

## Fish Out of Water

By Lindsey Pollak

A group of giggling little girls climbed into the hot tub and began hopping, spinning and splashing excitedly. Four or five little boys followed, walking gingerly down the steps, then belly flopping into the steaming water. Moments later the kids' dads jumped in after them, leaving piles of towels, flip-flops, snorkels and kickboards behind. When a few of the tykes left the tub, reinforcements soon followed in an endless stream of pudgy, flailing arms and piercing screeches.

On the other side of the tub huddled four 29 year-old, black bikini-clad, single New Yorkers, aghast that their hair was getting wet and their conversation interrupted. In their world—well, my world because I was one of them—hot tubs were for grown-ups. But this was not their world. This was Disneyworld.

Every January my three closest girlfriends and I take a vacation together. This year, the year of our thirtieth birthdays, we took advantage of the Disney employee discount of Danielle, one of our foursome and a marketing executive at a Disney-owned television network, and headed to Orlando for some rest, relaxation and roller coaster riding. We had planned the trip for months. Laura, a hedge fund analyst and our group's unofficial CFO, had calculated the best plane fares. Gillian, director of a non-profit arts organization, collected restaurant recommendations. I, the workaholic writer, packed my laptop and three thick books I knew I wouldn't read. Did our various friends and colleagues make fun of us for our vacation choice? Yes. Did we know that Disneyworld would be crowded with kids? Of course. Did we, however, think we would be the exclusive representatives of our entire demographic? Not exactly.

My friends and I, considered normal in the *Sex and the City*-watching, kid-averse island of Manhattan, arrived in Orlando and temporarily lost our majority status to a bunch of toddlers in Mouse ears. For four days, we had no choice but to live by their rules.

On our first day in the Magic Kingdom, Laura tripped over a tandem stroller that barreled directly towards her, clearly expecting Laura to move out of its way. "In New York," she scoffed, "strollers dodge *us*."

On our second day, after a fun-filled tour through Tomorrowland, Adventureland and Frontierland, we decided to re-energize for the evening with a late afternoon coffee ("Alright Goofy, where the hell is Caffeineland?"). Thinking we'd face an empty, pre-dinner hotel restaurant, we were shocked to find a roped-off line at least ten rows deep. We recalled that kids want dinner, not an appetite suppressant, at 5:30, as we tried to remember a time when any of us had left work before that hour.

On the third day, as we began to let down our guards and screamed through the Animal Kingdom safari ride, we started to notice the stares of confusion from the parents. Without Baby Bjorns and Ziploc bags full of Cheerios, we couldn't be moms. Without costumes or nametags, we couldn't be resort staff. We didn't fit. So I started to wonder: Where did we *want* to fit? Did

we want to blend in with—or perhaps even be—the parents around us, many of whom were exactly our age and settled down, married with kids?

I don't think so, not yet at least. So why did four ambitious urban sophisticates choose to spend the vacation of our thirtieth year—the threshold, some say, into can't-turn-back-now adulthood—in a place of family joy and safety and fantasy? It suddenly seemed so clear.

By our fourth and final day we had dropped our Carrie Bradshawness, shed our outsiders' standoffishness, and surrendered to the "Happiest Place on Earth." We bought matching Mickey Mouse Club t-shirts and sucked on massive rainbow lollipops. We stood in line for autographs from Mary Poppins and Peter Pan. We high-fived the little girls sharing our Space Mountain pod and laughed when it began to rain.

And then, as vacations always do, the trip seemed to end before it had even begun. My girlfriends and I packed our black rolling suitcases, took a taxi to the airport and bought sensible low-carb snacks and copies of *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* for the plane ride. We slung our winter coats back around our shoulders and boarded our flight back to Grownupland, where, a bit relieved and a bit sad, we would be outsiders no more.

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