



Self. Conscious

Humorous short stories about
life's minor embarrassments



By an earlier Mike Hogan

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Humorous short stories about life's minor embarrassments

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To life, and all it has to teach us.

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The Man from Atlantis

I just started swimming lessons, because I can't swim and I want to. Not being able to swim can be really depressing. Particularly on holidays. Invariably my friends and I wade out into the water to impress the topless girls down the beach, but then we go too far and I can't keep my feet on the bottom any more so I have to turn back to go building sandcastles with four year olds. Imagine how *not* like Baywatch that is. Imagine how impotent this makes a twenty six year old feel. Especially when the topless girls come to take their four year old sisters away from the weird man making a mess of their sandcastles.

So I got a flash pair of swimming shorts, a Speedo swim cap and a pair of goggles that make me look like one of The Proclaimers, and I headed down to the pool. Instantly I was reminded of the times I used to frequent the local swimming pool when I was about eight years old. I went nearly every day during the summer, which leaves me at a total loss to explain my inability to swim. I think I spent all my time messing, and chasing "young ones". Yes, that was it.....

I never had flash swimming shorts back then. In fact I didn't have swimming shorts at all. I used my jocks. So did most of the other kids in Clara. We all wore Y-fronts, of various colours. But they made terrible swim shorts. They turned transparent and clingy on contact with water. Luckily none of us had any pubic hair at the time. When getting out of the pool, the standard move of course is to put your hands on the wall, jump, and haul yourself out, swinging one leg up to get a grip on firm ground, and use that as a lever to finalise your exit. But if you lunged suddenly out of the water thus clothed, the Y-fronts would regularly remain behind, due to soddenness, and float embarrassingly around the pool like a cotton jellyfish, as you're left bare-arsed and panicked, trying to decide whether your hands were better used covering your willy or fishing out your Y-fronts. This needs to happen only a few times until you

learn to leave the pool with one hand firmly clutching your jocks. Similarly, if you jumped into the pool, you would effectively give yourself a wedgie, because you would rise back to the surface with your Y-fronts up around your ears. In fact, to an onlooker, it would seem like you were wearing your father's undergarments. Which, on one occasion, I was!

And then there was pissing. Pissing in the pool has to be one of the most satisfying experiences known to boy or man, only bettered potentially by driving really fast with your head out the window. The satisfaction has a lot to do with the fact that nobody knows you're doing this really "dirty" thing. At least that used to be the case in the eighties, until they introduced this chemical that goes purple when it reacts with urine. Now if you piss in the pool, you'll be easily identifiable, as you'll be the one leaving in your wake an expanding pool of purple shame. But, if you are caught unaware by a nature call, and you really do have to take a leak, try to do it right in front of those jets of water that they have every four or five meters down by the wall of the pool. This will whisk the stream of urine away towards the centre of the pool, where it will rise as an anonymous purple cloud. A phenomenon of nature that will never be claimed, like a silent fart in a lift. Unless some poor misfortunate happens to be standing where it surfaces and has to suffer the double trauma of knowing he is seeping in somebody else's wee AND everybody thinks he did it.

But, never mind that. The most satisfying thing about peeing in the pool is the sensation of the stream of warmth around your groin, then suddenly it feels colder than usual, followed quickly by a return to your normal temperature. It's a bit like a primitive form of massage I guess.

The whole poolside hygiene thing was always something I had great difficulty with. One particularly hot summer, I hadn't washed for about three weeks, and I'd worn the same pair of black socks for so long that they partially fused with the skin of my feet, adding to the mass of dirt that was already there. My mother sent me to the pool for a bath, so I went. I stripped to my Y-

fronts and ran from the changing room to the pool. There was a little pool of foot disinfectant that everybody is supposed to paddle through before entering the pool area, but whatever humour took me, I jumped over it, landing quite dramatically in the middle of the walkway around the pool, wearing what would appear to the uninitiated observer, like a pair of black ankle socks. I continued my momentum, such was my excitement to be immersed, and launched myself with uninterrupted motion with a second leap into the pool, a bit like completing the first two parts of a triple jump.

A lifeguard came sprinting over, screaming at me in the manner of a man who remembered the horrors of The Bubonic Plague and thought he was witnessing it's return.

"Get out! Get out!", he yelled. "Get back in there and clean those feet!"

I told him, in my innocence, that that was what I was here to do, and that if he kindly left me alone I could continue with the process, but he nearly belted me. So I hiked my jocks up in protest and stormed back to the dressing room. It's only now, almost 20 years later, that I feel embarrassed about it.

So, if we weren't pissing or adjusting or jocks while in the pool, we were terrorising young women. Tullamore is a big town about 7 miles from my town (Clara) and at the time it didn't have a pool. A lot of people came from Tullamore for a swim. To an eight year old from Clara, there was something very alluring about the foreign women from Tullamore. They spoke funny, they all seemed to be sallow skinned and exotic, and they were better looking and swam better than the girls from Clara. I guess the allure was down to a primal desire to strengthen the gene pool by mating with women from far off places. Well, at eight years of age, we weren't quite up to mating, so we contented ourselves instead with submerging ourselves and looking at their arses. I remember one poor girl, who was particularly alluring, turn around after her swim, to find a school of eight year old perverts following in her wake, like a swarm of tadpoles crowded around jelly. She went mental and we all got out of the pool in such a hurry that every one of us left our jocks

behind.

Anyway, I don't wear jocks any more in the pool. I remember when I was about eleven, I was reaching a stage of self consciousness and acquiring a small amount of fashion sense. I said

"Ma, you said everybody wears their underwear in the pool. Look at that fella over there!"

He was a cool chap from Tullamore, or maybe Athlone, and he had long swim trunks, almost down to his knees. To which Mammy replied, wearily:

"Ok Michael - I think maybe you've outgrown the Y-fronts". That was the first time I felt like a man. Next day I arrived down to the pool wearing a pair of paisley boxer shorts, and was the envy of the town. It so transformed my self image that I strutted over to one of the Tullamore girls and asked her if she was enjoying her holidays.