



Circa 1983, I'm 22 and ironing a shirt as my rumpled, painter-pant-sporting roommate laughed.

"Gonna' make somebody a great wife someday, Louie," he said, popping a long neck Old Milwaukee.

Later that evening, after a few brews at the local watering hole and several women complimenting me on my fresh-pressed look, my bedraggled buddy leaned over and said, "I give. Show me how to iron."

When I was 12, my mom introduced me to the washer, dryer, and ironing board. Along with my two brothers and two sisters, laundry, lawn mowing, leaf raking, snow shoveling, cleaning the kitchen after supper, shining Dad's shoes, or any other tasks my folks needed help with, were part of our household routine.

"Here," Dad said one winter day, handing me a snow shovel. "Whatta ya know. A perfect fit. Now go clear the drive and sidewalks."

It was the 1970s and home economics, wood working and basic mechanical repair classes were offered in most public schools. I don't recall Mom pitching in with my algebra homework, but with five kids she was pleased to provide additional assignments for home

economics. And I'm grateful.

Don't get me wrong, I don't yearn for household chores. But I do find such work yields a certain peace of mind. Having things in order, a well-kept yard, a home-cooked meal, and clean, wrinkle-free clothes settles me.

I'm no neat freak or Felix Unger wannabe. Couch cushions sealed in zippered plastic and off-limits rooms are not my thing. A home is to live in and ours is not always in apple-pie order. But my wife, Yolanda, and I crave a degree of organization.

We have no scheduled vacuuming, floor mopping, bathroom cleaning or laundry days. No chore list on the refrigerator. We prefer to pick up and clean as we go, putting things back into place when finished. When the kids were young their toys stayed upstairs in the playroom or their bedrooms. When the grass gets long, Yolanda cuts it and I weed whip, trim bushes and keep the flower and vegetable garden in order. I inspect the house and paint or repair as needed. I typically make the bed and we take turns doing laundry. Yolanda vacuums and dusts. We both clean the kitchen, dirty dishes in the sink a rarity. Sometimes we swap chores, but it's all done as needed. No fuss, no muss.

But ironing is my domain. At some point, when I approached

the fork in the road between wrinkled and pressed, I picked pressed. Though I'm certain the husband who irons is not the irony regarding life's choices Frost contemplated when writing "The Road Not Taken," sometimes a crisp, clean appearance does make all the difference.

Of course, my ironing life is less challenging than my mother or grandmothers who set aside an afternoon or whole day for ironing. My Grandmother Pemberton, a wiry, straight-backed retired registered nurse, was the stalwart, even ironing and starching bed sheets after taking them off the clothesline at her farmhouse. A lot of work, we might say today, for something that will be wrinkled upon first use. But Grandma was no Sisyphus, eternally rolling a boulder uphill only to see it tumble down. As a lifelong Cub fan, a worse fate unfolded upon her. Having celebrated the 1908 world championship when she was 8 years old, she spent the next 90 years patiently awaiting a repeat. Perhaps the Zen-like transcendence of ironing soothed such angst. Or maybe it was the knowledge that her house was in order. Or that her grandchildren, sliding comfortably into those fresh sheets, slept soundly.

I'm not as committed to order as Gram Pemberton nor am I a Zen ironer, purposely press-

ing in search of transcendence in the perfect crease. Nor am I an "Extreme Ironer," someone who, according to the Extreme Ironing Bureau, combines "the thrills of an extreme outdoor activity with the satisfaction of a well-pressed shirt." And I'm no iron aficionado, salivating over new cordless irons with digital readings. My Black & Decker with steam works fine.

No, I iron only when necessary. The fact is, most clothes these days do not require a pressing. I rarely wear dress shirts or suits, so my ironing is limited to slacks for the office and special occasions where I desire a sharp appearance.

This summer, however, Yolanda and I spent three weeks in Rome. It's hot in Rome in August, so I purchased three short-sleeved linen shirts at an Italian men's store near the Spanish Steps. Our one-bedroom apartment was equipped with a small, space saving single washer/dryer which partially dried the clothes, leaving them damp and wrinkled.

We did laundry in the evenings and draped my shirts along with Yolanda's cotton dresses over an aluminum drying rack. All required pressing. In the calm of early morning, I turned off the air conditioner, opened the shutters to the screenless window of our second-floor flat situated in the

Monti District near the Colosseum, and I ironed.

Yolanda brewed single cups of strong coffee on the gas stove top, the steel percolator huffing and puffing. An intermittent breeze carried the scent of fresh pastries from a nearby bakery and I listened to the start of a new day on the narrow street below as folks clip-clopped on the cobblestone. I glanced down to see mini-skirted women and suited businessmen zip by on scooters, tooting squeaky horns at wayward pedestrians. Our Italian neighbors greeted each other with smiles, sometimes with a quick kiss to the cheek, the pleasant pitter patter of their language lingering in the soft morning air.

I pressed on, my thoughts flowing as effortlessly as the hot iron across the linen, pleasant memories of days gone by mixing with plans for the day to come. I paused to hang smoothed shirts and dresses on wood hangers and take in the vibrant scene below, the bright morning sun foretelling the heat to follow. I finished ironing, slipped on a crisp, clean shirt and joined Yolanda for coffee.

And I was grateful.

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