

A tan in a bottle

After spending four decades experiencing the sweltering heat and humidity of south Mississippi, I was ready for a more adaptable climate.

Sun block and suntan lotion was a constant companion when playing golf in the heat of the day when temperatures reached the three digit figure, combined with unbearable humidity. One always sought out the best sun protection with its highest ratings. Generous and frequent lubrication helped eliminate the chance of sizzled skin and painful nights as well as minimizing the chance of melanoma cancer. Hand in hand with such a generous covering of sunscreen went a generous intake of liquids, especially water.

It is always easy to spot Irish people on sun-drenched vacations. Their pale color is their trade mark. The foolish ones, who spend their time on the beach soaking up the sun, support a fried skin, a red nose that would even make Rudolph blush, ears that are well done, complete with a headached, backed brain. They really don't support a lovely tan, just an overdone sunburnt body.

People, who cannot afford to take sun holidays, take to a tanning saloon instead to turn their bodies into bronzed bodies. Thus, they become the envy of their neighbors without leaving home.

Brides want to wear white for their wedding day but, they do not want to wear white bodies. They have to be glazed, waxed, bronzed and glowing for the wedding day.

Recently, I found out how easy it is to get a tan without sun, sand, or tanning bed. It all comes in a bottle or spray on can. It is so simple to use and can be put on any time, depending on the occasion and need. It is quick, easy and painless without having to spend hours soaking up the sun's rays.

My sixteen year old godchild is a connoisseur of such a method. Being a teenager, she is conscious of image, acceptance, peer pressure and being in fashion with what is trendy. As a socialite, she used every opportunity to celebrate with friends as well as make new ones, Attending discos becomes a venue for self-expression and enjoyment.

Prior to attending such events, she, along with her friends, have to undergo their ritual of tanning from a bottle. They apply it, judge it, mirror it and help each other with it. The bronzed look becomes a sought after and prized look that will help one feel tanned but accepted by one's peers.

On Valentine's Day, she and her friends decided to attend a disco in the local town. Earlier that day, they gathered in a friend's house to model clothes, mix and match outfits and, of course, apply a generous amount of the bottled tan on childlike skin in order to achieve the bronzed look.

Ironically, on the same day, the Lord had plans too. He sent the first major snowfall on the area to cover the shivering ground in a blanket of whiteness. At the same time, young teenage girls were covering their shivering, white bodies with a blanket of bronze. Pointing out the irony of the situation elicited blank stares and a "you wouldn't understand" expression.

Asking why it was necessary to support a tan while attending a disco dance in the middle of winter, brought its own response. It was something that was expected, something that all girls attending a disco showed up covered in a fake tan. I was informed that such is the prerogative of girls for such an occasion, while young men can show up with natural bodies.

Yes, life is full of ironies. So many of them stem from unreal expectations and fake promises. A real tan has its price and consequences. A fake tan can be cheap, fake and painless while, at the same time, is an expected requirement for acceptance, self-expression, and inclusion.

I think I will keep my leftover suntan lotion and sunscreen in case I ever need to use it in Ireland to soothe the real suntan.