

Tremaine's

When did I realize that I wasn't going to be like those other women? I knew it, of course, and I remember wanting so desperately to fit in, but didn't want to make concessions that I knew I had to. So from the beginning I knew I was different. When was it? I was twelve, maybe.

John Lilly had come up from Florida with his assistant to visit my father for the weekend. Mr. Lilly interested me not as much as his assistant, who was dressed like "a real woman." She was only a few years older than I but looked like a grown-up. I most definitely was not.

She had on stockings, high heels, a girdle and a bra. I must've seen her changing in the bedroom next to mine, or perhaps I saw her underwear for there was lot of it and I wore none of that stuff. And I remember looking at it and thinking, wow, powerful stuff. I want to wear that stuff, I want to be a woman.

But tight fitting lingerie does not make a woman, no more than having a figure, but I didn't know that then, and I wanted both. To have a shape was what I dreamed about constantly, to look in the mirror and see something, that was my dream. All I saw was a flat chested young girl, with measurements the same as in fourth grade, 20,20,20. My mother used to joke about it, way back then.

I was determined to have spike heels and a girdle, and I knew then that those were the signs of womanhood.

A few years later I did wear a girdle, a little one, but for what I didn't know for my stomach was flat as a pancake. And I wore nylons with a garter belt, which was

strange, and the garters make circular patterns on the bottoms of my thighs when I sat too long. But I liked them fine. And of course I wore a bra, but that was not as exciting as I had thought. No, getting the first bra in Cambridge in 1965 was a humiliating experience. We had to walk up to the second floor at Tremaine's in Harvard Square and go see the ladies in white uniforms at the back of the store. They would stand behind a glass counter and drawers and drawers of bras were behind them, against the wall. We were not allowed to touch the bras ourselves. Instead we had to tell the ladies our sizes and they would pull them out of the drawers, one by one, and embarrass the hell out of us while we were changing bras. They used to pound on the dressing room door and call out, "Honey, is everything all right?"

The first time I bought a bra it was frightening. One saleslady took a measuring tape from round her neck and wrapped it around my chest and I almost died. The smell of her perfume was overwhelming. I was staring into a heaving mountain of bosoms, and I was held so close I couldn't move. And I was being judged. The worse thing that could happen was to be told that you were too small for a bra, which occurred occasionally, thankfully not to me. So I waited and waited and dreaded that first time to come.

I wore heels some, and nylons some, but never the whole get-up. It just wasn't me, and for quite a while I wanted it to be me, I wanted to be a "real woman". It didn't feel right, to be like that. But it didn't feel right to look like a little girl either. So I never did succumb, never did get my hair right, and still can't do it today. I never could get into that tight corseted but very confident symbol of womanhood. Now the fashion has died and no one wears girdles, or stockings most of the time, and no one curls their hair by sleeping on big pink curlers anymore. But I still don't feel like I am a grown-up even now, even when I fake it with dresses and nice heels and all the current appearance of adulthood. I keep thinking someone is going to come up to me and say, "Give it up, now. You are never going to grow up at this rate. So stop pretending". And my fake self will

disappear, and know myself for the person I really am, a little flat-chested girl, measuring 20,20,20, waiting for my time to grow up, and dreading again the ladies at Tremaine's.