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**Don’t throw it out, wear it out**

*By Chris Hardie*

I pulled some old clothes from the closet the other day because I had some chores to do.

Chore clothes have always been old clothes to me. Once I’ve put a T-shirt, shirt or a pair of pants through the paces at the office, they are then moved from the good clothes closet to the chore clothes closet.

While others might choose donating to a thrift store, I am my own charitable entity. I, however, do not consider them as tax write-offs.

There are no hard and fast rules that apply to the precise time the closet transition is made, but it may include stains, balky zippers or holes, which usually develop in the back pocket where my wallet rests. Yes, my better half has often teased me about working “so hard” while I sit on my butt all day.

As long as it still functions, it’s perfectly fine to wear. The heck with fashion. One of our founding fathers — Thomas Jefferson — reflected my view when he said: “In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock.”

My clothing principle is if it still covers, snaps, buttons or zips — sometimes partially but still enough to prevent wardrobe malfunctions — then it’s still good enough to wear. That’s why safety pins, duct tape and twine are useful.

Some would say I suffer from clothing hoarding. I prefer to think of it as wardrobe purgatory — a resting spot where the clothing can still be reclaimed, like misguided souls.

While sometimes the clothes end up in the wrong closet, it’s a system that has served me well for many years. If I added an old tie and a sweater, I might even be confused for a gentleman farmer, although those are dangerously loose terms to apply.

One category of old T-shirts is those that came from the various fun runs that I used to compete in during my running days. For the record, I have not competed in any such events since 1998, which gives you an indication of how long I hold on to clothing.

That was evident when I pulled a very faded blue T-shirt that is nearly transparent when held up to the light. But you can still make out the lettering that dates it to June 1994 as part of the West Salem June Dairy Days Fun Run.

That, however, as longtime readers may recall, is not my oldest piece of clothing. In 2016, I wrote about my blue, green and white flannel shirt that dates to 1977. I wore the shirt for my eighth-grade class picture. Although the colors have faded and one sleeve is missing its button, it’s still a fine shirt.

Yes, I still have it and I can still wear it without too much gut-sucking. Besides, flannel dates back to the 17th century, so it never goes out of style.

I once wore an even older T-shirt well into the 1990s that proudly proclaimed I was a junior high wrestling champion. Yes, it had a few holes, but in the end was no match for Sherry, who with very little effort tore it in two and threw it away.

I am clearly taking a large risk that my vintage 1994 shirt will now suffer the same fate if Sherry decides to do some clothes culling. I may have to move it to the old clothing protection program, which is also where my high school football jersey resides.

But my bright blue leisure suit has mysteriously disappeared.

*Chris Hardie spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and publisher. He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and won dozens of state and national journalism awards. He is a former president of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. Contact him at chardie1963@gmail.com.*

***Photo cutlines:***

**Shirts:** The same flannel shirt from 1977 to 2016, when the second photo was taken. Both the shirts and the hair have faded over time.

**Fun run:** Threadbare might be one way to describe Chris Hardie’s T-shirt from June Dairy Days 1994.