

BOBOLINGS



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Impressions of a ski shop clerk.....

My regular office, where Uncle Sam uses some of my talents for 40 hours a week, is located only two blocks from a ski shop. For years some of my salary has gone to the shop. Dutch, the boss of the shop, once asked why I didn't get some of my money back (and a 20% discount on anything sold by the department store of which the ski shop is a part) by working there part time during the busy season. On talking it over with Peggy, we decided there were several merits to the idea. I could earn some of the seven quarters of social security credit that I needed for full coverage. I could talk skiing with interested customers rather than bore her with the fine details of fiberglass versus metal skis. I might possibly earn as much, with discount, as I planned to spend on equipment this year. And I'd save money by being on the floor selling rather than on the slopes skiing.

I earned three quarters of social security coverage; I talked skis and skiing with persons ranging from the purist snow bunnies to racers; I earned even more than I spent; and I only went skiing twice. I also learned an amazing amount.

One of my first lessons was that skiers don't buy skis for themselves. They buy boots and stretch pants and parkas and sweaters and socks and gloves and have new bindings put on their old skis or on skis they "picked up" (?) somewhere else. They flex skis, talk skis, thump skis, examine edges, complain that the skis they really want aren't as pretty as some other ski they don't want, but they don't buy skis. They will buy skis for their youngster, who will outgrow this pair just as he outgrew last year's pair. For themselves, they'll use last year's (which aren't really last year's anyway), or stick to rentals, or wait till the manufacturer switches to a base and top color combination which coordinates with the pants and parka they just bought.

A second lesson was that, whatever my lack of success in selling skis, I'm a fairly good boot salesman. Fitting boots is somewhat of a nightmare. Feet come in a wild variety of sizes and shapes, and have an astounding number of bumps. American feet are different from European feet (most of our South American customers had European feet), and both are different from Asiatic feet. A man's 9 Narrow boot is just a shade wider than a woman's 9 Medium. The technique of fitting a boot is just a little difficult, since the leather is extremely stiff (for those boots that still use leather rather than Corfam or some other plastic), and there's no way for a salesman to test for fit by pressing on the leather. So, you test for fit by watching facial grimaces and listening. If the person bites his lip, it's probably a reasonably snug fit. If he brings blood, it's probably a mite small. Similarly, the bones of the foot are not supposed to audibly crunch as you fasten the boot up--it would probably prove to be uncomfortable after a full day of skiing. Some skiers are more talkative than others, and this can provide helpful clues. "My God, it's killing me" is not half as forceful as "Get that **** boot off my foot."

Selling parkas and sweaters is quite routine, but stretch pants offer a real challenge. Early this season there was an article in one of the major magazines on the fitting of stretch pants. The title of the article was "That's Not a Second Skin You're Buying." Our fitting philosophy agreed completely. We sold First Skins.

I had dozens of customers, both male and female, that were almost identical to one of the very first customers I had this season. She

was a beginning skier who'd been out a couple of times in jeans or regular stretch pants, and she'd finally decided she liked skiing well enough to invest in some proper clothing. Not "proper" because of status, though there is much of that in skiing, but "proper" because ski clothing is warm, water repellent, and provides fit with freedom of action. She came into the store in street wear--coat, dress, and all that bother, and I'd sent her into the fitting room with a sweater and a pair of size 12 short ski pants. A few minutes later she came out, still in coat and dress, and handed me the pants. "These are too small," she said. "Let me try a 14 regular." At that time I hadn't been in the business long, but even then I knew that a girl 5'4" tall doesn't take a regular. I also knew that we had to start somewhere, so I gave her what she asked for, with instructions to wear them out so we could check the fit. She didn't seem to like that idea, but to my slight surprise did show up a couple of moments later in the pants, and without that coat. She was still wearing the dress.

Now how, I wondered, does one ask an evidently bashful woman to raise her dress? Giving that part of the question up for the moment, and hoping that the pants were adequately secured around her waist, I knelt and gave a tug on the leg of her pants. Under this kind of stress, the pants should give about 2 inches. I had two inches of wool/spandex/nylon wadded up before I even began to feel resistance. "They're too long" I said. "Oh," she said. "They felt about right to me. I didn't have to tug at all." And there the fitting paused for a while as I told her of the evils of baggy knees.

Again to the fitting room I sent her, this time with size 14 short, and with one further instruction. No dress. Sweater.

Two minutes later she reappeared. Sweater. Pants. The sweater was fine, but those pants.... Even the pleats had pleats. I kept quiet for a moment, while she was looking at herself in the mirror, and then casually said "I won't allow you to walk out of this shop in a pair of pants that fit like that." I pulled a slightly better grade of pants in the same color from the rack, and sent her back to the dressing room.

She looked great. She wasn't as sure as I was, however. "I can't wear these in public" she said. "People would look." "And appreciate," I said. By luck, Pam, one of our three airline stewardess part-time sales girls showed up just then. "That's a great fit" she commented.

Those were size 10 short. This spring, during our spring sale, I sold the same girl another pair of pants in another color. And this time she only tried on one pair of pants. Size 10 short. She was slightly harder to convince than most women, but men are much worse. At the end of the season, when I was first considering writing this article, I was reflecting back over some experiences, and it occurred to me that I was a typical "first stretch pants" customer back when I bought my first pair. Charlie Brun ran the only shop in town then, and his wife did the fitting. I can remember trying to talk he into selling me a long, while I actually fit in a regular or short, depending on the manufacturer. I just wasn't used to something that fit. Customers haven't changed much.

During the peak of the season--late December to mid-March around here--there was a tremendous amount of rental business. It's probably the least likeable part of the ski shop trade, for that is little more than hard work, and there's always some wonder whether you've given

that girl or guy the right size skis for his ability and whether the safety bindings really are set right. During January and February in the evenings, rentals were the real business of the shop. I still say no one buys skis--we couldn't possibly have rented as many pairs as we did if anyone owned their own.

In February, ski clothing went on sale, and on March 19th the big sale of rental equipment started. I must admit that we did sell some rental skis. About 200 pairs the first day. I didn't sell any--I was too busy fitting people into rental boots which were also on sale.

One of the mini-skirted girls did bother me somewhat more than most. She had nicer legs than most, and I always have been a leg man. I'd helped her try on one pair of lace boots, and was lacing up a second pair for her, when she said "Lacing up boots for customers must give you a beautiful set of triceps," using just that tone of voice. And that's what bothered me. What are triceps?

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MAILING 122 was highly relaxing. Good size and interesting content. But here it is, already May 7th, and no postmailings. What has FAPA come to with no pages postmailed by the ATM's at the last second to save their memberships?

There is some indication that FAPA is undergoing a change. The waiting list is shrinking, and new members are coming in fairly rapidly. Dick Lupoff, do you know what you're doing to FAPA?

TRILL. I'm sure you know by now that Jerry Pournelle is/was a fan; his name appeared elsewhere in the 122nd mailing.

HORRRIB. Thanks both for the visit and the copy of ONE MILLION CENTURIES Dick. The book sustained my interest, and had some memorable scenes (the flying pogo sticks created quite an image in my mind). It was an interesting mixture in which I liked most of the writing (some of it was truthfully unpolished) and most of the plotting, and yet found items such as the purpose in having a colored hero obscure. Oh, his color didn't hurt the story, but it was unnecessary to the story. I'll read your next book, even if I have to buy it. # Leave us not condemn the Hilton chain as con hotels. They did beautifully by DC. They lived up to every promise, and achieved some things they hadn't promised. There was a slightly difficult night manager, but he didn't succeed in causing much fuss, and the day people were top notch. The banquet manager held open banquet ticket cutoff until about 20 minutes prior to the banquet, the only proviso being hourly phone calls to let him know the standing at the time. I'd forgotten to arrange for chairs to let non-eaters sit during the after-banquet dinner festivities, so I departed from the head table during dinner to talk to the banquet manager. By the time I got back to the head table the extra chairs were being brought in. There were a hundred things; the Statler Hilton met us every time. We had the written contract we never once had to even refer to it. I'd willingly work with the same people and chain again. It's the people that count--written contracts are merely a defense against people who otherwise won't produce what they promised.

GRANDFATHER STORIES. I never attended the little red one-room school house. Ours had five rooms or so, with grades 1, 2, and 3 in one room, 4, 5, and 6 in another, and then I believe two grades to a room through the 12th grade. The higher classes were always the most

interesting, probably because of the lure of the unknown in preference to the chore of studying the half-grasped lesson that we were supposed to be studying while the teacher was busy with the higher grade(s). It didn't help my reading however. It was probably in the third grade that I found that I was the slowest reader. We had a quiz which involved reading a very interesting story about the arctic (and I did find the story very interesting), answering a question or two, and then going out to recess. I hadn't even finished the story, much less the questions, when the other kids came back from recess. I finally learned to read when the family came east in 1935, I lost my wide open Nebraska plains to ramble in, and I discovered in lieu thereof Big Little books such as Mickey Mouse and Pegleg Pete, the Arizona Kid, Buck Rogers (a Big Big rather than a Big Little book), and a few hundred others. Shortly thereafter it was the Bar-U boys, probably the first book I ever borrowed from a library. It was a trilogy, but my big-little book learning saved the day: I finished the book in one day, winding up under the covers with a flashlight at 2:30, just as in the comics. In both the fifth and sixth grades I was unhappy because one girl (the same one) could still read faster than I. How I wish I had that same reading speed now!

SERENADE. You mentioned the TV recording gizmo. The show I most regret missing on TV, and which I would have recorded at the time, was the showdown between McCarthy (Joe) and the Army. I can't recall the name of the counsel for the Army but he was, to my mind, the smoothest, most cunningly cuttingly clever man I'd ever seen. How long ago were those hearings--thirteen or so? I've still never seen anyone to compare. And shame, shame, I can't remember his name.

DYNATRON. JACK SPEER too, if Juffus will pardon a letter-type intrusion into what pretends to be a fanzine review. We're visiting Albuquerque after the con. See you then if you're around. And, Juffus, thanks for the comments some mailings back on Albuquerque. # Back to strictly comments on DYNATRON. The most interesting local interchange (highway) is one locally known as the mixing bowl. It's an X crossing, with the junction of the X being maybe 300 yards long. I don't drive it often, but find that the best time to hit it is during rush hour. At that time most of the out-of-towners have enough sense to avoid Washington, leaving the interchange to drivers who travel it twice a day and who know how the center merges and switches lanes, and roads. You can move at 30 MPH at rush hour, but when the strangers and more cautious drivers hit the interchange it slows to a dangerous 15 MPH or less. # You live on a freeway, in the Northwest? Which side of the Rio Grande?

THE RAMBLING FAP. I've wanted right along to comment on FAPA-- and my own--stupidity at the NYCON. The ponderous wheels of the mailing cycles obviously produce better results than a meeting of an hour or two--by which I don't mean to apologize, but to appreciate the slow evolution that we have. Personally I've always felt that the FAPA meetings were a chance to talk to members, and to raise some points for discussion, not for decision. They obviously can't be a final court, but they can be a grand jury. # The Minolta SR-T 101 looks good. I've been toying with the idea of that camera or the Nikkormat, when and if. I've talked to an expert on lenses, and am told that the Nikor zoom has no loss of definition. Rokor (however it's spelled), which Minolta produces, has been in his experience just a shade lower. He personally uses an Alpa as first preference, Nikor as second choice. My expert is a professional, and he states the differences between the three are very minor. I'll admit that the concept of a zoom lens is interesting, but what do you really need one

for? If memory serves you have a 58mm lens on your camera. You can use a 28 or 35mm lens for indoor work and certain special shots, your 58 for most purposes, and a 135 for closeups or most outdoor work. You hit 200mm and you need a tripod, and are somewhat limited in subject matter. How often do you want to take a close-up of a moose half a mile away? I did, once. I can't think of any other time when a 135 would not have satisfied me. You know your needs best, of course, but a good zoom is quite a bit more costly than a good 135mm lens. Borrow a friend's one day, or talk a camera shop into a one- or two-day trial of a 135, and see if you really need more than that. You can always crop and enlarge a picture from a good 135, but again that depends on the amount of sharpness that you need. # Many more check marks about cats, FFM/FN, and the Durango real estate, on all of which I agree with you, but don't feel like going into details about now. As usual, we share many likes.

A PROPOS DE RIEN. I like the idea of distributing the egoboo poll with the November mailing. # Johnson doesn't take much military advice, and McNamara wasn't the kind of man to let the military dominate. Johnson's actions, be they good or bad, have been primarily the result of civilian, not military, advice.

VANDY. Having the unemployed report for city/county/state work is the system used in Russia. And not a bad system either. It isn't too far from the WPA--which had a number of good features and results. # If you were a grave digger between your freshman and sophomore high school years, how come you were faced with the problem of digging in frozen ground? In Indiana in June-August? # Peace Corps was and is accomplishing some good. A perennial problem is that to accomplish what needs doing they must at times run counter to the government of the locality. Local policy is often to keep the illiterate illiterate, to keep the poor from gaining control of money, to prevent formation of "communistic" cooperatives through which the poor can threaten the hold of the wealthy. The whole concept of the Peace Corps runs in the opposite direction. It makes for a difficult political situation, and for slow progress--but changing a way of life is not a speedy thing. Mom is a tutor for slow readers in the DC public school system. She may see thirty students a year, and help 5, or 10. If she were younger (she's past 70) she could see and help more, but even a thousand younger ones couldn't help all the students in DC that need help. It's her own private peace corps (she gets no pay), and none of us will never see the results. The 5 or 10 youngsters will, however. Similarly with the Peace Corps, there will be some good results due to a few aggressive members of the Corps, but we'll never live to see them on a national basis.

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Just a word on the voting by paid up members of the next con proposal. Memberships in the next con would be sold by the bidding cities for the next year's con and not by the current-year convention city. The current-year city has enough problems. All monies and memberships go to the winning city.

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BOBOLINGS, May 1968, is the product of Bob Pavlat, 9710 47th Place, College Park, Maryland, 20740. Produced irregularly for FAPA, this issue intended for the 123rd mailing thereof, the first May mailing I've been present in since 1959. Dick Lupoff, do you know what you're doing to FAPA?