

Lauren West-Rosenthal recounts her journey from aspiring It girl to suburban mom.

# Faked it and didn't make it

Lauren West-Rosenthal was enthralled by NYC's glittering social scene — and went bankrupt trying to fit in

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By JANE RIDLEY

**I**N 2008, Lauren West-Rosenthal dropped by her bank on a lunch break to argue her case for a loan.

"I want to quit my job and pay off my credit-card debt," she earnestly told the manager. "Then, I will live off the rest."

The bank employee laughed in her face.

"I look back now and think, 'What on Earth was I thinking?'" West-Rosenthal tells *The Post*. "But I was so desperate to maintain a certain standard."

That standard was living a chic, TV version of a writer's life on the Upper East Side, where she shelled out \$2,000 a month for an apartment and plunked down her credit card for expensive takeout, shoes and glitzy trips.

In the end, her efforts to keep up with the Joneses backfired. She declared herself bankrupt at 31, after racking up \$30,000 in debts.

Now an older, wiser mom, West-Rosenthal has launched a blog chronicling her exploits, called *Not So It Girl*. In it, the 41-year-old writer describes her thwarted attempts to become a New York socialite.

"The problem is, I never quite fit in with the scene," she says, citing her weight issues and lack of family wealth.

West-Rosenthal moved to New York from her native Miami just before her 22nd birthday. She landed an internship at *Rolling Stone* magazine before being hired as a personal assistant to Atoosa Rubenstein, founding editor of *CosmoGirl*, in 1999.

After that, her life was a whirl

of fashion shoots, parties and celebrity interviews as she climbed the ladder in journalism. She mixed with Ashton Kutcher, Britney Spears and Anne Hathaway. However, as a size 16 to 18 and, at one point, weighing 220 pounds, the 5-foot-tall young woman felt intimidated. "I didn't fit the look of the crowd running with these celebrities," she says.

She says she spent two days in Hollywood with Hathaway, who was filming "*The Princess Diaries 2*," in 2003.

"We went to lunch, and she ate nothing," says West-Rosenthal. She remembers Hathaway looking "amazing" — and feeling "frumpy" by comparison.

Feelings of inferiority drove her to spend thousands of dollars on specialist diets and fancy gym memberships. She splashed out

cash on Marc Jacobs clothes and Tory Burch shoes, and refused to downgrade from her one-bedroom apartment, although she couldn't afford the rent.

"I wasn't even making six figures, so it was a little stupid," says West-Rosenthal, who later wrote three books. "But I wanted [the apartment for] the image."

Travel and food also drained her resources. She thought nothing of forking over \$70 on a takeout meal from Mr. Chow, or paying out of pocket to fly to Park City, Utah, for the Sundance Film Festival.

"I was into networking and living the New York dream," says West-Rosenthal, who names shoes and bags as her top vices. "I maxed out my credit cards."

A further extravagance: staycations in \$500-a-night rooms at luxury hotels, such as the Soho Grand. "I'd tell myself I needed to get away from my apartment for the night [to write], even though I lived alone."

By February 2007, she had started at a \$90,000-per-year job at Sirius Radio producing a range of talk shows, including one hosted by her idol, Candace Bushnell, the real-life Carrie Bradshaw of "*Sex and the City*" fame. "She influenced me a lot," says West-Rosenthal, who aspired to Bushnell's chic lifestyle.

But Bushnell's business acumen didn't rub off on West-Rosenthal, who sank further into debt. "The more money you have, the more money you spend," she says.

As time passed, she began to find the work at Sirius draining and demanding. It wasn't satisfying her creatively and was getting in the way of her ladder-climbing dreams. That's when she unsuccessfully ap-

proached Chase for a loan — keen to both quit her job and pay off her creditors. But fate intervened and she was let go in May 2008.

Panicking about her finances, West-Rosenthal was persuaded to consolidate her debt. This "only made things worse," she says, when the revised interest rate spiked to a higher number than before.

Things were so grave that she feared she'd have to "admit defeat" and return to Florida to live with her family.

She consulted a financial lawyer. His advice was clear: "You need to declare bankruptcy." So she did, in early 2009.

"For the longest time, I was so ashamed," she says. She

squirmed when she told her now-husband,

Nathanael, about her bankruptcy.

She finally got her finances in shape after cutting up her cards and moving in with Nathanael in Fort Greene.

"I got my confidence back," says the self-employed writer. "I paid my bills on time, monitored my spending, paid myself a 'salary' and saved the rest."

Nathanael and

West-Rosenthal tied the knot eight years ago. In 2014, they moved to Stamford, Conn., where they're raising a 4-year-old daughter, Mila. Nathanael works as a firefighter and paramedic. West-Rosenthal, now a healthy size 6, says she's thriving in her life and career.

"It was never wearing Tory Burch flats that earned me an assignment," she says. "I'm so much happier now that I'm comfortable in my own skin."

Her advice for aspiring *It* girls? Get a savings account — "and don't do what I did and live beyond your means."



▲ West-Rosenthal poses with Steven Tyler at an event.