

Generations

The lure of the stilettos

Every time I watch reruns of "Sex and the City" and hear that Carrie Bradshaw is willing to do just about anything for a pair of Manolo Blahniks, I wonder if pointy-toed stiletto wearers realize that most, if not all, shoe designers are men who have never had to walk in their torturous creations.

Sure, stilettos look chic and sexy, so we buy them and hobble around because we've been conditioned to believe that the opposite sex drools over a pair of legs being held up by a pair. However, when you fast-forward that same pair of legs 40-plus years or more later, they sure don't merit any whistles.

The old adage, "If I knew then what I know now" rings true when assessing how much torture my feet have endured over the past 40 years. Recently, I placed a call to my best buddy and former co-worker, Harriet. We have occasional chats about all the places she's traveled since retiring and the antics of our grandkids. This last call, however, quickly turned into something that we vowed we would never talk about: our aches and pains and, in particular, our feet.

Harriet had been suffering with something called Morton's neuroma, a swollen or thickened nerve in the ball of her foot. According to Web MD, the Internet's quick source of the whos, whys and hows of whatever ails anyone, this painful condition is due to toes being squeezed together too often and for too long and most likely the result of wearing high-heeled, tight or narrow shoes. She had endured unbearable pain and compared it to childbirth, which is what most women instinctively do when assessing a high degree of pain. After listening to her tale of woe, it was then my turn to ramble on about my bunions, corns, calluses, burning feet, ingrown toenails, etc.

After 30 minutes of nonstop whining about feet, and visions of my grandmother showing me her bunions during my teenage years, it was time to end the topic tactfully.

"Who would have thought that our feet would play such a cruel joke on us?" I said, and Harriet laughed. "You know who did this to us,

don't you?"

"No, who?" she asked.



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"It was that flock of male shoe designers who decided to bring back the stilettos to punish us, and we followed along like a herd of

sheep."

And it's true! Shoe fashions at the turn of the 20th century generally became more sensible and shoes flatter as a result of a demand for comfortable footwear influenced by the suffrage movement and women's rights. Bless those pioneering women! However, in the 1950s, Christian Dior decided to lead a brigade of designers to bring back the stiletto. The feminist movement of the 1960s rebelled, bunions blazing, and criticized stilettos as a device invented by men that slowed the progress of women, both figuratively and literally. With the passage of time, however, feminists softened their view, and today they affirm that heels give the wearer a sense of height, power and authority. In other words, if you can't beat them, join them, but put a good spin on it.

So, after many trips to shoe warehouses on our lunch hours, and patting ourselves on the back because we were able to buy one pair and get half off the second pair of dreamy stilettos, we were, pardon the pun, actually shooting ourselves in the feet.

Would anyone have banned me from the office if I had sensibly worn flats? Would the men I dated in my 20s, 30s and 40s refused to take me out because I showed up in a pair of penny loafers instead of stilettos? Could I have started a movement to demand that all shoe designers put a pair of stilettos on and wear them for eight hours before they released their shoes to the gullible public?

Dr. Natalie Nevins, osteopathic physician from the American Osteopathic Association, summed it up best in an article I found online: "Don't let your sense of style cripple your ability to stand or step pain-free. Your feet are, quite literally, your base of support. If your feet aren't happy, nothing above them will be."

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