

Stretch Pants of Life

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Somewhere along the line, we got our priorities screwed up. Who determined I had to conform to trendsetter designer looks and why do I live in fear of the fashion police?

Getting ready to go out in public is a formalized ritual for me. The process, methodical and precise, with each step designed to create a “look” that enhances my best qualities, continues as a daily challenge. It’s hard to celebrate a sharp wit through cosmetics.

For 30+ years, I have carefully applied my makeup, from foundation to mascara, building each layer cautiously and fastidiously, along with styling my short, sun bleached (through the magic of chemicals) hair with a hair blower and curling iron. Each morning, I narrowly miss suffering first degree burns of the forehead as I work on an errant lock of hair. The end result is held firmly in place with a light mist of hair spray amidst a seizure of sneezing.

Next, I face the arduous task of selecting what to wear for the day. How problematic this is depends completely upon my mood and how much water my body has retained. My “professional” clothing (designed to inspire confidence in my management and sales ability) has slimming lines and unforgiving rigid waistbands. The designer once again dictating that my figure conform to their expectations. God forbid a generous waist should grace their creation...

Well, they’re out of luck. Each water retention day, I send a blessing to the inventor of the safety pin. Linking two pins together, end-to-end, I can just ease out the waistband, hiding the transgression under a jacket. A close look at the silk tank top reveals a small coffee stain dead front and center. No problem. Put it on backwards and no one will be the wiser. I just have to remember not to take my jacket off during the day.

The final phase involves jewelry and shoe selection. Having a generous supply of each does not make the task easier. When regarding the jewelry, I ask myself, “Do I feel demure and wearing accessories today?” “How about sharpening the look with square silver earrings, belt buckle, and lapel pin...nope.” The softly rounded necklace slide, bangle watch, and long accenting scarf win the accessory decision.

Decisions on how to tie the scarf ultimately overwhelm me. How to get the slippery silk piece in place and make it stay put requires an extreme amount of patience and creativity. I end up with a long skinny scarf draped over my shoulders and looped under my jacket lapel. I tie off the ends into loose knots. Not bad...

Locating the shoes that compliment the look I'm trying to achieve will complete my ensemble. Closed or open toed? High, medium or low heel? Contrasting or conforming color? Strap, tie or slip on? I rule out three pair due to the body bloat which seems to have spread to my feet. My final decision guides the medium heel, fake alligator pump towards my waiting foot.

Forgot the panty hose...

Pulling the skirt up over my hips, the safety pins pop open. Didn't draw blood. The day is starting to look up. I tear open the new hosiery pouch with my teeth, smearing lipstick over the wrapping. Missed the hose. Another victory...

More water retention than I thought. My feet slide in all right, but it's a whole other story getting the hosiery up over my thighs and hips. I lay on top of the bed, my feet airborne, and use gravity and upper arm strength to position my support hose.

Starting to sweat now.

Nylons firmly in place, I slide the skirt back down my hips, re-set the pins, and try to stuff my "extra" waist back inside the waistband. Have you ever sat down and felt your stomach hit your thighs? Startled me the first time it happened. I thought something fell out and I hadn't noticed. Kind of like after you have your first baby and they forget to tell you that all that stretched skin won't just "suck" right back into place. You're left with a bowl of jiggly stomach with nowhere to go.

Surprise, it yells, I'm back!

I look in the mirror and realize it is the best it is going to get. The color seems to complement my skin and the look is fairly trim. Everything can't be perfect can it? Holding in my stomach, I can almost imagine what I looked like 30 pounds ago.

Almost. Maybe if I shut my eyes to half-mast and look sideways. There. Better.

Off to work, ready to take on the world. So I can't breathe. I can do that later. My panty hose is so tight; my legs want to spring upwards with each step. I look like I am counting to ten like a circus horse. The scarf decides to have a life of its own. The loose knotted ends snag on latch lever door handles, bringing me off my feet to a sudden stop. Ever sit on your scarf and have your chin pulled down to the desktop. You just pray it doesn't happen in front of people.

Throughout the day, I dread the eventual use of the rest room. If anything gives out...

On the drive home, all I can think about is changing into my stretch pants. You know the one with the matching sweatshirt. Just the right color that cat hair

doesn't show in a bright light and food stains are camouflaged by the design. My husband holds them out to me as I stumble through the door, tearing the scarf from my neck and flinging it on the floor.

What took forty five minutes to put on is stripped from my body in one minute flat. I glide into my welcoming stretch pants and sigh. I'm home.

My stretch pants are a life lesson.

I see people immaculately dressed for their "career presentation". However, I also marvel when they reveal their preferred persona while relaxing in their own version of my stretch pants.

My husband's grandfather, a self made man, had the right idea. He owned four outfits. Period. All exactly the same. White undershirt, khaki shirt, khaki pants, brown belt and brown shoes. The only variation was the location of the burn holes from his cigar ash. If forced, he would wear his only black suit to weddings and funerals.

He faced the world with an attitude of "here I am... take it or leave it." . And they took him. No problem.

So, I've decided to live his philosophy. No more conforming to an ideal public image that just isn't me. Simply put, I'm putting on the stretch pants of my life and going forward into the world.

Where are yours?

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