

RAINBOW ROWELL

Birks walk; Docs are the talk

Hear ye, hear ye! I have an announcement, a declaration, even an epistle from the king.

The Year of the Birkenstocks is hereby declared over!

Done, finished, ancient history, the end. As the French like to say, le fin. As the silly like to say, el finito mosquito.

For 365 days and 365 nights, this campus has faced the sandal blight.

Not too long ago, 7.5 out of every 12 University of Nebraska-Lincoln students sported the "so ugly they're cute" sandals.

You couldn't go anywhere on this campus without seeing a pair, usually dozens of pairs. It started out in that faction of the ultra-hip, stereotypically referred to as neo-hippies and granola girls.

"Who cares if we're ugly," their clunky feet seemed to shout, wiggling their toes, "we feel good."

The first Birkenstocks I ever saw were on the feet of a geometry teacher at my junior high. Needless to say, she was widely ridiculed. And of course those spunky eighth graders have since paraded about shamelessly in the sandals.

A few years ago, Birks started showing up on just about everybody, old and young, cool and geeky. People wore them with suits and dresses with — God forbid — socks.

As freshmen, a high school friend and I made a pact that we would never ever join the masses and start wearing what she liked to call "Jesus shoes."

Alas, she broke down the next year. I ran into her on campus, and she was wearing a pair.

"They're so comfortable," she stammered.

Ah, comfort. That was everyone's excuse. Indeed they probably are comfortable. But comfort, schomfort. Since when does that matter?



I never bought into the Birkenstock craze, mostly because I couldn't afford it. I couldn't imagine spending almost 100 clams so people could see my toes.

Walking around buck naked would be comfortable, too. Fuzzy, footed pink pajamas are comfortable, but you wouldn't wear those to work.

Besides, many of the Birkenstock wearers couldn't give a rat's patootie about comfort. If they were so comfortable, why have most people stopped wearing them?

I never bought into the Birkenstock craze, mostly because I couldn't afford it. I couldn't imagine spending almost 100 clams so people could see my toes.

I'd be more likely to pay that much to hide my feet. That's why I buy shoes.

My feet are horrifically ugly, although probably not any uglier than yours. Feet in general are pretty putrid in my mind.

They're icky and smelly and ugly. Just writing about them makes me uncomfortable. Even worse, they have toes, which — even worse — have toenails.

Birkenstock madness exposed thousands of ugly, unkempt feet to the public: hairy feet, skinny feet, fat feet, flaky feet. Freaky deaky, squirrely feet.

The worst are feet with small big toes and bizarre long non-big toes (you know — the index toe, the naughty toe, the ring toe and the pinky).

I know, I know, if I have such an aversion to this part of the human

body, I should just not look. But it's like anything else really gross — gallstones, a nasty wound, REO Speedwagon. You don't want to look, but you can't help it.

You peek and go "blech," peek and go "blech." Peek, "blech," peek, "blech." Blech.

Birkenstocks opened the sandal floodgate: Tevas, those silly sports sandals and all the Payless imitators. And all of those sandals were worn with socks — with socks for heaven's sake, even with bulky silver-toed athletic socks.

Aye caramba! But just last week, I walked all the way across campus without seeing a single pair. Not a cruddy big toe in sight. Sure, the occasional pair still surfaces now and then, usually just on the people who wore them in the first place.

The mania has passed, it seems, and peace has returned to Lincoln, Neb.

But the fight against trendy, ugly footwear is far from over. Gather your weapons and hide your pocketbooks. Hear ye, hear ye, the Year of the Doc Martens is officially under way!

Aw well, they might be ugly and overpriced, but at least they cover the toes.

Rowell is a senior news-editorial, advertising and English major and a Daily Nebraskan associate news editor.

MIKE ROYKO

World searching for clipper

A female co-worker sat down in my office, a look of distaste on her face, and said: "Toenails? How disgusting. Couldn't you find something less offensive and more relevant to write about?"

Which just shows how little some media people know about America; its people, their problems, needs, hopes and dreams.

I reached under the desk and brought out a big cardboard crate, filled with letters.

"Read them," I said.

"What are they about?" she said.

"Toenails. They are all from people pleading to know where they can buy that amazing clipper."

Just then the phone rang. I listened a moment, then said: "If your drugstore doesn't carry them, tell him to order some."

The phone rang again. And again and again. Each time it was a request for information about where the amazing Easy Hold toenail clipper could be found.

"All over the country," I said.

"This has been going on for days."

"People are weird," she said, heading for the door. "And I still think it is a disgusting topic."

Maybe so. But I seem to have touched a deep wellspring of frustration and despair in the American spirit.

It began two weeks ago, when I wrote a column about the agony of cutting one's toenails and how I found happiness with the Easy Hold clipper.

The response has been overwhelming. Nothing I have written in years has brought such an outpouring of mail and phone calls.

One elderly woman sounded near tears as she said: "Bless you, my boy. My fingers are weak and my spine is brittle. But for the first time in memory I am able to cut my toenails with an effortlessness I have not felt since my youth."



"For the rest of my days, when I look with happiness at my neatly trimmed toes, I shall think of you."

And an elderly man wrote: "For the rest of my days, when I look with happiness at my neatly trimmed toes, I shall think of you."

The rewards of this job go beyond the paycheck.

The same thing has been happening to Ric Rommerdale, 52, the retired Navy man who invented the Easy Hold clipper while working as head of lab technology at the University of Mississippi's dental school.

"It's been beyond my wildest dreams," said Rommerdale, who must have rather prim dreams for a Navy guy.

"The phones are non-stop. All over the country. We've been getting one call every 10 minutes, for days now. Then I got home, and the tape on my message machine is just about worn out."

"An old retired Army colonel just called me from Florida. Said he chopped up his toes something awful the other day and he's primed for my clipper."

"It is peculiar all this happening to me. Life sure does take some strange twists and turns, doesn't it?"

Yes, it does, especially if you invent something that benefits your fellow man, especially those who have thick toenails.

Unfortunately, many people cannot find the Easy Hold clipper. That's not my fault, or that of the inventor or the manufacturer, the E.

W. Bassett Co. in Shelton, Conn.

The Bassett people would be happy to supply enough Easy Hold clippers to gladden every toe in America. (And there are approximately 2.5 billion toes, if unusual statistics fascinate you).

But stores have to order them from distributors first. And I am shocked to learn how many drugstores — chains and independents — don't seem to give a hoot about the toes of their customers.

They sell all sorts of frivolous gunk for their hair, face and armpits. They overwhelm you with Halloween junk and quickly replace it with Christmas doodads.

But ask them for the finest toenails clipping aid since the days of Roman slaves and many say: "Never heard of it."

So it is up to you as a consumer to demand that they hear of it, find it, order it and serve mankind with something besides gunk for the hair and armpits.

In my dreams, I can see the golden day when no one in this great land grunts and strains and curses over a toenail, when those sharp slivers no longer whiz around the room, endangering loved ones.

A day when everyone can point to their feet and say: "I am proud to be an American, land of the brave, the free and the world's most perfectly trimmed toes."

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