



**Sweaty She Monday (5/11/09):
Conversations with John and His John**

By Susan Farago

Weekly Sweaty She postings can be found on "Sweaty She" on Facebook

In a land where the river runs free
In a land through the green country
In a land to a shining sea
And you and me are free to be you and me

Lyrics from "Free to be You and Me"

The idea behind this popular 1972 song was to promote and encourage values such as individuality, tolerance, and happiness with one's identity. I am all for people who want to express themselves and do their own thing. However my beliefs were tested last week when I went to Hippie Hollow to coach a swim workout. Hippie Hollow, located on Lake Travis in Austin, is a great place to get in some open water swimming BUT it is also a nude beach. Pardon me, a "clothing optional" beach.

I have decided there are 3 types of people who go to Hippie Hollow: those who want to be "seen", those who want to "see", and a handful of triathletes who just want to get in a good swim. What happens when these groups intersect? That's when I met John.

I was standing near the water watching the group of athletes during a 10 min swim warm-up, when I heard the crushing of rocks and footsteps getting closer and closer to me. I made the mistake of turning around and came face to face with John...and his john. "Hello!" he exclaimed. There he was, standing a few feet away from me wearing nothing but tube socks, tennis shoes, and a smile. We were on a slope and he was higher than me – putting my line of site right where I didn't want it to be. "Hi" I responded and quickly turned my head to the sky. I was so glad I had on sunglasses!

As I continued to face the water (I didn't dare turn around again!), he proceeded to tell me about how he loves to swim, asked about the training group and how often do we swim, what a wonderful evening it was, and other small talk. Then he said, "I'm sorry...I don't mean to be rude...my name is John." And he stuck out his hand to shake. I shook his hand and told him my name, and our conversation resumed. He asked me if I was part of the same group that swam here Monday nights. I hesitated my response. Then said, "yes". If we were in a coffee shop (fully clothed mind you) and he asked me about GuppyMax (the Monday night swim group), I would have happily told him all about it and asked for his e-mail so I could add him to the distribution list. But somewhat ashamedly, I didn't do any of that.

The conversation was pleasant and rather cordial. But I have never spent so much time facing the water, looking up at the sky, or looking down at the ground while talking to someone. And in hindsight, I should have just come right out and said something like, “Hey, I see that you are naked. I get it. I’ll try to be comfortable with it. But I may not look at you while we’re talking. OK?” He’s free being he but what about me?

I felt like we were on uneven playing ground. Maybe if I were only wearing socks and tennis shoes (or better yet, he had some shorts on!), things would have felt more equal or on par. What is it about clothing (or lack thereof) that makes such a statement?

People who go to nudist colonies say that it’s the freedom from clothing that removes all societal and economic barriers and creates an atmosphere of equality among everyone. Think about it. How different would you feel having coffee with someone wearing spandex or sweats versus someone wearing an Armani suit or Vera Wang dress? They say clothes make the person, so maybe lack of clothes “unmakes” the person and shows who we really are (literally and figuratively).

There is also something unpredictable about nudity. While talking to John I kept waiting for something to happen. Like some part of his body would all of a sudden become uncontrollable and we would ALL have to run for the hills! Or did I expect him to start shaking his shoulders and hips back and forth in Steve Martin style yelling, “I AM ONE WILD AND CRAZY GUY!!!” But John never did that.

The women finished up their warm-up and were heading back to shore. John smiled, said he would let me get back to coaching, and to have a nice evening.

The group reconvened and the women were giggling and asked if I had a nice chat...and I giggled a little myself. But you know what? I actually did. Go. Do. Be Free.