

never knew what to say or how to act around them. And even when God threw me a bone, my instincts for handling the situation weren't exactly up to par, as the following story illustrates.

Cotillion Crash and Burn

We've all had experiences that feel like they should have happened on a sitcom. Years down the road, we can see the humor in them...but as they were happening, we'd have given our life savings to just disappear. For me, one such moment occurred—not surprisingly—in the dating arena.

When I was in tenth grade, an absolutely gorgeous girl, Jill Kaplan, asked me to escort her to her junior-year cotillion in Framingham. Jill and I had met through our local Jewish youth groups. I was thrilled, and frankly very surprised, that Jill thought enough of me to ask me to be her date for her cotillion.

Jill, who by this point had her driver's license, came to pick me up. At first she seemed pleased to see me; however, as she looked me up and down I could tell from her changing expression that something was wrong. I believe she liked the "up" part: my freshly laundered shirt, tie, and suit. It was the "down" part that prompted Jill's gasp of unpleasant surprise: I was wearing my work boots!

To this day, I still do not understand why my parents didn't tell me to wear a pair of my father's dress shoes instead of my brown work boots for this big event. After Jill almost passed out from well-bred horror, I did hurriedly change into more suitable (although I'm sure still not ideal) footwear—but the damage had already been done. Off we went to the cotillion, Jill mortified and me very ill at ease.

I was now intent on making the evening up to Jill after my initial faux pas. So when we arrived at our dinner table, which included all of Jill's friends, I pulled back her chair, as any fine date would do so that she could more easily and elegantly take her place at the table. Unfortunately, I didn't push the chair back fast enough to meet Jill's derriere. To my absolute horror,

she landed inelegantly on the floor. Luckily, Jill wasn't hurt—although that wasn't much comfort to either of us at the moment. Strike two!

I never did get another chance to impress this beautiful girl, since my first two blunders totally destroyed any opportunity of our developing a relationship.

Like I said, it's funny *now*. I hope Jill looks back on it this way too!

Was It Really Work Boots?

The memory of me oh-so-embarrassingly dressing in work boots for a formal dance has on some level, I know, made me feel worse about myself through the years. And here's the kicker: I now believe, after writing this book, that my footwear faux pas may not have even happened in the way I've remembered. My parents certainly don't recall my work boots making an appearance, and after recently seeing my sixteen-year-old son go to his first semi-formal, I'm inclined to agree that they would not have let me greet my date dressed this way. Most likely, I was just wearing ugly old dress shoes that didn't work with my outfit.

The important thing is, though, that *in my mind* I convinced myself that it was so much worse, and—right or wrong—that's the memory that has influenced my self-image and development. Again, as I first pointed out in Chapter 2, how we remember our worst and most embarrassing moments can impact our self-esteem and sense of worth for years to come—so it's important to guard against letting inflated negative memories make us feel bad about ourselves today. (But boy...do I wish I could go back and see for myself what I was *really* wearing on my feet that night!)