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Bottoming out; Now's a good time to mention unmentionables

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This past week I heard lyrics from two songs that I realized belonged in a paragraph together.

First I heard, "Sex is a misdemeanor -- da more you miss da meaner you get." Then a couple of days later I encountered, "I underwear my sweetie is tonight."

I wish I could remember more of the lyrics because they were amusing, but that's plenty enough to get from Point A -- the songs -- to Point B -- a tale about underwear.

Keep in mind that we are still in the middle of those lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer, those days of sodas and pretzels and beer . . . and precious little to write about.

So, with that disclaimer and as I head for a little R&R and a few days away from the keyboard, I prematurely pass on to you information about a curious event that is going to take place in New York City.

This coming Wednesday, Aug. 13, has been designated National Underwear Day. In the Big Apple, some 20 models will be strutting around popular spots in the city, showing off a small part of their underwear.

The sponsor of this event, not surprisingly, is an underwear/intimate apparel retailer named Freshpair. The company's idea is this: "Elevating underwear from its currently discreet status to openly chatting about it around the office cooler is a large task." No kidding. Can you think of a faster way to get a workplace sexual harassment charge filed against you?

So . . . beginning at 7 a.m., nearly two dozen male and female models will grace New York's city sidewalks, dressed in what are described as "seeables." The models will move around to various locales and if you're in New York that day and would like to show support, you can sign a petition the models will have with them to get the day officially nationally designated.

You can also show your support by simply leaving a shirt button undone, says the sponsor. What if you didn't button a single button? How's that for support? Or what if you wore support hose?

Obviously, underwear has been around for some time. And there are many designations for this intimate piece of apparel. In New Orleans, a popular term is "drawers," as in every mother's admonition: "Don't go out in public with holes in your drawers. What if you get into a wreck and you have to go to the hospital?"

I'm in a wreck so bad that I have to go to the hospital and I'm going to worry about a hole in my drawers?

But there are many more synonyms, if you want to call them that: shorts, briefs, boxers, undies, Jockeys, panties, skivvies, grundies, drizzles, Fruit of the Looms, thongs, intimates, unmentionables, unthinkableables -- and those are just the ones I can think of. You may have some favorite term of your own.

The eagle-eyed investigative team here at the Lind Lunatic Fringe Research and Mindslip Center uncovered an ad from the 1940s that said: "Suffering from chafitis? Skivvy-grabitis?" (Skivvy, by the by, was a nautical term.)

There are some pretty amazing facts about underwear that you might be interested in. Then again, you might not.

Locally, the most visible underwear I know of is the Krewe of Underwear, a sub-krewe of Krewe du Vieux, the wild and wacky Carnival organization that yearly tests the boundaries of good taste. Members of the Krewe of Underwear regularly greet one another with this: "Underwear y'at!" A spokesman for that august organization said, "Parade day is the only day any of us wears underwear."

But here, thanks to the National Underwear Day folks, are some other underwear awareness items you might be interested in. Then again . . .

During the 18th century, underpants were not common, even among the more gentrified upper crust. Yuck!

In the latter part of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, long underwear was beginning to get popular, but the short stuff we wear today really didn't come into play until the 20th century.

Drawers, the popular New Orleans nomenclature, originated from the fact that there was a drawstring sewn into underpants manufactured in 1791. "Maggie's drawers," however, is a military term: It's the name for the red flag on a rifle range that is waved to indicate a shot missed a target.

Where else can you get worthless information like this?

The term lingerie came from the French word "linge," meaning linen.

The first modern bra was the brainstorm of a New York socialite named Mary Phelps Jacob back in 1913. The "bra" was made of two handkerchiefs, ribbon and some cord. She got a patent for her creation in 1914.

The world's largest bra was made in Japan in 1990. The bust measurement was 91 feet, 10 inches. Presumably, one hopes, it was a promotion. The world's largest pair of underpants was made in the United Kingdom in 1999. This was definitely a promotion -- for a magazine -- and the briefs measured 14 feet by 29 feet and were made of acrylic and lace.

Now here's the kind of stuff you can really sink your teeth into. This is simply awesome. It would take nearly 7.5 trillion pairs of size large men's briefs to cover the state of Texas. To gain some perspective on that, that's enough drawers to wrap around the Earth 179,115 times.

So there you have it -- underwear Cliffs Notes style. And when the column starts back up again in a week, we guarantee: It'll be nothing as serious as this subject matter.

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