

Life's Too Short for Pants

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The modern woman endures a lifetime love affair with pants. The tears will come, as well as the joys.

It started off with such a bang. It was in that golden period, between John Lennon announcing the Beatles were more popular than Christ, and the first copy of *Ms.* magazine appearing on our doorsteps, that something miraculous occurred. Across the fruited plain, in every school, in every grade and class, a voice appeared on the public address system, and announced: "Next Monday, girls will be allowed to wear pants." Very often, there was a postscript: "Dungarees will not be tolerated."

The next schoolday— I was in sixth grade— every single female appeared on campus in trousers, leggings, and yes, dungarees (that is to say, JEANS).

“Not tolerated” be damned. This was so much bigger than going bra-less. Can young women today comprehend a time in their mother’s lives when they couldn’t wear pants? How did we ever play kickball in a jumper?

There was only one hitch: It’s difficult to look great in pants. Trouser-liberators like Kate Hepburn were a rail-like exception to the rule.

Jeans were made originally for men to work in, at manual labor— not to sashay down the boulevard. There wasn’t a lot of call for making one’s *derriere* look fabulous. Most men don’t have much waist-to-hip differential, or would just as soon live with plumber’s butt and jackets that cover it all up. Early tailors never thought about making jean designs that held you in the right places and let you out in the others.

Of course that’s all changed now. You walk into a typical jeans store, and they have walls of folded denim and khaki, with signs directing you to styles like “curvy,” “low rise,” “classic,” “relaxed,” “boys cut,” and the enigmatic “long and lean”— is that an aspiration or a current appraisal?

Whatever their euphemisms, after a frantic couple of hours in the dressing room, you’re sweating like a mule and anything but “relaxed.” Every pair looks dreadful. You’ve either got camel toe, or you’re

swimming— a sad stick figure, or the broad side of a sagging barn.

Perhaps a ten-year-old child *would* look good in their “boys cut.”

But you— you are crafty. You have a sewing machine at home. You slam the door behind those stupid gauchos and give the rebel yell: “I’m making my own pants, you sons of bitches!”

And this is where the lycra-denim meets the road, ladies. You’re going to find out very soon that the reason ready-to-wear jean sizing is a bottomless pit of frustration is because:

- a) pants must be individually tailored, with a first draft, and then a final cut, to fit properly, because your bottom is as tricky as thumbprint; and,
- b) the female form— in which your hips or breasts are wider than your dead center— *looks* better in a skirt.

Oh, please don’t tell Gloria Steinem I told you this. You’ll still play kickball, hoe a field, and mine for gold far more effectively in dungarees. But you will LOOK— that is to say, your personal appearance will be *flattered*— by a skirt or a dress that flows over your hips, rather than cradles them.

This rule is so right that I can prove it by pointing out that if you have ever beheld a man in a kilt, and sighed over how handsome he looks, you have seen the evidence that even most grown men *also* look better in something that doesn't stuff their caboose into a sausage casing or a bifurcated tent held up with a belt.

In essence, as Jill Sanders, my sewing guru, told me the first day I begged for a trouser pattern: "Life's too short for pants."

If you are a beginning sewer, the first thing you must do when you vow to make your own pair of jeans is to pause, breathe, and finally purchase *a simple pattern for a straight-grain, A-line skirt*.

It can have elastic or a drawstring at the top— it can have a zipper if you've got the time. A separate waistband is okay, or better yet, none at all. Long, short, slit, seamed— try them all. Kwik Sew has a wrap-around skirt, #2954, that virgins could sew on their first thread-and-needle outing. And you know what? That one-afternoon, A-line skirt looks really, really, good on: EVERYONE.

The secret is this: You *cut* the size that closely matches your fullest hip-area measurement.

That might be your belly, your pube line, or practically your thighs—but whatever the wide point is, *that's* your magic number. *Ignore* the listings of waist sizes; it all gets adjusted from the hip. That one hip measure, in a skirt, is your guide, as opposed to a pair of jeans, where you'll need a ledger to track all your tailoring notes.

Choose a fabric, that when washed, has a little drape to it; nothing stiff. Cotton, rayon, silk, linen—anything besides home dec or taffeta. I have A-line skirts in Hawaiian prints, Day of the Dead designs, dots, rude stripes, and one little number with evil toddlers riding a rollercoaster. You may prefer something with gravitas in navy blue crepe. The A-line shape can accommodate anyone's style with aplomb.

One you have made your first, second, and third A-line skirts, your ego-to-ass ratio will soar to undreamed-of heights; you'll be feeling mighty liberated. You'll laugh as you walk past The Gap; "Don't cry for me, Levi-Strauss!" You'll also have the sewing experience that will lend you the serious patience and grand perspective it takes to make your first pair of beautifully-fitted, great-feeling dungarees.

In Our Next Column: How To Make Your First Pair of Perfect Jeans in Under Two Weeks (don't kid yourself it'll take any less)— Plus, a couple of sneaky good-looking cop-outs for those who realize, Life Really Is Too Sh—.