that she was willing to be a work in progress. For the first category we played it safe with a “Hair Makeover” and fans uploaded all kinds of images. Back in those days the fans bought into the spirit of the site, which was about helping Anya get her life together.

After 24 hours they voted and the winning makeover had 11,799 likes, which wasn't bad for a first week. We filmed her going to a salon and getting her hair cut and dyed black. [Pics of Anya at the salon [\(mm3ab\)](#)] Anya's original hair was pretty—kind of a light brown and really long—but the fans thought she should go for a more dramatic look, and I have to say that they were right. The new hairstyle made her look more like a woman, less like a girl, which is what she needed if she was going to be taken seriously as an adult actor. [Pic of Anya's new look [\(mm4c\)](#)] At the time we felt like it validated the project and we were really psyched!

## Chapter 2

### The Audition

#### Week Two

Anya was auditioning for Mary Epstein, who is a big agent in New York and takes on new clients like almost never. It was an important opportunity, so we asked the fans what she should wear. The dress they picked wasn't half bad, simple so that it didn't distract from Anya, and tight enough so that it showed off her figure. She wasn't crazy about the idea, but I convinced her to wear a push-up bra. I thought that Anya had to remind that agent that she was no longer a child actor—she was a woman with a kick-ass body. After the vote, Javier filmed her going to the audition and doing her monologue. [Pictures of Anya heading out to the audition in her new dress—43,400 Likes ([mm4ab](#))

She didn't end up landing Epstein, which actually turned out to be a good thing because losing increased Anya's likability. The fans had chosen her dress and her hairstyle; therefore, her rejection was their rejection. They left tons of sympathetic comments on the website and blasted Twitter with horrible digs about Epstein (who come to find out is actually really nice. Sorry Mary!). According to Google Analytics, this was when *makeover.us* started to get some traction—it wasn't just the interactive quality of the project, it was their connection to Anya as an underdog. People are great about offering second chances as long as they think the person has suffered enough.

## Chapter 3

### Ink

#### Week Three

Letting someone else pick your tattoo is a major deal because tattoos usually express something very personal. On my seventeenth birthday I got a tattoo of Goofy; I was supposed to wait until I was eighteen to make that kind of *major life decision*, but I was going out with this guy who worked in a tattoo place. [Pictures of me and Miguel kicking back in my old room ([mm5abc](#))] He did mine after hours, and my parents never said a word about it. Most normal parents would've freaked out when they saw their daughter with a dude who was obviously much older, but of course they didn't.

A lot of people, if they see my tattoo, probably judge me as immature, but I don't care. Goofy reminds me of Disney World which was the last vacation my family took before my older sister Maren died. We booked a special breakfast at the hotel; the characters would visit your table and joke with the kids and let families take pictures. I have lots of pictures with a whole bunch of the characters, but my favorite is the photo Goofy took of me and Maren sitting at the table with pancakes shaped like Mickey on our plates and my sister holding two fingers behind my head like devil horns. [Pictures of me and Maren goofing around at breakfast ([mm6](#))] That morning I remember thinking that my sister was a lot like Goofy—tall and gangly with pointy elbows and good intentions. After that trip, everything changed; we tried to keep the old rituals—decorating the house for Halloween, buying a Christmas tree, stuffing the turkey--but it was an empty performance. Eventually, we had to sell the house to pay the legal and medical bills. After I got my diploma, my parents moved to Florida to bury themselves in a retirement community; it took them a while to have kids, so they just made the minimum age requirement. Dad still does some taxes on the side; I don't know what Mom does to stay busy.

Which brings me back to my point: tattoos should tell a story or they are a waste of ink. We decided to have Anya open up and talk about herself on camera, provide fans with a *Cliff's Notes* version of her life since rehab. (Most people had a pretty good idea of what happened before rehab.) One of the things she told the fans was that she was trying to treat her body like it was a gift rather than a playground—no drugs, no cigarettes, alcohol only on special occasions. She was also a pescatarian, which meant that she still ate fish and eggs (as long as she didn't have to crack the shells open). Maybe you have to go through withdrawal to make those kinds of changes in your life. I believe your body is definitely your playground and you should have as much fun as you can with it in case somebody bulldozes it away.

The tattoo makeover turned out awesome because the fans chose this Celtic Tree of Life design (189,267 Likes). [Picture of the winning design [\(mm7a\)](#)] Some of the fans voted for it because Anya is big on the environment and some because of her Irish background. (Fun Fact: Anya is an old Irish name that means “radiance.” It goes back to Aine, who was a fairy queen and one of the wives of Fionn Mac Cool! No kidding!). She is supposed to be lucky in love (not so far) and in money (fingers crossed!). My mother named me after one of her favorite songs from the 70s. Why she thought it was a good omen to name her baby girl after a woman who is always flying away and leaving people broken hearted, I have no clue. We did include one rule—no tat on the face or neck because Anya needs to be marketable as an actor. The fans chose the back of her right shoulder, which is definitely a cool spot with the branches stretching up and almost reaching her shoulder and the roots of the tree trailing down towards her back. Anya squeezed my hand until I thought my fingers would break, but we got it done. [Pictures of Rob giving Anya the tattoo [\(mm8abc\)](#)]

Usually we get a few wacky makeover tips, but two of the images that were uploaded in the first 24 hours were creepy. One was a swastika and the other was a sketch of a needle dripping blood into a spoon, which if you ask me was definitely a mean reference to the rumors about her addiction to heroin. Anya said she never got into it, but who knows? She went to rehab for something. Obviously they didn't receive a lot of votes, (231 Likes for the swastika and 92 for the needle) but it was disturbing that they got any Likes at all. I didn't want to think about some white supremacist dressing Anya's avatar up in a Nazi dominatrix uniform. Not that she didn't have experience being the object of male fantasy both while she was on television and during her short stint at H-----. The first thing a pretty girl learns is not to think about what a guy might be thinking about.

Once we hit a million unique users, it was ridiculous. That's when the fans developed their own YouTube channel and uploaded confessional video clips explaining why they voted the way they did. At first it was fun to get a visual of what our fans were like and hear what they were thinking, but after a while it got weird. Some of the fans seemed too obsessed with Anya, and I started wondering if we should hire a few bodyguards, but Anya said no. She says that bodyguards turn into prison guards real fast. There was this one lady, Georgia127, who was a conspiracy theory type. She'd play the videos and pause them, claiming to find mysterious edits or evidence of green screens: The tattoo parlor wasn't real or the hair cut was a wig. And there was this tranni, @mebecraze, who vowed to do every makeover Anya adopted. [[Picture of @mebecraze wearing the exact same dress as Anya ([mm9a](#))] She needs some serious help with that wig!

# Chapter 4

## Fans' Choice

### Week Four

According to the rules, it was time for the fans to pick the category and they were ready. The winning choice was “Plastic Surgery” and the winning makeover was breast implants. Back at H-----, every once in a while a random guy would say something dumb because she didn't have the typical cup size. One customer asked if she was their Affirmative Action hire, but she never let it bother her. She said that women with big boobs were often typecast as stupid, as sluts, or as stupid sluts. Anya sort of considered herself a feminist. I know that seems crazy for a girl who worked at H-----, but we all make our compromises along the way.

When the fans chose breast implants, Anya had her first doubts about the project. All those hours of practice molding her body into a hard flexible strip of muscle—adding two bags of saline to her chest would throw everything off. Plus, it's one thing to wear a push-up bra, it's another to go under the knife. On their YouTube channel, the fans argued that finding roles that didn't involve getting naked or at least showing some major cleavage would be pretty tough. *HBO* and *Showtime* pretty much specialize in soft porn, but along with all that sex are some great series with cool parts for women. They weren't talking Double Ds, and they seemed to be thinking about what was best for Anya's career.

Here was the big moment—accept the makeover or shut it down and go home because if Anya didn't do it, our website would be no different from any other reality show. According to the rules (as more than one fan reminded us) Anya had 24 hrs. to make her decision. Traditional media was pounding on our door: we received lots of requests for interviews after the surgery—morning shows, the late nights, *People*, *In Touch*, *HuffPost*. Not everyone approved of the concept behind the website. Some of those media “experts” thought we were

headed for trouble and compared us to the Stanford Prison Experiment. I just finished a Psych 101 course online so I knew what they were talking about. Comparing our site to a horrible study that turned a bunch of college kids into sadists was stupid, but I guess pundits have to make their money somehow.

Before my sister died, there was no question that we would both go to college—my mom was a guidance counselor and my dad was an accountant. Maren played basketball and it looked like she'd probably get offered a few scholarships. Her first choice was UCONN because a lot of her friends were there, and they had a really good team, I guess. I think of my childhood as split into two periods—*Before The Accident (BTA)* and *After The Accident (ATA)*. In the *ATA* period, my parents decided I'd be better off homeschooled. I guess they wanted to spare me having to walk through the halls of our high school and hear the whispering about my family. I didn't argue with them. I was afraid that around every corner I'd run into Heather in her wheel chair. I took classes on my laptop from an accredited program and got my diploma three months after my seventeenth birthday.

What surprised me was my parents never pushed college, never even brought it up. You'd think they would've been even more determined to have me go given that my sister never would, but despite my almost straight A's, they couldn't even think about it. We didn't visit campuses, didn't get a seat for the SATs or fill out applications. No senior prom, no graduation party, I got a job at a Friendly's in a nearby town and dated boys who never heard of Maren. I took online college courses so that my brain wouldn't turn into mush in case my parents woke up from their comas and decided I could use a future.

When I turned eighteen, I asked my dad if he could spot me some money for the security deposit on an apartment in New York. He said yes and I guess they felt that with me gone there was nothing left keeping them in Connecticut, so they packed up my childhood in boxes marked **Florida** or **Charity**. We became a family of pretenders; we changed our addresses and pretended to move on but we were still stuck in the past.

The fans' choice of implants was the first time we seriously considered what Anya's end of the deal was. *Makemeover.us* doubled its number of unique users and those fans had become an intimate part of Anya's life. Letting others choose your hair style or clothing is one thing—letting them change your body is another. But the rewards were right there; we'd already started making some serious money from ads on YouTube and the website. When we went out to a restaurant or club, we got the VIP treatment because somebody on the staff was a fan. Anya was used to signing autographs and getting random calls from

other celebrities asking her to hang out from her days on the series, but I was blown away. Nevertheless, she was the one going under the knife so the big question was—how bad did she want another shot?

I haven't mentioned it yet but Anya had a boyfriend named Jake. They broke up and made up so often I never knew whether he still qualified as her boyfriend or not. She asked him what he thought about the boob job and he didn't hesitate. He said, "Hell yeah, go for it!" She broke up with him for that—not because he wanted her to get the makeover, but because he didn't have to think about it longer than two seconds. Of course he got mad and called her a crazy whore. I hate guys who immediately go for the insults that hurt the most. He knew what it was like to work at H----- and how they made waitresses stand at the door and compete for customers like they were prostitutes at the Bunny Ranch. He also knew that during those days before rehab she went with some douchebag guys who posted pictures of her. Every time he called her a whore he tapped into that. I didn't hate Jake because he hurt Anya: I hated him because he could charm his way back every time. Even girls who are pretty smart can be pretty dumb when it comes to guys.

Anya decided to do the makeover and the website's numbers went into the stratosphere. All of a sudden everyone wanted to be a part of remaking our former television star. Javier taped the whole thing (We not only are able to pay him now but even give him a crew—yay! [Pictures of Javier, Dave and Austin [\(mm10ab\)](#)]. One major issue was whether or not to show Anya's chest on camera and the procedure of cutting around the nipple. Anya gave us permission because she was tired of hearing about girls still in high school asking for boob jobs for a graduation gift; she wanted them to know what they would be getting into. [Pics of Anya resting after surgery [\(mm11ab\)](#)]. I have always looked down on women who opted for implants--if nature gave you small breasts be a big girl and deal with it. I never thought about the recovery from the surgery, but it turns out that it's a bigger bigger deal than I thought. They gave her some Vicodins, but they didn't help much because she puked them back up. Anya was still sore when she went on *The Today Show*. Even though she was pissed about it, she pretended to be happy with the fan's choice during the interview. I used to think that one of the things that sucked about being a kid was the lack of power and always having to do things you didn't want to do, but it's pretty much the same when you're an adult. As long as you want something—whether it's money or security or fame—sometimes you have to do things you don't want to do.

When I was six years old, my mom and I took a train into New York to go shopping on Canal Street and try to get on the *Today Show*. We stood outside

on the sidewalk holding a sign that said *WE LUV AL ROKER!* That was back when Roker was a little rounder and didn't have his own show. I can't get used to his face now, (No offense, Al!) but I'm horrible when it comes to change. Back when I was a kid, every time my parents wanted to take down wallpaper or paint a room a new color I would flip out, and I'm like that with people, too. That's why working on a project that involves making over my best friend is a big deal for me.

Anyway, Al didn't fall for it and we didn't get our chance to wave hello to a bunch of people we see every day at home. Yet there I was just twelve years later—associate producer of one of the hottest websites around. It was crazy cool to be on the inside looking out at all those people. I arranged it so that Dr. Huang, who did the surgery, was on the show with Anya—this gave him free publicity and us a free boob job. For the first time I thought I had a knack for that position.