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## *My First Bra*



Recently I bought my first bra. Actually, I bought four, but now it seems I have just one.

It was a long time coming, this purchase. Owner of a 40-inch bust, I am, for all that, rather flat-chested. Nor, over the course of a long marriage or before that when first I was getting to know women, did I ever have or make occasion to buy a bra. This is to my shame, but I confess it now: For me, the world of lingerie was *terra incognita*.

But life changes. My marriage ended and someone new entered my life. She is a woman of considerable wit, wisdom, and beauty, this woman in my life. And she poses, too, many a challenge.

The first woman I ever made love to wore a bra that opened in front. Reflecting on it now, I suspect that this was the style of bra she generally wore, that she owned many such bras, all possessed of this same feature, and that the particular bra she wore the night I first saw and undid it was merely a matter of chance. To think otherwise—to think that she owned only one such bra and that she chose it in anticipation of her evening with my youthful me—is, even now, too flattering to think realistic. But whatever the motivation or the fullness of her wardrobe, wear such a bra she did, and one result seems to have been that I was irreversibly imprinted with the allure of a bra that undoes from the front. Ask me now, decades later, what key feature a bra should have, and I will tell you that it should, like paired heavenly gates, open outward with a wide and welcoming sweep. Preferably with the need for only one hand.

But one must observe decorum. Hardly would it do to reveal such a preference in a budding relationship. So it was nearly half a year before I

mentioned to this new woman in my life one night as we were readying for bed, that, “We should get you a bra that opens in front.”

I hadn’t expected to say this just then. Hadn’t expected to say it at all. But the sight of a woman undressing can render a man foolish, rob his resolve and warp his judgment, and out it came. Still, I did have some confidence as I said it—confidence that I wouldn’t get smacked, laughed at, or ignored—for by then we’d traveled a bit together and shared a few secrets. In Spain she’d returned to the hotel after an outing alone one afternoon and with her she bore a catalog from a French *corsetière*, picked up in a local boutique. One day, she said, she wanted to go to Paris to be professionally fitted for a custom-made bra. The French knew how to make bras, and she wanted one that fit—comfortably. I’d never given this much thought, but I gathered there was more to it than finding the right-sized boxers.

If you’ve got a fine enough ruler, a fine enough scale, no two measurements are the same, and like every woman—like everyone—the woman in my life is uniquely proportioned. TWIML is trim and she is short; long-legged but short-waisted. Breathtaking, really, with a narrow back and large breasts. Petite. But, to be accurate, buxom. Now, I’m OK with this. But TWIML assured me then and has assured me since that the combination of large breasts and a narrow back was not good when it came to finding a bra. Manufacturers assumed that size went with size, and that large breasts meant a large frame. For nonconformists, selections were limited, and the choice often was simply to, well, fit in—or seek relief in France.

So I wasn’t entirely surprised at her response to my suggestion. “Good luck finding one,” she said. By which she meant good luck finding one the right size. Good luck finding one that fit and was comfortable, that wasn’t embarrassing or ridiculous, that didn’t look like an industrial safety harness, and—oh, by the way—opened in front. Good luck, she had said in a tone of amused resignation—amusement at my naiveté, resignation from having lived a lifetime in her body and knowing well the constraints it imposed. But if I read her right, she said it too in a voice tinged with wistfulness. Wouldn’t that be nice? she may have thought.

So I took it as a challenge. I’d buy us a bra. Her birthday was approaching and I’d make it a gift. After all, how hard could it be?

If you pop the word *bra* into Google, you get a lot of hits. More than five million. So this would be easy. I wouldn't have to embarrass myself in a lingerie store and I kind of like tracking down hard-to-find stuff on the Web: used car parts, out-of-print books, that sort of thing.

But bras from five million sites weren't going to do me much good, not unless I wanted to contribute to San Francisco artist Emily Duffy's one-ton, five-foot-diameter BraBall, which consists of eighteen thousand discarded and donated ill-fitting bras. So I added the two search terms I was most interested in: *front* and *open*. Which led me to a lot of borderline pornographic sites with names like *eroticdudsforyourbabe.com* and featuring an abundance of models in elbow-gloves and G-strings.

A front-opening bra, it turns out, is sort of a sexualized variant of a nursing bra. Except that nursing bras are designed for discretion. In contrast, one *eroticduds* bra was called the Peek-a-Boo; others were "one size fits all," and most featured the prominent use of clear plastic and zippers, which didn't seem good candidates for TWIML's comfort and fit criteria. So what did you call a bra that opened in front, but wasn't a "front-opening bra"?

Bras present a surprisingly complex design challenge. In an article packed with formulas and vector diagrams, one analyst described the problem of "enclosing and supporting a semi-solid mass of variable volume and shape" as a question of how "to provide an uplift against the vertical (downward) and sometimes tangential force of the woman's bust." The task, he said, is comparable in difficulty to designing a bridge. And indeed, more than a few bras have been designed by structural engineers—of whom one proudly told a reporter that the prototype he'd devised represented a "proper chassis design. It's how I'd hang an engine." At one point late in the twentieth century, the British industrial design firm Ove Arup even had one group of engineers calculating stresses for London's new stainless steel and aluminum Millennium Bridge while it had another helping the Charnos lingerie company create its "revolutionary" molded polymer Bioform bra.

Charnos obtained a U.S. patent for the Bioform in 2002, as did the inventors that year of sixty other methods or devices claiming in some way "to contact the breasts . . . to support or restrain or to temporarily alter the configuration thereof," which is the partial definition of inventions in Class 450, "Foundation Garments," Subclass 1, in the categorization scheme used by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. More than four thousand such

patents have been issued since the first American “breast supporter” was given protection in the midst of the Civil War. The first “modern” bra was created in 1914 from two handkerchiefs and a ribbon, and more recent contributions have included a “zip wire brassiere,” a “nipple enhancer,” a “bra with hot/cold inserts,” a “fragrant brassiere,” and the inestimably useful “brassiere having integrated inflatable bladders for the holding of comestible liquids.”

All this ingenuity has led to the development of a correspondingly rich descriptive vocabulary. In their book *Uplift: The Bra in America*, scholars Jane Farrell-Beck and Colleen Gau provide a glossary of nearly one hundred terms pertinent to understanding the bra’s history and manufacture. A *strophium* was an undergarment worn for support by women in ancient Rome. *Falsies* are for real: They’re “any device which may be fitted loosely or stitched into a brassiere to augment or increase the appearance of fullness of the breasts.” And a *soutien-gorge* is what the French call the thing English-speakers refer to when they use the French word *brassière*.

Slip over to the Internet, where scores of makers and vendors offer similar compendia on their websites, and you’ll find that to buy a bra you’ve got to know that they can be lined or unlined, backless, strapless, seamed or seamless; contoured, padded, convertible, wired, unwired, minimizing or maximizing. You’ve got to know construction—slides, casings, frames, and wings. You’ve got to know that different makers use different words for the same thing—*demi*, *shelf*, and *balconette* all describe a kind of bra that leaves the top half of the breasts exposed while providing lift from underneath (a style that, one website helpfully points out, “Men find very attractive”). And you’ve got to know that while different words *can* mean the same thing, the *same words can also mean different things*. For instance, one seller of “intimate apparel” notes that demi bras “leave the nipples exposed,” whereas a more mainstream manufacturer allows only that demis feature “reduced top coverage”—which isn’t entirely inconsistent with exposed nipples. It’s just a matter of perspective.

It’s also overwhelming.

But I persevere. And I learn. And what *do* you call a bra that opens in front? You call it a “front-closing” bra. A bra that *opens* in front is a *front-closing* bra. Naturally. *Who’s on first?* and what *could* I have been thinking?

But then, this too is a matter of perspective—it merely depends on what you want to do with a bra: put it on or take it off.

Figuring out what to call the thing I wanted in a bra helped in my quest. But it also made a big dent in the options. Adding *front* and *closing* to my Google bra search reduced my original five million hits by ninety-nine percent. Nor did it take into account the most important person in the whole affair: TWIML. She wouldn't wear the bra if it wasn't comfortable. Which meant she wouldn't wear it if it didn't fit. Which meant, first of all, that it had to be the right size.

There's a lot to say about size. But what I knew then were the basics, dimly remembered from TWIML's introductory lecture in Spain—that bra size is based on two measurements and some black-box massaging. The first measurement is chest circumference, measured with a tape measure held around the rib cage, just below the breasts. You read the number in inches, then add five. Don't ask why. It's how you do it. But the result is called the band size. The second measurement, the bust circumference, is taken across the nipples and around the breasts; the difference between it and the plus-five number gives the cup size, which is expressed in letters: a 1-inch difference calls for an A cup, 2 inches for a B, and so on. A woman measuring 29 inches around her chest and 36 inches around her bust would theoretically wear a size 34B bra.

Because the system involves a comparison between two numbers, and because we're dealing with nature, some sizes are always going to be harder to find than others. Consider, for instance, bras with a 5-inch differential between bust and band. On a bra with a size 38 band, that differential represents a bust circumference 13 percent greater than the band size. But five inches on a bra with a smaller band represents a greater percentage difference. On a size 30 it represents a bust 17 percent larger than the band, and that greater percentage difference in turn puts a 30DD bra farther away from the proportions of some statistically "average" bra than a 38DD, meaning it should be less common. And indeed, there are five times more Google hits for a search on *38DD bra* than for a *30DD* search. (And what's with the double Ds? Shouldn't the fifth letter of the alphabet, E, designate the cup size of a bra for a woman with 5-inch differential between bust and band? The answer is yes ... but. Yes, some manufacturers use an E. But the A-B-C system—an inch per letter, one letter at a time—breaks down after

a few letters, and others use a DD. Same breasts, same woman; different makers, different sizes. And it gets worse: Depending on the maker, the cups on a bra for a woman with a 7-inch differential might be designated DDDD, E, F, FF, or G.)

If this is confusing, think of Barbie. Before her late nineties remodel—and long before she took up with Blaine—Barbie was estimated to have had a “real life” figure with a 39-inch bust and 21-inch waist. Using this limited information, Barbie would have needed a size 26M bra. It is possible to buy a 50K bra, and it is possible to buy a 28AA. But it is not possible to buy something that is simultaneously as big and as small as a 26M. Barbie couldn’t buy a bra.

(However, *I* could buy a Barbie. And in the Pursuit of Knowledge, and because I eventually realized you couldn’t generate Barbie’s band size from her waist size, I went on eBay and bought my own Barbie—a vintage sixties model with platinum hair—for \$2.50. I trussed her with loops of dental floss, which I cut loose with a knife for measuring, and what I found was ... at once unconvincing and disturbing. Unconvincing because, near as I could tell, she should wear a 38A—but you can look at her and know *that’s* not right. And disturbing because she was my first Barbie and I was unprepared. Save for a pair of molded-on white undies, she came nude, and as I worked over her intently, laying flat the strands of floss to measure, I stopped midway to get up and lock the door. This was an activity I *never* wanted to be caught in the midst of, and if there is any way to feel sleazier, I don’t want to know about it.)

So you can expect some difficulties. But I also expected that the ability to choose from among the huge number of sellers and products on the Web (which is, after all, the *World Wide Web*) would overcome the problem. Though first I needed to know TWIML’s size. Strapping her with a tape measure (or dental floss) would have been awkward, so I resorted to the next best alternative: I scooped up a bedside bra one morning and read the label. When I then added the label size to my *front-closing bra* search I had another huge falloff in hits. From five million, I was now down to two thousand. But I was down, too, to the cream; from here it would be easy. Or so I figured.

Among the first sites to come up in my refined Google search was [www.freshpair.com](http://www.freshpair.com). Freshpair seemed to sell underwear of all kinds, but what

caught my attention were the search menus and windows. Under “Women’s Categories” you could click on “bras,” and from there you could click on the feature you wanted. I did so on “front-closure bras” and the site brought up a page with pictures, prices, and descriptions of sixteen bras. “Gravy!” I thought.

But the wisdom of TWIML was yet to be revealed. The page also brought up a filtering window enabling a search for size from among the sixteen, and when I entered TWIML’s size I was left with two selections. Two.

Having once thought I’d get to choose from among millions, two seemed a little restrictive. My multitudes had vanished. But my foray did demonstrate that the bra I wanted did exist in the size she needed. And because the two Freshpair bras were made by the same manufacturer as that of the bra I’d scooped from the floor, it also seemed I’d be more than able to satisfy TWIML’s demands for comfort and quality. There were two right-sized, front-closing bras out there—a “Y-back” and a “convertible seamless”—and now I was sure there were more. I’d find them. I’d shower TWIML with bras. I’d keep looking. I’d ... go back to the Web.

Soon I found myself at EBrasEtc.com, otherwise known as Sheila’s Sheer Elegance Lingerie, and then the Dallas-based HerRoom.com—which, in addition to carrying the wares of nearly fifty makers, proved a gold mine of information. Under an “All About Lingerie” menu, HerRoom offers treatises on no end of stuff you never knew you never knew.

Q: What is the correct way to put on a bra?

A: Every technique has its critics, of course, but it could be the eight-step Hook & Spin, the variant Upside-down Hook & Spin, or the simpler Stretch & Hook.

Q: How many hooks should a bra have?

A: This is based on band width—which is proportionate to cup size—but “Small cup sizes only require one or two hooks. Bigger cup sizes can require three, four, or five.”

Q: Who needs an underwire bra?

A: Any woman with a C cup or larger.

And—in a diagnostics and troubleshooting section—Q: What does it mean when a bra’s cups pucker?

A: That the cup size is too large. The solution is to go down one cup size ... or “tighten your bra straps.”

You can also find, at HerRoom, what kind of bra Paris Hilton wears.

I found among these sites four bras that seemed capable of contributing to my and TWIML's joint happiness. Three were by TWIML's favorite maker. A fourth was by Le Mystère, maker, said HerRoom, of bras "designed in France with the philosophy that beautiful lingerie can be both comfortable and sexy"—which seemed a good bet. Three were Y-backs and one was the convertible (which featured a "classy metal clasp" and could be reconfigured in back and worn in different styles). All opened (and closed) in front. And all were black. I found a fifth that could have worked, but it came only in white and nude. As the name of a color it would seem to have dawned on somebody that "nude" offered the same drawbacks as the old "flesh"-colored Crayola crayons, but the real problem was that I had a vision of the bra I wanted to see TWIML in, and the bra in that vision was black. So I skipped the fifth and ordered the four.

And then I waited.

When the bras arrived, I checked them out. They were in the box. They were black. They opened in front. The labels said they were the right size. Following this thorough review, I put them back in the box, wrapped it with paper and bow, affixed a card, and hid them away.

On her birthday TWIML was traveling. Flying from halfway around the globe. And while she flew I stocked the refrigerator with food and the house with flowers. Then I picked her up, brought her home, waited while she showered, fed her, heard the news from abroad, and finally ... plied her with gifts. She tendered expressions of surprise and delight. One by one she drew the bras from the box. Each came in a thin plastic bag and each she extracted then held gently aloft with two hands, turning the bra first this way then that for inspection. She noted that they were well made. She noted the clasps—that they would open (or close) in front. And she read with approval the labels: They were the right size. "But," she said, "they may not all fit. Every bra is different. We may have to return some. But we'll see; we'll have a bra show."

Though first she slept.



Why should it be so hard to find a bra that fits? So hard that an experienced user like TWIML can anticipate that a good portion of the bras labeled with her size won't actually conform to her dimensions? It seems a bizarre thing, as if I shouldn't expect that a pair of pants sized 32 inches in the waist will stay up.

One reason is the way bras are sized and women are measured. The A-B-C system was introduced in the 1930s. It was a great innovation at the time, representing a recognition by manufacturers that breasts were not all the same size and that a standardized labeling system could help refine the distinctions. (To an objective observer—a guy, let's say—it might seem rather late in human history to be noting such a difference, yet before jumping to conclusions it's worth remembering that it wasn't until the 1860s that an American could buy a pair of factory-made boots with distinct lefts and rights.) It wasn't long, however, before the four original letters and cup sizes, A through D, proved inadequate and the letters began proliferating. First the multiple Ds arrived, then the other letters, then the multiple other letters. Chaos was in the land.

But even more dramatic than the breakdown of the ABCs has been the mutating system for measuring size. You can look at a dozen different magazine articles, websites, or sales brochures, and you will find a dozen methods for determining size. Don't want to add 5 inches to the chest circumference? That's OK—you can add 1 inch. Or 3. Or, if the actual measurement was an even number instead of an odd, you can add 2 inches, or 4 inches, or 6. Or no inches at all. Or, instead of measuring below the breasts, you can measure above them, in which case you shouldn't add anything to correct the measurement—unless you do. And how to measure the bust itself? Definitely this should be done when the woman is standing—unless she should be sitting. And she should be wearing a bra. Or she shouldn't. One group says that measuring a woman's bust while she's wearing a bra will only reproduce the measurement of the bra she's in, and they suggest that the measurement should properly be taken with the breasts hanging free—or handheld by their owner to the desired height. So jumbled are the rules that you can easily take one set of measurements and come up with five "correct" sizes.

A system so variable can claim little advantage over the method of the memorable Ms. Pauline. Ms. Pauline was proprietor and matriarch of a store

in Brooklyn that sold only bras, and it was from her that TWIML bought the bras of her youth. In an era before the advent of slinky models and advertised secrets, Ms. Pauline's was a utilitarian store: Merchandise was stacked in white cardboard boxes and the saleswomen were ... experienced. In TWIML's memories, Ms. Pauline herself may have been ninety. But she knew bras and sizes. When a customer walked in, "She'd look at her and say, 'You're a 34C. Here, put this on.'" So keen was Ms. Pauline's eye and so valued her judgment that when TWIML returned years later to buy bras during a visit home, she had to pull her car from the road and wipe away tears on finding the store closed and out of business.

In truth, though, the retirement of Ms. Pauline and the vagaries of the alphabet system aren't the only reasons for the difficulties in obtaining the right size and a comfortable fit. Another culprit is the nature of breasts themselves. Even if perfectly fitted, the average woman, according to Her-Room, will wear six different bra sizes throughout her adult life. Partly this is because breasts are in near constant flux. They change with changes in a woman's weight. They change over the course of a woman's cycle. They change during pregnancy and they change depending on a woman's use or nonuse of birth control pills. Even if the same ostensible size, breasts can differ in shape (pear, melon, apple, or torpedo), placement (high or low), separation, angle (straight ahead or wide apart), tilt, and diameter. They differ, too, one from the other in a pair. In one study of college-age women from Michigan, no woman had two equal-volume breasts; in most cases the left was larger than the right, typically by about five percent. They're varied and vibrant, breasts, each possessed of its own attitude and inclination. Soft, "unruly structures," one physician calls them; hard to measure and hard to control.

It was a specialist in mammoplasty (the surgical augmentation, reduction, and reshaping of breasts) who offered this latter assessment, and if there's one group of professionals that you'd think would know how to measure breasts accurately it would be plastic surgeons. After all, if you've been asked to enlarge a woman's cup size from a B to a D, or reduce it from an E to a C, it would seem you'd want to know how much to add or subtract. It would seem, too, that this would be a profession harboring unlimited data on "normal" or "average" breasts—their sizes and shapes and weights and volumes, and how this all corresponds to bra sizes. If you wanted to know

what proportion of women wore 32-inch bands, and of these, what proportion wore C, D, or E cups, you'd think that these would be the people who would know. At the very least, you'd think a plastic surgeon could with some confidence tell you how to reliably measure a breast.

You'd think.

But visit a medical library, thumb through a half-dozen volumes along the lines of *Surgery of the Breast: Principles and Art*, and you'll find otherwise. One text offers a few numbers, but notes that no one knows where they come from or how they were obtained. An electronic search among the library's thousands of scientific journals turns up a paper with measurements on "aesthetically perfect" breasts—which seems more a matter of taste than of science. And there's the Michigan study, in which the researchers used fast-drying plaster casts (a method not likely to prove a hit with your typical lingerie customer) to determine that an average breast weighed ten and a quarter ounces, and that a lone specimen might weigh as much as two pounds. But this study, based on a small number of young, white women, doesn't really say much about the greater world of womanhood, and the few papers that do appear mostly begin with sentences to the effect that "Normal measurements of the adult female breast, normal values for breast volume, or volume-to-cup size relationships have not been published in the plastic surgical literature," and they end with expressions of frustration at the existing means of measuring breasts and converting those measurements to bra sizes.

In response to this problem, the writers tend to do three things. First is to conclude that most women wear the wrong size bra—if by "right size" is meant one based on an industry-recommended measuring system. Second is to dismiss current systems as "inaccurate so often as to be useless." Third is to develop their own system. At his Southern California implant practice, for instance, Dr. Edward A. Pechter determines cup size as if he were measuring the half-girth of a grapefruit: side-to-side with a tape measure, starting at the breastbone, curving up over the nipple and then back down to where the breast joins the ribcage at the side. A breast measuring 7 inches in this manner is best fit, says Pechter, by an A cup; 8 inches by a B, and so on.

Whether Pechter's system will catch on is anyone's guess. Every profession, it seems, has its own approach to the problem, whether it be Ms.

Pauline's eyeball-and-experience technique or the computer models built by the Bioform engineers from the laser scans of 180 women's busts. But in one sense, it doesn't matter: "Women," says HerRoom, "tend to buy the bra size they want to be rather than the size that fits." And in the meantime, says Pechter, finding a comfortable, well-fitting bra will remain "more a matter of educated guesswork, trial, and error than of precise measurements."

Which meant it was time to try on my purchases.

THE BRA SHOW: She slept for a long time. An interminably long time. And then there was work, and there were errands, and there was life. And it seemed forever before it came time for the bra show. Or maybe I was overcome with anticipation. TWIML, with blond hair, in a black bra—that opened in front. The thought made me weak, and the wait seemed longer, sweeter, than the buildup before a childhood Christmas ever did. But eventually, like Christmas, the day did come—oh happy day!—when TWIML announced, "We should do the bra show."

It begins with the pouring of wine and the slipping into of the proverbial "something more comfortable." Or in this case, half of something more comfortable. Then there is the reopening of boxes and the selection of the first candidate, an affair in lace.

"It's pretty," she says. Then on goes the bra: left arm slipped through a strap, band flung round behind so she can catch the other end, right arm through the other strap—the way I put on a shirt. But unlike me, she then bends over to let her breasts fall into the cups. Still bent, she draws together the two ends of the bra—tugging gently, breasts entrapped, drawn ends circling unsteadily in the air, straining—and fastens the snap. She grabs up and disentangles her hair, flings it over her back, and stands.

Briefly we assess the fit, which is not difficult: The cinched cups have squeezed her breasts into an exaggerated cleavage and the pair are threatening to spill out. Bending again, TWIML's hands disappear amid a flurry of tucking, lifting, plumping, and stuffing, and when next she stands she twists and adjusts the slides on the bra's straps to correct their length. All this lessens the chance of escape, but the effort's main effect is to have displaced a portion of each breast's bulge towards her underarms.

The bra is simply too small. "I'm not sure," she says, in reference to the cups and despite the bra's label, "that this is my size."

I'll have to send it back.

Next is the *Le Mystère*, which features cups made from a molded, foam-like material. This is a good thing, says TWIML absently, if you happen to have a “really hard nipple erection.” I ponder this comment as she puts the bra on—thinking just how much there is in this world that I’m unlikely ever to know—and when I come to she stands before me, nipples hidden but not much else. The bra doesn’t come close to fitting. There are swells of breasts that no amount of tucking in will ever capture, and if anything, the *Mystère*’s cups are smaller than their lace predecessors.

Third is the convertible with the shiny gold clasp. “Classy” as advertised, the mechanics of the clasp are nonetheless puzzling. “Let’s see how this works,” says TWIML, and she begins fiddling with the parts, pushing and jabbing and my fingers itching all the while to help. For one desperate moment we resort even to a search for directions. But finally we discover the secret: A T-shaped pin on one half of the clasp drops into a slot on the other half then pivots shut. She does and undoes it a few times to get the feel, then on goes the bra, left arm slipped through a strap, band flung round behind . . .

When finally she rises, our joint conclusion is that this bra has possibilities. There’s less extraneous bulging, and mostly TWIML seems comfortably held in. But it’s still not perfect; the cups are widely spaced and the result is that TWIML’s breasts are slung off to the side and slightly flattened. But not to worry. The convertible can be rerigged, and since the cups seem generally the right size, TWIML whips off the bra, changes some hooks and connections, puts it back on, and reemerges in a black halter top. A very striking black halter top, if I say so myself.

Through magic, the garment’s transformation has changed the way it shapes and carries TWIML’s breasts. Now they are rounder—more so than normal for her—and more forwardly held. Now, too, it seems they have become magnetic, for my hands are drawn irresistibly to assess the new shape. Long do I linger in my assessment—longer perhaps than is needed. But in reality I’ve probably not yet bought a bra. Part of this configuration’s appeal is that I’ve never seen TWIML in a halter top and novelty has its own allure. But I suspect I’ve not seen her in a halter for the same reason she’s not seen me in a cummerbund or bikini underwear—they ain’t me, and a halter’s not her.

So, we are three down with one to go, and despite my search through the seemingly millions of possibilities I have not yet found the right combination of size, fit, and psychological compatibility. Which is not to say I haven't enjoyed *Le Show*. Aside from the fact that the bra and the breast folks can't seem to agree on much, we are primarily here because of *TWIML*'s shapeliness, and that shapeliness has been on magnificent display. Moreover, I was getting to appreciate and observe that shapeliness in a manner new to me: neither furtive nor leering, neither sexual nor chaste. A manner that was, simply, frank: Here was *TWIML*, here was a bra; what did I think?—of each alone? of the two together? Look close; consider. And let's try on a T-shirt, a tight one, "Because wearing a T-shirt over a bra is the best way to see if the shape is right"—which I might have suspected had I ever thought about the process rather than merely drooled over the result.

Equally too, if I am not mistaken, does *TWIML* enjoy the evening. And for much the same reasons: *Le Show* gives her the chance to be admired, and frankly, while she goes about the business of being a woman. That, and it allows her to share with me the tribulations visited on her by the specifics of her shapeliness in a world of manufactured sizes and standards.

So, we are having great fun. But it is also true that we're partly here to celebrate *TWIML*'s birthday, and it would be nice if I actually succeeded in giving her a present. Our last bra is another by her favorite maker—another Y-back. It's seamless in the cups, but has no lace, no fancy clasp, and won't hide a nipple erection. Indeed, this is the plainest of the bras I purchased, its only distinguishing feature being a diamond-shaped panel of sheer mesh sewn into each strap as it flares out to join the cup. Without much prelude, then, *TWIML* slips it on and adjusts it as necessary. And it is then that this bra's huge advantage becomes apparent. For it fits.

It fits obviously and well. There's no threat of escape, no bulging out the sides. No spilling over the top, no squeezed cleavage. The cups are pucker-free and cradle her without distortion, neither flattening nor rounding; the shape instead is pure *TWIML*. Or rather, *TWIML* collected. For they seem to gather her up in the way she was meant to be, with leavened breasts presented forward and proud—a swelling expanse wrapped in black and accented with wisps of blond. Glorious.

Briefly, we put it to the T-shirt test, and it passes: The shape is *TWIML* still, that geography I have come to know and to love so well. And so, for her I have bought a bra. We will keep it. Happy birthday, my dear.

But for me? Have I bought a bra for me?

In her bra—black, magnificent, comfortable and well-fitting—TWIML stands before me. The front closure works. Is working. Is closed. But I want to do what a man wants to do. And I reach.

And yes.

“Yes,” I say, “yes.”

The closure opens.

With one hand.

Mid-American Review  
*Volume XXVI • Number 2*



Cover Art: *Scenic Overlook (Joyce & Ruth)* by Karin Stack  
Photograph, 15 by 23 inches, 2005



*Mid-American Review* is an official publication of the Department of English at Bowling Green State University. A current issue costs \$9, and a sample back issue costs \$5. Subscriptions are available—see our second-to-last page for form. Exchange subscriptions with literary magazines are encouraged. *Mid-American Review* does not reprint. Essays and reviews should follow MLA style. Reports on submissions take one to five months (longer in the summer). When funding permits, payment is \$10 per page, with a maximum of \$50; contributing writers receive two complimentary copies and a lifetime subscription. All rights revert to the writer upon publication. The views expressed by authors in *Mid-American Review* do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its editors.



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*Mid-American Review*

Subscription orders, submissions (with SASE), and all other correspondence should be sent to the appropriate editor, using the following information:

*Mid-American Review*  
Department of English  
Bowling Green State University  
Bowling Green OH 43403

Editors can be reached at (419) 372-2725. For more information, please consult our website:

[www.bgsu.edu/midamericanreview](http://www.bgsu.edu/midamericanreview)

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*Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 75-21360*

*ISSN 0747-8895*

*Mid-American Review* is indexed in the Publication of the Modern Language Association, The American Humanities Index, and the Index of American Periodical Verse.

# Contents

## *Fiction*

---

Rebecca Barry <i>Men Shoot Things to Kill Them</i>	1
David Yost <i>Stealing Crème Brûlée: A Test in Seven Parts</i>	118
Steve Almond <i>Three Stories</i>	184
Jim Hilgartner <i>Beowulf in Hell</i>	196
Allison Shuette-Hoffman <i>Two Stories</i>	197
Tom Noyes <i>Greeting Phantom</i>	247

## *Nonfiction*

---

Kyle Minor <i>Lay Me Down in the Blue Grass</i>	27
Debra Marquart <i>Great Falls, 1976</i>	164
Steven L. Shepherd <i>My First Bra</i>	224

## *The 2005 Sherwood Anderson Fiction Award*

---

First Prize: Valery Varble <i>Bat</i>	42
Editors' Choice: Josh Goldfaden <i>Disorder Destroyers</i>	71
Editors' Choice: M. Glenn Taylor <i>The Story of a Hateful Man</i>	91

## *The 2005 James Wright Poetry Award*

---

First Prize: Amanda Auchter <i>Alfred Eistenstaedt Holding His VJ Day</i>	53
<i>Negative With Two Hands, 1945</i>	
Editors' Choice: Teresa Ballard <i>What a Strange Machine</i>	67
Editors' Choice: Shawn Fawson <i>Servant of the Inarticulate</i>	68
Editors' Choice: Elton Glaser <i>Prayer From the Back Pew</i>	69
Editors' Choice: Anna Journey <i>Elegy: After Filling Out</i>	87
<i>Egg Donation Forms</i>	

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