

one was even touching me. I just went out like she had hit a reset button. I'm surprised I didn't wake up speaking Spanish like Buzz Lightyear. When I woke up the second time, the nurse was openly irritated with me. Did I have someone who could come and pick me up? "Nope!" "You're going to have to make another appointment. I couldn't finish the Pap smear." "WHY DIDN'T YOU FINISH IT WHILE I WAS OUT?" I yelled. Apparently it's against the law. Then she asked if I could hurry up and get out because she needed to perform an abortion on Willona from *Good Times*.

All Girls Must Be Everything

When I was thirteen I spent a weekend at the beach in Wildwood, New Jersey, with my teenage cousins Janet and Lori. In the space of thirty-six hours, they taught me everything I know about womanhood. They knew how to "lay out" in the sun wearing tanning oil instead of sunscreen. They taught me that you could make a reverse tattoo in your tan if you cut a shape out of a Band-Aid and stuck it on your leg. They taught me you could listen to *General Hospital* on the radio if you turned the FM dial way down to the bottom.

Wildwood is a huge wide beach—the distance from your towel to the water was often equal to the distance from your motel to your towel. And "back in the day" the place was packed exclusively with very, very tan Italian Americans and very, very burned Irish Americans. As a little kid, I almost always got separated from my parents and would panic trying to find them among dozens and dozens of similar umbrellas.

One afternoon a girl walked by in a bikini and my cousin Janet scoffed, "Look at the hips on her." I panicked. What about the hips? Were they too big? Too small? What were *my* hips? I didn't know hips could be a problem. I thought there was just fat or skinny.

This was how I found out that there are an infinite number of things that can be "incorrect" on a woman's body. At any given moment on planet Earth, a woman is buying a product to correct one of the following "deficiencies":

- big pores
- oily T-zone
- cankles
- fivehead
- lunch lady arms
- nipples too big
- nipples too small
- breasts too big
- breasts too small
- one breast bigger than the other
- one breast smaller than the other (How are those two different things? I don't know.)
- nasal labial folds
- "no arch in my eyebrows!"
- FUPA (a delightfully crude acronym for a protruding lower belly)
- muffin top
- spider veins

- saddlebags
- crotch biscuits (that's what I call the wobbly triangles on one's inner thighs)
- thin lashes
- bony knees
- low hairline
- calves too big
- "no calves!"
- "green undertones in my skin"
- and my personal favorite, "bad nail beds"

In hindsight, I'm pretty sure Janet meant the girl's hips were too wide. This was the late seventies, and the seventies were a small-eyed, thin-lipped blond woman's paradise. I remember watching *Three's Company* as a little brown-haired kid thinking, "Really? This is what we get? Joyce DeWitt is our brunet representative? She's got that greasy-looking bowl cut and they make her wear suntan pantyhose under her football jersey nightshirt." I may have only been seven or eight, but I knew that this sucked. The standard of beauty was set. Cheryl Tiegs, Farrah Fawcett, Christie Brinkley. Small eyes, toothy smile, boobies, no buttocks, yellow hair.

Let's talk about the hair. Why do I call it "yellow" hair and not "blond" hair? Because I'm pretty sure everybody calls my hair "brown." When I read fairy tales to my daughter I always change the word "blond" to "yellow," because I don't want her to think that blond hair is somehow better.

My daughter has a reversible doll: Sleeping Beauty on one side and Snow White on the other. I would always set it on her bed with the Snow White side out and she would toddle up to it and flip the skirt over to Sleeping Beauty. I would flip it back and say, "Snow White is so pretty." She would yell, "No!" and flip it back. I did this experiment so frequently and consistently that I should have applied for government funding. The result was always the same. When I asked her why she didn't like Snow White, she told me, "I don't like her hair." Not even three years old, she knew that yellow hair is king. And, let's admit it, yellow hair does have magic powers. You could put a blond wig on a hot-water heater and some dude would try to fuck it. Snow White is better looking. I hate to stir up trouble among the princesses, but take away the hair and Sleeping Beauty is actually a little beat.

Sure, when I was a kid, there were beautiful brunettes to be found—Linda Ronstadt, Jaclyn Smith, the little Spanish singer on *The Lawrence Welk Show*—but they were regarded as a fun, exotic alternative. Farrah was vanilla and Jaclyn Smith was chocolate. Can you remember a time when pop culture was so white that Jaclyn Smith was the chocolate?! By the eighties, we started to see some real chocolate: Halle Berry and Naomi Campbell. "Downtown" Julie Brown and Tyra Banks. But I think the first real change in women's body image came when JLo turned it butt-style. That was the first time that having a large-scale situation in the back was part of *mainstream* American beauty. Girls wanted butts now.

Men were free to admit that they had always enjoyed them. And then, what felt like *moments* later, boom—Beyoncé brought the leg meat. A back porch and thick muscular legs were now widely admired. And from that day forward, women embraced their diversity and realized that all shapes and sizes are beautiful. Ah ha ha. No. I'm totally messing with you. All Beyoncé and JLo have done is add to the laundry list of attributes women must have to qualify as beautiful. Now every girl is expected to have:

- Caucasian blue eyes
- full Spanish lips
- a classic button nose
- hairless Asian skin with a California tan
- a Jamaican dance hall ass
- long Swedish legs
- small Japanese feet
- the abs of a lesbian gym owner
- the hips of a nine-year-old boy
- the arms of Michelle Obama
- and doll tits

The person closest to actually achieving this look is Kim Kardashian, who, as we know, was made by Russian scientists to sabotage our athletes. Everyone else is struggling.

Even the Yellowhairs who were once on top can now be found squatting to a Rihanna song in a class called Gary's Glutes Camp in an attempt to reverse-engineer a butt. These are dark times. Back in my Wildwood days with

Janet, you were either blessed with a beautiful body or not. And if you were not, you could just chill out and learn a trade. Now if you're not "hot," you are expected to work on it until you are. It's like when you renovate a house and you're legally required to leave just one of the original walls standing. If you don't have a good body, you'd better starve the body you have down to a neutral shape, then bolt on some breast implants, replace your teeth, dye your skin orange, inject your lips, sew on some hair, and call yourself the Playmate of the Year.

How do we survive this? How do we teach our daughters and our gay sons that they are good enough the way they are? We have to lead by example. Instead of trying to fit an impossible ideal, I took a personal inventory of all my healthy body parts for which I am grateful:

- Straight Greek eyebrows. They start at the hairline at my temple and, left unchecked, will grow straight across my face and onto yours.
- A heart-shaped ass. Unfortunately, it's a right-side-up heart; the point is at the bottom.
- Droopy brown eyes designed to confuse predators into thinking I'm just on the verge of sleep and they should come back tomorrow to eat me.
- Permanently rounded shoulders from years of working at a computer.
- A rounded belly that is pushed out by my rounded posture no matter how many sit-ups I do. Which is mostly none.

- A small high waist.
- A wad of lower-back fat that never went away after I lost my "baby weight." One day in the next ten years, this back roll will meet up with my front pouch, forever obscuring my small high waist, and I will officially be my mother.
- Wide-set knockers that aren't so big but can be hoisted up once or twice a year for parades.
- Good strong legs with big gym teacher calves that I got from walking pigeon-toed my whole life.
- Wide German hips that look like somebody wrapped Pillsbury dough around a case of soda.
- My father's feet. Flat. Bony. Pale. I don't know how he even gets around, because his feet are in my shoes.

I would not trade any of these features for anybody else's. I wouldn't trade the small thin-lipped mouth that makes me resemble my nephew. I wouldn't even trade the acne scar on my right cheek, because that recurring zit spent more time with me in college than any boy ever did.

At the end of the day, I'm happy to have my father's feet and my mother's eyes with me at all times. If I ever go back to that beach in Wildwood, I want my daughter to be able to find me in the crowd by spotting my soda-case hips. I want her to be able to pick me out of a sea of highlighted-blond women with fake tans because I'm the one with the thick ponytail and the greenish undertones in my skin.

And if I ever meet Joyce DeWitt, I will first apologize

for having immediately punched her in the face, and then I will thank her. For while she looked like a Liza Minnelli doll that had been damaged in a fire, at least she didn't look like everybody else on TV.

Also, full disclosure, I *would* trade my feet for almost any other set of feet out there.

Delaware County Summer Showtime!

(All names in this story have been changed,
to protect the fabulous.)

Gay Wales

In 1976, a young Catholic family man named Larry Wentzler started a youth theater program in my hometown called Summer Showtime. It really is a terrific model for a community program. Young teenagers would put on daily Children's Theater shows for the community, giving preschoolers access to live theater at a very low cost for parents. The older kids would direct those Children's Theater shows and perform in Broadway-style musicals by night. In the process, all the kids would learn about music, art, carpentry, discipline, friendship, and teamwork. It's a fantastic program that continues to this day, and I can't recommend it highly enough.

Larry didn't set out to create a haven for gay teens, but you know how sometimes squirrels eat out of a bird feeder? Larry built a beautiful bird feeder, and the next thing you knew — full of squirrels.

I took a job as the night box office manager at Summer