



Unsqueezed: Springing Free From Skinny Jeans, Nose Jobs, Highlights and Stilettos
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Wrinkles and Furrows and Spots

I'm not proud of my butt-checking moments. On some days, though, I do live into the freedom of valuing the body God gave me for what it can do; on those days, I don't give my butt a second thought. In fact, not only am I willing to overlook my various aesthetic faux pas, but in the name of function, I have actually come to embrace them.

For instance, one of my favorite things in the world to do is to walk at the beach on a warm, sunny day. For depression and other assorted afflictions, it is definitely my drug of choice. Who can stay bummed out for long when they get to walk across green grass and golden sand, under blue skies, past purple and orange and turquoise houses? Typically, not me.

As I wind through the crowded boardwalk at Venice Beach, outside Los Angeles, my eyes squint against the rising midday sun. Since my stepdad is an ophthalmologist, I live with a nagging sense of guilt about the fact that I don't wear sunglasses; I've just never been able to make them work for me. I tried the dark plastic shield that goes over regular eyeglasses, but I felt like my grandfather. I tried some round, purple clip-on ones, but they made me feel like John Lennon. And though I do have the means to spring for a pair of prescription sunglasses, I never have. As I pass vendors and sand sculptors and the lady who paints your name on a grain of rice, I begin to reconsider the wisdom of not wearing them.

In pensive moments like this, I invariably find myself thinking about cavemen and cavewomen. I do. Surely, I tell myself, the cave people got along without plastic sunglasses. In fact, I convince myself that, in the face of the blazing sun, cave people probably did what I do: they squinted. Squinting against the bright sun is probably why God invented squinty muscles in the first place.

That's what I tell myself.

When I get back to my mom and stepfather's home, after a few hours outside, I glance in the mirror. Because the sun draws out my freckles, the blotchy skin on my face is like my own personal mood ring. Moving closer to the mirror, I happen to notice that a few of the freckles have accidentally clumped together. Then I realize that there are several patches like that. Without warning, the angst-ridden voice in a commercial from my childhood rings

in my head: "They call these *age spots*. I call them ugly. But what's a woman to do?" Though I vaguely recall that a woman was supposed to buy some product, I forget now what it was.

It isn't just the spots that are advertising my aging situation; I also notice two deep lines between my eyebrows. Those lines suggest that, like some brilliant scientist, I'd been thinking incredibly profound thoughts for the last several decades—even though I hadn't. The lines are just from all the squinting.

Media Contact | For more information and to schedule an interview with our featured author contact: Krista Carnet, broadcast publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kkcarnet@ivpress.com
Heather Mascarello, print publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4012 or hmascarello@ivpress.com
Adrianna Wright, online publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4096 or awright@ivpress.com
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Margot Starbuck

Truly, I am a beauty consultant's nightmare. After all, if I'd worn a big floppy sun hat for decades, plus whatever cream my consultant was selling, I might not have all those age spots. If I had used sunglasses, there wouldn't be the deep lines from all the squinting. If I hadn't *smiled* so much about all the gorgeous colors at the beach—if I'd been stone-faced and nonplussed and entirely unimpressed with all that natural and painted beauty—I wouldn't have such deep *smile lines* around my mouth. If I'd been sensible and avoided all that great stuff, I'd probably look younger and a lot less worn than I do now.

Yuck, right?

Who even wants to live like that??! If I have to choose between the spotty wrinkles and a lifetime of looking at a dulled-down sunglasses version of turquoise houses, and bright purple doors and neon orange stucco, give me the wrinkles! I want to squint and smile at gorgeous colors and—with proper UV protection—feel the warm sunshine melting my freckles together into unsightly age spots. That other second-rate show—the dulled-down one—is kind of what life is like when we get so obsessed with how our bodies appear that we forget that they were made for living—for splashing, walking, serving, smiling and squinting.

I may not be thinking clearly because I'm all hopped up on sunshine at this very moment. I will speculate, though, that God intentionally *gave* an extra measure of sunshine at the beach precisely so we wouldn't waste so much time worrying about our dimply thighs and bulgy stomachs and too-small or too-big boobs sagging toward earth in our bathing suits. This is my personal theory. Though Scripture gives no indication that this reasoning was part of God's master plan, Jesus' Father was all about setting people free. Even when the thing by which we're bound is a twisted preoccupation with self.

-From chapter 12, "Function"



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Adrianna Wright, online publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4096 or awright@ivpress.com
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