

# MY LIFE IN CLOTHES

*For Patti Smith, fashion has always been about freedom.  
As told to Stephen Mooallem. Photographs by Lynn Goldsmith*



LYNN GOLDSMITH and Patti Smith's recently released book, *Before Easter After* (Taschen), is a collection of Goldsmith's photographs of Smith taken mostly during the period around the release of Smith's 1978 album, *Easter*. But one of the volume's surprise supporting characters is Smith's wardrobe, which runs the gamut from punk-rock leather jackets to designer blazers. There are scarves—many of them, including one she gave to Bob Dylan and another given to her by her brother, Todd. There are jackets by Armani and Valentino, a white dress that was a gift from Robert Mapplethorpe, and a pair of Swiss army boots that she wore into the ground (and are now in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame).

Smith still owns many of the items. "One of the problems for people in our lives—and I'm like this too—is that we save everything because some things can become relics," says Goldsmith, who has known Smith for more than four decades. "And relics are a part of who Patti is, whether it's her boots or the leopard-print scarf that was used in a variety of pictures. She still has that scarf. It has holes in it. But those things *are* Patti. They're pieces of her. And they still exist. They're like sacred objects."

"Lynn really understands the talismanic value of certain objects and certain pieces of clothing," Smith says. "Some of these objects I've had for 45 or 50 years." Here, the singer, writer, and visual artist (though she prefers the term "worker") recalls her introduction

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to fashion as well as some of the special pieces she's loved and, in many cases, not lost.

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I would make paper dolls out of magazines for my younger sister. We always used whatever was available, like my mother's Sears catalogues. But one day someone who lived near us threw out this huge stack of *Harper's Bazaars* and *Vogues*. I took them because I thought there'd be pictures in them I could use to make paper dolls. Most of the pictures, though, were black-and-white. But for some reason, at a young age, I was struck by how different those pictures looked. And the clothing—everything about it fascinated me.

Not that we could afford anything like that. We were a lower-middle-class family. But the thrift stores were very good in the '50s and '60s. When I got older I'd go to Camden, New Jersey—they had one of the biggest thrift stores on the East Coast, where all the wealthy people from Philadelphia gave their clothes. And from looking at these magazines, I knew about the different fashion houses—the houses of Dior and Balenciaga. So I would go to the thrift store and look at the labels in the clothing. Usually the clothes were ill-fitting on me because I was tall and skinny. But I didn't really care. I got a Dior silk blouse once for 50 cents. I got a beautiful cashmere Balenciaga coat for four dollars. I wore that coat everywhere. I would wear it to the beach. ►

This page: A still life of Patti Smith's Swiss army boots from the 1970s, which her mother later donated to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, 2017. Facing page: Smith in her favorite Giorgio Armani jacket in New York, 1977.

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Even as a kid, what I was wearing was always very important to me. I very much identified with my clothing. I just didn't like the store-bought clothing that I was asked to wear. But these clothes I'd find at the thrift stores really suited my frame. I felt like myself in them.

When I came to New York and started performing, I always wanted to be in *Bazaar* or *Vogue*. But at the time I think I was too eccentric-looking, so all my attempts to get into these magazines or have pictures placed failed. Robert Mapplethorpe would take pictures of me and try. Lynn would try. Lynn took these pictures of me in this green silk raincoat that I got at a thrift store. It was actually a Bergdorf Goodman coat that people wore over fur coats. But I really tried to look like I could be in a fashion magazine. I even combed my hair back. It was fun to sort of imagine myself as a model.

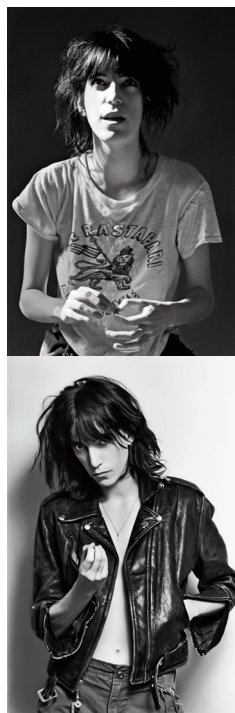
There was this scarf that I got at a Tibetan shop in '71 or '72. Lynn photographed me with it draped over me in the New York subway. It was my favorite scarf; I wore it all the time. I remember that I was in New Jersey with Sam Shepard and Bob Dylan. It was 1975, and Bob was about to embark on his Rolling Thunder Revue tour. I had been asked to join, but then they decided that there wasn't really a slot for me. So there I was, wishing Bob good luck because I wasn't going with him. I didn't have anything to give him, so I gave him my scarf. He put it on and wore it throughout the tour—it's even on the cover of a record. But I was proud. I was happy to give him my scarf and proud that he wore it.

There was another scarf that I had. It was a very old red scarf. It was made of a rough crepe material, like a silk crepe. My brother, Todd, tore part of it off to make a headband—you know, like Jimi Hendrix would wear. He gave me the other part and I wore it as a scarf. So we recycled it, and wore it over and over until it just fell apart. My brother died quite young, so I retired the last piece of the scarf and saved it. I still have it in a little box.

There was this Armani jacket that I became obsessed with back then. Giorgio Armani was a fairly new designer in the mid-1970s. I loved



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going to Bergdorf's. I didn't have the money to shop there, but of course I knew all about Bergdorf's. It was the old-school place to go for high-fashion clothing, so I would just go to look. But occasionally they would have these giant sales. I kept looking at that Armani jacket, and finally it was priced low enough that I could afford it. They only had one left. It was supposed to fit like a much smaller jacket—it wasn't supposed to be sort of a coat jacket. But I loved it. It was my favorite jacket to perform in because it was loose and really cool-looking.

Eventually the jacket was stolen, so I was mourning the loss of my jacket. But I was sort of popular at the time—I had a hit record—so we contacted the people at Armani and sent them pictures, and they very nicely made me another one. Whoever did it, though, was apparently appalled that the one I'd been wearing was too big, because they made the new one in a smaller size, and, you know, I've always liked things oversize. It wasn't the same. But I still have that jacket, and I did wear it quite a bit. It's still in my closet.

In the 1980s, I left New York and moved to Michigan to be with my husband, Fred. Once I had my children, I pretty much just wore T-shirts and dungarees. I wasn't performing, so I didn't dress up as much. I wasn't going to wear a torn T-shirt to a parent-teacher meeting. I also didn't have the access to the kinds of stores there were New York. But my life had changed. I tended to dress very simply because I didn't have any rock-star status. I was my kids' mother, and that didn't bother me because my essential image of myself in my head has always been more toward being a writer and a poet than a performer.

These days, I pretty much wear a certain uniform. My self-identity is as a worker. Because I am a worker—a day doesn't go by that I'm not working.

I'm lucky to have had a friend like Ann Demeulemeester, who has made me most of my clothes the past couple of decades. Ann has made me many, many jackets and vests. When she retired she gave me many more and some T-shirts too, so I still have those to perform in. Paul Smith was also

*Continued on page 151*



This page, from top: Bob Dylan in a scarf given to him by Smith, which he wore on his Rolling Thunder Revue tour, 1975; an image from Lynn Goldsmith's first session with Smith, in which Smith is wearing the scarf she gave to Dylan, 1975; Smith wearing a T-shirt she bought in Jamaica, 1976; Smith in a leather jacket from a thrift store in Camden, New Jersey, 1976. Facing page: Smith in another thrift-store find, a Valentino deerskin jacket, 1977.

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: KEN REGAN/CAMERA 5; © 1975 LYNN GOLDSMITH; © 1976 LYNN GOLDSMITH (2). OPPOSITE PAGE: © 1977 LYNN GOLDSMITH



kind enough to make me two beautiful black jackets that I perform in. He's a very good friend. But I tend to wear the same things over and over. I don't really dress up. If I have to go to a movie premiere or something, I usually just wear one of those nice jackets so I look presentable.

Now I'll mostly buy coats and boots. I have a weakness for coats. Sometimes I'll see a coat in a magazine that I really like and can't find anywhere. That's when I become obsessed. With footwear I like quality. The one thing I'll spend money on is a good pair of boots, because I'll wear them forever. I have a beautiful pair of Chanel combat boots that I've had for seven years. I still wear them all the time. I have these semi-motorcycle boots that Jimmy Choo made me that I wear onstage. I just wear them until they wear out, and then I'll get another pair because I know what I like.

I'm probably not so experimental these days, but I like to see what everybody else is doing. I like to see what Billie Eilish is wearing and what Rihanna is wearing and what different designers are doing. I still delight in that. ■