

## Shoe Envy

Anyone who takes one look at me knows I'm not into shoes. I have three pairs of the same brand of running shoes that make up my entire wardrobe and take me from hiking (the grungiest pair) to cocktail parties (the black leather version). Even when I didn't have a bum hip and bad knees that beg for a soft footfall, shoe shopping was a chore I tried to avoid, as no shoe worth getting excited over would ever fit my wide feet. So it is astonishing to me to discover that the memories that rise up unbidden when I think of my childhood are of great shoe longing.

I begged my mother to let me go to Sunday school with my friend Barbie so I could wear silky white ankle socks with patent leather mary janes like she did. I saw this as a church requirement, the 11<sup>th</sup> commandment. But my mother knew more about churches than I did, and told me that cotton socks would do just fine.

I saw an illustration in some book – maybe Dick & Jane? -- of a little girl wearing white mary janes with red socks. I truly fell in love with this combination, but white shoes my mother deemed absurdly impractical and I never got to wear that brilliant combination.

And then there were my friend and neighbor Joyce Martin's pink mary janes. They were unlike anything I had ever seen: The softest leather, the pearly glow of a subdued pink. Like all the objects in the Martin's house, they had a quality of such luxury, I knew better than to even ask my mother for a pair.

She could not understand my infatuation for the nouveau riche showy neighbors with their live in maid Emily. They needed the maid because every gleaming dark wood surface was covered with little porcelain and gold objects that required endless dusting. My mother never stepped foot in their house and so didn't know about what she would have called tacky knick knacks or googaas. She didn't understand that these perfect miniature mantel clocks and little footed beds were exquisite for the palaces of tiny stuffed animals.

All she really knew about the Martins was that they spent too much on a birthday gift for me, and she was disappointed in my desperate desire for the Madame Alexander doll they had promised me. I waited for hours on the front steps for them to come home from the store, embarrassed by my aching longing but unable to pull myself away from the possibility of their car arriving any second – a special delivery to me that I couldn't bear to delay. As it turned out, I never loved the doll as much as I might have. My mother's disappointment in me spoiled the pure joy of having such perfect beauty on my shelf.

Joyce had a small room for herself to play in, but at night she slept in one of the twin beds of her teenage sister. I don't remember her sister at all, but she must have been beautiful because I remember coming upon my brother one evening in my parents darkened bedroom looking through binoculars at the Martin's house across the street. "Don't bother, her room's on the other side of the house," I told him. He grunted, but didn't seem all that disappointed. He was still young enough to be almost as interested in playing with his various gadgets -- binoculars, telescopes, and my personal favorite the periscope -- as he was in actually catching a girl changing her clothes in the window.

The Martins didn't have pets. It just wouldn't suit their pristine house, but that didn't stop Joyce from wanting one of our cat's kittens. She decided she would take a kitten, keep it

hidden in her closet and somehow, in some yet to be determined way, convince her parents to keep it.

Unfortunately Joyce didn't have much understanding of a kittens habits or requirements, and that lovely pair of pearly pink shoes came to a sad and smelly end. The peed-upon shoes were tossed in the trash and the kitten was returned to our house.

Oddly, I do not remember my own shoes and socks, only those of other girls and that achy state of desperate longing.

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