

Long johns without silver

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ABSTRACT

Instead of returning my check (the card went on) I now had credit for \$31.77. Since it was still August I felt no immediate concern, and halfway through September I ordered again, referred to my credit, and again dwelt in my mind on the great comfort to accrue when snow fell.

FULL TEXT

Perhaps you, too, have noticed that the past few coolish months have proliferated the advertising for longies. These have been neither noticeable nor prominent for some time, as sartorial elegance ran to skimpies and thinsies and steam heat, so the well dressed citizen avoided exposure to King Winter otherwise. But the crunch on energy and the emphasis on substitute warmth have brought the long-john from obscurity, and we've been seeing all manner of folks parading around in the newspapers and magazines in adaptations of the fundamental haberdashery of times gone by. But there was, not too long ago, a period when long-handled underwear was in disrepute, and in such short supply that we old fogies were hard put to find any. Looking ahead, one summer, I made the rounds of the local stores and no winter underwear was to be had. Eddie Baker, who had kept me warm, decent, and sometimes stylish for years shook his head and said he hadn't been able to find any anywhere. Only place, he hated to say, might be a mail order house. So I applied to Monkey-Ward

There they were in the catalog - just as Eddie had suggested. I always preferred the Arctic-Antarctic model, with a puckering string at the Equator, and Monkey-Ward offered such at \$9.59 the set, plus mailing. I ordered three sets in my size, adding three dollars for mailing, and sat back in the dwindling heat of August with the assurance of a comfortable winter in there where I was going to be. Unless you've gone out after breakfast into a Maine winter and coped until suppertime, you won't appreciate how snug and cozy I projected myself. Those of us who favored the two-piece woolly had a ditty

Blest be the tie that bind

And thwarts the winter winds

Monkey-Ward sent me a card. It said the merchandise was temporarily out of stock and I should reorder in 30 days. Instead of returning my check (the card went on) I now had credit for \$31.77. Since it was still August I felt no immediate concern, and halfway through September I ordered again, referred to my credit, and again dwelt in my mind on the great comfort to accrue when snow fell. All this was away back before the computer machine rendered the absurdity commonplace, and my first touch of doubt arose when Monkey-Ward told me to reorder again in another 30 days, and that I now had credit for \$63.54. After that I reordered regularly, Monkey-Ward gave me another credit bounce of \$31.77 every 30 days, and by Easter I had accumulated hypothetical prosperity but no longies. I shivered the winter away in past-tense underwear from which the washing machine had long since drawn all thermal qualities, and just kept reordering every 30 days. There was one bright moment just before Christmas

Charlie Smith, our mailman, honked at the roadside, a signal that he had a parcel too large for the RFD box, and I tied on my snowshoes to go out and get it. It was from Monkey-Ward, and back in the warm kitchen I ripped the bundle open to find 15 pounds of hard candies - the kind to put in little mosquito-net bags and hang on the Christmas tree at the school party. The bundle was misdirected and should have gone to a Sunday School in Waynoka, Oklahoma. I sent a card, calling attention to this error, and asked what I should do with this unwanted candy. Promptly, I received additional credit for two stepladders, a case of binder twine, an eight-inch posthole auger, a bicycle pump, the complete works of Joseph Conrad, and ten pie plates. Nothing was said about the candy, so I donated it to an orphanage and it no longer concerns us

I did, indeed, receive my underwear at last. In May, in apple-bloom. I wrote, thanking Monkey-Ward slyly for the fast service, and got a reply that abject sorrow prevailed at the unavoidable delay, and my merchandise was finally on its way. So two days later I got three more sets of underwear

There is no particular conclusion to this. My accumulated credit was enough to get a portable sawmill, which I always wanted, but my wife is an honest sort and wouldn't let me send for one. So probably I still have the \$863.68 (which includes mailing), but I've not had courage to get further involved. Besides, longies are now back on the market and stylishly available

Credit: John Gould

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