

My fashion style is more Ralph Klein than Calvin (15, 12, 12)

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Our eldest daughter and I enjoy a standing joke regarding attire. Whenever we get into deep discussions, towards the end, I feel compelled to issue forth some distilled wisdom, derived from my many years on this planet. Most seniors share a valid desire to impart sage advice to their progeny.

I say, "Remember this," and pause for dramatic effect, but she knows what's coming. I follow up with, "Dress for success!" Sometimes, I start the routine with a mere wink and, "Three Words!"

I don't know when the routine started, but it cracks us both up. It might date back to our wilderness canoeing days when after vigorous portages, hauling canoes and huge packs containing our gear, we looked at each other, observed the sweat, grime and mud – and laughed about how appealing we appeared yet how much fun we were having.

I miss those canoe trips, the true measure of how you stack up with one another, given that your needs are microscopically reduced to food, shelter, a fire and lots of paddling with plenty of time to share thoughts amidst beautiful surroundings.

I think most problems of the world might be remedied by wilderness canoe trips. I would place an Israeli and a Palestinian in a canoe together. No arguments about who sits in the stern or the bow. The stern steers a canoe, so they would take turns. They would sleep in the same tent, cook and eat the same meals, and when everything was reduced to this simple harmony, their attitudes about coexistence would inevitably improve. On our many journeys through Algonquin, we encountered groups composed of youth at risk, being exposed to this formula. Far better than prison walls, don't you think?

Getting back to the wardrobe issue, in the wilderness, there is no need for spiffy clothes or makeup. One becomes utilitarian and pragmatic. Perhaps this is from where I derive my fashion sense which causes Miriam to shake her head.

Alas, without her sage advice, the neighbours might talk. Twice each year she insists that I try on everything that I own and discard what no longer fits. The Diabetes Foundation loves our house, whose coordinates are permanently imprinted on the GPS of all of their trucks. They call regularly to inform us of pick-up days, and Miriam invariably has a bag or three for them waiting at the door.

She quickly observed that I have no sense of style. Pretty much every day, I ask, "What do you think I should wear?" Often, I say, "Do you think jeans are OK for the wine-tasting party?" I know it's a stretch, but she might say yes.

Most wives do not understand a man's reluctance to part with old, tarnished garments. It's like abandoning a worn baseball mitt that has become an integral part of your hand. As I write this, I can actually smell the intoxicating scent of leather from my old mitt!

After we married and I made a few solo clothing purchases, I was soon grounded. "Do you realize that what you wear reflects on me?" Miriam asked. "Do you know how dumb you look when you wear your baseball hat in a restaurant?" she pressed. "Let's move from Three Stooges footwear to something spiffier," she advised. "Wearing your old Western football socks will not impress the ladies anymore," she intoned. I felt un-cool and betrayed. From then on, when I needed new clothes, Miriam was right there at my side.

My purchasing style like my fashion sense differs greatly from her. My fashion credo is not derived from Calvin Klein; it's more Ralph Klein with an emphasis on "bigger is better" and "the more, the merrier."

Also, any purchase should be completed within 5 minutes, tops. If I find something that works, I rationalize that it's wise to purchase four more of that item.

The final word on clothes goes to Mark Twain who once remarked, "Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society. I don't think he was aware of foreign movies.

