

What does a 75 year old man know about....?

What does a 75 year old man know about women's fashion? Nothing. What does a 75 year old retired priest know about woman's fashions? Absolutely nothing. The only thing a retired priest can say when asked about women's fashion, is to say nothing. Well, not saying nothing, but not saying things that might offend, embarrass, be judgmental or cause the recipient to break down in tears. He should refrain from such emotive judgmental words as "ugly," "doesn't suit you," "Is not your type," "Is not your colour." "Makes you look...."

Malia, my 24 year old niece arrived at my house with a request, "I am going to Galway to look for some outfits for a wedding and some parties we will be having at work. Would you like to come along?" I felt like saying: what do I know about wedding attire or what a woman should wear to a party? I am a proverbial black suit man myself when I attend weddings which is rarely anymore. Instead I simply said, "Ok! I will go with you." I knew the trip would become an educational experience that would be couched in less input from me and more non-invasive comments.

Obviously, I had to show some interest in the engagement. I had to ask educational questions that would show my interest in the task at hand. I had to show that I really appreciated the invitation to be part of the fact finding mission even if my input and contribution to the process was minimal. I had learned from past shopping experiences not to suggest checking out certain stores. That was to become the sole responsibility of the decision maker.

The shopping experience began with yours truly trying to keep up with her youthful pace, as she, with a sense of determination, marched into a store. It was no surprise to me that the store was an all-women's apparel store. As I followed my niece into the store, a quick glance around the store and its shopping clientele, reminded me that it was a place that men didnt frequent. In fact, looking around, no man could be seen, even as a cashier. Undaunted, I persevered and followed my niece around the store from clothes rack to clothes rack. To show my interest, I asked, "Are there certain colours or styles you are interested in?" Immune to my question, she continued to search.

Momentarily, she would pause and pull out an outfit that caught her eye. In my diplomatic way, I volunteered, "I like that colour. I think it would look good on you?" I was greeted with, "Here" Hold this for me.!" I reached out my left arm to hold her first choice. The search continued. Soon, my arm was weighted down with another outfit, and another and another. As I followed her around, I still felt inclined to offer some non committal comments, "Of the ones you have chosen so far, I like the... best. I could see you wearing the one and it would look good on you."

Then, it was the turn to look for matching shoes. She picked out a matching pair of shoes that had pretty high heels. As she tried them on, I asked her, "Do you want to get shoes with such high heels? Can you wear them? After all, you are almost six foot tall." The shoes were returned to their previous resting place.

"I am going to try on these outfits," she said, pointing to my outstretched arms. And off she went to the fitting room. Obviously, I was not going to hang around as the lone male figure in the store so I told my niece, I will visit some more generic stores while she was trying on and deciding on outfits.

Sometime later, I returned, glanced around to discover fitting on and deciding was still in progress, so I made a quick exit again. Later, I returned to discover my niece, at the checkout counter and realized she had made her decisions. Exiting the store, she revealed her choices and, of course, I affirmed them by commenting, "You made good choices." We celebrated her purchases with dinner at one of her favourite restaurants and headed for home sometime later.

On the fifty mile journey home, we chatted; not about her purchases and the choices she made, but just about life in general.

I began to realize that my input and involvement in her decisions what to purchase for attending a wedding or work party; was minimal. What was more important was the quality time we spent together as adults. The shopping experience was less a distraction and more of a learning experience.

By the way, my niece did look stunning in her wedding outfit choice while I, looked just as priestly as ever, in my black.