



LOWCOUNTRY MUSINGS

September 2018

A JOURNAL THROUGH TIME

By Florence Bothwell Cosby

September



Mall Central Park New York City ~ George Zucconi

*September has come, it is hers
whose vitality leaps in the autumn,
whose nature prefers
Trees without leaves and a fire in the fireplace.*

~ Autumn Journal, Louis MacNeice



My first trip to San Francisco was at the beginning of September in 1961 for my cousin's wedding. I was to be a bridesmaid and my mother was to visit her youngest brother. It was also the first time either my mother or I had flown in an airplane. As was expected at that time, we dressed up for the occasion—my mother in a work suit, hat, and gloves, and me in a dress and heels. We looked neatly attired when we started out, but gradually wilted as our long and arduous journey unfolded.



We departed from LaGuardia Airport in a prop plane, with no such conveniences as reserved seating or meals in flight. The boarding process was hectic and crowded, but we managed to locate two adjoining seats about midway down the aircraft. The pocket in the seatback in front of us had a handy *Occupied* placard that was positioned on one's seat as a placeholder while you ventured off to the restroom. As well, passengers were given the opportunity during stops along the way to exit the plane, climbing down a flight of rollaway stairs, to enter the terminal in search of food and beverages.

Our first layover—one of five along the way—was in Detroit, followed by St. Louis, where my mother left the plane to purchase us box lunches at inflated prices. I remained on the plane and became quite alarmed when my mother was absent for such a long time that I feared she would miss the next take-off. But she soon reappeared, looking overwrought and disheveled, and bearing box lunches consisting of dried out sandwiches and tepid coffee.

Our next stop was Dallas, then on to Denver. Again, my mother deplaned for snacks and coffee, although by now she was a seasoned traveler and knew the drill for seeking sustenance for the remaining leg of our flight. At this point, the plane hit some bumpy turbulence, which in turn jostled our coffee cups, spilling their contents down the front of our clothes. But by then it did not matter, as we had long ago lost the crisp and polished appearance from our early-morning departure. The entire zig-zagged journey from coast-to-coast had taken 13 hours, but we arrived at last in San Francisco, looking as we felt—worn out, weary, and relieved that the long flight had reached its final destination.

We spent a week there in the Bay Area, enjoying the many traditional sites and splendors of a beautiful city, commuting by bus each day from north of the city where our relatives lived, over the Oakland Bay bridge into the heart of the city. We took a Circle Line bus tour of the area, hopped on the cable cars—my mother's favorite attraction—for in-city transport, walked along Fisherman's Wharf, and visited a mission dating back to 1776. On other occasions, we drove with my aunt into the wine country of Napa Valley to visit the tasting rooms of two wineries, as well as to the nearby campus of the University of California, Berkeley, and even took time out to see a matinee showing of a popular movie.



We packed so much activity into that vacation beyond the wedding festivities, and probably touched every feature that makes the city outstandingly famous. But what I remember most is sampling some of the wonderful local foods. We feasted on sour dough bread and Dungeness crabs on Fisherman's Wharf, sitting outside and enjoying the bustle of the tourist crowd. At the original site of the first Swensen's ice cream store, we had sinful hot fudge sundaes served in a goblet and accompanied by a small pitcher of additional hot fudge for pouring on as we worked our way through the gooey treat. But most of all, I remember *Tommy's Joynt*, a San Francisco institution dating back to 1947, and which is surprisingly still there, still run by the same family, and still serving the same menu that made it famous

in the first place. We ate there several times, because the food was great, and the price was right. Each time, I selected the prime rib cut-to-order behind the counter, with a choice of two sides—which for me were mashed potatoes and gravy, cucumber salad in dill sour cream sauce—my absolute favorite—plus rolls and butter. To this day, my mouth waters at the memory of *Tommy's Joynt* meals and the fun my mother and I had there, on our special San Francisco vacation many years ago—one of the best times we ever had together.



My friend Ellen Petersen—THS '60—sent me this photo of her granddaughter Sarah (l.) and college friends Rachel (c.) and Julia (r.) at JFK airport recently, awaiting their flight to Florence, Italy, where they will be studying abroad at the ISI campus there. What is most noticeable is how much travel attire has changed since my mother's and my trip to San Francisco 57 years ago—and for the better, with ease and care-free convenience the top priority. No more suits, dresses, heels, hats, and gloves! Here, jeans, shorts, and sweats are the garments of choice, with sporty tops and cushioned sneakers—guaranteed to make the long flight measurably more relaxed and comfortable. *Buon Viaggio, Signorinas!*



David and I traveled to San Francisco many times during the years we lived in Santa Barbara, but the most fun was on a trip with our friends Paul and Mary-Michael. It was their seventh wedding anniversary and our tenth, so we decided to splurge on a long extravagant weekend vacation.



As on the trip with my mother years before, we packed an enormous number of activities into our short stay. We rode a train through the famed sites of the Gold Rush days north of the city, visiting Paul's twin brother along the way. Then there was the ill-fated attempt to ride in a hot-air balloon, which hovered off the ground by an inch or two before technical difficulties aborted the flight. We spent most of our time in the city itself, where David and I stayed at the lavish St. Francis Hotel, while our friends bunked in with Paul's mom at her townhouse elsewhere in the city. We shopped for special purchases at Dunhill and Tiffany—cigars and a marble ashtray for David and a gold and jade bracelet for me—as well as Gump's and the original Williams-Sonoma.



But best of all was the food. We ate and drank at many of the well-known San Francisco restaurants and hotel bars, but our favorites were *Victor's* on the top floor of our hotel, and a small Scottish pub a few blocks away. We reserved a table for our elegant anniversary dinner at *Victor's*, in a private nook encased by windows on three sides that afforded a spectacular panoramic view of all that surrounded us. I had ordered duck with cherry sauce, which was brought uncooked to the table for me to inspect: “Madam, your duck,” announced the attending chef, awaiting my acceptance of its naked plumpness before whisking it away to roast to crispy succulence. We drank cocktails and champagne, and leisurely worked our way through one luscious dish after another. All was perfection.

The next night we walked around the corner to the nearby pub *Edinburgh Castle*, where we sampled draft beers, ate fish and chips with our fingers, and listened to pop songs played on bagpipes from a corner juke box. The entire Tab—which the waiter wrote down on a paper napkin—was the approximate cost of the tip alone from the previous night’s feast, but with equal enjoyment and pleasure. Another memorable visit to The City by the Bay.

An Amazing San Francisco Time-lapse – “The City” by Sam Johnson
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=178&v=urY2oOTr8rA



So, National Bowling League Day? Well, I don’t think so. When I was a kid, my mother would not permit me to go bowling, even though we had a perfectly respectable bowling alley at the edge of the small town-center where we lived, half a block from our grammar school. But, no, she said. In her mind, only “tough” girls went bowling and where a “nice” girl would meet only the wrong sort of boys. And so, I grew up keeping the bowling crowd on the fringes of my social life.



When I was in high school, there was a Bowling Club for girls, sponsored by one of the most respected and admired teachers at our school. Several of my new friends at high school had joined the club, and so did I. Fortunately, there was a bowling alley near our school, so we had easy access to our after-school activity. And I am not sure that I ever got around to mentioning my part in the club’s activities to my mother. But I was not terribly athletic, so although I had fun, my scoring ability was not the highlight of high school sports.

I probably bowled a few times since then, but not enough that I pursued it as my life’s passion, and I remained not very good at it. When I was in college, sometimes a group of us would go bowling on a Friday night, but that was more of a social occasion with a date than a pursuit of a sport. David told me that as a high school teen he worked in a bowling alley setting up the pins, at first by hand before

automation took over the task. But, he said, he had not actually played himself, so bowling never became a part of our joint activities when we were married and living in Santa Barbara.

For some reason, Cameron as a kid thought that going bowling was the most important goal in his young life. Finally, the opportunity presented itself when he was invited to a friend's birthday party that was to be held at the Sandpiper Lanes Bowling Alley here in North Charleston. We dutifully drove him to the appointed location, and as we pulled into the parking lot and the huge signage of the bowling establishment came into sight, we heard him in the back seat release an emotional sigh and exclaim, "It's a dream come true!" Well, there you go—whatever floats your boat, when you are nine.



When we were kids, My Mother the Event Planner was once again in action as Labor Day drew near. For us in the northeast it marked the unofficial end of summer. The opening of the new school year was the next day, so it really was our last chance to bring closure on the many seasonal activities we had enjoyed these past few months. It was also the final neighborhood cookout gathering—as always, in the grove of trees next to the Links' backyard, where Mr. Link once again expertly set it up with lights, buffet tables, chairs, and charcoal grills. My mother dutifully reminded the invited families of the date, time, and menu requirements. Standard cookout fare prevailed, with hot dogs, hamburgers, baked beans, potato salad, corn on the cob, coleslaw, chips, and watermelon in abundance. Labor Day picnics were more subdued than our other holiday gatherings, in that there would not be fireworks or parades to attend. Nevertheless, it was the perfect ending to our lazy summer vacation.



Me ↑



Labor Day in 1955 was especially memorable, in that we kids had discovered Rock & Roll. We spent much time listening to our favorite groups on our portable radios, as well as on the popular 45 rpm vinyl records of that era—those dessert-plate size discs with the big hole in the middle—that we all acquired from the record shop in our small town. As well, we danced the jitter-bug at every opportunity, having practiced the right steps and moves from the TV program *American Bandstand*, where visiting teens danced on camera, Top 40 tunes were rated, and favorite groups performed their latest singles. The most popular recording for us that summer of 1955 was *Bill Haley & His Comets* performing "Rock Around the Clock," and we played it endlessly, singing along and dancing our hearts out. Mr. Link rigged a couple of speakers outside in their backyard, so we could dance the afternoon away leading up to the holiday cookout later in the day. All the kids on the block were there, grabbing partners and swinging away to the pulsing beat and rhythmic sounds of our youth. But now that I think back, I wonder how our parents survived the throbbing noise and frenetic energy that filled our neighborhood on that Labor Day celebration long ago.

Bill Haley & His Comets – *Rock Around the Clock* (1955)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgdufzXvjqw>



In 1959 my father's birthday, September 7, happened to fall on the first Monday of the month, which is Labor Day. He enjoyed the celebration of his special day in grand style, as we already had a holiday cookout planned with our neighborhood families. Add my mother's homemade birthday cake with candles, and the day was a huge success.



My mother gave my father a new shirt for his birthday, which he proudly modeled for this happy picture. It is my favorite photo of him, because it shows him as he was—easy-going, family centered, kind and caring to all he encountered. Sadly, though, it was his last birthday, as he died suddenly two months later of a heart attack at age 52. Not a day goes by that I don't think of him, of the loving father he was to me. Happy birthday.



The first Sunday after Labor Day apparently is Grandparents Day. I say apparently, because there was no such celebration in the years I was growing up. In fact, it came as a surprise to me when Cati was born and my mother celebrated the day with her sister and a friend, complete with a bakery cake appropriately scripted *Happy Grandparents Day*. Well, that was the first I had heard of it, and assumed that it had been created by Hallmark to sell more cards, or some such retailing advertisement to expand their product base.



But this morning as I searched the internet, I read that it was a heart-felt effort to recognize the significant contributions of seniors to our society. Then-President Jimmy Carter signed a proclamation in 1978 "...to honor grandparents, to give grandparents an opportunity to show love for their children's children, and to help children become aware of strength, information, and guidance older people can offer." Well, that is a fine sentiment indeed. My mother's celebration of her special day as Cati's grandparent was the first for that now-official occasion. However, for whatever reason, our current family has not really made a big deal out of the designated Grandparents Day. But our grandson Cameron, who has always lived either with us or close to us, is central to our lives as his grandparents. So, we can surely feel content that we have fulfilled the former President's statute which cites this day's justly-deserved purpose—to offer strength, information, and guidance to our youngest generation.



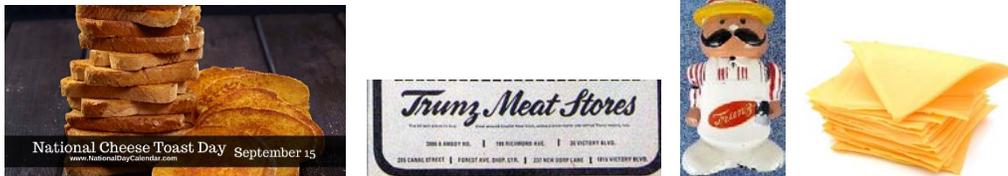
*The Towers fell
And I could not but weep.*



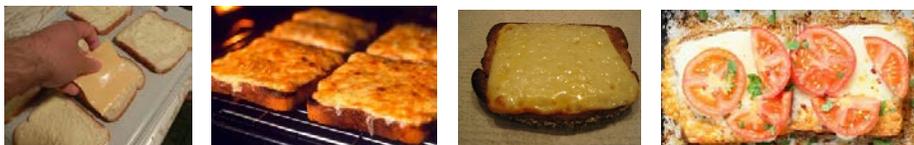
In memory of the nearly 3000 people who were killed in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, each year in the United States we observe *Patriot Day and National Day of Service and Remembrance*. A moment of silence is observed at 8:46 a.m., the time the first plane struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center. The images from that day will never be forgotten. My deep-felt recollections of the devastation of 9/11 remain in my heart and mind as we pay tribute to those who lost their lives—34 from our high school alone—as well as to the rescue workers whose tireless efforts will long be remembered with admiration and gratitude.



I cannot let National Cheese Toast Day slip by without paying tribute to this comfort food from my childhood. My mother was not a great cook [pause and wait for lightning to strike me dead for harboring such a thought] but a few of the dishes she tackled were a hit. Cheese toast was one of them.



There was always cheese in our Frigidaire on Robinson Avenue, purchased from Trunz Meat Market on Amboy Road in Great Kills. I was usually the one sent there to shop on a Saturday morning, with a list from my mother that included “50¢ worth of yellow American cheese.” On Sundays, my mother’s routine was to prepare a major dinner to be eaten mid-day, usually at noon, then to serve simple sandwiches for the evening meal, often eaten in the living room while watching TV. One of these sandwich options was cheese toast. She toasted plain white bread, added a slice of cheese, then finished it under the broiler. Sometimes she added a slice of tomato on top, then cut it into four smaller squares, and called this up-upgraded version a Cheese Dream. Either way, cheese toast was a staple when I was a kid.



David and I have carried on the inclusion of cheese toast in our family menu offerings. (Not to be confused with, or take the place of, a grilled cheese sandwich.) We used to buy the packaged Kraft or Borden’s pre-sliced American cheese, but in recent years we order it online for pick-up at Publix Deli

during the weekly grocery shopping trip—usually yellow, mostly Boar’s Head, and always ½ pound sliced thick. Whenever we want a tasty yet easy something to eat, our go-to-choice is cheese toast, whether for breakfast, lunch, or even dinner. We use ordinary loaf bread, whatever is on hand, and often, we, too, add sliced tomatoes, and sometimes a sprinkling of oregano for that pizza taste, and pop it all into our toaster oven, one of this appliance’s best uses. Sometimes we prepare it because we have an abundance of cheese to finish up, or because the tomatoes are perfectly ripe. But sometimes we fix cheese toast just because it tastes really good.



My daughter Cati has always loved everything about food—eating, grocery shopping, creating, cooking. In fact, when she was born—41 years ago on September 16—she was five weeks early and weighed only 4 lbs. 8 oz. But she was a good eater and gained normal weight right from the start. We figured she was in a rush to be born because she was hungry and wanted to get going on enjoying good tastes—healthy formula, a luscious pear, and David’s fluffy pancakes. All consumed with utter enjoyment.



Cati’s love of good food evolved into her interest in preparing what she enjoyed eating. She was a cookie baker at age three, perfecting the fine skill of that fork-made hatch mark on the top of peanut-butter cookies. When she was around age seven she watched Julia Child on TV and headed straight for the kitchen to prepare the featured dish—roasted whole chicken with mushrooms, carrots, and potatoes. It was a great success and tasted as if Julia herself had had a hand in its preparation.

Today she is an award-winning Executive Chef, as well as featured in numerous newspaper articles, on TV restaurant interviews, and as a TV contestant on the Food Network’s *Chopped!* She is well-known in the culinary community as a creative and innovative master in the kitchen she manages. *Bon Appetit, ma petite!*

Happy Birthday dear Cati



A happy smile from Day 1 to Day 14,975!



September 22 is the Autumnal Equinox, one of two days in the year when the sun rises at due east and sets at due west, with almost exactly 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of darkness. It also marks the change of the seasons on the calendar. At 9:54 p.m. it will officially be fall. The weather, however, has not gotten the memo—the current temperature here in Summerville is 81° with an expected high of 86° later this afternoon. Next week the temps are forecast close to 90° with humidity to match. Nevertheless, it is fall, and I am happy to see the change of seasons.



Fall is my favorite month. I love the cool, crisp air when it finally arrives, and I especially like the color of the foliage as the leaves lose their chlorophyll and change into the browns, yellows, oranges, and reds that signify the deciduous trees' preparation for winter dormancy. When we lived in the northeast—both in Maine and in New Jersey—we enjoyed the seasonal task of raking leaves, the crackling sound of leaping into the freshly-heaped pile of leaves, as well as the pungent fragrance of burning those leaves to dispose of them.

One fall when we lived on Round Top Road in Bernardsville in New Jersey, Cati and I had raked the vast array of fallen leaves down our driveway and heaped them at the curb for pick-up by the trash service. But first we had Cati hide in the pile, so that when David walked home from work he would see her leap from its depths. Surprise! The only problem was that she was giggling so much that the leaf pile quaked with her presence, and the sound of her glee was a dead giveaway. Lots of fun that only a fall day can provide.



When we lived in Santa Barbara, we missed the change of seasons, as there was no discernible difference in the foliage of the area. I remember eucalyptus, live oaks, and palm trees, but not the abundance of deciduous trees with the dramatic change of color that defines autumn in the northeastern woods. However, we did have a lone persimmon tree that grew across the arroyo and was visible from the balcony of our apartment on Cliff Drive. Each fall we would focus on the persimmon leaves changing color, and fondly remember the autumns of our youth.



To compensate for our lack of autumn leaves, my mother—still on Staten Island and then in New Jersey—would collect a sampling of fallen leaves, with any eye to representative trees and vividness of color. She would then press the leaves between sheets of newspaper to dry and flatten them. Then she would iron them between pieces of wax paper to preserve them for mounting on separate sheets. She would compile these pages of leaves into a booklet of sorts with a construction-paper cover, much like the craft projects we would do when we were kids growing up and learning the names of the local trees as identified by their distinctive leaves.

One year she displayed the leaf collection in a fancy photo album, with each leaf affixed behind the clear magnetic sheets. She sent us a new collection of fall leaves every autumn we lived in California, to share a bit of the season we missed so much—one of the many thoughtful gifts she would send to me when I was far from where I still called “home.”



I went to the ophthalmologist today for an eye exam to renew my driver’s license and a change in the prescription of my outdated glasses. It was a positive visit with good results and no problems detected. So, I ordered new glasses from the optician conveniently located in the same facility as the eye exam.



I got my first pair of eyeglasses when I was in high school. I know I had vision problems as early as 7th grade, but I resisted wearing glasses, because at that time eye-glass wearers were often laughed at and ridiculed by the cruel kids at school. One of my school friends showed up one morning with new glasses, and the class burst into derisive laughter. It upset me so much that I went home and cried with my mom. I vowed that I would never set myself up for such openly unkind reactions from others. And so, I cheated on the teacher-administered annual eye exam—I memorized the lines on the eye chart, so that when it was my turn to read the letters from the designated distance, I just read them from memory, not because I could see them, which I couldn’t.

By the time I entered high school, I realized that corrective lenses were essential if I were to succeed in class. Also, within the larger population of students in high school, there were so many eye-glass wearers that the taunting was pretty much non-existent by then. I chose a popular 1950s style called cat-eye glasses, with granite-colored frame tops and a clear bottom. I have no school photos of me in my glasses, because I usually did not need them when I was not in class.

The summer after my high school graduation, I worked and saved my money to purchase the new rage—contact lenses. My mother helped me pay for them and took me to our family optometrist Dr. Bradford O. Smith on Victory Blvd. to be fitted for a pair of clear hard lenses, the only type available at that time. I wore contact lenses for 50 years, always hard lenses, but switching to a light aqua tint once that became available—mainly because it was easier to find one if it popped out. I gave up the contacts when I retired, and resumed wearing glasses, because they are so much easier to wear and maintain.

Today I selected a new pair of frames for my corrected prescription, as well as an updated look appropriate for a 75-year-old retiree. The optician asked what style I wanted, but I really had no idea, so I just shrugged and said, *Surprise me*. She made a few selections, then handed me the first pair. They are a squared-off oval with a teal blue top that fades into clear gray at the bottom. I tried them on, turned my head to David, and waited for his reaction. His smile easily clinched the deal. After all, he is the one who looks at me most, with the new specs perched on my nose.



September winds up with National Beer Drinking Day. Well, we are a beer-drinking family, so we do not need a designated day to enjoy the pleasure of drinking a glass of beer. David loves beer and is a discerning judge of beer taste and quality. He has even tried his hand at brewing his own beers at home with exacting attention to process and product. With few exceptions, our refrigerator is kept well-stocked with beer for both refreshment and for cooking.

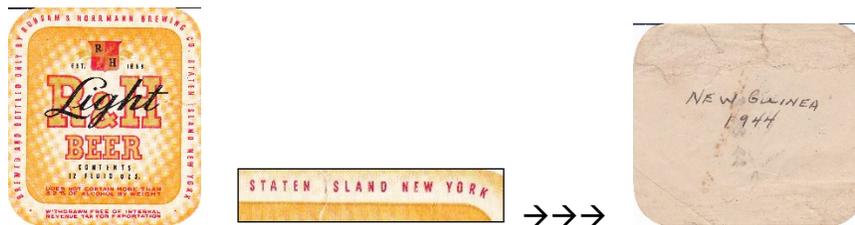


My father drank beer as his beverage of choice when we had summer cookouts and holiday celebrations. Back then, he did not view beer for daily consumption, but rather for special occasions. When he did have a beer, it was usually a bottle of Pabst or Rheingold, brands that were popular in our area in the 1950s.

Once or twice a year, the neighborhood fathers would chip in and order a barrel of beer from one of the distributors on the other side of the Island and set it up for everyone to enjoy. I remember one such gathering in the Morris’s backyard, with all the neighborhood families gathered for a day of games, races, and prizes for the kids, a massive cookout of food and snacks around the picnic tables and brick outdoor fireplace, and the keg of beer buried in a galvanized tub of ice. Drinkers were charged 10¢ a glass until the keg was paid for, then from there on the beer was “free.” Even the kids were permitted a small amount, a sip or two. Many kids didn’t like the taste, but I remember enjoying its smooth, hoppy flavor. But I was used to beer, as my father usually shared some of his when he drank a glass at home, poured for me into a small shot glass when I was younger.



In recent years, I discovered a box of memorabilia in the attic that my mother had stored away in a carton containing photos, commemorative albums, and keepsakes that she had saved from my father’s years with the Navy during World War II. One such item is a thick cardboard coaster advertising a beer my father had consumed while stationed in New Guinea in the South Pacific in 1944, but which had been brewed and bottled by the Rubsam & Horrmann Brewing Co. on Staten Island. How exciting that must have been for him, to sip a taste of home in a far-off land.





The last of the five prominent breweries on Staten Island, Piels Brewery, was closed in 1965. But during our college years, there was a pub tucked into the brewery building that was a local watering hole for students. The drinking age in New York back then was 18, so we were a young crowd of drinkers. The Embassy, as the pub was called, was small and intimate, where the bartender knew everyone's name, and even stored our college beer mugs on back-wall shelves over the bar. As each of us walked in, he would greet us by name, reach for our mug, and pour from a tap. We would sit as a group at large tables to drink our mugs of beer, smoke cigarettes, share our views on books and issues, sing songs, and play demented drinking games—all harmless, youthful fun, and we always made our way safely home. So, in honor of National Beer Drinking Day—Cheers! —the most popular one-word drinking toast.



There was a question recently on the *Charleston Post & Courier* daily newspaper's Online Poll that asked the responders' opinions about "kitten heels." I thought that was an odd one, mixed in with the usual collection of current political and technology happenings of the day. The replies to the Poll were fairly evenly distributed among *Like them*; *Don't like them*; and *No opinion* (perhaps partly from male responses). Well, that fashion style went right over my head, and I wasn't even sure if I remembered, or ever knew exactly what a kitten heel is. I don't pay much attention to style trends since I retired and spend most of my day either without shoes indoors or in sneakers outdoors. So, I searched around various online news outlets for something in the Style or Celebrity sections and found an article from last month entitled *Kitten Heels Are the Trendy Walking Shoe Right into Fall 2018*. Who knew!



A kitten heel is a woman's shoe with a little heel that is only 1 -2 inches in height. They came into fashion in the 1950s as a dressy shoe for adolescent girls (okay, now I remember!), for whom stiletto heels were considered too provocative for their age, as well as being easier to walk in. They were sometimes referred to as "trainer heels," and in fact were the shoes that my neighborhood girlfriends and I wore as our first pair of heels, for Easter when we were in 6th or 7th grade. Mine were black patent, to coordinate with a yellow, gray, and black outfit. We wore them with stockings for church or dressy occasions, but often with a pair of lacy anklet socks with our casual dresses.

By the early 1960s kitten heels became fashionable for older girls and women of all ages, when the stiletto heel fell out of fashion. The style icon and celebrity actress Audrey Hepburn made the shoe even more popular, wearing the kitten heel as her heel of choice, and featured in her movie *Breakfast at*

Tiffany's, perhaps because it was a good proportion for her statuesque height. Kitten heels have made another comeback in the past decade and continue to be a go-to-choice for women who want a dressy yet comfortable pair of footwear. "Kitten heels are a better option for optimal comfort and to keep your feet extra happy." Well, there you go—*put on your happy feet*.

Breakfast at Tiffany's Opening Scene

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JfS90u-1g8>



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 Please check back next month for the ***October*** entry to this *Journal through Time*.