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CONNECTIONS



Sneaker love

Before the infamous Jordans, there was a pair of life-changing Chucks

BY FAHIMA HAQUE

It's not unusual for women to covet shoes or blister their toes wearing them. But my Chucks weren't beautiful or expensive. They were cool. For six long years, I wore them almost every day. In a high school with more than 4,000 people, my Converse were known as the rattiest pair. I held that title with pride. My Chucks helped me talk to the boy who wanted to write a lyric on my right foot. Otherwise, he would never have had a reason to speak with me.

Those sneakers allowed me to be the person I wanted to be.

Getting my black-and-white pair coincided with my discovery of the Ramones, Dead Kennedys, the Distillers, Rancid, Sublime — basically anything with a power chord and scratchy vocals. In the book "Sex, Drugs and Cocoa Puffs," Chuck Klosterman marveled at how the people who say punk rock saved their lives genuinely believe it. Similarly, Chucks saved me. My Queens neigh-

borhood didn't value that aspect of me. So the shoes inextricably linked me to a world that understood me.

That I could fit in somewhere outside of the block with the kids who exclusively wore Eynce and velour sweatsuits and spent their time stringing up sneakers with the fat laces up on telephone poles.

My mother and I went to the Army-Navy store at the corner of 74th Street and 37th Road in the Jackson Heights neighborhood of Queens. It was the closest and cheapest option. I was 13, so my mother held the purse strings and had to embarrass me with her foreign, haggling ways. I was, and to this day remain, a Converse purist. I don't know why a classic would have to be reinterpreted as a knee length, sequined, pink, tacky monstrosity. High-tops will do — in red, black, white or cream. Low tops are acceptable, but high-tops are better.

High school is a breeding ground for anxiety over being popular, being normal and trying not to feel perpetually left out. The scrawled writing on the sneaker soles helped me cheat

my way to success in AP Government during my senior year when studying felt overwhelming and I, for a moment, stopped caring about school.

The more I think about it, the shoes I coveted would not register for today's sneakerheads.

In fact, the most recent Michael Jordan-Nike collaboration released right before Christmas — the retro Air Jordan XI Concord, which Jordan wore in 1995-96 when the Chicago Bulls won the NBA championship — caused a violent frenzy. Shoppers were beaten, trampled and even stabbed to buy this \$180 shoe.

And as someone who cried when her Converse were thrown out by unknowing (read: stupid) college roommates, I get what sneaker love is like. But it's not \$180, knife-fight worthy. Nothing justifies that. But I do know how the simple act of owning something special shapes you. Those shoes stood for more than just a pyramid-studded belt phase. To me, they meant acceptance into a world I wanted to be part of.

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American by birth, Polish by chance

Daughter reflects on father's 13 tough years in pre-World War II rural Poland

BY LINDA K. ZAUZIG

My father, Zygmunt Moryl — "Zygy" — was as unique as his name. He was born in Fulton, N.Y., on Feb. 13, 1914, an American citizen by birth to Polish and Austrian parents who had immigrated to the United States in the first decade of the 20th century.

When my father was 6, in 1920, his father contracted TB and wanted to go back to Poland, his homeland, to finish his life. He did so, taking my father and leaving his wife and their youngest son in New York. He was dead within six months.

Instead of returning to his mother, my father lived with his uncle on a back-breaking, rural farm close to Krakow. I never knew the name of the place where my father spent his next 13 years; he didn't talk much about it because of bad memories he did not want rekindled. Although his uncle was good to him, his aunt resented having another mouth to feed.

He worked hard on that farm to earn his keep. A tall, skinny boy, and then a young man, he never had enough to eat even though food was not scarce.

Sitting at the communal table, he was self-conscious about reaching out to the platters and bowls of food, knowing that



Zygmunt "Zygy" Moryl, left, was recruited by the Polish army. Below, Moryl, at right, is photographed as a young boy.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LINDA K. ZAUZIG

his aunt's reproachful eyes were on him. So he would eat his first and only serving of food and retreat, leaving the table hungry.

He had a small space allotted to him where he would fall into the exhausted slumber of an overworked farm laborer. It's so sad for me to think that this is what my father considered his "normal" life.

He gave his uncle credit for taking him in. But from the time he was 6, my father lived without the love of a true family, without the love that should have been his inherent right at birth.

In 1933, when he was 19, Germany invaded Poland. My dad was about to be inducted into the Polish army. Finally, 13 years too late, my grandmother sent the money for him to get on a ship and come home. By this time, she had a new husband and son and was operating a bar/restaurant in Syracuse, N.Y.

He arrived at Ellis Island with an identification tag around his neck. After 13 years in Poland, he no longer spoke English. He was Polish through and through in spite of being born on U.S. soil.

Catching his first glimpse of Lady Liberty, he sailed into the harbor with excitement in his heart and a huge smile on his face. His new life had just begun.

Stimulating the mind with music

Seniors band together and pick up instruments

BY ADRIENNE G. CANNON

Come on, smile with me through the nonstop counseling that tells us older folks how to stay young. Work out crossword or math puzzles. Better yet, struggle with those impossible number combinations needed to solve Sudoku puzzles. Play bridge or learn another language. And, oh yes, take a dance class.

We can politely agree as we sigh at the amount of effort prescribed for us so we can maintain our mental faculties at their optimum level and avoid illness — even if it is covered by Medicare. Sitting in a chair is not so bad, I reason, as I would be while grappling with those mind games.

But my favorite thing to do while sitting is to play in concert bands. I play regularly with the Mount Vernon Community Band and Northern Virginia Community College's Alexandria Campus Band. These two bands have members who are as old as 90. I am 73, and many of my band colleagues are retirees who come to us in their 60s and stay, just as I have. I have been playing the clarinet since I retired 15 years ago. Bonding with friends should make

those advice-givers happy.

And what friends they are. Some are 20 years older and need help carrying (or finding) their instrument, setting up their music stand and even getting in and out of their chair, especially after a long rehearsal. I can empathize when arthritis attacks my aging joints.

But how we come alive when we begin to play! Our spirit is renewed as we play through the score following the conductor, counting measures, sensing the rhythm and interpreting the dynamics.

Some of us have played all of our lives. Others have returned to an instrument we played as youth. Yet the whole group (concert band, chamber group, swing band) performs activities that younger folks envy.

Our hearing discrimination is better than many of our peers'. Our vision, poor as it may be, is keen enough to read a musical transcript. Our minds can calculate notes and render them into sound by key combinations or breath production.

No wonder musicians seem to live longer and hurt less. Maybe music, not Medicare or mind games, is the prescription for staying healthy.



JOEL ROBERT CANNON

Adrienne G. Cannon, from right, Franceen Hanson and Austin Holt make music in Fort Collins, Colo. Cannon, 73, performs regularly with Virginia-based bands.

Mission revived: A murder-free D.C.

In 2012, one man resolves to work to end killings

BY DAVID BOWERS

My journey to end murders in the District started a few days before Christmas in 2000. I walked down H Street NE passing out handbills and asking people whether we could have a murder-free D.C. Many were doubtful.

I launched the movement because God led me to it. When I first heard the call in 1997, ending murder in the former "murder capital" seemed too big a task. That year, 301 people were victims of homicide. In my late 20s at the time, I wanted to enjoy life and was afraid of losing the freedom I cherished.

After three years of restless nights, I relented. I was recently reminded of that now-defunct effort when I came across a T-shirt emblazoned with "NO MURDERS DC Mission: To end murders in D.C. by 2005."

The first few years, there were meetings with mayors and police chiefs, go-go bands and mothers of murdered sons. We talked to judges and businesses, passed out fliers at clubs and visited detention centers. Our talks centered on three guiding principles:

1. One murder is too many.
2. The resources to end murder in D.C. exist within the District.
3. Anytime a person is killed, the city should stop and ask how to prevent the next killing.

We wanted to raise consciousness and connect the many public- and private-sector stakeholders that either were, or should have been, working to end murder.

As I looked at the T-shirt with the 2005 deadline, I thought of the words of poet Langston Hughes: "What happens to a dream deferred?"

If we had been successful by the end of

2005, then the 919 people killed in the District from Jan. 1, 2006, through Dec. 28 could still be alive.

The good news is that the number killed annually in the District is far less than the record, in 1991, of 479.

As we begin 2012, there is excitement in some circles about the District's population growth and capital improvements. All over town, there are new bars and places to eat. A car inspection no longer requires a day off from work.

New recreation centers, stadiums and condominiums have many people feeling good about moving into the city. But I can't help but be haunted by this thought: What if all of the government and private-sector leaders worked together to end murder in D.C.?

Political bickering with the former mayor led to a major slowdown of activity by NO MURDERS DC after the D.C. Council passed a law at the end of 2006 to create the Comprehensive Homicide Elimination Strategy Task Force. And I have dragged my feet for more than a year.

But I am being compelled to work on this issue again. Last summer, after a child was killed, a friend texted me, wondering why I was no longer active with NO MURDERS DC. Then there was the story of a grieving relative after a child was killed on Christmas in Prince George's County (the work needs to be regional).

Of course, there's the T-shirt I found, and the sleepless nights have returned.

"Only" 108 homicides sounds good from a relative statistical point of view. But one murder sounds awful to the family and friends of the deceased. Although it's nice to talk about bars and streetcars, it's time for me to get back to working for a MURDER FREE DC (and PG as well). That's my resolution. What's yours?

THE DAILY QUIZ

What ethnic sandwich does Justin Rude highlight in his Lunchbreak column in today's Weekend section?

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