# I Want To Be a Euro-Mom

By Jessica Stockton Clancy

I pull up at Turtle Park, park my Jeep Cherokee, and my mental inventory goes into overdrive. Diaper bag? Yes. Wipes? Yes. Don't want her touching all those dirty playground things without being able to wipe her hands. Sippy cup? Yes. Snacks? Yes. Then I notice the sun. Please tell me I remembered her hat. I am now unpacking the bag. Found it. I am now stuffing everything back into the bag. Cell phone—in case of emergency? Yes. That should be all I need for 45 minutes at the playground.

As I climb out of the driver's seat, I attempt to stealthily adjust my underwear and pull up my slacks, which are more like sweats. They were called slacks on the website, but they are made of stretchy fabric (stained with avocado on the thigh) with an elastic waist. Who am I kidding? They are sweats. I am wearing sweats and one of my husband's old dress shirts. Yes, I confess, it's what I wear almost every day. Though I kid myself that I am "pseudo-chic" (the dress shirt is white—and clean), and that I am a generally relaxed parent, in truth I feel frumpy, and I'm too wound up about everything to do with my daughter.

I open the back door and unbuckle my daughter, dressed in baby Gap hand-me-downs and New Balance sneakers. I clip her into a carrier on my chest (this could double as mountaineering gear), grab my carefully inventoried blue satin Petunia Pickle Bottom diaper bag and head into the playground. That's where I meet one of "them."

## EURO-MOM ENCOUNTER

She is wearing a dress that looks like something out of my mom's closet in the 1970s or the movie *The Ice Storm*. It's a polyester, black-and-white print, V-neck dress that crisscrosses in front and ties in back—something that would be found in the $5 sale bin of a vintage clothing store. She has on footless black tights, reminiscent of Twyla Tharp. Then there are her shoes: gold lamé moccasins. Interesting choice. Somehow this all works. How is that possible? If I wore this outfit, my husband would be contacting my therapist about medication. But on her, it's perfect. Her bodacious (presumably nursing) breasts peek out from under her disco dress, and even I can't help but admire her femininity. Her

shapely legs, swaddled in Lycra, can be viewed when her wrap dress opens slightly as she catches her daughter, giggling hysterically, as she whooshes down the slide. Did I mention her hair? Large platinum blonde chunks, with dark roots, are pulled off her face with a clamping pink plastic clip. But somehow it all looks fine—better than fine. It's what I would categorize as, "Whoops! I just happen to look sexy!" I could never pull this off. This hair on me would prompt comments from my close friends like, "What's with the hair?" and would likely lead to some sort of hair intervention.

## EURO-CHILD ENCOUNTER

A few minutes later, our eyes meet, and she approaches me at the sandbox, smiling. "Hee-low," she says. German? Norwegian maybe? "Hi," I say. "I am Elsa, and this is Ingrid," she says, pointing towards her daughter who looks about 3. Ingrid is clearly not an American child. Not that there aren't adorable, cherubic American children, but you can just tell. Ingrid and her mother share a similarly haphazard look. On an American child, this outfit would elicit empathy, as if her parents couldn't afford to clothe her properly or that they unknowingly lacked taste. The red and blue striped tights with a hole in the knee, the green corduroy dress and hair that appears to have been braided prior to bedtime the day before yesterday. But, just like her mom's look, somehow it works. Not just works, but is completely endearing. Little Ingrid is Pippi Longstocking come to life.

Elsa is this sexy after having two kids? And her casual-by-nature attitude allows her to bring her feverish toddler to the park to sit propped up in a stroller watching her sister play. I am having trouble finding any similarities between Elsa and myself.

After chatting for a few minutes, Elsa tells me she is from Sweden. They are in town for a few weeks and staying at the Swedish embassy. Of course. She points out her other child sitting in a stroller that is parked not too far from us. "That is Agnes," she gestures. She has cheeks like red apples, is wearing striped tights like her sister and looks to be about one. Her clunky Mary Janes look more like something that would be found on an antique doll than on a real child. She gazes toward us with eyes like saucers. "She have fever," says Elsa,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 60

## I Want To Be a Euro-Mom

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 59

shaking her head. I assume this "tsk-tsk" gesture is her way of communicating concern. "She better to rest," she adds. Yes, I nod in polite agreement.

So in review, Elsa is this sexy after having two kids? And her casual-by-nature attitude allows her to bring her feverish toddler to the park to sit propped up in a stroller watching her sister play. I am having trouble finding any similarities between Elsa and myself. After spending the morning obsessing on baby websites, I would have changed into fresh sweats and headed to the pediatrician's office to be debriefed on the appropriate Tylenol dosage. But somehow when you are a Euro-mom, you don't sweat this stuff.

Though my first instinct is to roll my eyes, the truth is I long to be more like Elsa, to have a relaxed maternal aura that radiates from me like warm light. I want to look good in clothes that clash, have bad hair days and still be ravish-worthy.

Living in Washington, I know these Euro-mom encounters will never cease. They will be there, sexy, smiling, modeling creative fashion choices and seemingly able to manage the same mom tasks I do without a care in the world.

### OTHER EURO-MOM ENCOUNTERS

It's the same envy I felt for Susanna, the mom I met strolling the beach while on vacation when my daughter was just shy of one. Susanna donned a bikini á la Ursula Andress in that Bond movie, with less-than-perfect thighs that on her were feminine and alluring. Her baby was strapped to her hip with a large scarf that she probably found at a flea market in Paris. "You just love to eat leaves!" she said to her son adoringly while watching him shove dried seaweed into his mouth. Why can't I be like that?

I am the mom at airport security with 100 jars of baby food in a duffel bag and a copy of the TSA rules at the ready in case someone hassles me.

I see them everywhere. Katia, a Euro-mom from our toddler music class, was also into lamé shoes; hers were silver sneakers. She had a lacy peekaboo thong that (whoops!) appeared out of her jeans when she knelt to pick up her lederhosen-wearing son. She often arrived at class with only 10 minutes left and couldn't understand most of the songs we sang, but she always clapped jubilantly.

Living in Washington, I know these Euro-mom encounters will never cease. They will be there, sexy, smiling, modeling creative fashion choices and seemingly able to manage the same mom tasks I do without a care in the world. What my Euro-sisters have figured out, that I am just now realizing, is that a little laissez faire doesn't make you a bad person. In fact, paired with the right shoes, it just might make you the sexiest mom ever.

---

**Jessica Stockton Clancy is a mother and freelance writer. She was raised in New York City, lived in Detroit and Los Angeles, and now calls Washington, D.C., home. She is an instructor for the Momoir Project (www.themomoirproject.com) and will teach a series of classes this fall to inspire moms to write their own first-person essays.**