

Tailor

Believe it or not, I once had a tuxedo of my very own. I belonged to the Catskill Glee Club and we appeared in black tie when we sang. Some fifty men with strong voices ranging in age from 24 to 92 years, but most of us were in that middle period of life when our middles were not well under control. Were it not for a device some call a cummerbund, many of us might have been arrested for indecency as we stood singing in public with the tops of our flies open for comfort behind the band of black satin. But also constricting was our dress code that required tuxes to be buttoned during a performance. Some of us could no longer manage that.

We usually sang in humble churches dotted across the mountains in our home area of Southeastern NY State, arraying ourselves across small altars and sanctuaries or in basement church halls, squeezing our group into tiny places as best we could. These were the only meeting places available in many of the crossroad communities where we were invited to sing. Occasionally we performed in a more formal and ample auditorium. One Sunday afternoon we assembled onstage at a local college behind the drawn curtain. Technicians adjusted the lights in front of and behind us, lights so bright they turned our black attire into grey-blue. The intense lights also revealed that some of my fellows in front of me had found a unique solution to the problem of a tightly buttoned jacket. They'd had the center stitching on the back of their tuxes unraveled about 6 inches above the flap. I remembered that two of our members were undertakers. So after the lighting adjustments were made, I approached Stewart while we waited for our cue to go on.

"Can you open my coat up the back another six inches to make room for my pot belly?" I asked.

"Sure," he said, "now or later?"

"Later?" I asked, slightly confused.

"Yeah, at your funeral some day, so you won't look like a stuffed sausage in the casket," he said. "You never carry any cash and if I do it now I'll have to carry that charge on the books for who knows how many years. The interest will compound and a simple \$10 procedure may wind up costing your widow a thousand bucks."

"Stewart," I said, "you want ten dollars to un-stitch my tux?"

"Sure," he said. "What do *you* think is fair?"

"How about a nickel, since you're being juvenile and as a kid I never paid more than a nickel for anything," I said.

"You never met my cousin, Betty Lou," he said, "but turn around and I'll do ya."

I spun around and almost immediately my tux was ripped up the back all the way to my neck.

"Whoops," said Stewart. "I made a mistake. No charge." And he walked away.

I had no problem singing in my new air conditioned coat. In fact, it's quite comfortable and on stage the audience can't see my back. But at the coffee and cookies reception later, I had to stand with my back to the wall, well away from the goodies table.

Stewart approached me, looking sheepish, his eyes averting mine. "I brought you a cookie," he said, sidling up to me.

Miffed, I said, "Fat chance I'll ever be your customer some day. I said just six inches, Stewart. Don't you ever listen?"

"No, actually," he said. "I never listen to my customers. They're done talking. Want me to get you another cookie?"

"No," I said. "Here's a nickel. I want to hear more about Betty Lou."

Copyright David Griffin, 2012

The Windswept Press

Murrells Inlet, South Carolina

www.windsweptpress.com