

## 116 FEET

### PUNE DRACKER

In the 1953 film noir *Niagara*, Marilyn Monroe takes what was promoted as the “longest walk in cinematic history,” the camera focusing on her swaying hips, black skirt red sweater, as she walks away from the viewer and toward the Falls, left right left right for four counts of eight, then five steps more. The bell tower ding-donging in the background intrusive, a beat behind. “Watching Marilyn walk in front of you, down a hallway or a street,” actor Robert Vaughn once said, “has been described as rather like watching two small boys having a pillow fight beneath a blanket.”

The famous Monroe swing and sway,

the famous Monroe *wiggle*.

The movie magazines called it a *horizontal walk*. Turbinoid undulations, as the portrait photographer Philippe Halsman put it.

Did they refer to a woman’s buttocks as her *booty* in the 1950s?

Rear. Tushy. Fanny. Caboose?

*Non*, we will go with *derrière*, because she\* never got to go to Paris. Because perhaps the French would not have reduced her to rump roast.

\*Marilyn, the *derrière* that came before all others and allowed J.Lo to insure\*\* hers.

\*\*This is not true. Although tabloids reported Lopez took out a \$27 million insurance policy on her booty, she later told an interviewer, “No! There is no such thing as that.”

*Watch it glimmer. See it shimmer.*

Gelatin desserts were all the rage in the Victorian era, the intricate, magnificent jelly molds the province of royalty and the well-to-do.

That is, until 1897, when the powdered form we know as Jell-O was trademarked. With the advent of refrigeration and marketing, Jell-O became a staple in American homes. The original formula was comprised of 88 percent sugar, but due to its relatively low calorie count per serving, it has long been thought of as a diet food.

In 1923, Jell-O went sugar-free and didn't look back.

*Watch it wiggle. See it jiggle.*

#### **WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT MARILYN:**

She slept in the nude.

She was a comedic genius.

Joe DiMaggio ordered a half-dozen roses to be placed on her grave three times a week, for twenty years.

She was a size 12.

I was 11 and it is Christmas and I get a size 12 pantsuit, violet-blue denim with a little bit of tie-dye exactly like but I had never seen then Magritte clouds. The top fits but not the bottom and it makes me feel like I did something wrong so I tell my family it feels fine, and imagine what it would be like to walk around like a sky in my pantsuit. Later that night I look up at the moon over John M. Marshall Elementary School and think *I have a good Dorothy Hamill haircut but I don't want to be fat and help me not be fat.*

#### **Q: WHY DOES JELL-O JIGGLE?**

**A:** Gelatin is made by grinding up the bones and connective tissues of cows in order to extract their collagen; when the ground cows are submerged in boiling water, the collagen bonds are broken and torn apart. As the mixture chills, the collagen molecules aggregate and bond to each other again. Because cows are loyal herd animals, and will do anything to remain with their friends. Because the water has

weakened the new bonds, they are now much less rigid, and water becomes trapped between the collagen molecules.

The person I love more than anyone ever was a *volume eater*. He didn't like ordering take-out from the Thai place up the street because they were "cheap" with their portions. On the other hand, he was constantly anxious about his weight; in his case, it was a dancer/dance teacher thing. Thus, he'd always be buying weird fat-free or sugar-free items, of which he could eat more of for the same number of calories as the regular versions. I'd always know when he had made sugar-free Jell-O because there'd be hot-pink powder on the counters, and not a neat row of little dishes settling in in the refrigerator, but a mixing bowl, sometimes even the saucepan, full of wiggling orange. Without a lid or cover. He'd eat it with fat-free Cool Whip, which our cross-eyed Siamese demanded spoonfuls of.

#### **HYPOTHESES AS TO HOW & WHY SHE WALKED LIKE THAT**

1. Weak ankles and/or double-jointed knees, according to Emmeline Snively, the head of Marilyn's former modeling agency
2. "She learned a trick of cutting a quarter of an inch off one heel," wrote Hollywood columnist Jimmy Starr.
3. Husband/writer Arthur Miller in his autobiography: "It was, in fact, her natural walk: her footprints on a beach would be in a straight line, the heel descending exactly before the last toeprint."
4. Marilyn: "I learned to walk as a baby and I haven't had a lesson since."

If it were 1958 you'd go to the gym to use the jigglor machine. Stand on the platform, put the belt around your waist or derrière and turn the machine on. Stand there and let the machine do all the work for you. As the machine vibrates, it transmits energy to your body, forcing your muscles to relax and then contract dozens of times each second. *It is this speeded-up motion of your tissues—3,200 times a minute!—that aids in fast, effective, spot reduction. Helps trim down the size of your measurements wherever it embarrasses you most! You can even use it while napping!*

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It is 1958 and many achieved the wiggle by wearing a wiggle dress—a close-fitting garment with a hem narrower than its hips. When wearing a wiggle dress, there is no way to get anywhere other than walking in short strides with one’s legs close together, causing a wiggle of the hips. “I urge you to give it a go even if it terrifies you,” writes one British fashion columnist.

**REPRESENTATIVE TITLES IN MARILYN MONROE'S PERSONAL LIBRARY**

*De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (Study of Human Bone Structure),  
Andreas Vesalius

*Sexual Impotence in the Male*, Leonard Paul Wershush

*The Little Disturbances of Man*, Grace Paley

*The Little Engine That Could*, Piper Watty (with childish pencil scrawls at end, possibly Marilyn’s?)

Marilyn: Sometimes I want to know what’s going to happen. Then I think it’s better not to. There’s two things I’d like to know, though. One is whether I’m going to lose weight.

TC: And the other?

Marilyn: That’s a secret.

—*Marilyn Monroe to Truman Capote, at a funeral for their mutual friend*

*Constance Collier, taken from Capote’s essay, “A Beautiful Child,” Music for Chameleons*

Look at the menu in any diner and find a section titled Dieter’s Delites, and always there for you to enjoy is a plate of coleslaw and a scoop of tuna salad on a bed of lettuce, and a side of Jell-O with whipped topping, the former two of which are filled with yellowed mayonnaise and saturated fat; the latter, sugar and chemicals.

Slim Line

Sliced Turkey on a Bed of Crisp Lettuce with Tomatoes and Cottage Cheese.....\$11.95

Turkey Delight

Cottage Cheese, Avocado, Tomato, Cucumber, Half Peach in a Light Syrup, Served on a Bed of Lettuce.....\$10.95

California Salad Platter

Fruit Salad, Cottage Cheese, and Jello on Crisp Lettuce.....\$9.99

ORDER NOW YOUR CART IS EMPTY!

Sal told me that in the 1970s, he used to lie down in order to zip up his jeans, which were worn tight, but rigid and unyielding when purchased. Jeans did not contain Spandex back then. I later read that not only did people lie down, but they lied down in bathtubs full of warm water so the denim would meld to their bodies as they dried for a custom fit. *No*, said Sal, laughing, *you don't know nothing*. Well, look at this—it says that at the Levi's store in San Francisco, at least as of 2006, there's a shrink-to-fit tub where they “will dip you and your new Levi's jeans into a special bath, then blow dry you and your pants in a human dryer until they hug every curve just right.”

Perhaps Jell-O is considered diet food because it slides down your throat so fast you question its existence, as fleeting as you, whooshing down the slide into your dream-pool in July, on your potential body a bikini colored in chlorine and striped like a parfait.

I went on a diet the summer of my junior year in high school. Jell-O was not part of the diet, but granola bars were. The summer I started candy striping at Southampton Hospital, where I delivered pitchers of ice water to patients' rooms. That summer I delivered a pitcher to Truman Capote, the mini-ice cubes bonding to each other and tinkling as they melted.

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Some say that love is best defined as a vibration of 528 hertz, a frequency present in everything from chlorophyll and water to “Imagine”—John Lennon recorded that song in 528 hertz. I do not know the frequency of Jell-O, but its wiggling and jiggling can be described in scientific terms as *simple harmonic motion*.

**HYPOTHESIS:** The vibratory effects from ingesting Jell-O, should it jiggle, would be canceled out if eaten by a pigeon.

**EVIDENCE:** You know how pigeons bob their heads? They do that to stabilize the images of their surroundings while in motion. To catch and hold images in motion. If Jell-O is already in motion, the head bobbing may be superfluous.

**FACT:** When a pigeon is walking on a treadmill, her head does not bob.

#### **ASSORTED TITLES IN MARILYN MONROE'S PERSONAL LIBRARY WHICH SHE READ DURING FILMING**

*Justine*, Lawrence Durrell (read during *The Misfits*)

*Letters to a Young Poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke (read during *All About Eve*)

*The Rights of Man*, Thomas Paine (read during *Some Like It Hot*)

#### **Q: WHY DOES JELL-O JIGGLE?**

**A:** It is sensitive, chronically anxious. Hoping it will be loved for what it is, not some cheap and easy dish to bring to a Tupperware party.

#### **Q: WHY DOES MARILYN WIGGLE?**

**A:** *I've never wiggled deliberately in my life*, says Marilyn, *but all my life I've had trouble with people who say that I do.*

They have Jell-O with whipped cream at the Orion Diner, where I ordered extra-extra well-done french fries and Sal ordered extra-extra-extra well-done french fries. But he never got Jell-O there. Why pay \$3.95 for all that sugar and full-fat Cool Whip

when you can buy four boxes (orange, raspberry, cherry, lemon) for \$1 on sale at Key Food?

**EIGHT THINGS THAT PEOPLE PUT IN THEIR JELL-O, CIRCA 1940S-1970S**

Pretzels  
Prune-Stuffed Roast Pork  
Marshmallows, Finely Cut  
Sauerkraut  
Thinly Sliced Radishes  
Tomato Wedge  
Vanilla Ice Cream  
Tiny Shrimp

**SHE WAS A SIZE 12.**

“The truism that the world’s sexiest woman would be fat by today’s glamour standards has been repeated unattributed in hundreds of articles and books,” NPR’s Jessica Seigel has said.

The truth is that size 12 in the 1940s is the equivalent of a size six today. The truth is that clothing manufacturers since the 1980s have been increasingly practicing size inflation, whereby ready-to-wear clothing of the same nominal size gradually has become bigger in physical size over time. The truth is that vanity sizing is designed to satisfy wearers’ wishes to appear thin and feel better about themselves.

I’ve been trying on the twenty-five or so pairs of jeans that Sal wore, and so far I can comfortably fit into one—black Diesels fading to gray in the Tepphar slim carrot style, W26 L30. I have this feeling they are mislabeled, but I don’t care. They have a hole in the knee, and I remember looking and seeing that hole in the knee on the M23 bus home after dance class.

## MAKE YOUR MEAT PLATTER FAMOUS IN 1935

They'll never know how good meat can be until they've tried yours.  
Grind. Walk. Cook. Chill. Dissolve. Fold into a size-12 loaf pan.

I loved shopping for jeans with him. He would take forever in the dressing room, especially if he'd forgotten to wear straight-leg jeans. Because then he'd have to sit down and I'd have to hold the ankles of the jeans he was wearing and help him pull them off. He'd sit down again to put the new ones on, get up and walk to the mirror, turn around and look over his shoulder, the way he did when he was teaching us how to spot on our pirouettes.

"Can you see the fat bulging out?" he'd ask me, and sometimes, the salesperson.

"Are there any bulges?"

Almost six decades of dancing there are, never were, no bulges.