

Bill Rea ? Fashions aren't my thing

Those of you who know me are aware that I could be described with many terms, and that list of terms does not include the words ?fashion plate.?

I have never been known for my taste in clothes, and I don't believe I possess what could be called an aesthetic eye. I can appreciate things of beauty as well as the next person. As proof, I cite the fact that I accept how devilishly handsome I really am, although I have learned to live with it.

But when it comes to my choice of clothes, I am neither sensitive or inclined enough to give it much thought.

Don't come down on me too hard for that. I don't dress like Don Cherry, do I? I think that gives me an argument for the Order of Canada, at least.

I do have some good clothes. For example, I have three suits in my closet, kept there for occasions when such attire is required.

Alas, I have had to attend funeral events for four people so far this year (I only had two last year), meaning the suits have had to see the light of day in the last couple of months.

But beyond that, it's basically the same old clothes every day. There are a few variations. If I suspect I might have to go into the woods during a given day (a common occurrence in my line of work), the leather shoes will stay at home, and I'll wear my running shoes.

I have a habit, probably a bad one, of wearing the same clothes until they can't be worn any more.

Shopping for clothes presents certain problems for me. For one thing, it's frequently hard for me to find the time to deal with such tasks. Usually, when I go shopping for clothes, I know roughly what I want, and I make a point of finding it fast, trying on (if necessary), paying for it and getting the hell out of there as fast as possible. As well, if I must put myself through such experiences, I prefer to do it by myself. I find the decisions involved to be tough enough ? I have no desire to get into debates.

It is true that I hate shopping for clothes. Having once been a little boy, I spent many miserable hours being dragged through various stores by my mother in search of clothes that she thought looked good. My input in such cases was seldom wanted or solicited. I guess most boys went through such ordeals. To this day, I can't understand why more men don't have almost a phobia when it comes to shopping for clothes.

So strong is my aversion that I try to avoid buying clothes as gifts for others. Thinking back, I think the only clothing I have ever bought for my wife was a pair of bedroom slippers, and that was early in our marriage. I well remember making the frantic phone call to my mother-in-law from the mall where I was doing my last-minute Christmas shopping with the all-important question ? ?What's Beth's shoe size?? (6 was the answer I received, for the benefit of you who are interested). There's a practical side to that too. Were I to buy Beth clothes for Christmas, she would feel an obligation to wear them in deference to my feelings, and I would not want her feeling compelled to wear anything she might think was hideous. I'm in the habit of falling back on jewelry if I'm stuck for a gift idea. Beth has never thrown it back at me.

Of course, the standards for dress, even in professions, have relaxed a lot over the years.

My late father spent most of his adult life working in office settings, so the thought of leaving the house without wearing a tie, and at least a sports jacket (if not a suit) would have never occurred to him. Yet, men dressed to that extent in the course of a regular work day is something of a rarity.

I usually (but not always) wear a tie to work, almost out of habit. But it's been several years since I wore a businesslike-looking jacket to work. Indeed, apart from my suits, I'm not sure I'm in possession of such an article. For many years, I have been wearing vests with lots of pockets, giving me ample room for extra pens, notepads, my spare camera, batteries (for my camera equipment) and other stuff I have to cart around in the course of my job. In fact, I am working on my third such vest, and it's rapidly falling apart on me.

Aware of that, I did a bit of shopping for an appropriate jacket a couple of Saturdays ago, accompanied by my wife. I saw something on the rack that looked like it might serve the purpose, although it was a little on the expensive side. I pulled down a ?large? and tried it on. Beth was quick to tell me it looked a little tight. Although I think I handled the matter coolly, there was a bit of devastation attached to my spouse's observation. I have been a ?large? in just about every article of clothing one could think of since I was in my teens. I calmly put the large jacket back on the rack, and sought out an extra large. Beth thought that was too small too. I think everyone by now should understand why I prefer to do these things by myself.

Actually, the need for me to do clothes shopping is probably a lot less than for a lot of other men. It is impressive when it comes to what ways one's inheritance can be helpful, under certain circumstances.

This coming October will mark 22 years since my father's death. I well remember that in the weeks that followed his passing, my

brother and I spent considerable time with my mother going through Dad's 'stuff'. When it came to physical development, I basically followed my old man. He was an inch or so taller than me, and a little stockier, but the dimensions more or less matched. My older brother, on the other hand, was somewhat more compact in his build (but like my dad, he was a lot more athletic than I). The point is when it came to parceling out Dad's clothes, I got most of them. I can't remember what 'big brother' got out of the deal, apart from the privilege of laughing at my witticisms, and we all know what they amount to, don't we.

The whole matter popped into my head a couple of Sundays ago, when I started to go through my clothes closets. I found articles of clothing I had forgotten I had possessed, many of them forced upon me by my mother, which I let her get away with largely because I realized there was little to be gained by getting into a heated argument with a recently bereaved widow (the path of least resistance does have certain charms).

My late father had a thing for sweater coats, which was an article of clothing I never warmed up to (there's a pun there, but I'm too immersed in this mid-life crisis to appreciate it). A couple of them have spent the last 22 years in a drawer that I happened to go through recently - interesting, since I have moved twice since my father died.

There are a lot of other items in my closets that I have not ever had on, and I'm not likely to don them soon. But there are occasions, like the recent one, where I'm obliged to go through the inventory. Nothing much is likely to come of it. The quality of my attire is going to remain pretty much the same. I may not be good, but I am consistent.

