

Shoes

I cannot remember a time when I haven't liked shoes. I like to try them on and I like to buy them. I like to see them lined up in the closet. I like to wear them, even now that I am limited in the styles I can wear. I even enjoy looking at advertisements of the latest styles and speculating whether I might like to own some of them. However, I am frequently astonished and repelled by the price tags I see on some of them - figures in three digits seem too much indulgence.

Until I was college age, school shoes were usually plain brown leather oxfords which I did not dislike despite their utilitarian, unglamorous appearance. The reason was that for several years, summer and winter when I was six and seven, I had to wear heavy brown high-top lace-up orthopedic shoes to strengthen a weak left ankle. When I no longer had to wear those clodhoppers, even the orthodox brown school oxfords were a pleasure - at least for a few years. I generally had a dress-up pair, too, but never more than two pairs at a time.

On occasion for party or church, I would wear black patent leather shoes which were well worth the bother of having to treat with petroleum jelly to keep them from cracking between wearings. Of course, the jelly had to be removed before wear. (Isn't it convenient to have our synthetic, non-cracking patent leather today?) One special pair of black patent shoes I had when I was about eight or nine were Roman sandals. It was great fun to use a button hook to fasten each of the straps extending from the instep to above my ankle. I had a pair of white kid Roman sandals, too, one year, but the patent leather ones were my favorites. White silk knee socks went with those, and a pair of garters was necessary to hold up the socks.

I remember with especial fondness some other shoes I have worn. I must have been about twelve or thirteen when I owned a pair of lizard shoes, at a time when no one questioned the possibility of the lizards becoming scarce. The leather was a warm beige with brown flecks emphasizing the scales on the skin. The texture delighted my eye as well as my fingers.

The simple strap across the instep and the skin-covered low heels gave the shoe its style. I first remember them in the early spring, Easter shoes, no doubt, but I cannot recall what dress I wore, maybe because the combination of white silk ankle socks along with the shoes combined for a feeling of such elegance that the dress really didn't matter. Unfortunately, I was growing so fast that I could only wear them for the one season.

When I was fourteen, I had a pair of navy-blue kid pumps with a minute leather-covered heel that gave promise of higher heels to come, I thought. A pair of navy-blue silk stockings went with those shoes, but I was dismayed to see the dark blue halo which appeared to outline my legs. I was not sorry when that pair of hose ended its short life because I was never comfortable with them. Several years ago, I was reluctant to try dark

hose, but fortunately when the dark colors became popular again nylon hose were so sheer that the halo does not appear.

Somewhere in adolescence I graduated to heels of a modest height, but because I am above average height very high heels have never been as important to me as simple variety. I was thrilled with my first pair of silver sandals to go with my first long party dress, a confection of cerise chiffon that impressed me, with its accompanying silver sandals as being the epitome of sophistication. I didn't envy Marie Dishman's red crepe strapless, low-backed gown - or at least not much. She confided that her three-inch stiletto heels were killing her and she couldn't wait to get home so that she could kick them off. Me - I could have danced all night!

Early in the summer before I entered college, I bought a pair of brown and white saddle shoes for that important occasion. I wore them often in order to scuff them and take away their newness. I was still living at home and was horrified when I dressed for my first day at college to find that Mother, thinking she was doing something really nice for me, had cleaned and polished my saddle shoes. There was nothing to do but mingle with my new classmates in clean, character-less shoes. A few days of classes provided the shoes the lived-in character that was considered desirable.

At the time of my marriage, I had three new pairs of memorable shoes, a pair of Oxford tan alligators, a pair of cadet-blue kid pumps to match my going-away suit, and a pair of black suede pumps. Those were acquired fortuitously just months before shoe rationing became an awful fact during World War II. They lasted happily and beautifully until shoe rationing was a thing of the past. During the austere days of rationing, I used a couple of shoe coupons for everyday shoes and was able to let some young friends use my other coupons for the growing feet of their little ones.

Following the war, I could indulge my taste for shoes; I enjoyed every minute of the indulgence. Now, I'm content with my laced oxfords for walking and my mid-heel pumps for dress. I think they compare more than favorably with the black and navy Enna Jettick and Dr. Shoals shoes with cute little decorative cut-outs that used to be the fate of old ladies. And I can watch young women with their stylishly chunky block heels, their old-fashioned almost heelless boots, or their clunky running shoes and remember with fondness my own sleek lizard shoes or even the patent leather Roman sandals.



Enna Jettick shoes 1930s