

After lowering myself into the tank, tail first, I dove. Or tried to. The water was extra salty and pushed me right back to the surface, where I whacked my head on a steel I-beam. It went on like this—dive, struggle, whack—for some time. There were no graceful mermaid swoopings. Eventually I figured out how to push myself down to the coral and hold on to it, blowing bubbles at the audience. Attempting an upside-down twist, I inhaled a lungful of salt water, panicked, ricocheted off the glass, and shot to the surface, where I hit my head with such force that I wondered if I might be bleeding. Without goggles (Jaiko had vetoed them, as well as nose plugs, on dual grounds of authenticity and sex appeal), I couldn't see much more than some bright lights and a blurry array of top-shelf liquor. On several occasions, I rammed into things. My tail kept snagging on the coral. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a vague glimpse of a large red-and-white-striped object approaching menacingly.

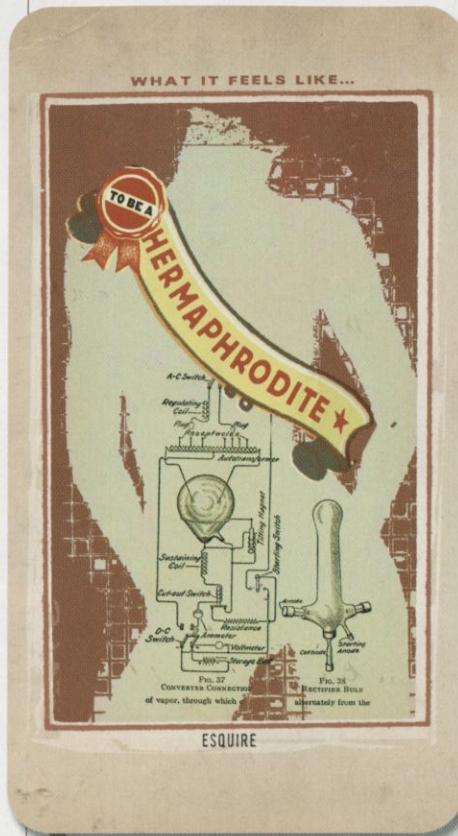
Three hours later I climbed out, shaking from the cold, my tail sodden and droopy, my eyes red. "Attention Mermaids," the sign on the wall above me read. "No colored sequins. The dye comes off and may harm the fish." It's a hard life, mermaiding. No wonder they were always trying to pick up sailors.



◀ Wolf Blitzer's Dopp Kit

In his fifteen years at CNN, Blitzer and his bag have been to more exotic locations than even Brooke Burke and her bikini. The roving anchor gave us a peek at what he packs.

1 and 9 Beard trimmer and case. "I once told the chairman of CNN I was considering shaving my beard. He responded, 'Are you out of your mind? I've been thinking of getting an insurance policy on it.'" 2 Cipro. In case of anthrax exposure. 3 Earplugs and eyeshades (not visible). "I have to stay on an East Coast schedule, because that's when my shows are on. So I don't always get the best conditions for sleep." 4 Quinine. To prevent malaria. 5 Toothpicks. "You don't want to be on television with a piece of lettuce stuck in your teeth. That could be ugly." 6 Foundation and puffs. "When I'm on the road, I have to do my own makeup. I don't do it well, but I can do it." 7 Water-purification tablets. 8 Bug spray. "Who knows what the long-term effects of DEET might be, but I'll trade all that to not get bitten during a live telecast from Botswana."



BY JIM COSTICH, 48,
FORMER LAB TECHNOLOGIST



I'm not a hermaphrodite. The slugs in your yard are true hermaphrodites; when they mate with each other, there's an exchange of sperm and eggs from both. I'm infertile. But if you're going to define a hermaphrodite as somebody who has both male and female characteristics, then yeah, I'm a hermaphrodite.

The commonly used term is *intersex*. When I was born,

the doctors couldn't determine exactly what my sex was because my genitals were ambiguous. It appeared that I had no vagina, but I didn't have testicles, either. What I did have could be considered a big clitoris or a small penis. I call it a phalicit. It's grown to be about an inch and a half.

In toddlerhood I identified myself as a boy, so my parents realized that's what I was and gave me the nickname James when I was four. My birth name was, and legally still is, Judith. I've never left the country because I can't get a passport for that very reason.

I was forty-four when I found out I had a vagina, but it had closed over. I have a tiny uterus and tiny atrophic ovaries. I have XX chromosomes but was exposed to a lot of male hormones in utero. I have a vaginal canal, but I can't get lubricated. I have a G-spot. Oh, God, yeah. And I've always ejaculated. I thought it was male ejaculation, but I guess it was what others would consider female ejaculation. I can't pee standing, but big deal. I can have intercourse with my phalicit, but only with women. They've had to sit on me because it's not very big, but those days are over since I've come out of the closet as a gay man. My vagina was opened up for sex and medical reasons, and now I have vaginal intercourse with men as frequently as possible because it's the best orgasm I've ever had.

I laughed along with the character Pat on *Saturday Night Live*. It was hysterical. But I'm not androgynous. You'd never look at me and think I wasn't a garden-variety male. There are parts of me that I realize are very female and parts of me that are very male. I've never had any corrective surgery and I have no interest. I'm very happy in my own body, thank you. —AS TOLD TO ANYA STRZEMIEN