

A Pin and a Tuck

Patricia Catering, was my mother's business and so I had my first job at 13, washing-up for large weddings or parties; wages, tips and a slice of Black Forest gâteau if you were lucky. I then moved on to Saturday jobs in retail. The main problem being you could only take a couple of Saturdays off in the year. Sometimes it was easier to leave and get another job! So I usually worked for Mum in the summer then get something else for the winter. And that's how I started working at Mr Howard's Menswear in 1979 at the age of 17! I just walked in and asked for a job, the manager asked if I was good with figures and could I sew? Of course I lied. Jon said I could start on Saturday as the cashier and he would show me how to take trousers up!

Men would buy their outfit to go out that evening, we would then carry out any necessary alterations and they would collect later. I quickly learnt the cashier's role, handwritten receipts on a machine with carbon paper in, the shop copy kept on a wooden block with a spike sticking up. The cash went in a locked drawer under the counter, no till as such. Most of the time, the amount in the drawer, less the float, tallied up with the receipts. Job done!

The sewing was a little trickier. Jon would take the gentleman's inside leg measurement, thank goodness, and he'd mark where the hem should be! I then had to pin the hem, tack and sew them. Some of the trousers had turn-ups to make things more complicated. All this, whilst running the cash desk as well.

The shop assistants were a great bunch of lads. Pete, the top salesman, was always stationed by the door and we always had a few laughs. One day, whilst sewing up more trousers, I dropped the scissors. I didn't get off my stool to pick them up, I just leant to the right, put my arm down and scooped them up. As I came back to the sitting position my ear was stinging. Pete screamed, his knees gave way and he collapsed to the floor. Jon came running to the front of the shop to see his best salesman unconscious on the floor, and the cashier, with a metal spike sticking out of her head!

I had impaled my ear on the receipt block, I hardly felt a thing as it had gone into the top of the ear, where people sometimes have piercings! Poor Pete thought it had gone right into my head and he'd fainted, apparently he hated the sight of blood...there wasn't any. He soon recovered and received a lot of teasing about the incident. I pulled the spike out and continued with taking up the trousers. Another satisfied customer an hour later, none the wiser about the drama that had occurred!