



MODEL, SINGER AND ACTRESS LOU DOILLON, 34, ON HER LIFELONG LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH DENIM

I remember swearing to myself as a little girl that I would never wear jeans. Growing up in the Eighties, everyone was in Levi's 50ls.

It was the same cut for men and women, worn with Converse, and I used to think it was the worst combination possible. I feel differently about denim now, of course.

I was born in September 1982, and at that time my mother [actress Jane Birkin], my father [director Jacques Doillon] and three of my sisters – Kate Barry, Charlotte Gainsbourg and Lola Doillon – were all wearing jeans. It was all they ever wore, with a white T-shirt or a denim jacket. I must have believed that jeans were a uniform.

When my mum gave birth to me, she'd run away to a very bourgeois part of Paris, the 16th arrondissement, which is extremely boring. She'd left Serge [Gainsbourg, singer-songwriter] for my dad so, to hide from the press and madness of it, they bought a house in this horrible area where everyone wore two-piece Chanel suits with dreadful heeled ballet pumps and tights. My mum stood out because she was absolutely androgynous, which today is the norm but, back in the Eighties, certainly wasn't. I hated her for it. Jeans were a family trademark, and I wanted to rebel against them. >

Photography: Boo George. As told to Bibby Sowray

THE DENIM STORY

When I was a teenager, I had dreadlocks and piercings. I used to walk around Paris barefoot, with my flared jeans dragging along the ground, reading William Blake aloud. People were horrified. It was great; at least they weren't saying, 'Look, it's Jane Birkin's daughter.' Most 'kids of' are just 'kids of', so I created a kind of look that was the best way of getting out of the 'chic' character impressed upon me, which I wasn't. I was weird and tall and crooked and loud, so I had to own it one way or another.

I can't say I've learned any lessons from my mum when it comes to denim, or even style in general. She has no fashion sense whatsoever – that's why she can be a fashion icon. I remember having a conversation with Kate Moss about it. What most people don't get today is that everybody is so bloody self-conscious and they're all trying so hard – 99% of Instagram photos are of people trying to resemble women like my mother – but she had no clue about either her beauty or her sense of fun. She literally wore whatever was around. At the time, my mother had three kids, she was performing nearly every night, drove her own car, barely had a nanny, and needed to wear something practical. I've never seen her in heels because she's always late and needs to run.

There's a wonderful photograph of me, my mother, Kate and Charlotte, in which we're all wearing jeans, taken by the famous French photographer Jeanloup Sieff shortly before he died in 2000. I was about 14 and had started liking jeans again. I used to buy them from thrift stores and tear them up the side to add a flare, an old technique my mum taught me. Last time I was going through her trunk of old things, I found this horrendous pair with a huge heart patch on the arse that she'd made in the Seventies. I've got another pair of my mum's from the Eighties, which I seldom wear but love having around. They're very 'of the decade': high-waisted and short on the leg. People wore them so high, it made the most insane bum.

I don't customise my jeans any more, which is a shame. I used to do it a lot. It's the real sadness of comfort and wealth: now that I have a dressing room, I've lost a lot of my sense of style. I always tell kids: you've got it all when you haven't got much because you have to get your brain going. The more books you have, the fewer you read. The more clothes you own, the fewer you wear.

I remember my father wearing the same jeans for months. We would tell him to wash them but he'd say no. That's the whole point of jeans; they were made with a double grid of thread and were extremely resistant. I also recall him telling me that, when he was younger, he'd worked for two years to be able to afford a pair of jeans.

It's funny – despite being French, until a few years ago, I'd never made the connection that 'denim' derives from Nîmes – 'de Nîmes', as in the French city where it originally came from. There's something beautiful about the story of this crazy fabric you can really, *really* have fun with – and now you have Vêtements, a

Birkin blues: Lou Doillon with her sisters, Kate and Charlotte, and her mother, Jane Birkin, shot in 2000 by the legendary French photographer Jeanloup Sieff



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brand that does crazy pieces of denim. And then on the other hand, you have J Brand, a company I now work with as a collaborator and model, whose jeans are so classy and chic.

For me, denim is a form of protection. When I'm on tour with my band, I take one pair of black jeans and one blue pair. They're like a second skin; it's why a lot of musicians wear them with a T-shirt. It's a kind of code: you want people to forget the look and just listen to the music.

As a kid, I hated wearing denim dungarees, but now when I see all the pictures, I think they're so lovely. I even forced my son, Marlowe [now 15], to wear them when he was small. They're like Marmite: people either love them or hate them. The drummer in my band has a pair and I love it when he wears them, but the rest of our group takes the piss out of him. I guess it makes me think of children, and I love the practicality of them.

I own around 10 pairs of jeans, but I wear the same three until they crack, or that terrible moment when the zip doesn't work any more. Whether we feel good in a pair of jeans is extremely personal; it's hard to find a lovely pair that fits you perfectly.

In fashion, we're always going back to something, and right now we're going back to the Eighties, which was the era of denim. It was a uniform that went through every age, every country, every social strata. It was the first democratic style: men, women, kids, even my grandmother had a pair. Everyone had a pair of jeans. There's a beautiful message behind that, and I think that's what we're craving right now. ■