

## In the Swim!

There are several reasons why a man can't buy himself a swimsuit. 1) men don't know how to shop for anything other than razor blades and tools. 2) when it comes to swimsuits, they have no conception of style. This is apparent by the array of masculine pulchritude parading around the beaches in suits that either start at the belly and end up at the knees, or are the bikini variety which only 1% of the male population can actually carry off.

There are two types of men who should wear bikinis: Olympic swimmers and toddlers. But sadly, our world is filled with ego-maniacs who are in total denial. Such is my friend, Jane's husband, Jack, a nice man with a good head on his shoulders who can make predictions in the stock market that guarantee instant success. Yet, when it comes to Jack's sense of style, he just doesn't get it. You see, Jack is not exactly male model material. He is rather bald, rotund and has a pot belly which, although Jane defines as "adorable," has no business being publicly displayed. In short, Jack ought to keep his portly bod under wraps, but because Jane continues to flatter Jack, she has created a monster who now thinks he is God's gift to women.

Case in point: a recent Caribbean cruise for which Jack purchased an entire line of Speedo bikinis. One afternoon while Jane was sitting poolside, Jack appeared in one of his form-fitting Speedos, cut so low that one could actually see, if observing Jack from the rear: tushy cleavage. If one surveyed Jack from the front, it was an altogether different story. Jack's hairy and well-endowed belly graced the scene and well, to put it bluntly, Jack looked rather like a member of the ape family. The only difference being, that an ape knows better than to don a bikini and does not consider himself a stud muffin. An ape knows he is an ape. Not Jack. He walked around the ship's deck several times showing off his Speedo, and telling those who were polite enough to listen, that he had just lost 20-pounds on the cabbage soup diet and didn't he look svelte.

My husband, Parker and I accompanied Jane and Jack on this cruise and I'm here to tell you that Jack, cabbage soup aside, did not look svelte. Nor did he turn any heads except the ones that turned away in disgust for having to witness the sight of a middle-aged man acting out his rendition of male menopause.

There ought to be a law against men over thirty wearing bikinis, the same way women of a certain age have no business wearing min-skirts. My cousin, Elaine and her husband, Ira believe that when it comes to beach attire, anything goes. Elaine has been wearing string bikinis since she left college forty years ago. Ira has a collection of bikinis that rival Elaine's. They range from hot pink to panther black, the latter of which would cause cardiac arrest to any panther who was forced to catch a glimpse.

"I save my hot pinks for the middle of summer," Ira once told me. "That way, I've had time to develop my tan line. Do you know what a hot pink bikini does for a man with a tan?"

“Enlighten me, Ira,” I said.

“A hot pink man’s bikini on a tan body exudes sexuality,” Ira said. And as he spoke, I stood there trying to envision Ira, not only in hot pink, but as a sex symbol, as well. Ira may be many things: a fine CPA, an excellent father and husband, but a sex symbol, he is not.

Similarly, Jack like Ira, should have known better than to sport a bikini, but there Jack sat in his deck chair, sun screen smeared on his nose, flip-flops on his feet, a gold chain around his neck, while Mark and I pretended not to know him.

But, sadly I understand first-hand how humiliating an experience this can be. Last summer, Parker, who himself had a brief stint with denial, decided to go the bikini route. It wasn’t a pretty sight. Even worse, he had forced me to go shopping with him while he modeled suits in all patterns, shapes and styles. My job was to judge which looked best. First came the stripes, then the prints, followed by a pumpkin colored bikini with pink flamingos, which the salesman said, gave Mark that tropical look. I wasn’t impressed.

“Stay with your tan trunks,” I told him.

“Bikinis are the new look,” he said. “I just read an article on the new millennium man coming into his own and expressing himself in creative ways.”

“That doesn’t mean bikinis,” I said.

But, Parker was stubborn. All summer he hit the beach in his flamingo bikini while I hid under an umbrella. Finally, when a group of teenagers strolled by his chair and giggled, did Parker get the hint. He arrived home dejected.

“Sweetheart,” I said compassionately, “face it: you’re just not the bikini type.”

“What type am I?” he asked.

“You’re more of an “undercover” man,” I said. “A man who looks better in clothes than without them”

He wouldn’t speak to me for a week.

When we decided to join Jane and Jack on the Caribbean cruise, Parker and I made a pact: if he didn’t bring along the flamingo bikini, I wouldn’t take my see-through gold lame gown with the matching feather boa and my gold stiletto high heels. We would practice safe-dressing and present ourselves as an understated, well-bred couple who knew the fashion score. Instead, we brought along our matching beige Bermuda shorts, a couple of t-shirts and very conservative swim suits that would render us very PC.

Jack, however, who had just had hair implants, a buttocks lift and some liposuction on his tummy was feeling rather frisky. He was the first one at the pool every morning so he could impress a group of American Airlines flight attendants who were sailing on our ship. Not only that: he informed us on our first

day out at sea, that a new look had hit the fashion scene: diamond belly button studs. While Jane was asleep in the cabin, Jack got himself a little piercing at the jewelry shop. He appeared at Bouillon Break looking quite sparkly, indeed.

“You have to admit one thing,” Parker said. “Jack is a gutsy guy. What would you say if I got a diamond belly button stud, too?”

“Before or after I threw you overboard?” I asked.