

# CROSSINGS

## Rags to Riches

**M**Y FAVORITE outdoor clothes are not really rags, but they're a long way from Abercrombie & Fitch. My sons openly scorn my attire and say I'm eccentric. My wife simply shakes her head and smiles.

"Clothes make the man" may be a mantra of corporate ladder climbers, but in my world, function trumps form every time. So what if my favorite, albeit matted and leaky, goose down vest was a gift from more than 30 years ago, and my hip boots are covered with patches resembling myriad shapes in a ninth grade geometry book?



I'm gainfully employed so it's not about money. Although, when my children blaspheme my clothing, I invoke the long-standing defense: "I'm paying for your college educations." But, like my clothes, this excuse is wearing thin ever since they learned about grants, scholarships and student loans.

Growing up, to help fuel the family furnace we collected lump coal in gunnysacks where it slid off railcars on tight curves. But, unlike some families, we weren't so poor that Mother fashioned clothes from similar burlap bags. Wearing hand-me-downs, including hunting clothes, was a given, something we never questioned. Undoubtedly, my frugality with clothing is partly rooted in these humble beginnings. More likely, though, it's about comfort.

Outdoor clothing that is soft, flexible and non-constricting is the key to comfort. There's nothing worse than new hunting boots that cause blisters. It's the little things that can make or break a day afield.

Long ago, the military realized that an effective infantry must have good footwear. Over the years, shoe companies realized this, too, and developed lighter and more flexible boots for outdoorsmen. Nowadays, most of us don't have the time nor desire to break in boots, pants or jackets; they've got to be pretty much instantly comfortable. With Gore-Tex and other lightweight synthetic materials, clothing designers have melded form with function. Consequently, my long-standing belief that clothes must be old to be comfortable no longer applies. Of course, there's a price to be paid for instantaneous comfort.

Much the same can be said about design. Take camouflage for example. I wore Army surplus camo pants and jackets before these patterns became the outdoor standard. Now there are more camo patterns than days in a month to wear them. Only half jokingly, I tell my kids that I was a trendsetter before camouflage became the norm for hunters. By marketing my visionary fashions, perhaps I could have made my fortune in the outdoor clothing industry. But, knowing my frugal nature, I'd probably still be wearing the same old duds, only in a totally different profession — full-time sportsman.



**Gregg Rinkus**