



Garib de Young amaret

**Selita Ebanks
Brings Caymanian
Sizzle Stateside.
By Leah Furman
Photos by Luke Duvall**











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he's a Victoria's Secret Angel. A *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit goddess. One of *People Magazine's* 50 Most Beautiful People. And, according to *Forbes*, she's also the 12th highest paid model in the world. For Selita Ebanks, all the signs point to the kind of superstardom associated with the one-name wonders – Tyra, Gisele, Heidi and now Selita.

The Victoria's Secret catwalk and the flash of the paparazzi cameras are worlds away from Georgetown, Grand Cayman where Selita spent her wonder years. Growing up as the only daughter of a Caymanian mother and a Jamaican father, the 25-year-old beauty was a tomboy who once whiled away the hours climbing trees and playing sports with her seven brothers. "I grew up playing basketball, football and soccer and playing track, and I have a ton of medals," Selita said.

Despite a healthy appetite, the athletic activity kept Selita lean – which wasn't always a good thing. In fact, being a beanpole among a sea of curvy Caribbean women was hardly a day at Cayman beach. "I had such the complex," Selita explained. "I drank Mioplex, weight gainer and ate oatmeal every morning. Anything to gain a little bit of weight, and it never happened."

Lucky thing, too, or Selita may never have been picked out of a crowd by a model scout at New Jersey's Six Flags Great Adventure. The discovery happened when Selita was 17, many years after the Ebanks family had left the sunny shores of Grand Cayman for the considerably cloudier ones of Staten Island. At the time, the high school senior was preparing for life as a college student and hoping to become a lawyer. She was interning at *Spin Magazine* and planning on representing entertainers behind the scenes.

But that day at Great Adventure changed all that, launching a whirlwind of a career that has only gained momentum with time. In the past

eight years, Selita has appeared in campaigns for Abercrombie, Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger and Levi's. She's attained the pinnacle of supermodeldom by being chosen for the *Sports Illustrated* legendary Swimsuit issue. And she's been inducted into the hall of fame of modeling by being named one of Victoria's Secret Angels.

Naturally, with work comes fame, and with fame comes perks. Selita's life is filled with A-list parties, designer gowns and fabulous men. She's been linked to everyone from tennis ace James Blake to Superbowl champ Osi Umenyiora. And, of course, there was that celebrated engagement to actor-rapper Nick Cannon. After a two-month courtship, Cannon popped the question while the couple was on their way home from the Costume Institute Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Although the couple broke up in October 2007, Selita still counts Cannon among her dear friends. What drew the two together in the first place was a shared passion for philanthropy and volunteer work, and, according to Selita, it is her Cayman-based mentoring program that is now her foremost priority. Selita started the Stardom Youth Foundation to motivate Caymanian kids to think big and reach for their dreams. She was also active in hurricane relief efforts, going back to Grand Cayman with thousands of pairs of shoes provided by Neiman Marcus, Payless, Nike and Adidas.

Despite the glitz and glamour of her fast-paced lifestyle, Selita is still a Caribbean girl at heart, returning to the island often for much needed reality checks and moments of quiet contemplation.

"Whenever I go to the Caymans, I make sure we spend at least one day [at Rum Point]," she said. "We're on the road by noon and stop at this fish hut and get fried snappers and groupers, and you put onions on it. We take our fish to Rum Point and eat it there. You sit and have drinks, sit in a hammock and sit on the beach at the edge of the sand till sunset. It's the most amazing thing." ■