



If the Jacket Fits ...

Over the past month or so, the weather here in Tokyo has been just perfect; of course very cold, that can't be helped in January, but also very clear, with bright blue skies most days. I like this a lot. Cold and damp is miserable, cold and sunny is wonderful!

At least, it's wonderful outdoors. Like most Japanese houses, my home is so poorly insulated that there is just no point in running any kind of heater. All the energy would be instantly wasted as the heat escaped straight out through the walls. So the house is bitterly cold, and almost every day I have the experience of heading out the door to go on an errand, and exclaiming, "Wow, it's so warm out here!"

But grumbling about my house is not what I intended to do when I sat down to prepare this story today. I read in my newspaper this morning that the amount of clothing purchased per person has been calculated at just over 32 kilograms per year, and that over 75% of this will soon end up in a landfill. (This was a story from Britain; I have no idea what the corresponding figures for Japan would be.) The reporters made the point that because clothing prices had fallen so much in recent years, many people now purchased clothes that would be worn only a few times before being discarded.

After reading this, I began to think about my own situation. Although I go through a pair of jeans about every year - living on the floor as I mostly do is kind of tough on the knees - most of the other clothing in my closet seems to have been there for quite a long time. How long? Well, I thought of a way to find out. I pulled the old family photo albums out of their storage box, and had a flip through, curious if I would run across anything familiar.

I hit paydirt right away. In an album of pictures taken on vacation in Canada in 1996, I found the same windbreaker that I used this morning when I made a quick bicycle trip to the post office. So it's 12 years old! And it's in wonderful condition - nobody would suggest it should be discarded. That made me wonder about my heavier jacket, the thick one I wear on very cold days. Yes, there it is - in a photo from 1993, and I don't think it was new even then!

But these are both topped by another one I discovered. And this was hilarious; here I was, sitting in my living room on the hot carpet, the only (slightly) warm place in the entire house. I was wearing a padded down vest over my sweater, and blowing on my fingers to keep them warm as I flipped the pages of the albums. And there, in a shot taken while camping in 1979, is David wearing this same vest ... that's 39 years ago!

I hasten to add that yes, it has indeed been washed a few times in the intervening years! But what a wonderful lesson. This vest is made from very fine down, and was perhaps a bit expensive when I bought it, but this was obviously money well spent. It is still in very good condition, and now that I think about it, I suppose that it will probably last my lifetime.

But then again, perhaps not. It is getting very heavy use in recent years, since I moved into my present house. Oops! I promised not to talk about *that* topic, didn't I!

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