

To Give Away or Not

Donna Jones

I have a problem that has bugged me for decades: a metal cabinet crammed full of 40- to 60-year-old handmade clothes. I will never wear these clothes again and I almost never even look at them. You are wondering why don't I just photograph them and donate them to a worthy cause. This is easier said than done.



When I was a girl, my grandma, mom, and I would go shopping for school clothes. I would search for clothes I liked. My mother would inspect the length of the skirt, make sure the tops were appropriate, and make a decision about whether we could afford it. Finally, my grandma would check their quality to see if they would last. Often, my mother would veto an outfit because

it was too expensive or too short. I would sulk. Grandma would come to my rescue by offering to make it for me. She said, "I'll draw it and we'll go to the yardage store and you can pick out any type of material you want."

When we got home, my grandma's bedroom turned into a sewing room for the next week. You could hear material being

ripped, scissors clanging away, and the old fashioned sewing machine clicking along. You knew something

went wrong when Grandma said, "Oh sugar!"

The parts I hated the most were the fittings and the hem pinning. She gently but firmly reminded me to stop fidgeting. "Stand still," she said, "or the hem will be crooked." Grandma put a lot of love and hard work into the clothes that she made for me. Sometimes I raced to the store with my new outfit just to stand in front of the store window comparing them. There was hardly any difference. I was lucky to have my grandmother do this for me. She had won blue ribbons at the county and state fairs for her needle work. She also sewed clothes to make extra money.

Once, Grandma made a long-sleeved, low-cut, black velvet evening dress with a mid thigh slit up the front. It was stunning, and I felt like a runway model in that dress. I draped a plush silver fox stole (this was before I knew about how furs were made) around my shoulders and a fake diamond necklace around my neck. Fancy earrings topped off the outfit. How could I possibly part with that





outfit? My youth has passed me by, acceptability of wearing furs gone away (thank heavens), and the fear of wearing flashy jewelry has crept in, so all I have left are my memories and the actual dress.

Every spring I wrestle with whether I should give the dress away. And every spring I decide that I can't part with it because I know my grandma's hands touched it and her talent went into designing and creating it just for me. So each year I compromise

and toss out a few half worn ugly T-shirts and save my black velvet dress along with my memories of dining in special restaurants, waltzing under the stars, and hearing Johnny Mathis singing "Chances Are" at one of San Francisco's famous hotels. When I do take the dress out of the cabinet, I wrap it around me like a cape and dance around the room like I did in my twenties. Then I carefully put the dress back into the metal cabinet.

Writing this article helped me decide what to do about this problem that has bugged me for so many years. First, I made a vow never to think again about getting rid of these special clothes. I made another vow to get rid of outdated and hardly ever worn factory-made clothes. Finally, I made a vow to bring back my family's tried and true approach to buying clothes: Whenever I shop for clothes, I will incorporate a rule from each generation: 1. *my rule*: pick out what I like, 2. *my mother's rule*: check to see if it is appropriate and affordable, and 3. *my grandma's rule*: check if it is of good quality.

I can envision my mother and grandma nodding their heads in approval.



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Three Rules for Shopping

Donna Jones has three rules for shopping:

- 1. Her rule:** Pick out what I like.
- 2. Her mother's rule:** Make sure it is appropriate and affordable.
- 3. Her grandmother's rule:** Make sure it is of good quality.

What are your three rules for shopping?

1.

2.

3.