

## Walking to the Shower Wearing Socks

By Gail Grenier Sweet ©2006

It was September 1964. I was 13 years old. It was my first day of gym class. And I was terrified.

It was only my second day of high school, and it hadn't been too good so far. I was new in town. I only knew one girl in the whole school, Kathi Yeko, my childhood friend. I was navigationally challenged. I had gotten lost 13 times yesterday.

We only had five minutes between classes and I was always holding all these big heavy books in my arms plus my purse over my shoulder, and when I finally got to my locker, it took me six or seven tries to work my locker combination - clear it - right to 39, left past zero to 11, right to 22 — clear it - right to 39, left past zero to 11, right to 22 — clear it right to 39, left past zero to 11, right to 22 - and I was sweating all over my forehead.

Gym class would be third hour today and I'd only gotten lost in the halls four times, so I was doing better than yesterday -

- But - GYM CLASS! Or as they said at Brookfield Central, P - H - Y - E - D.

PHY ED! It sounded HARSH. I was terrified.

I didn't think of my self as athletic, or even coordinated. We never had gym class at Our Lady of Sorrows grade school in Milwaukee. The closest I got to physical activity there was dancing the cha cha and the bossa nova on the playground with my best friend Carol LaVesser.

I did ride my bike when I was sure I wouldn't bump into anyone I knew, and I played the occasional game of dodgeball or baseball at family reunions, but I thought of myself as a klutz.

However, that's not why I was terrified. I was terrified because of the locker room! I was terrified because I knew I'd have to get naked in front of a bunch of strangers.

Anyway, the start of gym class wasn't too bad. We had three minutes to change for class. I found my assigned gym locker, fiddled with yet another combination - only three times - There were a couple of quiet freshman girls near me and a bunch of sophomore girls at the end of the bench, chattering away. It seemed that nobody saw me, which was fine with me.

I shoved my books and my purse into the locker. I whipped off my plaid skirt and my white blouse with the Peter Pan collar, threw em in. I pulled off my brown loafers and bobby sox and threw them in too. I snuck a look at the sophomore girls. Blond pageboys, blond flips.

I put on my gym uniform - royal blue cotton shorts and a white blouse my mom had ironed. I pulled on my gym socks and white tennis shoes and off I went into the gym to the freshman side. Our teacher, Miss Wolf, was kindly and old and had the exact same body as the

sophomore's teacher, Miss Sanft, who was much younger. They both had efficient legs and short hair.

Miss Wolf led us in calisthenics and told us we were going to learn ball-handling skills next class. Oh boy. She spent a lot of time going over the rules of Phy Ed class, including BE ON TIME and TAKE A FULL SOAPY SHOWER and prove it by showing your wet bare butt to Miss Sanft, who will hand you a towel. The big shower room was for everyone to use. The little room with the curtain was for our special time of month.

Gym class was over and Miss Wolf said we had seven minutes to take our shower and change back to regular clothes. Seven minutes! Now I was terrified AND in a rush! I could feel the sweat getting ready to pop out on my forehead.

I trooped back to my locker room aisle. I fiddled with the locker combination again, just twice this time, whipped off my blouse and shorts and threw 'em in the locker. I kicked off my tennies and shoved 'em under the bench. The blondes were talking and giggling down the bench. I had less than seven minutes.

I looked down at my white cotton size 32A bra. The bra fabric was all puckered where I did not fill it in. I took a breath and pushed down the straps, whipped the bra around, unhooked it and flung it into the locker. I had less than seven minutes.

I took another breath. The sophomores were still cackling away. I snuck a peek. Whoa. One of them had gigantic juggling boobs and PINK bikini underpants. I'd never seen anything like that.

I looked down at my very substantial white cotton underpants and in one stroke, whipped 'em off and flung 'em into the locker.

There I was, all 98 lbs. of me.

The room was chilly. I had less than seven minutes. The sweat was starting to coat my forehead. I walked toward the peroxide girls, toward the shower room, averting my eyes, eager for the cover soon to be provided by the towel Miss Sanft would hand me (I didn't realize yet that the towel would be minuscule and have very little absorbency.)

I was almost past the blonde flips and page-boys when I heard a LOUD voice followed by a clutch of cackles. "LOOK! She's wearing her socks to the shower!"

I looked down. Yup. Those were my two feet, and white socks were on them.

I retraced my steps, flung those stupid white socks under the bench, then zipped now blindly through those mean cackling hens, to the shower.

I don't remember anything else about that experience, but I'm sure I made it in my allotted seven minutes.

I learned two things that morning that I've never forgotten:

1. You don't need to make people feel bad when they've made mistakes. They already feel bad.
2. Never wear socks to the shower.

The End