

Excerpt from HUMIDOR

The summer I was 15, before entering a newly co-educational school for the first time, I broke my leg by falling down the basement stairs carrying the laundry. “Put some shoes on before you go down those steps!”

I obeyed my mother, reluctantly tearing myself away from an important episode of *Gidget*, and slipping my bare feet into brand new, oxblood Bass Weejun loafers (tassels for the first time, instead of the classic penny). But the large wicker basket of clothes obscured my vision and I assumed that the landing was about three steps sooner than it was. My surprised foot hovered in space for a split second, probably annoyed that it had gotten all dressed up for such a menial task, before crashing onto the cement floor, twisting the leg under me...

... with my knee now the size of a melon, I am whisked away in an ambulance, which appalled both mid-teen me and my attention eschewing mother. We had to wait several days for the swelling to go down before they could put on the cast, so I spent way too much time as the oldest child on the pediatric ward of Mercer Hospital in Trenton, NJ. As a result, I endured an odd assortment of children in various stages of recovery wandering into my room.

“What’s the matter with her...she cripple?”

or, ”How come you’re so tall?”

I was sullen and spoke to no one, listening to the crisp nurse voices over the intercom, as they paged different doctors - Dr. Yuzusian...Dr. H. Yusuzian...Dr. Wise...Dr. Wise...Dr. Habeebee...Dr. Habeebee, some of whom I recognized as men who played gin rummy with my father at The Trenton Club, where they went by such names as Ace and Fuzzy.

When I finally got home, there was a bed set up for me in the dining room with a view both into the kitchen and out the window. I could be part of the action, they figured. And they wouldn’t have to climb stairs to attend to me.

My parents were in their mid-fifties after all and my mother had bad knees.

I was part of the action, even when I REALLY did not want to be part of the action. Like when you have to go to the bathroom, but there you are in the dining room using a bedpan...in the DINING ROOM!

Naturally, my period arrives right on the dot. Today’s modern girl would have no qualms about asking for help with this awkward inconvenience. But back then, my aging mother did not want to be reminded that her youngest was also afflicted with what my sisters consistently referred to as - “the curse”. So, asking her to add Kotex to her grocery list was stressful. Mind you - this is in the pre-self-adhesive but post torn-up-rags era on the sanitary napkin timeline. And to add

insult to injury, we had to wear a skinny, elastic G-string type of contraption, which harnessed you up to a wad of cotton the size of a hot dog roll between your legs. It could have been almost kinky, in a perverse, sad strip club kind of way. But as luck would have it, all was soon made passé by the head smacking enlightenment of tampons! Sadly, tampons were considered a little too advanced for me. “You shouldn’t know so much of your own anatomy at your age - don’t delve.”

In my family, crossing over from baby to babe was tricky, and somehow tied up in this secret menstrual business, which is funny because as a baby you assume that you will eventually become a babe, but then as a babe, you try not to have a baby, so you can still be a babe and a baby at the same time! It’s why we shave...and wax. You didn’t flaunt the bloody evidence of your ripeness and it was hard to maneuver it all discreetly...in the dining room. So how to dispose of these rolled up buns of stained cotton? I considered dropping them in the maroon wastebasket with the fox hunting scene, along with the Bazooka Joe bubble gum wrappers and unwanted mail.

But then I noticed, sitting next to me on the windowsill, patient and unobtrusive, a large ceramic lidded crock, the color of melting baker’s chocolate - a humidor in fact, stamped with the early name of my grandfather’s pottery – “G. W. Fulper and Bros., Flemington, NJ”...*

*To read this and other essays in full, for publication or live reading inquiries,

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Humidor



Close up of early mark on Humidor



"The Men in my family" – 3 Fulper Brothers front and to the right, circa 1880



Grandfather: "Maybe a lot more Form and a little less Function in the future".