

Soles of Virtue

By Pete Clark

To me, shoes have always been a utilitarian commodity; in my younger years, like a set of new pedals for my bicycle or, in the present, gasoline for my ford: something that helps me get from point A to point B, with ease and alacrity. Shoes also serve to protect my feet from rough things, sticky things and sharp things, with the added value of helping keep my mud hooks, as my mother called my feet, warm during the winter, when it is cold and sometimes wet. I most surely appreciated my shoes, in the olden days, when occasionally, I would have to walk across an alkali flat, filled with foxtail. Unlike the rest of my lower body clothing, I did not have to pull barbed seeds out of my shoes' leather.

The type of shoes I wear has always depended upon what I will be doing on any given day or time of day. When I worked out in the boondocks, wading through sagebrush and cactus, while circumventing rattlesnakes, I wore good quality, high leather, lace up boots, for protection and ankle support. Rough country is, often, not easy walking. Outdoor jobs in town require the same type of protection for feet and lower legs, because of different obstacles. Off of the job, low quarters or even sandals will do for motivating around where ever I happen to be.

At one time, I did actually require a special pair of shoes and no, they were not orthopedic shoes. They were football shoes, complete with replaceable cleats. The shoes were the only part of our football equipment and uniforms we had to pay for. Walking in and out of the locker room and up and down the tiled hallway in cleats took some getting used to, but I was young and not quite so set in my ways, so adapting was no problem. My freshman year in high school, getting in shape for my first football season was a shock to my system, but not only did I survive, I thrived, in the full speed and hard, body contact activity that was so new to me. I learned the ins and outs of playing the game more slowly than the other freshmen, but I did OK. By the end of the season, I was playing first string Right Offensive Guard and first string Left Defensive Tackle. My senior year, the coach gave me the new defensive position, Center Guard, now known as Nose Guard. The coach tried to tell me when to move toward the line of scrimmage, but I could not get his advice to work. I had learned much in the previous three seasons, such as the Center's fingers would twitch signaling his move to hike the ball and at that instant, I could lunge and legally hit him.

My favorite shoes are, and were, those that actually fit my feet, for like Clementine of noteworthy yore, my feet need "Herring boxes, without topses," as I have a very good understanding.