

Confessions of a '70's feminist by Terri Reinhart



The “Intimate Apparel” section of the department store is an interesting place. I was shocked the other day when we arrived at this part of our shopping trip. I had no idea there were so many different kinds of underwear, bras, socks, and pajamas. One can hardly call them by those ordinary words. In fact, the store has much more creative names for these articles of clothing. In the underwear section they had bikinis, panties, thongs, high cut briefs, French cut briefs, and boxers.

I visit this section now and then to pick up my bag of economy plain white cotton briefs. I know where to find them and I don't look at anything else. That's enough.

It's different when I come with my daughter, however. She wants to see what the store has and decide what to buy based on what her girlfriends have told her. She buys her own underwear and bras and is fully capable of doing it without my help.

This was good because I have never had a positive relationship with bras. From the very beginning, when my sister and cousin decided that, at 12 years old, I was long overdue for a *training* bra, and they tackled me and shoved me onto the bed and put the blasted thing on me, I have had a hate/hate relationship with them.

Daughter knows best

Why, you ask me? When I was in high school, the only place I had straight A's was in my bra size. My mother used to tell me, often, that I could play ball in the middle of the street without my shirt on and no one would notice. When you're small in that area, bras are uncomfortable. They don't make a bra that fits me well. Not so, my daughter informs me. I just haven't found the right one.

Right. I calmly informed her that I was raised in the '60s and '70s when women protested so that other women would have the right to not wear bras. Besides, my breasts were perfectly well behaved and I saw no reason to have to put them in a harness. They weren't going anywhere, were they?

She rolled her eyes at me. She didn't say anything because she was busy looking at the rack of items with names such as “Dream Lift” and “Moving Comfort.”

Dream lifting

I didn't have anything else to do, so I started looking at them, too. For years, I had it easy. The styles I grew up with were made for the bra-less. I wore overalls and baggy t-shirts most of the time. I wore loose jumpers over t-shirts or turtle-necks as a kindergarten teacher for so many years. I had been lucky.

The styles today aren't so friendly. They're more form fitting and the form they are meant to fit is not mine. I had to admit that my breasts, like the rest of me, were migrating downward and perhaps it was time to do something about it, if I ever wanted to wear nice clothes that were of the style from this decade.

I decided I would just check and see if maybe they had started manufacturing anything in a size that fit me comfortably. If, and that was a big if, they did, I might decide to buy one, just one, in case I needed to go some place where I was expected to dress up.

My daughter didn't say anything, but I could tell she approved. She helped me choose several different styles and sizes. When I tried them on, she stood just outside the dressing room so she could give me advice.

One with “oomph!”

I tried on several without success. I figured I had proved my point. Instead of agreeing with me, she reiterated *her* point that I had just not found the right size. She directed me to the next samples to try on. Though I hate to admit it, she was right.

Forty-some years after my sister and cousin had forced me to put on my first “training” bra, I now wore a size that was more in line with the actual grades I received in school. I put my shirt on over it and stepped outside to let the expert give her opinion.

“Nice,” she said, “it gives you a little more... a little more... oomph.”

I bought it. I guess at my age, a little more oomph sounded like a good thing.

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