

On Wind-Surfing, Pleasure and Pain

By JOHANNA HYDE

It's hard to explain at first why you do it, why it's worth the aching muscles, pulled and stretched beyond belief, the feet sliced by barnacles, cuts full of pond muck, and the hands so swollen, red, and chafed they are difficult to close. The pursuit of pleasure is painful indeed, especially for such an amateur.

Perhaps there is no explanation for why we reach for almost impossible goals and dreams. Why set our sights on the stars when the ground is so much more solid beneath us? Is it the certainty of success that draws us on? The knowledge that if you try your very hardest, do your very best, you'll always be a winner? Ha! As I pull on the up-haul of my fallen sail yet again, arms straining, back breaking, I tell myself over and over that I'll never make it beyond the lower level, and I know it's true. Then I pull harder.

All over the world and through time we've punished ourselves with hard work in the pursuit of pleasure, a better life, a state of happiness. "Follow your dreams" seems a cliché, but in truth it is what we've been doing and will be doing all our lives; following our dreams down the rocky paths, through brambles, over mountains, and now, for me, on the back of a wind-surfer, trying to achieve those moments of ultimate freedom when the wind changes and the board becomes alive beneath me, leaping forward, straining against the leashes of my arms. For a few moments at least I am transported to a world of screaming exhilaration, of fulfillment. Skating over the water I wish the pond would never end, the ocean go on forever. Then I understand why when I complained to a friend about the aches, the frustrations, and the failures, she turned to me, a light of excitement in her eyes, and said: "You know how to wind-surf? Teach me!" As if I were on a trip that could be taught! If only it was that simple, but one thing with dreams is that they belong to you only. It is never an act of following in someone's footsteps, for as variable as our thoughts, our dreams cannot be exactly the

same, and we are on our own path regardless of how hard we try. I don't know, I can't be sure what her thoughts are, or where that excitement comes from, the willingness for hard work is there. Maybe she could be a wind chaser too.

And then the fatal mistake, grip lost or sail tilted too far back and I am left suspended over water, the wind lost. Frustration is feeling the water close in over my head, feeling the shock of the sail hitting the surface and knowing it is sinking, sinking down to stick in the mud.

Was it all for that then? Those moments of excitement, of freedom seem brief now. An image of surfing for hours in . . . Bermuda, maybe, never getting tired, never having to tack flashes into my mind. I pull myself back up onto the board and sprawl there, eyelids drooping in exhaustion, spitting out brackish pond water that tastes like goose poop. Always there is that slump, the point where it all seems pointless, and failure seems certain. Working and fighting their way through life, did the ancient Romans ever reach a better way of life? Did the Buddhists ever reach Nirvana? Did the English in their many crusades reach a state of happiness? Have we? Even in our literature the struggle is documented, the Joads for instance, locked in a struggle for life, working and starving for that life, will it ever be reached?

Another image comes, one of my parents now, working endlessly, a teacher and a landscaper, trying to earn a better life, earn happiness, and all the other parents trying to do the same thing. We'll never make it. But even now, even as I think it, a roguish breeze ruffles my hair, tickles my face, teases me into opening my eyes. We are still standing, reaching up to the stars, the sky is still there, brilliant blue above me.

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Halloween: A Chance to Try a New Identity

By LYETTE MERCIER

IDRESSED UP FOR HALLOWEEN last year. I wanted to be daring, different. And Halloween afforded me the perfect excuse to do something outrageous. Halloween has never been my forte. I stopped dressing as soon as I realized I could get as much candy eating what we had left over at our house as I could tramping around in the cold. Ask my mother, and she'll tell you I always wanted to be something glamorous, something larger than life. A rock star one year, a princess the next. But my passion for being something I wasn't faded as I grew comfortable with my reality. I wasn't ever going to be a fairy princess or a rock star. Why dress up like one?

But some primal urge made me want to dress up again last year. I couldn't do anything traditional, couldn't be a sedate Cinderella or vampire. I wanted to be the antithesis of myself.

Then my friend Lenore gave me the perfect costume, even though she was only joking when she said it. "Go as a grunge goddess. Dye your hair black and everything."

The outfit ended up consisting of temporary black hair dye, an earring with the back broken off fixed to my nose with toothpaste, a shirt from my dad's army days, a pair of borrowed fatigues, and red lipstick.

The lipstick finally made me sure I liked the costume. All my life I've wanted to be able to wear fire-engine red lipstick. But a pale face and brown hair conspired against me. Every time I put a layer of it on, my lips appear to become independent of my face. But with black hair, for Halloween, it would be all right.

The first person I saw in school that day grinned

at me and said, "Now you'll blend right in."

She was referring to the fact that I was dressed for Halloween the way many high schoolers dress daily. But it made me think that no matter how you dress, eventually you'll join in the crowd. It sounds ridiculous to say, but sometimes it seems like the goal of



life is to unite with your friends. Humans are social creatures. We travel in packs. It has been this way since we swung down from the trees a few millennia ago. Back then it was for protection, and it still is today. It's harder for someone to ridicule you if you're

surrounded by a bunch of people who like you and will defend you. But sometimes you begin to feel stuck within the limits of what everyone expects from your group. Once in awhile, even if only for a day, you have to break out of the confines of your life.

Standing in front of my mirror that morning, my hair hardening into a sticky, black shell, lips hidden under a layer of crimson beeswax, I thought I was beautiful. Why? Because I was different. Anything different from my normal appearance was beautiful. I was bored with myself, bored with my world. I wanted to be something I wasn't.

Everyone is insecure about his or her image and occasionally wants a drastic change. Maybe this accounts for the new trends in clothing design. The hottest thing on the market for women right now is the Wonderbra. It's an old-fashioned push-up bra. But it represents the longing for a temporary, not permanent, change. Before, it was plastic surgery. Now it's the \$18 equivalent of a box of Kleenex. And after the party you went to in that slinky dress, you can go back to sports bras and not worry about silicone leaks.

When I got home from school that day, I went upstairs and took a bath. Sylvia Plath said in *The Bell Jar*: "There must be quite a few things a hot bath won't cure, but I don't know many of them." As my hair melted off and my tired muscles relaxed, I decided being myself would be fine for another year.

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