

# Darlene & Me

A PHOTO SERIES BY ANJA NIEMI





I was never good at expressing myself verbally, so when I first started taking pictures and realized I could tell stories without words, it changed everything. Now I photograph, stage and play out characters all by myself. I prefer it this way. I'm definitely an introvert and ironically I hate having my picture taken, but alone and in character I get comfortable.

Using myself as the only model, means I can be as ruthless as I like. I can spend days repeating the same pose over and over again until I get it right, and I always leave room for intuition. I like creating and changing things along the way.

Most of my characters, despite their striving for perfection, find themselves a little defeated. I suppose one of my ongoing comments is about our struggle for happiness and success. That's why Darlene got my immediate attention:

I once found this old suitcase. After I looked through it the first time, I got a strong sense of its previous owner. The suitcase belonged to a beauty consultant named Darlene and contained makeup samples, brochures and receipts from her few sales. I found many signs of uneasiness in her possessions. In August 1960, Darlene sold a jar of *Liquid Beauty* and one *Temptress Hairspray*, both to herself. The suitcase gave me a strong feeling of one woman's attempt at success and a sense of who got in her way. I started picturing her alone, being both a beauty consultant and a customer at the same time, which eventually led me to my fictional version of Darlene and her relationship with herself.







