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## 25 Years' Worth of Lint

BY RALPH GARDNER

The human mind has a propensity to designate people and things friend or enemy, good or evil. This can lead to legislative gridlock, but it also helps us create order out of the swirling chaos of the universe. We can probably all agree that nice people, rainbows, butterflies, sunsets, puppies and kittens fall into the good category. Into the bad goes hate, cancer, cockroaches (until they were recently replaced by bedbugs) and terrorists.

But there's a third category—neither good nor bad, things that make no contribution to society and also do no harm.

I'm thinking specifically of lint.

There are few items of domestic existence that generate the mellow satisfaction of removing the fuzzy stuff from your dryer's lint screen. It feels so soft and velvety. You'd think you ought to be able to repurpose it. For example, my father would take those useless little shards of soap after the bar had been reduced to almost nothing and add them to a ball he made from all the other little shards. By the time he died the object had grown to the size of a bowling ball, a generation's worth of Palmolive, Cashmere Bouquet, Ivory, Yardley Lavender, Roger Gallet and who knows how many hundred bars of filched hotel soap.

And when I eventually manage to find it in the back of whatever closet it's hiding in, I can either use it whole (though that might prove unwieldy) or find a knife, cut it into pieces, and never have to buy soap again.

My point is that even the dying embers of soap can be reborn. Lint, on the other hand, seems worthless.

"I guess you might want to stuff a pillow," said Maria Vizzi, who with her husband Giuseppe owns Indoor Environmental Solutions, a lint-removal company.

You read that right. What the Vizzis and several dedicated employees do all day is remove lint from people's dryers. So how's business? "It's not top of mind,"

confessed Ms. Vizzi, who runs the office while her husband and intrepid crew travel from TriBeCa to Park Avenue to the Bronx, where their company is headquartered, removing lint. "It's not an electrical or plumbing thing. That's the challenge. Most of our work is referrals."

Ms. Vizzi said Indoor Environmental Solutions will typically get a call—much the way Ghostbusters did when troublemaking poltergeist needed to be trapped—from appliance companies or building supers. "There's nothing wrong with the dryer," Ms. Vizzi explained. "It's just shutting down because there's no ventilation."

The worst-case scenario, she added, is that the lint can catch fire if it comes into contact with a heat source, such as the dryer's igniter.

But hold on a minute. Since I had Ms. Vizzi on the phone, this was my golden opportunity to broach some existential questions—such as what, exactly, is lint? "Lint? It's pieces of fabric. It's all the little things that come off the clothes. Hair and cotton. You find change and paper clips. Giuseppe has to get behind the machine. He finds people's bras back there. They always talk about the missing sock. We're the people who find the missing sock. By that time the other one is long missing."

Even though Ms. Vizzi sounded sincere, I remained skeptical of the need for her service. With all the problems in the world, from car payments to toenail fungus, do we really need to worry about lint?

She offered to have her team visit my apartment and perform a dryer inspection. I reluctantly agreed, if only because—and I think I can speak for at least some of us—I have a soft spot for lint. It evokes feelings of coziness. Of rainy days. Of your mom, or the housekeeper, doing the laundry; of the washer and dryer going round and round, of simpler times.

I was frankly surprised when Mr. Vizzi and his second-in-command, Bifford (Biff) Baker, knocked on our door—not only by the amount of equipment they were carrying but also by the men's size. They looked like they could have been construction workers or stevedores or professional wrestlers. I didn't realize that lint removal required muscle power.

Mr. Vizzi started by pulling out our washing machine—we have one of those combination washer-dryers, the dryer above, the washer below—and where the two met you could see lint had accumulated, though not an alarming amount. However, when he popped a couple of screws and a metal plate to gain access to the dryer's motor, I couldn't believe me eyes: It was a lint dreamscape. Lint covered every wire, every everything.

"Oh my god!" my wife exclaimed. "It looks like Carlsbad Caverns."

"Oh wow!" Mr. Baker said.

"Biff," Mr. Vizzi ordered, as if he'd cornered a wolverine but didn't know how long he'd be able to keep it at bay, "go get the vacuum downstairs. There's a light or spark or something, it catches right away. But we're here for you. We're going to take care of it right."

But the dryer, it turned out, was only the tip of the proverbial iceberg, or lintberg. After Messrs. Vizzi and Baker took turns vacuuming our dryer's innards ("That's a lot of lint," Mr. Baker confided, "almost one of the worst."), Mr. Vizzi inspected and removed the ventilation tube that stretched from the back of the dryer, through a hole in the wall, along the maid's room bathroom ceiling and out the back window. It's a standard part of their service.

"Watch this," he said as he stuck his hand into the hole where the tube had been and started to remove fistfuls of lint, filling an entire shopping bag, probably a quarter-century's worth because we'd lived in the apartment 20 years and inherited the washer/dryer from the previous tenants. "They didn't connect it



right."

But what about that little lint tray we've been cleaning religiously all these years? "That only pulls out, like, 30 or 40%," Mr. Vizzi explained. "They might as well not put that there."

# THE WALLS OF LINT

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