

Dressing for the Revolution

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There were plenty of red-diaper babies—children of Commie parents—in lefty politics at Berkeley, but I was not among them. I was a Valley Girl from Encino, California. John Wayne lived on my corner. Patty Andrews, one of the Andrews Sisters, lived across the street. My parents were divorced when I was ten years old. My mother was blind from the time I was three and had additional health problems that prevented her from a working life or even participating fully as a parent. We lived in my rich uncle's discarded old house in Los Angeles. He'd moved on to Beverly Hills. You could say I was bourgeois, given my neighbors and address, but I suffered from a Cinderella complex, in part because we were poor relations and my mother couldn't see to dress me. I worried a lot about being presentable. I preface my treatise with this personal history because it perhaps explains my desire to appear normal no matter what the circumstances, even within the parameters of my growing disaffection with authority at Berkeley.

My rebel-versus-Valley-Girl tensions began in high school, foreshadowing the lefty I would become: I was sent to the principal's office, for example, for refusing to "drop" during a nuke "drop drill," telling my teacher I thought it was a stupid exercise in futility; and I wrote for a mimeographed poetry magazine that the school eventually banned because of one bard's poem about kissing a breast. And, more to the sartorial point, I dressed like a beatnik, but a neat one, in black skirt, tights, and, my favorite, a little plaid corduroy vest. My black hair and long bangs completed the picture.

Such high-school nonconformity was a prelude for Berkeley, and I went gaga when I got here, hooking up with SLATE, the on-campus issues-oriented political party that called for no ROTC on campus, an end to capital punishment and nuclear testing, and free birth control on demand. SLATE stood for a "slate" of candidates, a lefty rival to the frat rats, and it

had in its membership then a rather large pool of very smart, very lefty grad students—mostly male—whom I, quite frankly, worshipped and sought to emulate politically and intellectually. They had beards, wore blue work shirts and lots of baggy corduroys.

The tonic for my inchoate lefty yearnings and unformed ideology came my first semester, in the spring of 1960, when the House Un-American Activities Committee came to San Francisco. The Commie-hunting committee subpoenaed Doug Wachter, a Cal student, along with Archie Brown, the fiery ILWU labor leader, to name just a couple. The protest that exploded down the steps of city hall, the picket lines, the pitched battle that marked the first northern student activism (to balance the earliest civil rights demonstrations beginning in the South)—it was a heady brew, imbibed by this coed in huge gulps.

Zap! I came over to the “dark side,” happily pitching myself under the aegis of student leftyism. Of course, along with my commitments to civil liberties and civil rights came an attendant discarding of the virgin fetish. A sympathetic Berkeley physician prescribed diaphragms for Cal coeds, and sometime after I’d lost my hymen, I finally got one. Talk about dressing for any circumstance: I was so horrified by the thought of getting pregnant—I’d previously gone unprotected—that I wore my diaphragm everywhere, even to the market. After all, you never knew when you’d be jumped. (A scant two years later the pill came out and revolutionized everything, but that’s another story.)

In between HUAC and the FSM, there were a couple of years of militant civil rights demos calling for an end to Jim Crow in hiring. I missed the big Sheraton Palace sit-in, but I marched at Jack London Square and messed with Lucky Supermarkets. The shop-in at Lucky’s was a devilish tactic of loading up carts, bringing them to the counter, and then not buying, forcing them to restock the mess. When local black youth, CORE members from Oakland, threw fresh produce around the store, I was horrified. But one day a little old Berkeley lady rammed her shopping cart into my Achilles heel and I buckled to the floor. “Why did you do that?” I wailed painfully. “I used to be for CORE,” she hissed, “but not any more.” That got me over the property thing. I started throwing cabbages myself.

So I was radicalized in my five years at Cal culminating in the Free Speech Movement, which took place in my senior year. After all these years of being a student activist, I had noticed one thing about the world beyond the campus: they were always categorizing us as dirty beatniks, filthy students, and the like. I was dismayed by these descriptions in press and television accounts, since I, for one, was fastidious and always conscious of my appearance, as I stated earlier. This daughter of a blind woman cared very much about being tidy, especially since as a kid, if I tore a hem or ripped a

lining, I was the safety-pin queen well before punk style had made that particular mode de rigueur.

And so it was that on the eve of December 2, 1964, contemplating the culminating sit-in in Sproul Hall that night, I was wracked with indecision. How was I going to dress for the revolution in such a way that I would reflect well upon the aesthetics of a movement about which I was very passionate?

I had just the outfit, I was sure: crimson print Swedish ski sweater (tight weave), black shiny tight pants that looked like patent leather but were really cheap-chic rubber through and through, and a pair of matching shiny faux-leather black rubber boots up to the knee. I'd be slick, cutting edge, warm, and encased in protective RUBBER! Was I out of my mind!

I thought I'd be in Siberia. I was wrong. For most of the sit-in upstairs, side-by-side with folk singer Joanie Baez, we smeared peanut butter on white bread to give out to the hungry hordes of fellow demonstrators. We were jammed, body to body, on the second, then the third floor. No, I didn't break into any of the offices—I was a Valley Girl, remember? But I was angry nonetheless at reading contracts with big Central Valley growers and other damning information on UC's administration. (And they were coming down on us for our off-campus agitation. What about their collusion with big growers and industry?)

Did I tell you it was HOT up there?

At some point in those wee hours, the cops charged in wedge formation and grabbed recognizable leaders out of the crowd and carted them off. It was selective arrest. I recall that shortly thereafter, a naive fellow demonstrator stood up and yelled, "Now that they've got the leadership, we might as well cooperate in our arrests."

NO WAY! With my booming voice I urged everyone to stay seated, stay limp, and to resist passively and not at all "cooperate" with the arrest.

I then heard the officiating cop yell and point in my direction: "Get her!" They waded through others, grabbed me, and dragged me off, twisting my arms upright to keep me erect, as it were. I felt my arms were going to be ripped out of their sockets. I was vaguely aware of sweating more in fear than from the very real physical anguish I was feeling—especially when they flung me into an elevator to the floor. I lay in a heap of bodies as we went down, down to the basement of Sproul where they had set up a temporary processing center. I was photographed and fingerprinted on the spot.

And then a police matron ushered me into a teeny, closet-sized room and closed the door. There was barely room for the both of us. She ordered me to strip to my underwear and remove my boots.

It was a struggle in that confined space to peel down my wet rubber pants, to tug at my tight boots, which encased my feet like a sauna. As I

detached each article of clothing from my sweaty body, yet another emanation filled the cubby with a rank odor.

I was dying there in a puddle of embarrassment and humiliation while the matron remained adamant and severe. She ran her hands under my bra for hidden—what? razor blades? soap? Oh, a girl could dream. And she repeated it along the waist and leg bands of my underpants. Oh, the horror! as Joseph Conrad would have said, I'm sure, had he caught a whiff of my stewing body juices.

With difficulty, I tried unsuccessfully to resist my own exploration of what she must be thinking of me at that moment. To her I must be the cesspool of the Free Speech Movement. But so mortified was I that something in my thinking began to shift. It was not my fault that they were arresting me; it was theirs—no, hers. For she was there every bit as voluntarily as I. And if she chose to frisk me in a closet after I had sat-in all night in a dubious outfit better designed for the North Sea, then that was her choice. "Fuck her if she can't take the smell!" was my next thought.

Somehow I lived through the search. At the end, I had managed to transform my humiliation into a triumph of smell-o-rama weaponry. I wore my odors now as a badge, a rite of passage, and did so all through my succeeding stints at the Oakland city jail drunk tank, followed by the San Leandro armory, and finally the Santa Rita jail, where I remained until I was bailed out, I believe, two days later.

I arrived home exhausted and undressed. Even with the windows open in my tiny bedroom it was too much. I tossed the pants and rubber boots out on the roof outside and shut the window. After a shower and long sleep I awoke the next morning resolved to take the offending clothing directly to the trash. But it was gone, covertly whisked to Washington, D.C., I believe to this day, by the secret sniff squad of the FBI.

Of the many lessons I learned for the revolution during the FSM, not the least of them was what to wear to the revolution: Wear cotton. Wear open shoes. They breathe. We might even say, they breathe freely. Which was, after all, what the FSM was all about.