

Farewell to Mini-skirts

It's finally time for me to bid farewell to micro-mini skirts – even though I only weigh 130 pounds and most of my mini-skirts still fit. After all, I'm almost 62 – way past the time when 14-inch skirts are appropriate. Last spring, as I took my summer wardrobe out of storage and examined skirts that had entered my closet over the past fifteen years, I began the goodbye process.

Back in 1989 when Bob and I started dating, my skirts all fell below my knees or at mid-calf. My long-held self-image as a string-bean had been carved in the early 60's when I was a teenager living in South Carolina. The teen-aged boys I knew liked girls with full behinds, broad hips and thick thighs – all things I lacked. Whenever anyone pointed a camera at me, I'd position one leg in front of the other, in an attempt to make them look bigger. In college, straight skirts were the rage and I'd often wear one on top of another, hoping to make my narrow hips look wider, and more attractive. But Bob, a self-proclaimed leg-man, assured me that my legs weren't skinny, but shapely and fashionable – like a model's. I found it hard to agree with him, even when he repeatedly pointed out photos of thin-legged models posing seductively on the pages of fashion magazines. "Do you think her legs are skinny?" he'd ask. If I demurred, he'd say, "well, they picked her for the ad because every woman wants legs like hers. You have them."

I felt fortunate to have found a man who loved my body type and loved taking me shopping. Wary of his interest in women's clothes, I worried that one day I'd find him wearing a dress. It was a needless worry and soon I learned that his love of women's clothes began and ended with my body. "You're a beautiful woman," he told me. "And you look good in clothes. I want the world to admire you."

As time passed, I began to embrace the short skirts and dresses Bob encouraged me to buy. For our wedding, I chose a Victorian style two-piece lace dress with a short skirt. I figured that since Bob liked my legs, I'd show them to him on our wedding day. The afternoon of my first fitting, the proprietor was in a tizzy. My dress had arrived, but without the skirt. She proceeded to show me the lacy top with its below-the-waist flounce, which I lifted. Lo and behold, hanging beneath the top was the skirt. At 17 inches long, the lace skirt was shorter than the top. Everyone in the store laughed.

From then on, Bob perused newspapers and fashion magazines and clipped pictures of miniskirts that caught his fancy. Then, off we'd go to Bloomingdale's, Saks Fifth Avenue, or Neiman Marcus in search of them. Salesclerks were effusive in their admiration. "You're so lucky to have thin hips and long legs," they'd say. "These skirts were made for women like you." Now that, I could agree with. Finally, I could buy off-the-rack skirts that fit my waist and hips. Soon, my closet held rows of mini-skirts: A-lines, ruffled ones, flared ones, straight ones, and pleated ones – Bob's favorite. I owned Polka-dots, plaids, abstract prints, and solid colors in every fabric imaginable – from nubby wools to polyester, denim, and silk.

"How does your husband feel about your wearing such short skirts?" people often asked. "Is he jealous?" They were always shocked when I told them that my husband was the one who bought me those short skirts. "On my own, I'd still be hiding these skinny legs," I'd say. Each fall during fashion week, Bob would smile as he sat transfixed by Full Frontal Fashion. "Short skirts are still on the runway. Guess we can add a few new ones to your collection." As the years passed, short skirts stayed in fashion, and we continued to buy them. Like Bella Abzug's hats, they even became my signature style. Whenever I appeared at public events, people would complement my clothes, and my dancer's legs. However, those short skirts once elicited a critical letter from an arts patron who felt that short skirts were inappropriate for Greenburgh's director of cultural affairs. "She's supposed to be a role-model, not an exhibitionist," the unsigned letter to the Town Supervisor said.

"It's probably from a woman with fat legs," Bob said when I told him about the letter. "And she's just jealous. You always wear stockings or tights under your skirts, and you never look tarty or cheap –

just fashionable." My boss told me to ignore the letter, but I couldn't. I wanted to be admired, but I also wanted to be respected. After that, I wore my longest skirts whenever I had to host an event at Town Hall.

Then, last year, after I delivered a package to a friend's mailbox, her husband told her that I'd sent a young teenager in a very short skirt to deliver the package. "That was no young girl," she told him, "That was Sarah." When she related the story, I felt foolish: like a woman who still wears the same hairdo that she wore at 16, or the make-up she wore at 30. "I wouldn't send you out looking cartoonish," Bob said when I told him the story. "You may be 60," he said, "but you don't have a thing to worry about. You still look fabulous." I didn't want to be a fabulous 60-year-old trying to hang on to her youth; so, I lowered my hemlines to a place nearer my knees. Whenever Bob admired a new micro-mini in a magazine, I made noises about not liking it. Finally, I told him that I was no longer going to wear miniskirts. "Why not? You've still got the legs for them," he argued. "But I no longer have the heart for them," I answered. "And I don't need the attention they bring. They're for young girls."

He put his arms around me. "If you'll be happier in longer skirts, I'll stop urging short ones on you. It's your body and I want you to be happy. Just please, don't wear them so long you look dowdy."

Remembering all the happy times I'd worn my mini-skirts, I lovingly folded the shortest ones into a shopping bag which I put in the trunk of my car. I intended to take them to a local thrift shop but couldn't bring myself to abandon them to an anonymous rack in a second-hand shop. They deserved better: they were still beautiful, in perfect condition and – according to the spring fashion shows and recent magazine ads – still trendy. My plan now is to give them to the next skinny-legged young girl I see on the street in a mini-skirt. Maybe they'll make her feel like they did me – thin, confident, and beautiful. When you're young, external things sometimes shore-up an unsteady ego. Once you're mature, you don't need the crutches. However, I've kept a few of my longer miniskirts. I'm comfortable wearing them, and it makes my husband very happy. As a woman of a certain age, I want people to see the whole person I've become, not just my great legs.