

Mermaid

Leah Giesy

Some mermaids do it for the money—dressing up in a tail and top to attend parties or perform. You can find photos of them all over social media. But for local aesthetician Leah Giesey, swimming in a mermaid tail made of swimsuit and wetsuit materials just feels natural.

So have you always had an affinity with the water?

Always. I love the ocean. Ever since I can remember, I've just loved going to the ocean. It's weird that I live in a land-locked state. I did live in the Virgin Islands for about three and half years in my 20s. And I miss it every day. That was before they made tails, but I was in that water every day—trying to swim like a mermaid. That's hard to do when your legs move separately.

What kinds of bodies of water have you swum in with your tail?

Mostly Lake Tahoe, swimming pools, rivers, the ocean—the Pacific Ocean.

That's what gets me. You went in the ocean with a tail on? I'd be afraid a large predator would think, "That looks tasty."

You'd be afraid you'd look like fish food? I feel surfers get that. They look like sea lions. I mean, they look like legit sea lions up on their boards. I feel like a shiny, big fish—but I don't know. It is a little scary in the Pacific because you can't see like you can in the Caribbean. In the Caribbean, it's crystal clear, and you can see everything, and there's not huge waves. So it is a little daunting, I'd have to say, in the Pacific. So Tahoe is definitely my favorite nearby body of water.

If you were in the Virgin Islands, though, you'd don a tail?

Oh, for sure—every day. I'd probably live in the water. I'd be like, "Bring me my rum. Bring me my shrimp. This is what I eat now. Bring me my mahi mahi tacos. This is where I live now." That water is so beautiful. It's 80 degrees year-round. Even in a storm it's gorgeous.

Was it at all hard to learn to swim in a tail?

No. My brother and I took swimming lessons really, really early. And I feel like I always tried to swim with my legs together when I was a little girl, and so it just became a really natural feeling—just using the trunk of my body. I don't usually use my arms when I swim with my tail, too. I can go really, really fast without using my arms, just using the tail as the propeller.

And using your core for strength to propel you forward?



Absolutely, and it just feels natural. You're just going with the water and with the tail. The tail, which I can show you later, is made out of wetsuit and fin material. So it's made to just tread through that water. I have a lot of people ask me, "Oh, you can swim in that thing." It's like, "Well, dude, it's made for swimming." And I don't necessarily use it to get attention. I usually go to obscure beaches that allow nudity because I like to swim topless. And I just like to swim in it. It just feels good. It feels awesome. It's a good workout. It's natural. ... I don't even think of it like a workout because it's just like breathing air to me. I don't know what it is. I just love it. And I would love the chance to have one of those three-grand tails—but I've got to pay off my car first.

So not all tails are created equal? Like, there are some that are more aesthetically pleasing than viable, yes?

I would think so. I haven't really gone into that too much because I know I couldn't afford it. But they have, of course, the mermaids who get paid. They have them in the tanks and they have the little oxygen tanks. That'd be really neat, if they had somewhere in Reno like that. But I think maybe I'm too old to do that. But, yeah, I really just enjoy the movement of it. It's kind of like dancing, dancing in water. And I really like to come up on the kayakers and paddle boarders and kind of freak them out and then swim away. They'll come around a corner, and I'll splash my tail and then just swim away. And they're like, "What the fuck? What was that?"

That would scare the hell out of me.

It's hilarious. ... "It's a big fish with red hair!"

So are the tails that are wicked expensive meant to be particularly pretty or particularly effective for swimming?

You know, I don't know. They can probably swim in them really well. I think they're made of rubber. They seem like they'd be heavy, but in water everything's weightless. Mine is just like a cover of swimsuit material, and then it has the fin that's made out of wetsuit material and the plastic, regular fins.

When did you get your first tail?

It was probably 2011.

Oh, wow, you've been doing this for a while.

Yeah, since before it was popular. Now it seems like everybody is. I feel like I started a trend. I'm just kidding. I didn't start it. ... I was just pumped that I could buy a tail on Amazon. I mean, it was advertised for little girls, but they had adult women's sizes. I was like, "I don't care if little girls are doing this shit. I want to do it. It looks fun, so give me a tail." I bought it on Amazon for like 130 dollars.

Have you had or do you have multiple tails?

I've had two—because my other one wore out. So I just bought another one. I wore it out. ... Yeah, it was put away wet too many times.

As the weather warms up, you'll be back out there—but how often?

Oh, yeah. I'm not even going to say which beach I go to because I don't want people to flock to it—because I'm anti social. I go once a week. I'm anti-social as fuck.

Yeah, no, you just want to scare the hell out of some folks.

It's hysterical. At least I'm not drowning them. Come on, at least I'm not drowning them. That's what real mermaids do. □

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