

# Virtual Author Talk



## Breaking All the Rules Ger Tysk

*The author of "Breaking All The Rules: Cosplay and the Art of Self-Expression" talks about the book, crowdfunding, and her unusual journey in writing it.*

*Breaking All The Rules: Cosplay and the Art of Self-Expression* is a photobook project documenting the culture of fan costuming, also known as "cosplay," across the United States. Although fan costuming has been a part of pop culture since the boom of science-fiction conventions, cosplay has enjoyed a huge surge in popularity that has seen the growth of international cosplay contests and the rise of "professional cosplayers" who have taken it from a hobby to a full-time career.

I began cosplaying in 2007. I didn't know how to sew, so I bought ready-made clothes from thrift shops and discount stores and modified them. I started taking photographs of cosplayers in 2010, and the idea for this book came to me in the spring of 2012, when I realized I was storing hundreds of photographs of various

people in costume on my computer, and I needed something to do with them. I imagined a grand endeavor of cross-country travel, where I would meet a few costumers from each region of the country, take their photos, and compile everything neatly into one volume.

What I didn't realize was that this book journey would introduce me to people from all across the costuming spectrum, from people who had just made their first costumes to people like Marty Gear,



costuming since 1956. I learned not only about the history of costuming in the United States, but I was able to talk to hundreds of people about their personal stories.

Each person featured in the book was given a 20-question interview, with questions ranging from why they were interested in making and wearing costumes to peer pressure in costuming, their opinions on "cosplay celebrities," and where they thought the costuming community in the United States was heading.

At the time, the only nationally available photobook on cosplay in the United States was a book called *Cosplay in America*, by Ejen Chuang. The first thing I did when I decided to make my own book was contact him for advice. His advice was, "Don't do it!" When I asked why, he told me that making such a book required extensive resources and financial support. He counseled me to save my credit cards the trouble and start smaller.

Well-meaning as his advice was, I forged ahead anyway. (We've since become great friends and plan to give a few panels in 2014 about making photobooks!) By crowdfunding the majority of the money needed for my travel through Indiegogo, I was able to travel to around 20 conventions and meet more than 300 costumers from all walks of life.



I went to as many different kinds of conventions as I could- from tiny anime conventions in their second year to the revered Dragon\*Con in Atlanta, a mecca for science-fiction fans. In the end, I was exhausted, but I had forged bonds with costumers and communities across the country and grown myself as a costumer and cosplayer in ways I couldn't have imagined.

The book is organized much like a documentary. Each costumer has one written page for his or her interview, and the facing page is a photo in costume. Sometimes, I encountered people who cosplayed in duos or trios, and I showcase them as a group. I took photos not on a studio backdrop, but in whatever settings were available, whether a convention center, a hotel lobby, office buildings, back alleys, basements. The youngest person I interviewed was 16, the oldest was Marty Gear at 73.

Marty Gear was a one-of-a-kind costumer and when I at first approached him for inclusion in my book, I wasn't sure what he would say. I had heard stories of more established costumers who didn't like being lumped into the same category with newer "cosplayers." But Marty had no such qualms.

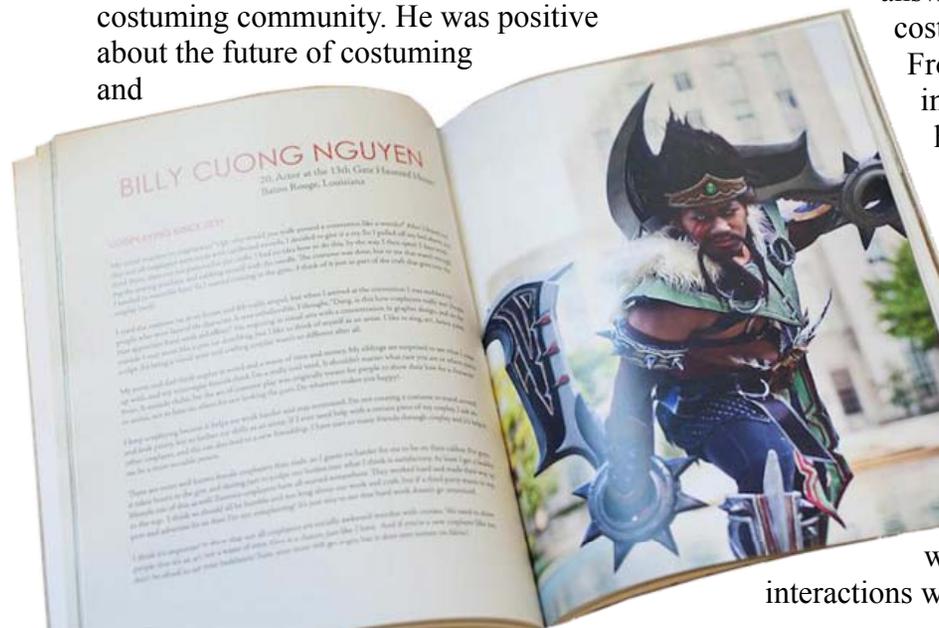
He was excited to be included, and answered my interview questions with such thoroughness that I expanded his book section to four pages to accommodate his answers, which were full of his experience of more than 60 years as a costumer, masquerade judge and MC, and leader in the costuming community. He was positive about the future of costuming and



cosplay, full of praise for cosplayers and the detailed costumes they made. The loss of such a man from our community can never quite be put into words, but he has left an enormous legacy and big shoes to fill.

Throughout the book, I sought to answer one question: why is costuming and cosplay important? From the hundreds of people I interviewed, I came away with hundreds of answers that were variations on the same phrase. Costuming is an outlet for creativity; cosplay is an outlet for finding different parts of oneself through existing works and putting that into tangible form.

No matter if it's in the construction details themselves, in the actual wearing of the costume, the interactions with other people at conventions



or festivals, or in performance in contests or masquerades, costuming is an expression of joy. The title of my book, *Breaking All The Rules: Cosplay and the Art of Self-Expression*, encompasses this sentiment.



People make costumes for a myriad of different reasons, but in the end, putting the costume on and stepping out into the world helps us showcase amazing sides of ourselves that may not ever have come to the forefront.

I traveled for the book from spring of 2012 through fall of 2013. As of this writing, the books are leaving the printing press in Hong Kong and are on their (very long) way across the ocean to my home in Boston. It's been almost two years full of red-eye flights, cramped hotel rooms, rides with strangers, early mornings and late nights and lots of caffeine. I heard more stories than I can count of costuming drama, both personal and between friends, stories of mishaps and broken props and misbehaving fabric, stories of families who didn't and still don't understand why these costumers do what they do.



My hope is that this book can be a stepping stone for some of these families and for those unfamiliar with costuming and cosplay. The cosplayers I photographed and interviewed are everyday, ordinary people. They are students, waitresses, engineers, musicians, consultants, retail assistants, and office workers who, several times a year, put on a costume and become outlaws, villains, ingenues, femme fatales, knights, and heroes starting out on their journeys. They are all extraordinary.

*Ger Tysk is a cosplayer and photographer from Boston, Massachusetts. She started cosplaying in 2007 and attended her first convention, Anime Boston, in 2008. Being both a cosplayer and photographer has given her a unique perspective on the cosplay culture in America, and she hopes to bring that to life in "Breaking All The Rules: Cosplay and the Art of Self-Expression." Visit the book [website](#) for more information or to [order](#) the book.*