

# ironing

**B**ack in high school, a wrinkly shirted friend laughingly deemed that ironing was “a fad.” I, being of full manliness, declared the same, and throughout my 20’s and 30’s wound up routinely bedecked in crumpled raiments that earned me countless insults on my domestic skills. The worst incident — the one that finally changed me — was from a colleague in front of a group of 50 teenagers. She asked simply, “Do you even own an iron?”

Cackling ensued, and while red-faced and ego-bruised and with pants, well, quite wrinkled, I made a vow to never be so unsmooth again.

As I dove into this new land of pressing knowledge, I quickly discovered how much of my source information was thoroughly incorrect. The Chinese came up with the notion as early as the first century B.C., tucking hot charcoal into pans to flatten garments. The Scandinavians were down with smoothing stones and smoothing boards — both heat-free ways in which to roll out even the toughest of rumples. Then came the wave of the future — propelled by those fancy high collars — with a series of goffering irons, flutter irons and sad irons. I learned of Mrs. Mary Florence Potts, who invented the cold-handle sad iron, allowing quick changing of iron bases; Mr. Henry Seely, who patented an electric flatiron in 1882. Further, I gained ironing inspira-

WRINKLES TAKING THE  
STEAM OUT OF YOUR  
ATTIRE? TRY A  
FULL-COURT PRESS  
TO SMOOTH OUT THE  
ROUGH EDGES

BY MARK LUCE

tion from two completely different sources: Suresh Joachim of Ontario, Canada; and my own musical tastes.

First, Mr. Joachim. On Sept. 22, 2005, Suresh Joachim started ironing in a mall in Canada; 55 hours 5 minutes later, he stopped, setting another of his 20 world records. Mr. Joachim performs these feats to raise money to combat childhood poverty. So if he can manage to iron for more than two days, I can surely find 20 minutes to compress a couple of pairs of pants and a few Oxfords — especially if the cause was my own fashion sense.

I have always understood the basics — an iron gets hot, it makes wrinkles go away. I had never thought of my cotton shirts such as Louis Bloomfield, University Virginia Professor and author of



“How Things Work: The Physics of Everyday Life,” had put on one his final exams: “Cotton fibers are essentially pure cellulose, a glassy, crystalline polymer formed from sugar molecules. One reason for spraying water on a cotton shirt just before you iron that shirt is

that the water acts as a plasticizer, lubricating the polymer molecules so that they can rearrange easily during ironing.” In other words: heat plus weight equals straight clothes.

With that in mind, I dusted off the electric steam iron, filled it with distilled water, hit the switch and scanned the memory banks for the basics — start at the collar, work your way down, sleeves before front. To keep me focused on the task, a mix CD seemed appropriate and the name “Zen Ironing” seemed to work on the metaphorical level of evening out one’s laundry and in turn, one’s life.

So now, with the strains of old blues, melancholy odes and dreams of being king, I have finally found myself in clothes that not only fit but keep their creases, too.

*Mark Luce lives in Kansas City, Mo., where he remains convinced that “wrinkle-free” means nothing of the sort.*

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