



Full name and birthplace

Michelle De'Anne Peters, born in Oakland, California

Any nicknames ?

"Chelle" for family, church family and old friends. My trainers, (God's Gym) Gary & Donna Shields started calling me "Pe'tee" (Petey) years ago, which has become contagious. I really like that nickname, my dad and brother are called "Pete" and I'm "Pe'Tee"pretty catchy.

What cities have you've traveled marketing ChurchGurl?

Let me just say, my close friends, family members and church family were the word of mouth marketing. Many churches open their doors to me in the Bay Area, so I must give thanks to Bay Area Pastors because they took it to another level. The first church other than my own who really worked the marketing as soon as they heard about ChurchGurl was my cousin, Maria Reems, her husband and mother-in-law, Pastor Brondon Reems and Bishop Ernestine Cleveland Reems, they immediately invited me to several events at the Center of Hope Church.

In the Sacramento area, First Lady Kitty Griffin helped me market that area in the very beginning stages. She really believed in me and let me travel with her when she had speaking engagements. She did a "ChurchGurl" store at her conference. She took me to New Orleans to meet Bishop Paul Morton's wife and to do "ChurchGurl" at St. Stephens. I will forever be grateful to First Lady Kitty.

In Los Angeles, it was Home Assembly Apostolic Church and we literally stood outside of West Angeles until they invited me to an event.

In Atlanta, Bishop Dreyfus Smith was the first to open his doors, Pastor Norwert Hills, Jr . has been extremely encouraging, Bishop Steve Hall and Bishop Brian Keith Hodges have been supportive as well but it was Mega-Fest with TD Jakes, that elevated ChurchGurl to the next level because there was so many people there from all over the world.

In Washington DC, it was Dr. Theresa Hairston and Tina Gamble from Gospel Today Magazine who invited me to the 2006 Heritage Conference and we did-give-a-ways to celebrities for promotion.

In Tampa, Florida it was the Gospel Music Workshop of America 2003. and in Miami, Florida, it was Bishop Victor T. Curry and the New Birth Church staff who introduced "ChurchGurl" in that area.

Oh, if only I can name all the people who have labored and traveled with me in the beginning stages but I don't want to be lengthy, so I want to do a quick shot out to the people who helped me just because they love me and they are my models, Sean Young, who designed my website, My god brother, Rodney and the St. John Baptist Church, Olivet, Greater St. Paul, who encouraged their choirs and dance ministries to perform in ChurchGurl. To Shonda, Lila, Smoke, Nik, Flowers and my brother, Pastor Marty, who did vendor events with me and that is hard work...especially Lila who did Mega-Fest. We literally thought we were going to lose our minds there, we were just that busy, we begged Pastor Hills and Pastor Hamner of Atlanta to have mercy on us and help us so we can rest our feet and they actually did, they thought it was fun (for a while!)

Ok, I know I have to stop now, but there are so many grateful memories.

How did the concept of the clothing line come about?

I am a Pastor's daughter who's been in church since I was 3 weeks old. When I was in high school and college, I was a little ashamed to be a "churchgurl" so whenever I would go to secular events or parties, people who knew my dad was a Pastor would say, "Ooooo, Chelle, you aren't supposed be here, you're a Church Girl," as if church girls could only go to church, school and back home. I dated this one guy in college and he would introduce me to his friends, "as his little church girl." He would do that with such pride, it made me feel kinda proud to be a church girl. I think I was the first girl he ever dated that went to church. If he reads this he is going to crack up laughing..and ask for a cut of the business, knowing him!

In 2003, I went through some personal adjustments. God was maturing me and had rescued me from a horrendous relationship. The church was going through a transition as well. It was a lonely process, but well worth it. I was processing things and defining my life all over again and I got this vision of a plain black t-shirt that glittered "ChurchGurl" I assured myself, "I'm a ChurchGurl, I can handle this..bring it on." But I didn't see the word "girl," I saw "gurl" which is how we sistahs pronounce "girl" when we are talking to our home-girls and friends when we are about to say something profound, funny or just a good secret. So one day I painted the word "ChurchGurl" on a high end t-shirt with a glitter pen and wore it to Bible Class and everyone thought it was a little sloppy, but a great concept. So I trademarked the word then I started saving money and researched books and the Internet to make my vision become a reality. I took a 3-year leave of absence from my job and traveled to promote the business. So this is encouragement to women who are in the "valley," you can birth something wonderful when you are at your lowest point because there is nowhere else to go but up.

How long have you been designing?

I don't think of myself as a fashion designer, but more so an owner of a clothing line and I've been doing it for almost 4 years.

How did you get started in fashion?

I always loved fashion, my great-grandmother, grandmother, mother and her five sisters had style galore, so I would just say that it's part of my heritage.

What was your childhood like?

Oh my God, I had a wonderful childhood. I am the older of 2 brothers. My mom has 5 sisters that are like my sisters instead my aunts so I was always at my grandparents home trying to hangout with them when I was a little girl growing up in the mid 70's. We went to church a lot, I sang in the choir with my mom and her sisters and I was the only little girl up there. I sang my first solo at 3 years old, started directing the adult choir at my grandfather's church at 12 years old. Later my Dad organized Victory and for the most part, the family had to work together to help Dad with the ministry.

My parents weren't as strict as my grandparents. They allowed me to have social outlets and go on trips with the school (Holy Names High) and hang out with my friends. I attend sports events, proms, etc. My parents were very advantageous in encouraging and working hard to give me exposure, but nothing could come before my obligations to the church, **NOTHING!** I could go out on the weekends as long as I was in by 1:00am and at the Peters house, you went to church; rain, shine, sleet, snow, earthquake or any kind of natural disaster, we had to be there.

One childhood story I can remember clearly is back in the 80's, we had this TV show called "Dance Party" where they would invite high schools all over the Bay Area to dance on this show each week. I asked my parents if I could go when it was time for St. Mary's (*the all-boys catholic school*) and Holy Names (*the all-girls catholic school*) were invited to the show. This was going to be one of the highlights of my senior year; to be on TV. They emphatically said, "*No, you will not be dancing on TV like a "Soul Train" dancer. We are Christians and that is crossing the line.*" Of course, being the head-strong person that I am, I went anyway, with my still-to-date-best friend, Shonda and Willie Brown Jr. who was my dance partner (*son of Willie Brown, formerly of the Raiders.*) Well, needless to say, my younger brothers saw me on TV and told my parents and they watched me in disbelief, I got it good when I got home too. My parents were liberal but not that liberal.

Were you into fashion as a child? What do you remember about fashion as a child?

For a few years, I was the only granddaughter and I am the only daughter to my parents and my mother made it her duty to dress me in the finest little clothes. She had excellent taste in style and made sure I was "well fitted" from my clothes to my hair, to tights, to my shoes. She custom-made our clothes, as she is an excellent seamstress. We would also

frequent 2nd hand, consignment stores and flea markets to get high fashion clothes for a little of nothing. If I had a million dollar clothing budget, I would still go to consignment stores and flea markets. I absolutely love them.

Influential icons in the world of fashion (designers, models, celebrities, political figures)

Well if you look at ChurchGurl, clearly I like Bebe. But when it comes to haute couture, I've always been a fan of Coco Chanel, the lady who founded Chanel. Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel (1883-1971) She was a French fashion designer and an icon, one of the leaders of haute couture (high fashion) Her name was synonymous to elegance and chic.

Politically, I admire Kamala Harris, who is the district attorney for San Francisco. We are from the same town and she went to a neighboring catholic school. I always knew she had it in her to be somebody important.

Celebrities, Oprah, of course and Star Jones, I think they both have a lot of tenacity and they are very altruistic.

Models, Tyra Banks, she keeps it so real!

What types of other careers do you have experience in and what you like to do?

I work in P.R. for the city & county of San Francisco where I'm a deputy manager. I also sing and I'm the director of the music and arts ministry at my church, Victory Baptist Church of Oakland, victoryoakland.org. The last professional gig I did was a song for the movie "Phat Girlz" that comedienne, Mo'Nique starred and produced, a local producer, Derrick Hall wrote the song, so I was honored that he ask me to sing it. I'm always singing the national anthem at professional sport games. I love to write plays and act. We have a drama ministry at the church which embodies some of the most talented people I have ever seen and at one time we were very active, but they are growing up and have other obligations but I really want to be in full force again with that ministry real soon. I want to do another big production! I would love to do a gospel album, about 10 to 12 good songs and I want at least 6 of the songs to be recorded live, a real quality project, with some money behind it. I would love to partner with some of my producer buddies and work that out. Who knows, maybe that will happen one day soon. I also love doing ministry and community work.

Which artists (customer/clients) are your customers?

I find it fascinating to see ladies in ChurchGurl period. Whether it's on the street, out of town or on TV. It's been over 3 years and I still can't get over it. If you go to my website, churchgurl.com, I have a "Who's Who" list with popular ladies who have supported "ChurchGurl" it's a wonderful feeling, but we have a long way to go with "ChurchGurl."

Any interesting stories about working with certain clients?

Well, the way I launched ChurchGurl is a pretty interesting story. It was January 2003 and I got this wild idea to launch it at the Gospel Stellar

Awards. I took a little over 500 high-end tee shirts, bought my god sister and I an airline ticket and was off to Atlanta. My brother and cousin were in college there at the time and I talked them into driving us to the Stella Awards, we didn't even have tickets. Everybody was dressed in their finest. My god sister and I wore furs, jeans and "ChurchGurl" tees, not that we were trying to be cute, it was cold! They went upstairs to enjoy the show, my plan was to talk the security guard into letting me set up a "ChurchGurl" display. Amazingly, he said, "Ok." I ran to get the others and they were like, *"Are you really going to do this, HERE?"* I told them. *"Yes and hurry up, chop, chop."* They were like, *"Awwwww Chelle, we're going to jail tonight!" LOLLOL!*

We set up under the most brilliant chandelier and when the people exited, all they could see was something glittering so they were curious to know what it was. You know church girls love glitter. LOLLOL! When they saw that little t-shirt they went bananas and we sold out in an hour. They also let me back stage to give some to the celebrities. I remember I got teary-eyed in the car. Everybody were amazed at what had just happened, they were like, *"Well Gurl, I guess you got something there!"* It's still amazes me when I see orders from all over the country. I'm thankful to God as well as the many people who have embraced "ChurchGurl" it's become a movement and it makes ladies happy to wear it and men love it too, mega-producer, Rodney Jerkins said, "My wife will look fly in these undies, Gurl." My friend, Lila was telling me that she was reading a inspirational novel and "ChurchGurl" Tees is mentioned. I think the main character owned a store and she carried, "ChurchGurl." I consider that marketing as well. Thanks for the mention! Basically, "ChurchGurl" is not only cute but it holds a deeper meaning to me; it gives us a sense of who we are and church girls from babies to seniors are rocking "ChurchGurl" ..Now that's blessing!

Do you custom design?

I don't custom design, I trademarked, "ChurchGurl." I don't do other things like, "Church Diva or Church Lady" or people's names in rhinestone. The signature is "ChurchGurl." People ask me that a lot.

Do you have mentors in the world of fashion? In your personal life?

My mother, is a designer and decorator in her own rite. My grandmother is the sharpest lady you ever want to see, my home girls, Michele Thornton, (NY) and Monique Henderson-Ford (Bay Area) are natural-born dressers. I mean, most of my friends have great taste, but those gurls are like, "Shut yo' mouth and give me your hand-me-downs dressers!" My Aunt, First Lady Kathi is really good at putting fashion together, she used to be a rep for Ives St. Laurent.

Do you have advice for those who want to follow in your footsteps (adults and teenager/younger women)?

I cannot tell you how many people have emailed me to ask me how can they do what I've done and I really wish I had something profound to tell them. "ChurchGurl" was a divine vision from God and He showed me favor. But I can tell you this, don't start a business unless you have saved some seed money, at least \$10,000. Do your research in terms of

marketing and think out the process. Work smart and work hard. Before I sold an item, I started the trademarked procedure to brand "ChurchGurl." Many companies tried to oppose it. I had offers to buy it out, lawyers called me, I got letters. My reply was, *"Have you been to my website? I'm just a small company, you are Church's chicken and I'm not selling chicken, I'm in the apparel business, LOLLOL."* But big companies pay their lawyers to investigate anything that phonetically sounds like the name of their company. I keep an eye out for "ChurchGurl" too.

Lastly, do your best not to borrow money from friends and family. I didn't ask my friends and family for a dime to start "ChurchGurl." In the words of Billie Holiday, "God Bless The Child that Got His Own."

5 words (or a phrase) that describe yourself?

Verbose (though I'm working on being less of) Determined, Headstrong, Committed, Witty

Plan to ever marry, start a family?

Well, that's not on my list of pressing things -to -do, but sure, one day that will be nice. My mother just gifted me with a book entitled, "Sassy, Single & Satisfied" by Michele McKinney Hammond. She wants me to prepare my mind, heart and soul for a mate as well as rediscover all the incredible opportunities of a joyful and fulfilled life regardless of me meeting Mr. Right or not. She knows that I'm pretty independent and submission will be pretty hard for me, but God says that I have to be and I want to be. I'm older, more mellowed and more settled so when it happens, I'll welcome it but right now, I can't imagine myself married and "ChurchGurl" is like my child. LOLLOL!

Any prospects?

Ummmm, no.

3 words (or a phrase) that describe your line, ChurchGurl

Sassy, Savvy, Saved

Your personal tips in creating the perfect wardrobe (ie. certain pieces, undergarments, etc)

In the words of Coco Chanel; "a little black dress, a dab of Chanel No. 5 and rows of pearls will always be a classic and timeless look. But in the words of Michelle Peters, "Throw your hair in a ponytail, put on a ChurchGurl beater, some jeans, stilettos, a nice handbag to match your shoes, some designer sunglasses and get -to-steppin, ChurchGurl!"