

Shoes of a Muse

By Toni V. Muse

While browsing through things found in thrift shops, yard sales or antique stores I remember discovering a pair of cast off bronzed baby shoes. While looking at the shoes I began to wonder who they belonged to and why this once cherished item had been discarded?

My first pair of shoes were never bronzed, but were most likely the hand-me-down shoes of an older sister. By the time the last child got to wear them, they



Old Fashioned baby shoes typically bronzed.

had been repainted with that white shoe polish in a bottle so many times there was no need for bronzing. Needless to say, bronzed shoes wasn't very popular in our family.

Bronzed baby shoes is one of those fading American traditions which started in the early 1930s by a Cleveland Ohio department store which advertised bronzed baby shoes as a family keepsake. An intrigued mother, Violet Shinbach had her infant daughter's shoes bronzed. After doing her homework Violet and her husband, Sam, founded the Bron-Shoe Company. in 1934. By 1952 the company added a new division—the American Bronzing Company. Since 1934, the Shinbach family business has bronzed more than 14 million baby shoes.

As kids I remember the spike heels and 1940's styled shoes that we played in. Back then we didn't have child sized princess or fairy dresses. Just real adult clothes which we had to get creative with and modify. I wasn't born a princess or fairy and would never be one. An early dose of reality — use what you have and

make it work.

Eventually a pair of kid sized plastic high heels with elastic straps found their way to our house one Christmas which didn't last very long.

As for baby shoes, I'm not sure about how strong the bronzing tradition is these days. However, baby shoes can still be spotted hanging from the rear view mirrors in some vehicles.

I remember the first pair of shoes I actually fell in love with were a pair of shiny black patent leather "Go-Go boots" with a red synthetic lining and slippery heels. I was in kindergarten and even after I out grew the boots I still tried to wear them. I can't say whatever happened to these boots, but I wish I still had them.

At thirteen I wanted a pair of Pro Keds high top sneakers which costs \$15. I had to save up and buy them with my own money because no sensible adult was going to pay that much for a single pair of sneakers. Needless to say I loved those sneakers should've probably bronzed them.

When I left home after graduating high school at eighteen I owned thirty six pairs of shoes — which one might consider not too shabby for a teenager, back then.

When I shop for shoes now, which isn't often, I have a hard time finding just the right kind of shoes. Similar to my choice of foods I'm basically very picky when it comes to shoes. Sneakers are now at the bottom of the list. Given the option I'd chose boots instead of sneakers. The important factors in any type of footwear is the heel height, toe overall shape and comfort.

I admit that I've had my share of outlandish styles and super high heels over the years. I've felt the pain and endured the blisters, and learned how to pad, walk, run (for the bus), stand, lean and sit according to the shoes upon my feet.

These days my preference in footwear is classic styled shoes that are well made and fit comfortably but aren't priced out of this world.



Trud'homme from Paris circa 1910, dress shoes acquired by L. M. Muse at Vintage clothing fair "because they fit".

My shoe collection is now worst for wear. I wear my shoes to the bitter end. Even after they are worn completely out they remain with me and end up collecting dust somewhere. Then there is my real shoe collection of white kid leather baby shoes, several pairs of infant moccasins, a pair of Victorian ladies dress boots, work boots and a pair of imported fancy ladies dress shoes from 1910 and more. Shoes in the collection have been found at vintage clothing fairs, yard sales, thrift shops and some were even given to me.

Talking about pairs there is another kind of match made in heaven, the pairing off of me and my husband. When I first met Aaron I did note his footwear which were better quality work boots both sensible and nicely broken in.

For dress wear Aaron has a pair of black Dan Post western boots (A.K.A. Cowboy boots) and a grey suede pair of Justin's. He is loyal to his boots and his Dan Post boots have been resoled several times.

Until we take that road trip to Texas, I believe there is a new pair of Justin Boots online that have his name on them.

When you love shoes knowing a really good cobbler (a.k.a shoemaker) is essential. However these days finding one may not be so easy since there are only 6,000 professional cobblers left in the U.S.



Worn once, maybe twice Fry Boots discovered in thrift shop; cost \$5.