

## SHOES DO IT:

Anecdotal stories of my special shoes and how they effected my life:

### STORY ONE: MARY JANE SHOES

“The Princess is getting married! The Princess is getting married!” I chanted over and over again as I skipped merrily in perfect time to all eight beats of the childish sing-song rhyme that I fabricated. The date: May 6<sup>th</sup> 1959. May! So-bloom-filled and sparkling spring-like that year!

My white patent-leather Mary-Jane shoes complete with pearl-button snap ankle straps, carried me lighted-footed, high-stepping back to school after lunch that afternoon. That pleasant moment etched itself in my memory for not only had I witnessed Princess Margaret marry her Lord Snowden on our primitive black & white T.V. that noon-time, May 6<sup>th</sup> was also my 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. Those adorable white shoes were my favourite gift of the day. How I treasured them! I cleaned the scuff marks off the heels, washed the black leather-hide thick soles, used vaseline to polish and prevent the shiny fake leather from cracking and peeling. These were my “Princess Shoes”. I wore them carefully on countless occasions until Labour Day that year. They even went to the Ex with me! After Labour Day my mother informed me that white shoes are not to be worn. How confused and mildly annoyed was I trying to figure the supposed logic to such a fashion law. Nevertheless the “Princess Shoes” were wrapped in tissue and put up

on the top shelf of my closet. A new pair of drab, dull Buster Browns encased my feet instead.

Soon Easter came around again and I eagerly fetched the pretty shoe box that housed my fabulous Mary Janes. Even after their long hibernation, they still looked terrific and I eagerly jammed my feet in the waiting shoes. But – no! What’s this? My feet had ostensibly grown so much that the toes crunched up in the rounded toe and bulged out of the smooth vamp. No amount of shoe-horning or squeezing would do. The shoes were done! It was over. Finished!

I do not recall what mother did with those lovely shoes that charmed me so much. They were missed sorely. The new pair of shiny blacks with silver bows that took their place never quite measured up.

Now, nearly fifty years on when I pass a display of little girls’ shoes, I inadvertently search for a facsimile. Once in a while I see a pair and I stop, stare, and caress them as the memories hop back to life. I even sing “The Princess is getting married” in that old eight beat staccato-under my breath of course!

## Story 2: Black Satin Pointe Shoes:

Lévèz – Relévèz – Lévèz – Relévèz... Up on toes! Sûr les pointes! Up. Down and repeated over and over again!

The black satin ballet shoes, pointe shoes I loved so much seemed to stoically endure the punishment that a dancers' feet could dole out mercilessly. My black satins were more durable than any pasty pink pointe shoes could ever be. Perhaps their being purchased for seven dollars in a dusty, cluttered theatrical supply shop in Buffalo one winter in '67 accounts for their uniqueness. Only one pair left that could fit me perfectly and they came in black – not the common uniform candy pink. It behoves me to understand, but those unusual shoes seemed to anticipate my moves, my steps. There was a mutuality between us; a sense of belonging. In fact they seemed to be a living extension of my very body not a mere addition.

Once laced up, they took hold of my legs and directed my dance with pointed precision. The execution of difficult movements took on a character of its own. I could lift "en pointe" in a flash and hold position for arabesque without a wobble or quivering of ankle. Pirouettes, feuettes, pas de beurrés were flawless with these shoes in action.

The boxing which encases the hard toe and vamp of the pointe shoe never appeared to weaken or breakdown – nor did the snub flat nose of the slipper need to be redarned with coarse reinforcement floss.

There was, to me anyway, something enigmatically powerful in those shoes and the day I lost them at the Islington bus station was the day that a slow, relentless nagging and self doubting of my talent as a dancer began to encroach.

The new replacement shoes felt like sculptured plaster. The élan and fleetness of my steps were not the same; to me anyway. The spring in my arches to perform a grand jété, was lacking. Gone was the rivet-like stance in performing perfect pirouettes. I missed my special black satin slippers and that told in my dancing.

The old adage states that all things can be replaced somehow - but in the case of my beloved black pointe shoes I, to this moment, believe that statement does not always apply.

### Story 3: The Golden Slippers

My gold sequined platform evening shoes with the sling back and the sparkled-high heels were not only irresistibly flashy and tacky - they bear the responsibility of my meeting Mr. Right!!

A femme fatale was I that New Years' Eve very long ago when my slinky gold lamé evening gown and my showy shoes cut a mean-number on the ballroom floor. Those saucy shoes, were the reason a handsome, fellow stopped by my table when my date was absent, and asked if the golden-shoed lady would sneak away for the next dance!!

Well, those shoes danced all night with that charming chap. Those glamorous shoes started a waltz that continued from that night, into weeks, months and years!!

The destiny charted by those fancy high heels has continued still sparkling and glittering with golden memories and bright highlights - all set into swing by those bodacious shoes of mine!!

Shoes... just a piece of wardrobe essential to every day you say? Not at all. Shoes tell a story. Shoes start a story. Shoes end a story. Sometimes shoes *are* the story. They are eloquent links to the personal events of our lives as much as the people we

know, the songs we sing, the thoughts we ponder. Shoes have their undeniably relevant place on our feet, but they impart an indelible footprint on our hearts.

#### STORY FOUR "THE FINAL JOURNEY"

Taking in Sinatra's fabulous lyrics "My Way". I keened my attention to the words "I face the final journey", so with a well-practiced shrug and a firm setting of my jaw I entered the funeral home.

Serendipity, of course, that at this particular moment of my life, such a meaningful, inspirational ballad should come into my air-space!! How appropriate. Destiny? Karma? Synchronicity? Who knows? Yet how touching and gratia to the fates for the extra kick of courage handed me just then to "face the final journey".

Humming the words, "I did it my way", I sat down in front of an oh-so-sympathetic funeral director. Crisp, starched and grim. He was so skilled at the art of dealing with folks that were all at-sea, and vulnerably unsure of the procedures to pack off a loved one.

A little surprised, he was, as I presented pictures of my desired hairstyle, colour, makeup, jewelery (fake of course) informing him of my chosen "laying-out" wardrobe including silky "unders" to the blue pant suit, I outlined the musical selections, and flower arrangements. All choices would match the pretty coffin and champagne silk-lining. Deal made and done.

With the slightly raised eyebrow of the pleasantly amused, he quipped "How about shoes?"

"Don't worry about that," I assured him with the calm that comes from acceptance of the inevitable, "you'll get them with the rest of the layette." I laughed, he smiled.

Shoes, shoes, shoes, oh! How they have been benchmarks in my life! From the tiny two inch ivory leather slippers of my christening to the white patterned pearl buttoned Mary-janes of childhood- the first one inch pumps marking youthful womanhood to the character dancing leather tap shoes, the golden ballroom high heels, the white platforms of disco to the skin tight kid leather thigh highs Woodstock- shoes have been boss!!

My send-off shoes are hand crafted by an ancient Hungarian cobbler artist- so skilled in old school quality. Cost me a small bit, but last week he handed me my custom-designed just for me- black real satin, gold glittered half-heels, white kid straps with pearl buttons, ivory silk ribbon bows on the vamp. A fashion abomination-!! Crazy!!

Holding them was like love at "last" sight- so much joy specifically crafted into a single pair of shoes that I will be "tapping, waltzing, skipping, pirouetting and disco-ing" into the here after.

Shoes may not be the "be-all" but to me- oh! They are the "end-all" in more ways than one.