

## DRESSING UP

By the time I entered high school, I knew there were occasions when one “dressed up:” Bar Mitzvahs, visits to relatives, going to Shul—and toward the end of high school, going to a party or on a date. The other 340 days in the year, I wore whatever was lying around.

Going to Stuyvesant, I passed Klein’s Department Store on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, which practically gave merchandise away. From early on, I bought my own clothes, and I was a sucker for a bargain. And Klein’s specialized in bargains. My mother taught me about quality—the feel of the material, the stitching, the matching patterns—and I learned about the different manufacturers’ and retailers’ labels. I continued shopping at Klein’s through college and beyond. While working in mid-town Manhattan, I discovered Gimbel’s Basement, which also had quality merchandise at bargain prices. But I felt like a traitor (to Klein’s) shopping there.

The point is: I dressed well when it was required. I should point out that not only did I check the clothes for quality, I always checked them for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers union label. Over the years, I accumulated an impressive (union made) wardrobe, which I took with me when we moved to Washington in 1965.

By this time, my sartorial routine was well established. I went off to work each day in my uniform: lightly starched shirt, carefully knotted tie, pressed suit, shined shoes. Also, I was showered, shaved and neatly combed, ready to face the world. In Washington, I eventually had to supplement my wardrobe, and found Woodward and Lothrop (Woody’s) and Hecht’s. They didn’t come close to Klein’s or Gimbel’s Basement, but you make do with what there is.

Of course, when I moved to Boston in 1979, I discovered “shoppers heaven,” FILENE’S BASEMENT. I suspect it out-Kleined Kleins. By this time, my Klein’s wardrobe had sharply “declined” (get it?). I restocked, in keeping with my position as a Federal agency Regional Director. I continued to dress sharp, as above. I continued to check the quality of the goods, and I continued to look for the union label. However, in 1997, I retired. I no longer had any need for suits, dress shirts, ties, or even shined shoes. I had come full circle. As in high school, there were only rare occasions when I was required to “dress up.” I didn’t even need to wear a suit when I went to services at the Newton Center Minyan. My wardrobe remained in my wardrobe closet. When I take out an old (union made) suit, I am impressed how well it looks, after all these years. I am pleased that the waist size is still the same, and the jacket still fits, but strangely, the trousers are too long. I am three inches shorter than when I bought the suit!

So what have I been wearing for the past 15 years? The casual wear that I wore on weekends the previous 15 years: slacks, sport shirts, sneakers, sweater, though I have acquired a few new items. I regret to report that Filene’s Basement is no more, and search as I might, it is almost impossible to find union made garments. I bought a few items from T. J. Maxx, in my neighborhood, and sneakers from the nearby New Balance outlet.

The fact is, there is no need for me to dress up. Who do I have to impress? I remember going to the theatre or a concert, or a fine restaurant; everyone dressed up. Some restaurants demanded that men wear a tie and jacket, and if you weren’t wearing one, they provided it. No longer. It is rare to see any man with a suit and tie at a theatre or concert. When I do, I assume he is coming from work and didn’t have time to change.

These days, my suits hang undisturbed in one closet, and the slacks and shirts I wear are in another closet. During the summer, I may wear shorts, and polo shirts and T shirts. I now wear sneakers year round. My ties hang on a fancy tie rack, lonely and neglected. I make a great Windsor knot, and miss it. No style changes with regard to underwear and socks. (I was going to write "I have not changed my underwear and socks," but I was afraid it would be misunderstood.)

I have not mentioned coats. I have two classy overcoats from the old days, which I no longer wear. It is time to give them away. Instead, I wear a variety of outer jackets of different weights. I love my leather jacket, and I have a down jacket. Also a raincoat. I don't carry umbrellas, but wear caps. I have a brown cap and a gray cap, and I alternate them, depending on the color of my outerwear. As with my underwear, I haven't made any changes regarding gloves and scarves. (You will never catch me in a Burberry scarf. Such ostentation!) I also have lots of baseball caps, which I don't wear.

I am perfectly happy with the way I dress. I realize that I have to get rid of a lot of clothes that I no longer wear. However, most of the items are too worn to give to Goodwill. I suspect I will give it to them anyway, and let them make the decision. What I will do is take my suit pants to a tailor to be shortened. Next month we will be going to a Bar Mitzvah in New York. I will be dressing up, and I don't want to have my cuffs dragging.

12-26-11