

Period Envy

My period of period envy began when I was six years old. Bubbe wouldn't let Mom or my sister, who was ten years older than me, water the plants at certain times of the month. They always blamed bitchiness on "periods," and right in front of my watchful eyes, they casually rolled up their bloody Modess sanitary napkins into neat bundles swaddled in toilet paper. Then they'd pin a fresh one into the crotches of their waist high undies either because they didn't know about elastic belts with metal clips, or they were just too cheap to spring for them.

Once I learned about the belts with trusty Kimberly metal clips, I began checking on them in the ladies aisle every time we shopped at Rexall Drugs. Compared to safety pins, I found them titillating and knew for certain that I'd own at least a couple of them one day.

I also made sure that my Barbie chose the belt over pins. My ready-for-any-occasion Barbie had sanitary protection made out of her white elbow length evening glove which was kept in place with her gold lame' belt. She never had to worry about embarrassing leakage. I had a couple of Barbie accessory packs, so there was no chance of Barbie spotting on her "Barbie Q" outfit, complete with tiny utensils and chef hat. I couldn't believe that other girls allowed their Barbies to fly

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Kit includes 2 booklets: "You're A Young Lady Now" (for girls 9 to 11), and "Very Personally Yours" (for girls 12 and over). A pamphlet, "At What Age Should a Girl Be Told About Menstruation?" (for parents). An assortment of Kotex feminine napkins, including Miss Deb, Slenderline, Regular, and individually packaged feminine napkins, plus a Miss Deb belt for small waists.

Miss Marion Jones, Kimberly-Clark Corp.
Educational Department, Box 551, D2
Neenah, Wisconsin 54957
Dear Miss Jones:
Please send me the Kotex Introductory Kit. My check or money order in the amount of \$1.00 is enclosed. My daughter's age is _____.
Name _____ (please print)
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
(Please allow 4 weeks for delivery)
07-16-009 Kotex & Slenderline are registered trademarks of Kimberly-Clark Corporation

Do you have a little girl who will mature soon?

Even if she is just 10, she may start menstruating any day. For young girls are maturing much earlier -- one out of every 4 menstruates before she is 11 years old.
You'll find that your daughter will accept menstruation with understanding and ease if you prepare her for it *in advance*. The makers of Kotex napkins offer the very nicest way to help her *now*.

around at any event, even “Solo in the Spotlight,” with that unshielded cafe au lait colored crotch.

By fourth grade, I was on the prowl. When I visited friends with older sisters, I always checked out their brand. There was something so seductively secret about the whole process. To me, it was the epitome of femininity and translated somehow into being sexy. I lurked about in public restrooms just waiting for a teenager in Patty Duke capris to slip a nickel in a machine marked either Guards, Kotex, or “Modess....*because.*” I was never privy to an actual purchase, but I remember sitting in a hospital lobby once when a girl came out of the rest room and asked her older brother for a nickel for his girlfriend who was waiting in the ladies’ room.

“Oh, I get it,” he nodded as he reached into his pocket with a knowing look. I knew just what was going on, and that girlfriend might as well have walked right out to the lobby in her embroidered “Wednesday” underpants and straddled him on the Herculon chair.

My friend in the apartment upstairs was probably responsible for kicking my curiosity into the intense Period Envy phase. She was in the seventh grade and had an occasional period. Lying in wait on her closet shelf was the most desirable feminine hygiene product of all time: Miss Debs. Not the after school cookie treat with a similar name, but the slender, soft, pink napkins that were specially designed for young girls. In my imagination, that box of Miss Debs was surrounded by tiny doves with pastel ribbons in their mouths.

Needless to say, I was fascinated by ads in magazines for period products. Tucked in the back, along with recipes for Lemon Jelly Rolls and Bing Cherry Sponge, were Midol ads that promised to dispel “sour mood” along with the bloating. My

favorite ads were for Tampax, the true forbidden fruit. My mother spoke of Tampax in hushed tones. I got the impression that only girls with bad reputations used them. If my mother knew where my Barbie was sporting her gloves, and that she answered the door to Ken with her pink negligee flying open, she'd know that I already had a bad rep.

Tampax ads promised that you'd be rid of "telltale odors" and the "wearer's hands need not even touch the Tampax." Coupled with the promise of no bulging or chafing, how could you go wrong? They even promised you could swim, golf, and ride horses with confidence.

The first time I spotted an actual real-life box of Tampax, I was in my father's pawn shop. I was sitting on a swivel stool behind the counter peering at the miscellaneous odds-and-ends on the back shelves through a pair of binoculars. When I recall the scene in my mind, I add the theme song for Peter Gun. There they were in their glory, nestled right between a chartreuse leopard TV lamp and a box of Ritz crackers. I gasped several times before zeroing in on the side of the box to read the famous slogan: "No Belts, No Pins, No Pads."

It was a defining moment for me for another reason. Yes, the Tampax box confirmed that my dad did have a girlfriend. This made sense out of my having heard my mother say into the telephone with her hand cupped over her mouth, "She's a slut."

Mom and Dad were living separately by then, but still I was Daddy's girl, and here was very painful evidence of a whole other piece of femininity in my father's life.

Of course, I vividly recall the moment I became a woman. It was winter break and I would turn 12 in less than a month. I was asleep, dreaming that I was in an

open, horse-drawn carriage wearing a long poufy dress with several petticoats and Abraham Lincoln holding the reins. It was just the two of us and suddenly I was aware that blood was squiggling down my legs beneath the hoop skirts. I woke up and pulled down my pink flannel pajama bottoms. There were strands of bloody discharge stretching from one inner pant leg to the next. The day of reckoning had finally arrived!

I don't recall ever using Miss Debs. Maybe they were a 1963 fad. By then it was 1966 and the metal clips on the belts dug into my skin. I went through years of cramps and accidents just like most girls, but it wasn't until I became sexually active that I could effectively insert a tampon. Before that, no matter what I did, the thing popped out.

One day at the beach I allowed my girlfriends to convince me that it was truly "in" and thus safe to go swimming with them in Lake Michigan.

"What's that?" one of them shrieked as she splashed at a puffy, white object floating in our circle. I knew instantly and threw back my head laughing,

"I told you I can't use those things!"

Six taut, tanned, tenth-grade boys from our class came barreling at us with a football.

"Go back!" we screamed, convincing them instantly. They dropped their sunny grins, turned around in unison, and hightailed it back to the sand. The only thing that girl power required back then was the right pitch.

Unlike most women over 50, I miss my "monthly visitor." There is something so utterly primal and uniquely feminine about the experience. To men, it's a total mystery and I really like that.

At the back of my bra drawer, I still keep one yellow plastic tampon case. It's autographed by the raunchy filmmaker, John Waters. I had gotten in the autograph line empty handed after a talk Waters gave at the Ladies Literary Club in Grand Rapids. In front of me, a man held a mannequin torso with flashing electric nipples for Waters to sign, and the director was almost nonchalant as he scrawled his name across the chest. When it was my turn, I scrounged around in my purse and finally pulled out the tampon case.

"What is this?" Waters asked as he pulled it apart and discovered two regulars.

"Two regulars," I said. His eyebrows arched like two scared cats, and a look of great respect crossed his face as he handed it back to me. On the face of the guy with the electric-nippled mannequin, I swear, I saw Period Envy.

