



The Tanning Inferno

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Recently on a vacation I got a sunburn, which, when you think about it, is one of those unique ways that people voluntarily hurt themselves.

“So what are your plans for the weekend?”

“Oh, I thought I would lie on the ground until my flesh is visibly scarred by the raw power of the sun.”

“Great. Gonna bring the kids?”

My wife, Michele, and I were in Hawaii for a wedding. The couple getting married didn't live in Hawaii, but they thought that by having their wedding really far away it would be much easier to keep the guest list down. It's kind of like limiting the guests at your birthday party to just those people who can make it through an obstacle course. A lot of people might want to come, but not everyone will make it past the ring of fire.

When you're in Hawaii, you go to the beach. It's the law. I think just to make sure, they have police occasionally frisk you for sand. The thing is, though, the beach is where you get exposed to a lot of sun, enough to make you go blind. Thus you have to protect yourself.

People didn't always protect themselves from the sun. When I was a kid, people would lay out in the sun with no protection until they were dangerously close to evaporating.

Not only would people not wear any sunblock, but they would slather themselves in oil to ensure either a deeper tan or higher viscosity. One of the two. The bottles the oils came in always said the contents were the result of a special formula, but the oils really weren't much different than what you'd use to fry chicken. In fact, in a blind tanning test, there's a good chance that most people wouldn't be able to tell the leading oils apart from something made by the Wesson Corporation.

However, people are now somewhat more wary of sunbathing, mainly because the news shows keep saying it will kill you. As a result, before we went to the beach, I put on some sunblock. However, the stuff I put on had a protection factor of four, which is only two points higher than a heavy salad dressing. Personally, I thought this would be enough. I was an idiot.

I should have put on something much stronger, something with a protection factor of, say, 812. I shouldn't have walked outside without any covering thinner than a roof tile. Instead I went out into the sun wearing a liquid that wasn't much more chemically advanced than saliva.

As a result, I got a sunburn, one of those burns where for the next several days you're perpetually 15 degrees warmer than a preheated oven. You also tend to move a little stiffer than normal when you have a sunburn. When someone called for my attention, it took me about 15 minutes to turn around and look at them. The word “agile” was no longer in my vocabulary. Not that I moved like a cat before, but at least I would move like something belonging to the cow family. Now I moved like a cow that was going through physical therapy.

I still participated in the wedding without much trouble, but I had a moment of shock when I caught a glimpse of myself in a bathroom mirror during the reception. I looked like someone had hit me in the face with paint. I didn't appear to have a tan as much as a medical condition. Michele later said it didn't look that bad in natural lighting, by which I assume she meant in the dark.

Despite all of this, I did have fun in Hawaii and I probably will go to the beach again. Although next time I'll probably wear more sun protection, like a canopy the size of swimming pool.