

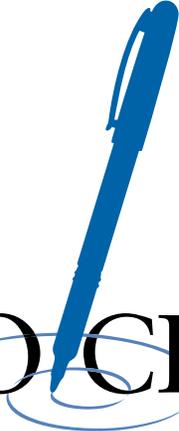


About the Author

Joyce Anderson Jackson, a clergy widow, lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she enjoys teaching English cooking classes in her home, gardening, genealogy, writing her memoirs, and keeping up with four children, 11 grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

About Vintage Voice

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VINTAGE VOICE

Being Different — Or, How to Cope With “Thigh Gap”

By Joyce Anderson Jackson

Well, well. Can you believe it? I've finally become stylish!

It's not anything I did. It's an attribute I've always had. It's just that now, it has become “in.” It's fashionable. And I've got it.

What, you might ask, is “it”? Believe it or not, it's something called “thigh gap.” It is now, officially, no longer desirable to have the inside of your thighs touch each other. There has to be a gap between them. Look at any pictures of models parading along the runway and you'll see it — the gap between their inner thighs.

I spent countless hours as a teenager bemoaning the fact that my inner thighs didn't touch each other. All the other girls I knew had inner thighs that met neatly when they stood with their feet together. Everybody except me. I tried exercises. It didn't work. I just felt inadequate and “less than.”

And now — now that I'm 84 years old — having a gap between your inner thighs is the way to look!

So, how is it going to affect me? Shall I wear shorts more often? In cold weather, that's going to be a little difficult. I guess I'll just have the satisfaction of knowing that, beneath my slacks, whether others see it or not, I'm stylish. I've got thigh gap.

And so it goes. The thing we agonize about at one stage in our lives is something that either doesn't matter, or becomes desirable, at another point.

It's like my other experiences of being different. “Being different” was part of my life as I grew up in the 1930s and 1940s. I had an English accent in, of all places, Tulsa, Oklahoma! And my parents, newly arrived in America from the North of England shortly before I was born, had English accents that were sometimes simply not understood by Tulsa ears.

How well I still recall an episode in grade school. A circle of children stood around me on the playground and they said, “Now talk for us.”

I didn't know what they were talking about. I had no idea that I had an English accent. I talked like everyone else I knew (essentially my parents and my uncle, who lived with us). I recall feeling so shy and embarrassed when the other children said that, and I was utterly baffled.

That difference was with me, even in my college days. My friends and I all ate lunch in the Student Union before our 1:00 classes. I remember so vividly hearing someone say, "Oh, let's go over to that table. Joyce is starting to eat." And they would gather around and watch how I held my knife and fork as I ate. They were just amazed to see how deftly I managed with "the fork in the wrong hand!"

It was at that time that I consciously adopted an attitude that has stood me in good stead all these years. I realized I was different. I always had been. And I perceived that there was "different good" and "different bad." I determined then that my different-ness would always be "different good."

When, in 1953, I married a newly ordained deacon, soon to be ordained priest, I imagined my life was going to be very different. Don, just out of The General Theological Seminary, issued an edict: "No wife of mine is going to work." So it was understood that I would not get a job. Don's salary was the magnificent sum of \$220 per month. And that was because he was married; the two newly ordained single clergy who were placed elsewhere in the diocese got \$200. Wow! I was worth \$20 a month! That was certainly "different good."

But circumstances changed things, as we all know they can. My parents had some sudden, unexpected financial problems. Within a couple of months of our getting married and settling in to the rectory in Ottawa, Kansas, I was offered a job as a social worker for the State of Kansas. Don's edict went out the window. I took the job and made \$150 a month, which we sent to my parents.

My life in the church wasn't really much different than it had been all of my life. I grew up in an Episcopal Church-going family. All four of us sang in the choir. We were there every time the doors were open. We went to the three-hour service on Good Friday, and we attended (and sang in) the 6:00, 9:00, and the 11:00 services on Easter Sunday mornings.

Sometimes, at the various clergy spouse gatherings over the years, I was surprised to hear some of the other wives grouse about having to do this, that, or the other thing in their congregations. To me, those things were just normal. I thought to myself, their take on being a clergy wife was certainly different from mine. Maybe my church life gave me an edge (without my knowing it) on being a clergy wife.

Don died just two months before our fiftieth wedding anniversary, and three months before his fiftieth anniversary of being ordained priest. My life was suddenly changed. Even now, 11 years later, I find myself still, from time to time, needing help remembering some detail or other. So I say to myself, "Oh, I'll just ask Don. He'll remember what it was." And then I remember. I can't do that. Life is different now.

So here I am today, and I continue to mush on, with some things being very much the same, and some very different. The clergy spouse network is still very active in the Diocese of Oklahoma (where Don spent almost all his years as a priest), and I am nurtured with contact with fellow clergy and spouses. I stay very active with many things and I'm still busy getting settled in our house in Tulsa. It was a mere 43 years ago that we moved in here, but I figure if I'm here another 43 years maybe I can get all the pictures hung. That would be different — to have all my tasks done!

I laugh to myself at the "thigh gap" thing. I'm no longer "different bad" when it comes to how my inner thighs look. Hooray! How many of us have some secret "different good" thing that we can feel good about, even though other people don't have a clue? Something that bothered us many years ago has become different — and it is now "different good."



19 East 34th Street
New York, NY 10016
(800) 223-6602
www.cpg.org