



## Reflections of a River Rat:

This shopper rushed home with his failures

When I walked into Kohl's, I was convinced this would be my renaissance year. This comeback would be grander than Churchill leading the British through World War II, or the Buffalo Bills recovering from a 35-3 second-half deficit to eliminate the Houston Oilers in the NFL playoffs.

This Christmas, I fell into the inescapable trap that has swallowed up many a husband – I went clothes shopping for my wife at Christmas.

A klaxon should have reverberated in my brain. My wedding album should have flashed before my eyes. Or the image of a full stadium of fans chanting “na na na na, hey hey hey, goodbye.”



I already had been declared the Grinch of Shoppers by my wife, Mary, and with just cause. But I had convinced myself to atone for the Christmas debacle of 28 years ago. I was confident the errors of the past couldn't be repeated, that this shopper would rush home with his treasures.

My original sin was borne out of naivete in the early 1990s. I left early for work that afternoon, my mind uplifted by the chance to cram in another task before arriving at 5 p.m. at the newspaper copy desk. We had three children under 8 and free time was sparse. Without any forethought, I bounded up the escalator steps at a Macy's and headed for the clothing department.

There exists one great, fundamental difference between the sexes -- women shop, men buy. It's akin to men asking for directions before GPS became prevalent. “I don't need any directions,” men have said since Ford invented the Model-T.

At the second floor, I strode overconfidently past housewares and electronics, and spied the clothing department. I took a quick mental inventory – married 9

years with three children. There hung the sign, as distinctive as “Welcome Las Vegas.” Except it stated “Women’s Department.”

I was primed to add another checkmark to my to-do list. I was going to snatch the first decent dress and zip out of the mall and into work.

This is where naivete struck again. I thought I knew her size. I should have asked a salesclerk for advice. I should have detected the lame print pattern. I should have realized this was going to be a Mrs. Doubtfire dress.

On Christmas morning, once our threesome needed to come up for air after ripping into their packages, Mary unwrapped the box. She winced, then held it up and frowned (the loudspeaker in my head was booming, “Danger, Will Robinson!”).

After a quick check of the tag, she asked how I found it. Then she explained the Women’s Department was for plus-size women. Our children could have camped under this thing.

Now fast forward 28 years to this Christmas. My confidence was restored, or perhaps my memory had dulled. I confronted a husband’s lament – “What do I get for the woman who has everything?”

My wife had declared a moratorium on earrings. Electronics didn’t excite her either. I had bought too many gift certificates for the hair and nail salon. Antiques only worked if we picked them out together.

That was when my brainflash occurred. Sweaters. Not the heavy ones for a skating rink. Nope, the thin variety that she could wear to work. Her four-window office is always on the cool side. So I inspected her stash of sweaters, noted the size, and raided her purse that night. I found her Kohl’s card, the Kohl’s cash and the savings card in the same compartment. I was going to find a great Christmas gift and save some money. Touchdown!

Remember, men don’t shop, they buy. I walked through women’s clothes, found the rack of sweaters, and picked two colors she didn’t have. I was in and



**When I raided her closet, I found a lot of blue sweaters like this one.**

out of Kohl's in 15 minutes. It was like being the first guy out on the golf course at dawn. Nobody held me up.



**Would the second-hand store offerings have been a better fit?**

Christmas morning was another epic failure. Strike One was wrapping them together. I was saving on boxes; it appeared I wasn't invested in her gift. Strike Two was my choice of colors. I opted for ones she didn't have, choosing one burgundy and one greenish blue. The colors were deemed "bland."

Strike Three arrived the moment Mary tried them on. There was enough fabric to wrap King Tut. I had unwittingly repeated the size mistake of years ago, had redefined the term animal husbandry.

I even consulted my older brother, looking for a kindred spirit. It turns out he was jeans shopping with his wife many years ago when he suggested they enter a Today's Woman store in Florida. His wife immediately schooled him that it was a plus-size store.

"Geez, Fran," I whined. "Wouldn't it be easier if they just labeled the clothes department Slim, Average and Large?"

Responded the older and perhaps wiser one, "For you, they should label one section Fat so you understand it."

"Yeah, they could label one section Slinky and Sleazy for the guys who cheat on their wives and buy them negligees."

"They already did," he said. "They called it Victoria's Secret."

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