



If the Shoe Fits

LONG BEFORE “BLACK FRIDAY” BECAME A PART of our lexicon, and before shopping on the day after Thanksgiving became a combat sport, the women in my family had long since been gathering together for a day of shopping, dining and fun, spent together.

One year, while perusing the shoe department of the “old” Nordstrom, my sister and I stumbled across the most hideous shoe ever to be made. A mustard gold leather bootie, curling at the toe and gathered at the ankle with an elastic strap, this shoe looked like it could only be destined for the small foot of a seasonal display elf, or meant as a joke. And yet, there it was, for sale.

An early morning start, low blood sugar and four hours of shopping already under our belts without a break, left us a bit slap happy, and the sight of this ridiculous shoe pushed us over the edge. We started laughing uncontrollably in the shoe racks. My aunt rounded the corner to see what we were laughing at. We handed her the shoe to examine. We laughed some more. We moved on. End of story? Of course not.

Several hours later, after lunch and stops at a handful other stores, we found ourselves at a cash register in another downtown establishment, clustered around my aunt as she prepared to make a purchase. As the sales clerk rang up the total, my aunt reached into her handbag to pull out her wallet. Her hand dipped into her large purse, and her hand brushed against what she assumed was her wallet. In one swift movement she pulled her hand out of her bag, with her fingers curled around not a wallet, but one hideous mustard gold elf boot with an elastic gathering at the ankle. She stood with the shoe grasped

in her hand at face level for one brief moment as everyone registered what we were seeing.

“It’s a shoe” she said, confused. “Why do I have this shoe?”

“You stole a shoe!!!” someone in the crowd of family gathered around her exclaimed.

My aunt dropped the shoe, as if it was a burning her hand simply by touching in it. “I did not!” she cried, horrified. “How did that get in there?!!!”

We all began a brisk walk back to Nordstrom to return the “stolen” shoe. With my aunt wearing an aghast look of disbelief, the rest of us trailed a few steps behind, so as to keep our distance from her, in case the police descended. We slipped back into the shoe department, where my aunt replaced the shoe on the rack where it was originally found, then turned around and walked quickly away, hoping to forget it ever happened.

For years a debate has raged over how the shoe got into my aunt’s purse. She insists my sister and I planted it there. For the record, we didn’t. We suspect that, unbeknownst to her, when she put the shoe back on the rack it tumbled off and fell into the Goliath size purse she was sporting.

It is not just the debate of how the shoe got there that lives on, but celebration of the anniversary every year on the day after Thanksgiving, which we affectionately dubbed “Shoe Day.”

We’ve tortured my aunt with the holiday. One year we surprised her with T-shirts that had huge shoes on them and said “Shoe Day.” Designed like baseball shirts, rather than her last name on the back, hers said, “Thief.” Another year, with the help of a amiable waiter, she opened her lunch menu to find the daily specials including *Shoestring fries*, *Sole*, *Hush Puppies* and other shoe-pun food offerings. Waiters delivering shoe shaped gifts throughout the meal, having her paged over the intercom to the shoe department in stores, and pinning a sign to her back that said, “Ask me about Shoe Day,” have just been some of the ways we have simultaneously lovingly tortured her and celebrated the day.

The ultimate trick came in 2001, when I wrote a letter to Doug Clark at the *Spokesman-Review* asking for help in surprising my aunt with a story to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of Shoe Day. We met for an interview, and he then cobbled together an incredible piece that appeared on the front page of the IN Life section. She was - and is - a trooper to put up with so much ribbing, all for the fun of Shoe Day.

A silver lining came out of sharing Shoe Day with Doug Clark. Intrigued by the letter I sent him, and learning of my desire to be a writer, he encouraged me to pursue a career in writing, introducing me to contacts and opportunities to gain experience. Those contacts and opportunities eventually led me to my job at *Spokane Coeur d’Alene Living*, ten years ago. To think, it all began with a “stolen” shoe.

When that shoe was pilfered, I never expected it would in any way lead me to the career I wanted, but in a small way it did. That just goes to show, there can be unexpected blessings from anything that comes into your life. For that, I am thankful.

I hope you take the chance to be thankful this Thanksgiving for all that life brings you, and for the twists and turns it takes, knowing wherever the road leads you, when the shoe fits, it feels great!

Happy Thanksgiving!

Blythe