

JUNE 7, 2017 | SPEAK EASY

Essay: Are we too old to wear that?

Commentary by Ellen Scolnic & Joyce Eisenberg

Each spring, we bring our summer clothes down from the attic. We get reacquainted with the T-shirts and cotton pants that we lived without for six months. Could we live without them forever? Should we have ever lived with them?

The questions are monumental: Keep or donate? Passable or horrible? Can I get one more wearing out of this? Should I even wear it in public?



We realized we needed some advice so we turned to nonjudgmental Google: "Can short people wear capri pants?" The answer was yes, "if you can wear them with confidence." If we had confidence, we wouldn't have had to ask Google.

We tried again. "Are we too old to wear capris?" Google results suggested a strong "maybe," but we did learn that hair scrunchies, fishnet stockings, and crop tops are definite no-nos for our age group.

Luckily, we both have adult daughters who care about how their mothers look more than Google does. If you can't decide which clothes you should keep, you need a daughter. We'd lend you ours, but we need them.

We wish our girls still lived at home, so we could know their opinion of our outfit just by the look on their face. But they don't, so we have to text them a selfie of us modeling the questionable garment — for example: a bright floral-print blazer with the tags still on it.

"Closet cleaning. Should this go?"

"Too Florida grandma," came the reply. "And by the way, your mirror could use a good cleaning."

Digging into the back of a closet is like carbon dating a fossil. You look for clues in the surrounding material. You try to pin down how old the item is by the things buried alongside it. This dress was bought for a cousin's wedding. She got married — what — like three years ago? Well, her son is in middle school, so it must be more like 12 years ago.

One of us has a beloved outfit — skirt, blouse and vest — that she wore to her son's Bar Mitzvah 19 years ago. She long ago managed to part with the hippie patchwork skirt and matching blouse that she knew she wouldn't wear again, but she still can't part with the vest. "It's not bad. It can go with anything. I just have to remember not to wear it when my daughter is around."

We've browsed the book that says we should only keep the clothes that "spark joy." But how can we predict if these platform wedges might bring joy one day in the future? Better hang on to them.

We want to be stylish but age appropriate, and we walk the fine line between the two — in our comfy sandals with padded soles and Velcro closures. Through the years, our necklines have risen and our sleeves have lengthened. Still, we are wooed by new trends, like peek-a-boo shoulders and rainbow-bright stripes. Generally, better judgment prevails.

Even though we'd love to try that new green glitter eyeliner, we won't go there. Kylie Jenner's eyes looked great in green glitter in *Teen Vogue*, but if we'd tried it, there would be glitter on our cheeks and all over our glasses.

But we don't want to go too far in the other direction either. That tie-dyed shirt was very cool — until we spotted a lady in her eighties wearing the identical shirt. Another one for the donation pile.

We depend on our daughters not only for critiques but also to keep us up on what's in style. They taught us years ago that our shirt and pants don't have to match exactly; it can be an outfit even if you bought them at different stores. It's okay to wear a scarf even if you're not heading out into a snowstorm.

We've lived long enough to know that what goes around will eventually come around again. If only we had held onto our Frye boots, wide-leg jeans, and espadrille sandals from the early 1980s. All of these items are back in style. Our daughters are tired of us telling them that they weren't the first generation to discover leg warmers, crocheted vests, and rompers. We wore rompers in junior high school. They were navy blue with an attached metal slide buckle. We were required to change into them for gym class. Nothing about them was stylish.

Sometimes we are trendy, but it's by accident. We know that jeans with rips and tears are once again very *au courant*. Our old jeans are worn out in the knees, but their rips were earned, not purchased.

Back in the day, we fell for the ads that touted "a blouse that will take you from work to dinner date" and the easy care of a "wash and wear sundress." Now when we go shopping, we fall for the bathing suit that promises you'll "look 10 lbs lighter in 10 seconds" and the "most comfortable pants you'll ever buy."

When you're a kid it's easy to know when to get rid of your clothes. Your mom does it because your corduroys are ripped and stained from the playground and your favorite SpongeBob shirt doesn't fit you anymore. When you're an adult, if you find that you've outgrown your pants, it's not good news. Nor is it good when you discover that you've been wearing a shirt all day with coffee stain right smack in the middle. Both go in the bag to donate.

All this purging has left us with some extra closet space. We're not students, so we can't look forward to back-to-school shopping. Our feet aren't growing, so there's no reason to buy new shoes. But we just saw an ad online for "the world's best versatile, wrinkle-free travel dress." It will be perfect for our trip in August. We're clicking to order it now.