

Hardships Around Shops



by Michael Lewis

My sartorial elegance does not spring from my innate sense of style or fashion, nor even from my own volition. It is by dint of hard work and determination by she who loves me: The Management.

She has been known to stand in the doorway, barring my exit into the expectant world, with hands on hips and the words “No Way” written all over her pursed lips and furrowed brow.

“You look like a slob.”

I’m allowed to exit after I change clothes or shave or usually both.

I was pleased when my elder son announced that the theme for his recent wedding, at which I was asked to officiate, would be “beach casual.” My faded khaki shorts topped with my favorite beer-themed

T-shirt immediately sprang to mind as admirably suitable for this casual event on the beach. To my astonishment The Management read “beach casual” somewhat differently from me, and so, when the big day arrived, I was rigged out in new clothes from top to toe.

None of which struck me as either beachy or casual.

I prefer my clothes to be familiar and comfortable and well adapted to my slightly odd body shape. By the time they reach this admirable condition they may be slightly frayed or stretched, a bit thin at the elbows maybe or with some small spots or stains. Just when clothes approach truly comfortable I can no longer find them. It turns out The Management, has spirited them to that clothing recycling

heaven called ArUnAr.

The Management is very good at making things appear and disappear.

I have a Scottish shooting jacket made of heavy Harris tweed with leather elbow patches that I bought as an undergraduate. It’s very warm and I love it dearly. I’ve had to rescue it twice from the clutches of ArUnAr and The management has learned that it is untouchable. Every time I wear that jacket, however, I’m told how much better it would look if it were altered to fit.

Unbelievable!

But the wanton dispatch of perfectly good clothing means that I must be taken shopping on a regular basis. Hence our yearly trairpse to Nordstroms, where, in my view, nothing good can happen.

I recently enjoyed coffee with my two favorite women. The conversation turned briefly to a shopping trip they had planned. I offered to join them. That was a joke of course, but I was unprepared for the intense hot salvo blast of NO-O-O-O WAY-Y-Y-Ys the quip engendered. My daughter grabbed the small cross she sometimes wears and pointed it at me, my wife made a hex sign and I could see her mentally groping for garlic and a wooden stake.

Occasionally I get trapped

into a grocery store:

“I just need a few odds and ends for dinner.”

My heart sinks. I’m OK if required only to provide motive power for the cart, but I know I’ll be sent off to get eggs or vegetables or fruit. What am I supposed to do with such a vague request? But I know if I ask:

“What kind? What size? How many? and Where are they?”

I’ll get a flea in my ear and a challenge:

“Use your imagination.”

I find myself contemplating the egg place with white and brown ones, in 6, 12, 24 and 36 egg packages, A, AA, AAA or Jumbo size, free range ones, organic ones and whatever the non-free, non-organic ones are. I calculate the odds and find my chance of making the right choice by random selection is close to zero.

This will take some time.

When we meet up half-an-hour or so later The Management has the cart overflowing with the few odds and ends she needs for dinner but always takes time to praise my egg choice in a sort of good doggie voice:

“That’s fine. We’ll manage.”

Sometimes I get waylaid into entering a ladies’ clothing store. Life can be on a perfectly even keel driving through Sacramento for example for a

theater or a concert matinee or a game or points East when I hear:

“I just want to pop into”

This is usually one of two places: Nordstroms, or the shop with the bright red door and a brass knocker. Apparently they stock something called “petites.”

Fortunately, I know by experience they have chairs in strategic locations necessary because at the words “pop into” my body sags, my mind spins and my vision blurs. Fortunately, I also know by experience that my reward will be a decent lunch at a place where they make a spectacular martini.

But there I sit festooned in handbags and coats and umbrellas while The Management forages among the racks and shelves. Before blessed sleep envelopes me I see a man, doubtless some poor woman’s husband, also foraging the same racks and I wonder what on earth he thinks he’s doing.

Once in a while a dress appeals:

“What do you think?”

There was a time when this question was intimidating and unnerving and induced panic.

But, amazing as it may seem, The Management trusts the dress sense of a man who cannot choose eggs. Although she says I have a pretty good eye for these things, I’ve learned to

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be most circumspect with my comments.

There is a small coffee booth outside Nordstroms where I prefer to be dropped off. I can indulge in people-watching and count, for example, how many wear flip-flops or ladies in pants, or men in T-shirts or shorts or baseball caps.

How much better if that place were a pub where I and other husbands could be dropped off and properly cared for. I might then have a different view of shopping. ♦



Michael J. Lewis, Ph.D., is professor emeritus of brewing science at the University of California, Davis, and recipient of the UC Davis Distinguished Teaching

Award. He is a humorist whose column in the Davis Enterprise, “A Point of Brew,” has been running 25 years. He lives in Davis with his wife of 59 years, Sheila.

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