Wren ★ Feathers
Some thoughts about choices, simplifying your life and maybe being more creative

Hard to believe, but we've been back at school for several weeks already! With the return started something I had forgotten about, or maybe conveniently blocked out of my mind – the "What should I wear today?" saga.

Too many choices and decisions are not necessarily a good thing, as you can read more about in an excellent book by Barry Schwartz about The Paradox of Choice: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Paradox_of_Choice . This was illustrated for me in a graphic way recently. My husband and I decided to head to Denver to check out a new museum exhibit, and then have lunch and hang out downtown. Part of that "hanging out" was going to involve a trip to a small, independent fabric/yarn store called Fancy Tiger. I LOVE that place! Liberty prints! Unique patterns! Pendleton! Ikat! Spinning fiber! Yes, go there next time you're in Denver. Anyway, the weather was going to be hot, but the museum would probably be freezing. Hubby threw on shorts and a polo shirt and was ready to go. I agonized in front of the closet. Shorts? Skirt? Dress? Which dress? Let's try them all on. No, I hate them all. Can a T-shirt go with this skirt? Yes, that looks good, let's pick out jewelry. No wait, what if I'm cold, how about lightweight pants instead? OK, these pants will work but this T is too tight to leave out, should I tuck it in? No, that looks silly, let's change the shirt. Oops, now I need to choose different jewelry to match this outfit. Now what to do about shoes… After the museum we went to lunch at one of our favorite places, and in addition to their normal menu they had added FOUR new specials for the month! I agonized for a long time and finally gave up, asking hubby to just get me whatever and ended up wishing I had stuck with something I already knew I liked.

At that point, I was about done making good decisions for the day, but it was time for Fancy Tiger. I wandered around wanting all the cute patterns but lamenting that many were not very versatile so only I'd use them maybe once, when I came across a line of patterns intended for men. And then, surprisingly, I got mad. A man could (in theory) build a basic wardrobe with a very small range like a pants pattern or two, a dress shirt, a T-shirt. In contrast, there were dozens and dozens of options of patterns for women. Dresses, skirts, pants, blouses, bags, etc. in all ranges of styles from casual to formal. This seems great – we have the freedom to choose from lots of different options! But are all those choices really needed? And how many times have you made yourself something, investing many hours into it, and then decided the fit wasn't quite right, or the fabric wasn't really the best match for the style, and let it languish in your closet? It stays in your closet because at least it's another option that might be good for some occasion at some point in the future, or maybe you wear it from time to time and just don't feel your best that day because you don't love the garment but feel guilty not wearing it after wasting all the time making it? I came home from FT without buying anything, because I was too overwhelmed at all the possibilities and suffering serious decision fatigue just from getting dressed and eating lunch!

When we got home that day, I was thinking about that line of men's patterns and how much easier my life could be without so many variables in my wardrobe. Coincidentally, I had started reading Mari Kondo's book on tidying : https://konmari.com/ at about this time. Her motto is, if it doesn't bring you joy, get rid of it.

She says to start with clothes, and when I went to my closet, there were a few jeans and pants that always make me feel good when I wear them. Everything else was there because you have to have variety in your wardrobe, right? You can't just wear the same favorite pants and shirt every day, because people will judge you for wearing the same thing all the time, right? Apparently not. There are a number of people in technical or even creative professions that have developed a work "uniform" and wear the same thing every day so their mornings are not spent frantically trying on and discarding outfits only to have to come home at the end of a work day to a pile of clean-but-now-wrinkled clothes all over the floor. Here are a few examples/thoughts on "uniforms":

- https://www.forbes.com/sites/joshuabecker/2017/06/14/five-reasons-to-wear-the-same-thing-every-day/#5863fd006c7d
- https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/a10441/why-i-wear-the-same-thing-to-work-everday/
- https://www.inc.com/craig-bloem/this-1-unusual-habit-helped-make-mark-zuckerberg-steve-jobs-dr-dre-successful.html

This reduction of stress in the morning and feeling confident in your appearance can lead people to use their energy and decision-making powers for something better, say, coming up with creative new work-related ideas! It supposedly also eliminates wasteful purchases, like that trendy blouse you wore twice before it went out of style. So after the FT incident and thinking about what I love to wear and a reduction in choices I decided to modify the work uniform idea and simplify my life.

I started an enormous pile of clothes to donate, and it was like a magnet for things I haven't worn in years. **Mari says to let things that don't spark joy go by thanking them for serving a purpose or teaching you something, and that was SO helpful for me!** Things I couldn't part with because I had made them got thanked for teaching me that pattern didn't work for me and donated knowing they'd fit someone else better. It felt SO GOOD!

 I know what you're thinking right about now, because I thought it too...then what will I wear? I won't have enough clothes! Well, Mari has you organize your clothing so it's all visible at once rather than in piles in drawers. After you discard, you hang up or fold things into your drawers standing up. Wow. If you had asked, I'd have told you I need more socks. It's hard to believe that after discarding dozens of pairs of socks and organizing the ones I have, I realized I have more than enough! The issue was that when I used to rummage in my sock drawer, I had to pass over many that were worn out or too tight or an unusual color/pattern that didn't match any of my clothes. It made it feel like the few that "worked" were special and limited, and my favorites were often languishing in a laundry pile. When I eliminated the surplus and arranged the rest so they were all visible at once, I could immediately see and count how many pairs there were; it was obvious there were enough to last through several weeks of laundry. Plus, organizing them means no more rummaging in the morning – open the drawer, grab the color that matches and go! No surprise holes or worn-out elastic!

Next, what would be the "uniform"? Working with kids, I didn't want to have to try to explain why I wore EXACTLY the same thing every day, but I did want to **severely** limit the choices available in the morning. I decided to start this with the pants that I love and went back to the store they came from and bought a few of the exact same ones in tan and green to pair with a standard button-front shirt. Yep, just like the outfits guys wear to the office. Given my wide shoulders and long arms, it's hard to find ready-made blouses that fit, so on the suggestion of the best husband ever (who not only listens, but apparently remembers what I say!) I turned to "My Favorite Shirt Book" by Machiko Kayaki. https://www.etsy.com/search?q=%E2%80%9CMy%20Favorite%20Shirt%20Book%E2%80%9D%20Machiko%20Kayaki.

It's not called that for nothing! Over the years I've made a number of great shirts from the book, but for some reason never tried the first one labeled "Standard Shirt". Well guess what? It's my favorite shirt pattern, like, ever, in decades of sewing. All the pieces fit together beautifully and the shirt fits so well it's like I drafted it for my own measurements. I decided my "uniform" shirt would be that one in a limited color palette and 10 shirts should be sufficient to have a week worth of clean shirts while the other week is in the laundry.

After exhausting my stash to meet the goal, I still needed a few more yards of fabric. Having this one pattern that looks great and fits well AND a limited color palette in mind finally gave me the freedom to go back to Fancy Tiger this weekend and splurge on some high-quality fabrics. Just a few more shirts to sew!

I hope to update this after living with less for a while and let you know how it goes…