



Of Cabbages and Kings



Bring Back the BVDs!

Another piece of Americana has all but vanished from the scene, but perhaps it's time we bring back this venerable reminder of an earlier day.

I refer, of course, to the famous BVDs with the button trapdoor at the rear. I'm not sure if they're still made today, but I seriously doubt it because most of today's underwear come in two pieces, top and bottom.

When I was a boy, the BVDs came in two styles: the long, itchy heavyweights (which reached from neck to ankle for the cold winters), and a much lighter version, shortened to the knees for summer.

The heavy winter style was loved by mothers and detested by both boys and girls. To city kids, who had only a short distance to their schools, the "longies" were a joke and the subject of much razzing, not to mention numerous fisticuffs.

To we outsiders who had a long way to walk from the edges of town, the "woolies" were greatly appreciated in 10-degree weather ... *until* we got in the classroom, where the temperature climbed and the eternal itching set in!

It was enough to drive men mad, let alone young boys just reaching puberty. It was impossible to concentrate on studies while scratching with both hands at the same time.

While there was some external evidence of the long underwear, especially among the girls, where the leg-ends were more or less visible under their stockings, it was



less noticeable with the boys.

It was in gym class where everyone was forced to "come out of the closet," so to speak. That's when the razzing began, and when hostilities also commenced. For the first few minutes, the locker rooms were a bedlam of flying

fists, bloody noses and distraught gym teachers.

These encounters invariably resulted later in a begging and pleading session with an unyielding mother. Her stock answer was, "You'll catch your death of cold without them!" And the hated foundation garment stayed throughout the winter.

One old saw proclaims, "One man's meat is another man's poison," and it was true in the case of the BVDs.

When I went to work in a steel mill, not long after leaving high school, I discovered that all the men who worked with the big, electric steel furnaces wore the heavy longies every day and wouldn't be without them. According to the men, they not only kept out the cold, but also the heat as well! Toiling around the furnaces where the temperature was a constant 110-120 degrees would be impossible,

the workers said, without protection of their heavy underwear.

Since they were all big men with bulging biceps developed from days of shoveling scrap metal and ores, I never disputed their assertions. But I had my own opinion of BVDs. In addition to the customary itching, the rear trapdoor posed unique problems. Under normal conditions, it was not a hazard, but when colds and flu became involved – along with a loosening of the digestive system – haste and decorum were on a collision course.

Unfastening buttons in the back while under heavy stress was no simple matter, and some practice and basic training are essential. Simply unfastening the flap or trapdoor is not enough – it must be shunted out of the way as well. Doing all of this in a matter of seconds in a "pressing" emergency was even successful sometimes.

If there was a virtue to the BVDs, it was the ability to take the starch out of a snob. If God meant all men to be created equal, he should have put them all on Earth in BVDs. No one is more equal than a bunch of men standing around in long-johns, especially with a trapdoor in the back!

If the police in a city like Los Angeles really want to deflate some of the youth gangs terrorizing the public, there is an easy way. Dress 'em all in the old BVDs with trapdoors, and parade around in a public venue!