

Born to Shop

I don't like T-shirts with lots of stuff printed on them. They are supposed to be clever. I find most of them silly. But I saw one that had the ring of truth. It read: "Born to Shop." I am going to get one of those for Fran.

For years, I didn't want to believe it. Not my wife. The Born to Shop women are those on the "Real Housewives..." shows. Fran reads the NY Times, and serious novels and cookbooks. She discusses politics. She has a good understanding of what makes people tick. She is part of a Torah Study group. But I now realize that she is a compulsive shopper. She was Born to Shop. It is an addiction. Remember the question: Do you eat to live, or live to eat? If you change the question to: Do you shop to live, or live to shop, I am afraid the answer for Fran would be the latter.

I should have suspected something when, many years ago, I noticed the pantry, the refrigerator and the freezer filling up. There was no space to add anything. We had every kind of canned food jammed into every corner of the pantry. We had every type of spice imaginable. We had tea and pasta up the kazoo, and every other kind of food that can be considered non-perishable: olive oil, soup mix, cereal, kasha. Fran had been buying and storing them, and I was oblivious.

A special category of non-perishables is paper products. Fran is obsessive about paper toweling. It must be top of the line, with lots of perforations. Also tissues—facial and toilet. We have them stored under the sink in the kitchen and bathroom.

It is the same story with perishable food. The freezer is packed with frozen food. Some of the food is bought frozen, and the rest Fran has frozen—meat: cooked and uncooked, soup, bread. I have no idea what is in the dozens of packages. Whatever food is freezable, Fran has frozen. My occasional purchase of a half-gallon of ice cream can hardly find space in the freezer. I am so intimidated by all of the things Fran has squirreled away in the freezer, I am afraid to open it up, except to get some ice cream from time to time.

And now, the refrigerator. Fran has managed to fill it with everything perishable that is not freezable: every kind of dairy product, cheese, yogurt, eggs, spread, salad dressing, condiments, sauce, relish, jam and juice. (I sneak in a couple of cans of soda and beer.) The two drawers at the bottom of the freezer have a variety of fruits and vegetables. Usually, they sit there for weeks, and if not eaten, they are thrown out. My diet is shaped by the foods that are on the verge of going bad. Some times Fran stocks up when planning to make something, but if she doesn't get around to making it, the ingredients accumulate. When I see carrots or celery sitting around for a while, I add them to my salad. My shopping contribution is limited to orange juice and milk, and the abovementioned soda and beer.. On Fridays, I may buy a challah from the Butcherie, and a Stop and Shop rotisserie chicken (reduced to \$5).

Fran's food shopping compulsion is compounded by her lack of trust in my shopping judgment. She suspects (correctly) that I will look for bargains. My offer to shop, is almost always rejected. Shopping gives her pleasure. If I go, I will be depriving her of this source of pleasure. Pushing a shopping cart is exactly like pushing a walker. Walking up and down the supermarket aisles is exercise. It doesn't matter if it is Stop and Shop, Trader Joe's or Shaw's (formerly Star), they are all home to Fran. For a change of pace, Fran will check out the Russian store on Beacon

Street, and when she goes to her podiatrist in Watertown, she will spend hours in the Armenian store. And come summer, it is Annandale Farms, and the Farmers Market every Thursday.

Of course, food shopping is only a small part of the shopping addiction. There is clothes shopping, gift shopping, book shopping and pottery shopping. Shopping for clothes—for herself or for gifts--will range from Bloomingdales, to TJ Maxx, to The Gap, to Goodwill Industries. They are all nearby, more or less. Just as the kitchen pantry and refrigerator are filled, so are Fran's closets. In this case, with gifts of every sort, for future giving. Fran never goes anywhere empty-handed.

Fran has never become a fan of malls. When she goes to Bloomingdales, she goes to Bloomingdales, even if it is in a mall. (She may peek into a few other stores, but I don't see her bring home anything from them.) There are no "Big Box" stores near us, though some of our neighbors do shlepp out to Costco in Dedham.

Speaking of Costco, Fran was in shoppers' heaven when we visited friends in San Antonio, and accompanied them as they made their weekly visit to their favorite store. That place has everything, but for sale in quantities I can't handle. And as you wander around, grabbing up bargains, they provide you with food samples, enabling you to shop without starving. When you are finished shopping, as a reward, you can get a foot-long all beef frankfurter and an all-you-can-drink soda for \$1.49. Now that's a bargain.

These days, Fran doesn't have the energy she used to, and shopping is taking her longer. Nevertheless, the bundles are as big as ever. Fran was born to shop. Pushing a shopping cart may even be therapeutic. But it is an addiction, though not as harmful as alcohol or drugs. Have they formed a Shoppers Anonymous organization yet?

7-11-11