

A shop in the reminiscence business.

collaboration MILDEW MAGAZINE

Lately, it can feel like time is running in reverse, retreating from an uncertain future. When I ask an almost-13-year-old what's in style, she shows me replicas of the outfits the cool girls wore when I was in middle school 25 years ago. Politicians seem intent on bending progress back onto itself. Our most forward-looking technology is a regurgitation machine.

And here I am, making a print magazine about second-hand fashion called *Mildew*, with pages full of anachronistic clothing, faded ephemera, and obsolete objects.

Mildew brings together art and writing that invites readers to think about old clothes in new ways. The magazine is steeped in nostalgia—but not the kind that yearns for a bygone era or idealizes the past. In our pages, nostalgia is about looking at the things we wear and live with and seeing the emotions and memories they hold: of the people who made them, the people who used them before us, the people who will love them after we do.

In the story that follows—originally published in *Mildew*'s second issue in 2023—nostalgia is healing. It's about an unusual thrift shop—one that reconnects people with dementia to their sense of self and belonging through reminiscence therapy and the power of remembering.

Our stories aren't about atoning for fashion's sins or shaming readers out of fast fashion and into thrifted sweaters. Instead, *Mildew* shows that wearing used items can be as beautiful, thrilling, expressive, aspirational—and joyful—as wearing new ones. Fashion trends come and go and come again, but second-hand fashion asks you to choose something to put on your body not because someone in marketing told you to, but because you saw something special in it. Even when dressing ourselves within the creative confines of what's already here on earth, it's surprising how clothes can feel so charged with memory, meaning, and identity. Second-hand fashion is ephemeral: each piece has lived before, will live again, and reminds us of the fleeting, cyclical nature of style.

foreword ELLEN FREEMAN

Mildew celebrates this temporality, arguing that wearing used clothes doesn't mean looking as if you live in a period piece; instead, the magazine is a guide to dressing in the spirit of our times—revelling in the decay of fashion as we knew it and envisioning a fashion future we actually want to inhabit. ■

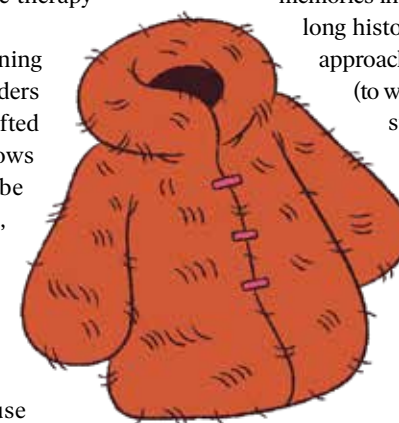
In a small, unassuming clothing shop nestled a few miles south of San Diego, inside a sprawling warehouse that used to house a thrift store called Everything Five Dollars, sits a marvellous coat. Fashioned entirely out of mink, its brown fur highlighted with streaks of black, it is the one item in the whole store that almost everyone would immediately realize is missing. "That's probably my favourite," admits Lisa Tyburski, chief marketing officer at the George G. Glenner Alzheimer's Family Centers, the organization responsible for Glenner Town Square. "That one does not leave, and that one we would notice. If somebody had that one on..." She trails off, smiling.

What appears to be a mid-century, small-town Americana boutique actually serves another purpose entirely: it is a form of "reminiscence therapy" for people with dementia.

Reminiscence therapy, through which artifacts and reminders of years gone past provoke fond memories in adults with dementia, has a decades-long history in the field of memory care. This approach has given rise to "dementia villages" (to which Glenner's is frequently compared), such as Hogeweyk, an immersive, residential skilled nursing facility in the Netherlands. Hogeweyk opened on four acres in 2009 and employs a staff of hundreds, who maintain an entirely self-contained neighbourhood that has been crafted to evoke a bygone postwar Holland.

In contrast, Glenner Town Square makes no attempts at permanently maintaining its illusion of the 1950s, but instead operates more as a day trip destination and respite for people with dementia. The 9,000-square-foot facility may provide just as much relief for their family members, who often still work daytime hours on top of caretaking.

Glenner's boutique sits across from the square's auto shop, where a reverently preserved black 1959



text
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Thunderbird sits quietly parked out front. The entire facility is designed to evoke the years from 1953 to 1961—years which, for the current generation of elders with dementia, are most likely to evoke the strongest memories. Program aides trained in dementia care lead groups of five to ten throughout the facility, making pit stops at Rosie's Diner, the Pied Piper Movie Theatre, or the Silver Fox Barber and Beauty Shop.

(Youthful memories, of course, will always be a moving target: a decade from now—and possibly in partnership with the scenic design wunderkinds at San Diego Opera Scenic Studio, who provided some of the original painting and faux finishes—this town square will find itself entirely remodeled to be more evocative of moon landings and Woodstock than Sinatra and Lucille Ball.)

Before enrolling their loved ones in the program, each participant's family provides the centre with biographies that provide insight into the person's lived experiences, interests, and triggers. Pet therapy, for example, might feel far from soothing to a retired postal worker with a history of dog bites.

Within reminiscence therapy, clothing and wardrobe can carry incredible weight. Dress can embody identity and self-image in a way that period films or childhood cuisine cannot, because our choice of attire is one of the few stories about ourselves that we can see in our own reflection. (In 2014, a pair of British researchers authored an entire paper on how women with dementia negotiated their identity in relation to their handbags.) Especially within elder care, where institutional ageism can sometimes take away as much agency as any disease, control over one's dress can provide a means to proudly assert a priceless sense of self.

The modest collection of secondhand jewellery and fancy hats on the racks was compiled by Tyburski and the Town Square's CEO, plus a hodgepodge of helpful donations, often from participants' families, to round out the collection. The shop regularly hosts jewellery-making workshops, as well as Red Hat Society tea parties, which manifest as an effervescent gaggle of AARP fashionistas painting the town red.

The shop isn't actually in the business of selling its wares, but Glenner does occasionally rotate its collection with the seasons—or to replace items that go missing.

illustrations
AUDREY MALO

"There are items that don't come back," admits Tyburski. "Or sometimes, we'll find them in another store, or the pub. We just put them back at the end of the day."

Although the shop is outfitted with a lovely vintage cash register, the shops at the Town Square are actually at pains to avoid the use of cash. The facility didn't include a bank for that reason, as dementia can cause people to suspect that they are being cheated; capitalism, it turns out, is universally triggering. That isn't to say that the store doesn't receive offers, but staff have learned instead, to assure patrons that items are on the house (or, failing that, that they can put it on "layaway").

The aforementioned mink coat, meanwhile, has the most well-known provenance. This particularly dashing item was donated by Joy Glenner, wife of the company's founder. Which also explains the name on the front of the store: Joy's. ■

JONATHAN FEAOKINS is a freelance science and history writer with a deep curiosity about the world and its people. Before turning to writing, he worked in education and the sciences, with a background in education and the sciences. Driven by curiosity, he now explores—and shares—the absurd, astonishing, and fascinating stories of our world, ranging from bird chronicles and surface chemistry to eclipses.

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