Wedding Dress Tells a Love Story

MY SISTER laid the long, flat box on my bed.

“Here’s Mom’s wedding dress,” she said. “No one seems to want it or know what to do with it.”

The statement sounded bizarre, almost blasphemous. There was a time when we all wanted Mom’s white satin flapper gown with the flying panels and handmade satin roses edging its collar. As kids on our Depression-era farm in eastern Montana, we saw these treasures as last remnants of a once-prosperous life.

Back then, our precious possessions were stored in Mom’s cedar chest. Uncle Beaufort had made and given it as his wedding gift to his beloved Sis. On special occasions, we children afforded ourselves the luxury of lifting its lid to enjoy the heady cedar fragrance and to peek at the folks’ wedding finery.

It reminded us that once our folks had enjoyed better times and were prosperous enough to afford silks, satin, brocade shoes and such. In addition, there were Daddy’s diamond stickpin and silver cuff links—Mom’s wedding gifts to him—and her huge canary diamond ring and string of Delta pearls—his gifts to her.

Somewhere in the distant past, Momma had stopped wearing the diamond and pearls, and I never knew my dad to wear the cuff links or diamond stickpin, or his huge ruby ring.

Perhaps he did during the 6 years before I was born, but with my birth came the big stock market crash and the dust bowl.

I suspect some of Daddy’s jewelry went to buy food and shoes for his seven children. He didn’t ask Mom to give up her diamond or the pearls, nor did he give up the violin he cheered us with on winter evenings.

But the wedding clothes and Mom's second-day clothes remained in the cedar chest at the foot of their bed. Now, 80-some years later, they lay delicate and fragile in a cardboard box on my bed, and no one wanted them.

I hated the sound of it.

Mom had lived 68 years after her beloved husband died—of heartbreak, she said. They had known each other only 15 years, yet they'd loved a lifetime together in that short period.

Due to the dust bowl, the Depression and illness, they had gone from riches to rags. She went from a dark-haired beauty to a work-worn wife and mother of seven.

But always she hoped he would remember her as she looked on their wedding day in the white satin gown.

Years later, when life's load had lifted, she purchased another white dress, lace this time. She wore it only once, to her son's college graduation.

It was stored for years in my closet. Occasionally, she'd ask about it, and I'd assure her it was clean and ready to go.

She planned to be buried in it.

Shortly before her death at 104, I asked why it was so important that she be buried in white. Her response brought a lump to my throat.

"Because I want to meet Daddy in the white lace dress so he will remember me," she said.

She wanted him to see her once more as his beautiful bride, as she had looked on their wedding day.

I assured her that God understood and would see to it that she appeared to Daddy in white.

Now, with her passing, Daddy has once again seen her, not as work-worn and weary, but as his beautiful bride in white. And I am left with the decision of what to do with her wedding dress and the remains of a time that once was.

One day, I hope it will find a home with the Montana Historical Society, along with their love story.

—Maxine Melton, Lewistown, Montana