

## COLORFAST

*by Fred Hobbs*

A little research turns up the fact that the term and its importance emerged in 1916. Not being a laundry aficionado or even a fan of laundry-lore I had no idea the concept goes back so far. In fact, I didn't encounter its true meaning until my first week in college in the 1950s. Having never done my own clothes washing before I hadn't paid any attention. I just threw the dirty items in the hamper and a few days later as if by magic my mother delivered them to my room appropriately pressed and/or folded.

Proud to be emancipated and working my own way through college, I looked forward to making all of my own decisions. A very early discovery after a week or two of living in the dorm posed two questions: "What was I to do with the shirts, shorts and socks I had worn and then thrown on the floor or tossed in the closet?" And, "What was I going to do to get them clean?"

Coin-operated laundromats (as they came to be known) trace back to 1936 when the first one opened in Fort Worth, Texas. I wasn't aware of any in 1950s Boulder, Colorado and was disinclined to seek one out. Being on a very limited income I didn't want to spend money on such a trivial chore. If I had bothered to check I would have noticed that a laundry room actually existed in the dorm. Use of the machines was free and they usually were available. (Most students sent a bundle home to "Mommy" as needed.)

Doing my own laundry seemed like a very simple process. But, I failed to do my homework. I didn't know how much soap to use (we didn't call it detergent in those days.) So I poured in the amount that I thought was about right, dumped all the clothes in the washer; the dirty white corduroys fashionable for college freshmen at the time along with socks, handkerchiefs, underwear and various colored t-shirts ... and turned on the machine. Immediately, a mountain of suds filled the tub to the top and began spilling over the sides.

In something of a panic, I grabbed a nearby mop and tried to push the flood of suds closer to the floor drain. As the agitator began to do its work, the tide ebbed before spilling into the hallway and possible disaster and certain humiliation for a novice launderer.

But my troubles weren't over. After successfully navigating the rinse cycle, upon removing the items from the washer, I discovered that once white t-shirts, handkerchiefs and shorts had turned to a kind of sickly pale yellow-green. It seems that much of my rather meager and decidedly inexpensive wardrobe was not fashioned from fabrics that were "colorfast" and had "bled" into an unattractive hodge-podge.

Today, my briefs and other white stuff go in one machine with a little bleach trickled in. The colors are in another; the two never to mix even though I'm told that almost every clothing item sold now is colorfast.

The extra two quarters spent are worth it. Just to be sure.

