

BIGGER IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER

BY MELINDA MURPHY

It's bad enough having giant feet, but the fact they have to be clad in ugly shoes just adds insult to injury. Now there is hope for the big-footed women of Singapore!

It's a curse I was born with – literally. One of the first things people would say about me as a newborn baby was, “My, what long feet she has!” Sadly, they didn't stop growing until I was left with whopping stompers.

“Hey Bigfoot, there's a bug over here. Come squish it.” I knew that kid across the playground was calling me. The other favourite name my childhood bullies would use was Sasquatch. I once went bowling and asked for my shoe size, and the guy behind the counter said, “Hey, this is a bowling alley, not a ski shop.” Nice. I guess we all have something that others teased us about. For me? It was my uber-long, super-skinny feet.

Finding shoes that fit

I grew up in the small, dusty West Texas town of Midland. The closest place for me to get shoes was a two-hour drive, and even that one shop didn't have many size 42s, certainly none appropriate for a pre-teen girl. There were no websites for finding shoes. Instead, my mother tracked down a mail-order place in Chicago. They had a catalogue with black and white drawings of shoes, and we'd try to guess what they'd look like. (“Wonder what colour ‘wine’ is? Do you think it's maroon or more purple?”) It was like Christmas when the carefully-selected shoes would arrive – only almost all would be far too wide and we'd have to send them back. I'd sob on my bed, feeling more like a monster than ever, wishing I could somehow cut off my toes. The post office loved us.

I went to a big school dance wearing one of my mail-ordered four-inch pumps, the only 12-year-old in such high heels. Already 178cm in my bare feet, I bent my ankles and stood on the sides of my feet so I wouldn't tower even more over the boys than I already did. One of the dads who was chaperoning made fun of me. Thanks, dude; way to make a young girl feel good about being crazy tall.



When I moved to New York, there were a few shops that had my size: long and skinny. What a thrill to try on more than one pair of shoes at once! The shopkeepers all knew me by name. Yet the embarrassment never really ended. I was working as a producer at a talk show called *Sally Jesse Raphael*, producing a show about a transsexual father and his children. (Lovely job, that one.) The dad-now-turned-mom was upset she'd forgotten her heels. My associate producer suggested she wear mine. And why not? Most of my shoes were made for transvestites back then. Truly. I once went to a transvestite show in the West Village at a place called Lips and saw my shoes on more than a few blokes.

Online improvements

Then the glorious internet was born! Zappos in the US had my size in more than one style and they delivered! Only it was the same story: I'd order and send most back because they were too wide, but at least they had my size. I could finally buy some nice shoes. No Manolos or Valentinos, but decent shoes just the same.

When I went for my interview at CBS News, I'd heard that the man who was the decision-maker had a thing for shoes, so I went and bought the most expensive, highest heels I ever owned. But I was so nervous about my interview that I left my wallet behind and had to *walk* more than 3km in 4.5-inch pumps! True to form, though, I caught him looking at my shoes – so the bleeding toes he couldn't see were well worth the effort.

Years later, after we'd both left CBS, that same man took me to lunch when I was grossly pregnant with my first. My feet were so swollen, they'd barely fit into my shoes. I saw him grimace when he looked at my tootsies. Odd. I haven't seen him since. I'm sure it has nothing to do with my feet, right?

After my daughter was born, all was good. My feet returned to normal and off I went, baby in tow, sporting my fancy footwear even though I was a new mother. I was in heaven... until my second baby was born.

My shoes just didn't seem to fit after my son was born, even after everything else had more or less returned to normal. I finally trudged off to a shoe store to get measured, where the 16-year-old, pimply-faced assistant measured me and said, “M'am, you're a 43.” “*What?! I can't be. I just can't be.*” I started to sob – big heaving, hormonal-driven sobs. That poor kid was probably scarred for life.

You see, they just don't make many shoes in a size 43. Hardly any. A 42 was doable. Many manufacturers make shoes up to size 42, not 43. I went about the sad job of giving away my reporter-days shoes and ordering awful, ugly 43s.

Solutions in Singapore

Then, I moved to Asia, home of small-foot worship. Heck, back in the old days in China, they used binding so the ladies would have appropriately tiny feet. Great. I feel even more like Shrek here in Singapore. Of course, I could buy a smaller size and let my toes hang off the end. That's what some people seem to do, just so they can say they're a smaller size. It drives me batty.

So, where do I buy shoes here? Once my husband bought me the coolest gift ever: a chance to design my own shoes from an Aussie company (that has since gone out of business). Sadly, they were too wide when they came. Still, if you have normal width feet, bespoke shoes are a cool gift. Far better than the card he once gave me for my birthday, in which a shoe salesman says to a shopper, “Sorry, lady. The only thing we have that fits you is the box.” You can also get shoes made in Vietnam, by the way. Expect some funny looks that include big eyes and lots of laughter when you get measured. Sigh.

But shopping online is by far the best bet for us big-footed gals. Truth? I reached out to my expat wives networks and other big-footed friends for this story. I personally had no idea there were so many of us here – or so many options! And, well, I admit it. I got a little weepy with joy. One woman told me about The Tui Collection, a store here in Singapore where you can actually try on shoes – and it ships for free locally. And there's a company called Cote & Badt with super cute big-sized espadrilles in several local locations. RIA Menorca also has lovelies shoes in a few stores here.

It seems there are more shoes – cute shoes, no less – in my near future. In fact, I think I'll call a taxi now and get shopping!



amazon.com | everyday shoes, up to size 47
boohoo.com | everyday shoes, up to size 42
borderfree.com | check individual shops
coteandbadt.com | several local locations, up to size 42
dianaferrari.com.au | everyday shoes from Australia, up to size 44
macys.com | everyday shoes, up to size 46
marksandspencer.com/sg | everyday shoes, up to size 41
myTheresa.com | posh shoes, up to size 44.5
net-a-porter.com | posh shoes, up to size 42
next.co.uk | everyday shoes, up to size 43
nordstrom.com | massive selection, up to size 48
outlet.com | posh shoes, up to size 43
shop.com | ships from Australia, up to 47
singsale.com.sg | local, up to size 41
thetuicollection.com | local Singapore storefront, up to size 43
zappos.com | shipped through re-shipper from US, up to size 50 *u*