

Style Wise
Expressing Your Unique Self

Chronic Chic

Rethinking the importance of underwear

by Thomas Orton

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NOTE: Skye Moody, our regular StyleWise contributor, is featured in a longer essay on page 12 of this issue. Tom is stepping in for Skye, who will return to this column next issue.

“Style, so I told myself, supported nothing but ego, and ego was not going to help me cope with a chronic disease.”

I was exhausted. I couldn't help cutting corners. And where there were no corners, I cut whatever was there. This fatigue, a symptom of my Parkinson's, had saddled me with a repertoire of some bad but necessary habits. By bed time every night, I was so tired I pulled off my jeans and shorts at the same time, not bothering to separate them before dropping them in a heap on the floor.

One morning, I put on fresh shorts, then pulled on the same jeans, forgetting that the old shorts were still inside. I went to work as usual. Through the morning, the old shorts began working their way down the back of my right pant leg the way a piglet, swallowed by a python, slowly moves through the serpent's gut. I had no idea this was happening. I felt tightness at the back of my thigh but assumed it was one of those dry jokes by which Parkinson's only makes it seem you are developing yet another symptom.

At noon I left the office for lunch, walking up the carpeted hallway when the shorts finally made it out the bottom of my pant leg. Flew out is more like it, landing some ways down the hall at the feet of a woman just coming out her office door. My face burned hot and I realized something terrible: I was no longer cool.

OK, I probably have not been cool or stylish since I hit 40. Despite the corrosive effect of simple aging in the decades since, I have

managed to keep deluding myself that, if I wasn't actually cool, the possibility still existed.

In my current shape — stumbling, slurring my words, kicking my underwear at strange women — only an idiot could think I was cool. Dignity was hard enough to come by; if I tried to be cool on top of that, I would surely make a jackass of myself.

The underwear had to go.

Perhaps it is true that people with class wear underwear, but wrestling with my shorts every morning exhausted me. I simply was not going to put up with it anymore. I threw out the worst of them and took the rest to Goodwill.

I felt purged, unburdened. This worked so well that I decided there were other nonessentials that could be given their walking papers.

Soon I identified the next item destined for the chopping block: dress shirts. Wearing fine shirts used to make me relaxed and confident; trying to button them with PD bled all that good feeling away. I made another trip to Goodwill. While there, I bought a number of serviceable T- and sweatshirts that were easier to wear and maintain than dress shirts. They quickly became part of what I thought of as my new uniform.

I was on a roll. Casting about for another likely target, my eye fell upon the general category of grooming, a breeding ground of useless style items.

For this next adjustment, I zeroed in on the particular scourge of shaving. I used to put a fairly high premium on shaving my

face as closely as possible, especially when I was going out. For closeness, you needed a blade. An electric razor just wasn't going to make it. With Parkinson's, using a blade on my face had become the same kind of hell as buttoning shirts, only far more intimate. I had to brace my arms to minimize the effects (and the danger) of stiffness and shaking, moving my face against the razor instead of the other way around. All the effort began to seem empty. So, one day I dropped all my paraphernalia in the garbage and let my beard do what it would.

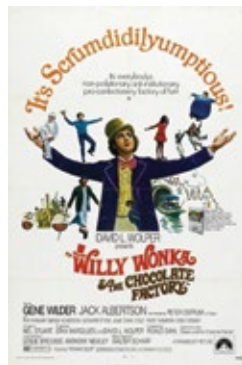
Initially there was the same exhilaration as with the shirts and underwear; the same sense of lightening my life, streamlining it. At the same time, I began to hear a voice in my head saying, *If you keep this up, pretty soon there won't be anything left.*

What? Wait. Where did that chiding, finger-wagging tone come from? I was responding responsibly to an emergency in my life, for God's sake! I was doing something positive about my situation.

Or was I?

Maybe I was simply trying to escape the pain of an ego that was tired of being bruised and battered by the embarrassing symptoms of my “dis-ease.”

Perhaps, unconsciously, I thought if I could edit the style elements out of my life — no matter how minor and unimportant they seemed — I could trick the ego into believing that none of it mattered, as if having style were a **Chronic Chic:** *Continued on page 41*



Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory (1971)

It's not hard to guess why the musical adaptation of Roald Dahl's children's book is so fondly remembered by a couple of generations. The fantasy of childhood magic, the colorful designs inside the great candy factory, the catchy songs — and the appeal of “pure imagination,” as Mr. Wonka himself sings it: “There is no/Life I know/To compare with pure imagination.” The movie is so wild (especially in contrast to the humble existence of Golden Ticket winner Charlie), it can't help but fire up the brains of children and adults alike. In fact, a common shared reaction of grown-ups re-visiting this movie is to marvel at just how weird it actually is, especially a practically psychedelic monologue delivered during an out-of-control boat ride by the great Gene Wilder, whose starring turn as the chocolate-maker is a classic. But maybe that craziness is liberating, too — at any age. (Available on Amazon, Google Play and Vudu.)



“It's a beautiful day ...”

MUSIC REVIEWS

by Joe Rodriguez / Freelance music writer

“Reality leaves a lot to the imagination.” — John Lennon



Historical Misappropriation (Album)

— Scott Bradlee & Postmodern Jukebox, 2014

Here's an album that will definitely help you bridge the musical generation gap. Not just another cover album, it's an amazing collection of current pop, hip-hop and rock hits completely re-imagined. These arrangements — which could be mistaken for jazz and swing gems from decades ago for those unfamiliar with them — are the brainchildren of 33-year-old Scott Bradlee and his Postmodern Jukebox (a band of rotating singers and jazz musicians). The first track, “Rude,” transforms a reggae rock hit by Magic into a doo-wop tune with the heartthrob crooning of Von Smith and backup vocals reminiscent of the Shangri-las. Then there is the reimagined Britney Spear's tune “Womanizer” that transports you to a smoky speakeasy where a singer in the vein of Shirley Bassey serenades your ears. Perhaps the best reimagining on this album was of this summer's biggest hit from pop sensation Meghan Trainor, “All About That Bass,” now slowed to a sultry tempo with the buttery-toned jazz singer Kate Davis providing lead vocals and playing standup bass. Gorgeous stuff.



Pure Imagination (Single) — Fiona Apple, 2013

Chipotle (yes, the restaurant chain) has been working with musicians to create compelling reimagined songs for its brand awareness campaign, hoping to provide a stark comparison between them and other fast food restaurants. Many of these videos have gone viral and become musical hits of their own. Fiona Apple was one of those artists who lent her talents to Chipotle's cause and performs a dark rendition of “Pure Imagination” from the 1971 classic film *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. Unlike the original film score's happier tone, Fiona's version has a brooding and dystopian soul to it, albeit with a message of hope and change in the lyrics. Without imagination, no new ideas or changes would ever be free to see the light of day, and this song exhorts us to use our imagination more and often. To experience the full impact, watch the video on YouTube.



With Imagination (I'll Get There) (Single) — Harry Connick Jr., Blue Light, Red Light, 1991

This Dixieland jazz/gospel-inspired track treats your ears to the New Orleans jazz style that Harry Connick Jr. helped revive in the early 1990s. At 24, Connick Jr.'s voice reminded us of Sinatra and Crosby with a southern flair. “With Imagination” gives the feeling that you've stepped out onto Bourbon Street and are witnessing his impromptu performance with a brass ensemble. In this wistful song, we travel with Connick Jr. on his search for a place to call home. In the end, he finds what he was seeking by using his dreams and imagination as his guide. His message is simple; if you can visualize your goals, then you can reach them with the help from the heavens above and your imagination. In this way, nothing is unattainable.

Beautiful Day: Continued from page 29

If I had imagined this, I would have done many things differently before it happened. I wish I had known. Now I'm a caregiver, and life isn't the same.

I wouldn't dare to imagine living like this, alone and living in a new place so late in life.

As for one of my personal favorites: “I never imagined that at this point I would be in this situation.” When I was first separated from my husband, still shocked (even though someone else might say it was fairly predictable), I sat with a friend, repeating those words over and over. She humored me, as I recall, by tossing out the idea that I could write a book entitled, *The Failure of Imagination*.

But it's less about failure than it is about how we choose to use our imagination. Thinking of what could go wrong hardly feels like a healthy way to plan or live a good life. Indeed,

those of us who do too much of this are plagued by worry, fear and anxiety about the future. I start the coaching process with an imagination-powered question: “What inspired vision do you have for yourself?” Few would want to reply with, “Well, if I get diagnosed with a terrible disease in my sixties, then I will ...” Rather, we turn our creative minds to the life-affirming well-being we wish for — how we see ourselves flourishing for as long as we have days and dreams. How do you see yourself in the days and years ahead? I ask this question of everyone, even those who know their days are limited by their condition. If you have only six months to live, how do you imagine living them well?

While my father never imagined the beasts he would wrestle in the physical sense as he dangled on the silk thread for more than 15 years, his imagination didn't fail him as he saw the beauty in each day. He could describe

the taste of a pear, just ripe enough to eat but not too much so, in a way that caused my own salivary glands to think I had taken the bite myself. Was it his imagination that the next day would be so beautiful that gave him hope, or was it the hope for another day that allowed him to imagine he could tough out the day in front of him? Could he ever have imagined that I would use his story to inspire others and myself?

How do you use your imagination to make this day a good one? How do you imagine yourself in the days and years ahead? Sick, healthy, alone or with loved ones, how would you describe yourself being the best you can be or having the best day you could have? What small change can you make in that direction today? And last, if you told me your story, could you imagine telling it with a new beginning? Try this as an opening statement: “It's a beautiful day ...” ♦

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matter wholly of choice. Instead, style proved to be a separate entity, a living thing that did most of its important work while I wasn't looking, while I believed, wrongheadedly, that I was making strides in a different direction.

Rather than discarding my style, I found myself revamping it. I started buying dress-style shirts at thrift shops, and now wear them unbuttoned and untucked over T-shirts, consciously avoiding clashing colors. I bought a trimmer for

my beard, much more forgiving than razors. Making these changes allowed a trickle of the old confidence. For now, the ego is playing along.

Maintaining a sense of style when you're dealing with a chronic illness is not only possible, it's mandatory. Giving your ego even a mild workout can supply the vinegar your personality craves when depression seems to have bled all your resources dry. And when you do, your style can reflect these changes that sometimes, happily, appear out of the blue. ♦