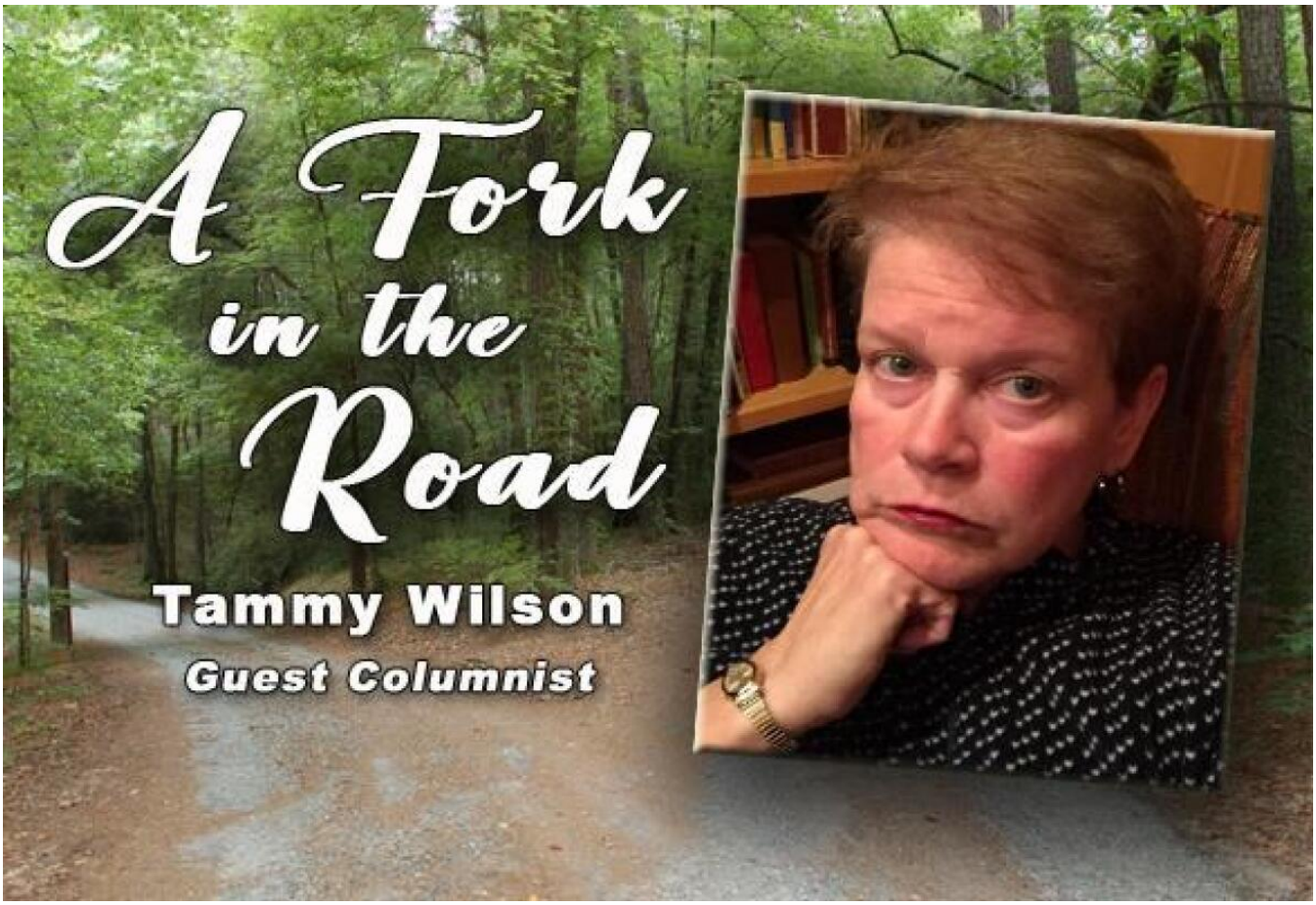

Every September, I Become My Mother

Tammy Wilson

The transition from summer to fall, brings to mind the fashion rule: Don't wear white shoes after Labor Day.

If you were raised by a mother—or grandmother—born before 1940, you know this one. Any lady worth her salt knows when to put summer styles away in early September, and those include seersucker, pastel stripes, straw hats and handbags and the ubiquitous shell jewelry that shouts "beach resort."

If you follow me on Facebook, you know I become the "fashion police" around Labor Day. I post vital reminders to put away the summer apparel, daring to put the world back straight. "Remember," I posted on Sept. 2, "this is your last day to wear white shoes seersucker, straw accessories and shell jewelry until next spring."

"Still wearing the badge I see," taunted a former co-worker.

Another old friend I've known since kindergarten proclaimed, "I've been waiting for the fashion police announcement."

One posed what-if of living in Arizona. This came from the mother of a former classmate who lives in that desert climate.

"The jury is out," I told her. "They also say this in Hawaii, SoCal, Texas and Florida." I suppose those who live in perpetual summer might get a pass...then again...

Delving into the finer points of fashion brings to mind a post from a long-time Facebooker who works on a cruise ship.

“What if traveling to Japan and we missed Labor Day while crossing the International Dateline? I’m on a ship…no one will know,” she wrote.

She had a point, but I advised, “You can sail, but you cannot hide.”

There were defiant responses.

“I’m wearing white pants tomorrow,” one said.

“I shall blatantly and joyfully defy you, Fashion Police,” said another.

Sadly, there were more of that ilk.. “Mrs. Wilson, when will you ever learn that all the fashion rules have changed! Anything goes any time of the year.”

Obviously, these ladies never knew my Mom. Like a ruler-wielding Mother Superior, I learned early on to put away resort clothes in favor of more season-appropriate outfits. You couldn’t go wrong with madras cottons and penny loafers were a far better than seersucker skirts or white slacks.

Back in the day, such pushers of the fashion envelope were silently chided with frowns and knowing looks. Didn’t that girl’s mother know the rules?

Last week, one Fashion Police fan went all out to send me a clip from Serial Mom, the comedy in which Kathleen Turner chides Patty Hearst with a slap. “You can’t wear white shoes after Labor Day. Didn’t your mother ever tell you?”

If you know anything about Patty Hearst, you know that white shoes were the least of her problems in the ‘70s.

A Jewish acquaintance from New Jersey pointed out, “Some of us wear white (at least on the bimah/altar) throughout the High Holy Days, no matter whether they are “early (just after Labor Day) or “late” (Yom Kippur is almost in mid-October this year.)

Yes, there are special exceptions to the “no white” rule: brides, sorority pledges, debutantes. Sailors in their service dress whites and Dominican sisters in traditional habits.

Still, there’s something comforting about traditional garb. They throw back to a time when rules were rules. You didn’t have wonder when summer was officially over. Labor Day did that for you.

---Tammy Wilson is a writer who lives near Newton. Contact her at tym50@bellsouth.net