



Photo Illustration • Declan Outhit

Remembering Mom

Old photographs capture personality, style and ambition



My mother was a farm girl who drove tractors just like the men, but with her hair tied up in a colourful bandana like Rosie the Riveter.

I'm captivated by photographs taken of her before I was born. I see a fashionable young woman determined to take on the world. She was an adventurous teen, confident enough to leave her Perth County farm for a job in the big city of Toronto.

It makes me smile, to see her youthful spirit in photographs taken before she had three children.



Lynn Haddrall

My husband has the same reaction to a photograph of his grandparents, taken at a picnic when they were a young couple. In it, his grandmother smiles and laughs in a way that he had never seen. My husband carries the photo in his wallet.

I thought more about such images, our mothers before us, after reading Women in

Clothes, a book I reviewed for Grand. The authors asked women to submit photos of their mothers "from the time before they had children." They called the feature "Mothers as Others."

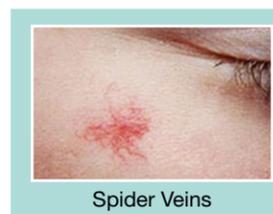
From that inspiration comes this Mother's Day Style column. I asked Waterloo Region women to share a photograph of their mothers or grandmothers taken before they had children. The women told me remarkable stories and shared intriguing photographs. Perhaps their memories will bring to mind images of your mother or grandmother before you entered their lives.



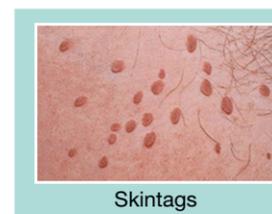
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“I never put all her trials and tribulations into context until I became an adult and thought back about having to live through the things that she did. My mother lived an ordinary extraordinary life.”



Marjorie Jackson

Marjorie Jackson wrote to her boyfriend every day when he served overseas in England, Belgium, the Netherlands and France. Sometimes she sent maple syrup and other treats from Schneiders where she worked. He shared the goodies with his brothers in arms.

Debra Joseph thinks about those days when she looks at this photograph, taken while her mother waited for her boyfriend to come home from the Second World War.

Bill Joseph landed at Juno Beach on D-Day in 1944. He came home to Marjorie on Feb. 6, 1946. They married March 20, 1946.

“It is hard for me to imagine that at the age of 20 my dear mom had so much thrown at her. She looks so happy, yet she had the constant worry that her

sweetheart might not be one of the lucky ones to make it home. My mom told me that of her five girlfriends who had a loved one serving overseas, my dad was the only one to make it home alive.”

Joseph loves how smartly dressed her mother appears at a time when fashion wasn't top of mind for everyone.

“She may have made the dress,” says Joseph. “Materials were hard to come by during the war and my mother was pretty resourceful. She loved to sew and make dresses, when sewing was the budget-minded thing to do. My mom could make a dollar stretch with having a garden and canning and preserving.”

Marjorie Jackson was remarkably positive about life, considering what it threw at her. She was one of six children including her twin brother, Graham, and a baby brother who died of pneumonia when she was four. Her mother died when Marjorie was 11. Her father was killed by a drunk driver when Marjorie and Bill were newly married.

“Reflecting on her early years, she never complained about all the things that happened to her, she always remained positive,” Joseph recalls.

She left home at 14 to board and attend high school in Listowel.

“She spoke often about how she had to budget the small allowance she had from 14 to 18 to make it last through her high school years,” Joseph says.

“While she was away at high school in Listowel, her beloved grandmother was moved to British Columbia to join family, and my mother never saw her again. It was a mighty blow to lose her grandmother, so soon after her mother's death.”

Jackson graduated from high school, attended secretarial college in Toronto and returned to Kitchener where she worked at Forbes Motors. That's where she met her future husband, who was a mechanic there. She worked at Schneiders during and after the war.

Joseph says her mother was dealt another blow while working at Schneiders, and boarding in Kitchener. The family farmhouse burned to the ground, destroying the family treasures Jackson had hoped to bring to her home once she married. Bill's mechanics tools, stored at the family farm while he served in the war, were also destroyed.

“What I really admire about my mother looking back at this photo is the resilience that she had at such an early age. She always looked at her life and thought that someone had it worse off than her. I loved my mother's optimism and her approach to just keep plowing through whatever life handed her.

“I never put all her trials and tribulations into context until I became an adult and thought back about having to live through the things that she did. My mother lived an ordinary extraordinary life.”



Wendy Cook

When Wendy Cook posed for her Ryerson graduation photograph, she probably wasn't thinking about how much it would inspire her future daughter.

“I remember seeing it as a child and thinking how beautiful she looked. Every time I passed by the bookshelf at our cottage I would look at it and hope one day I could be as beautiful,” Heather Wende recalls. “When I saw the photo again after some time, it took me back to the time at our cottage which was the best part of my childhood.”

Wende sees in that image a focused young woman eager to embrace life.

“This photo of my mom makes me think of her as young and ready to take on the world, like she's ready to start a new chapter in her life,” Heather Wende says. “Being her graduation photo, it made me want to go to post-secondary too, so I could be smart like her.”

Wende's mother is an accomplished

seamstress. She made her own wedding gown.

“When I was younger, she taught me how to sew and I even had my own little sewing machine. We would sew together and while she was sewing clothes I was sewing little things like wallets and a pillow. I have such great memories of sewing with my mother when I was younger and I'm so thankful for that time with her.”

Wende always hoped that her own wedding gown would be created by her mother.

“Wearing the wedding dress that was made by my mother was always my dream. As soon as I was engaged, I asked her to make it for me,” Wende says. “She said yes right away and we got to work on the design. We compromised on a few things on the dress but, in the end, it was perfect and what I wanted.”

Wende likes to tell friends that her design was custom made. She even has the custom “Made with Love by Mom” tag to prove it.

“This photo of my mom makes me think of her as young and ready to take on the world, like she's ready to start a new chapter in her life.”



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Elizabeth Crowther

Elizabeth Crowther stands in her parents' backyard beside future husband Kenneth Tanswell in this circa 1947 photograph. Kenneth had just returned from the Second World War and their relationship was blossoming.

"It makes me realize she was a woman who was feeling loved and cared for – she had been orphaned very young and had lived with relatives since she was three years old," says her daughter, Caroline Tanswell. "With dad, she was able to look forward to having her own family."

Elizabeth Crowther is fashionably dressed in this moment, a woman paying special attention to her shoes. Caroline, who loves stylish shoes, smiles when she sees the pair her mother sports in the photograph.

"I remember my mother loving her shoes. She kept all of them in their

original shoe boxes with shoe trees in them. Do you remember shoe trees? She was a tall woman and wore a size nine shoe, so when she found a pair she liked, she didn't hesitate to buy them," Tanswell recalls.

When her mother became less mobile, she hated not being able to wear beautiful shoes.

"I always thought that there must be a shoe designer somewhere who could design safe comfortable yet beautiful shoes for women as we grow older and are restricted by our limitations, but not by our love of beautiful things to wear. It didn't happen in her lifetime. Maybe it will in ours."

The picture is poignant for Tanswell because she doesn't have many photos of her parents and "they looked so happy and so close."

"It's interesting to know that they seemed so happy together. They moved to Canada in 1952 and their life changed dramatically. Family all stayed in England, and they had to adjust to a new life, new job, new surroundings that were very different than the life they had back home."

The photograph shows a time before the challenges of life in the new country.

"I mostly remember the struggles, not the relaxed times that they seem to be enjoying in these photos. Children change lives a lot, but having children and moving half a world away changes lives even more."



CAROLINE TANSWELL
Daughter of Elizabeth Crowther

Director, external relations and internal communications, Renison University College



Rugee Restemeyer

Rugee Restemeyer worked with her husband, Hubert, in their butcher shop in Plattsville. She had a stylish flair that her granddaughter recalls when she looks at this photograph. Those beads and that barely visible hair bow add a dash of style to the formal picture.

"My grandma Rugee was a very artistic woman, and I remember her boldly wearing bright colours and statement jewelry. She would not get her ears pierced and she had quite the collection of clip-on earrings," Amy Deutschmann says.

Her grandmother grew up in Grand Bend with eight siblings. She moved to Plattsville with her husband and opened a local butcher shop.

"My mom remembers her consistently wearing dresses while working in the shop. I also wear dresses frequently. In the summer months, it is my uniform."

Deutschmann, who features her own unique style on her fashion blog, fondly remembers the time spent with her grandmother in the craft room, "glue guns



ablazing." It was a creative outlet for both.

"She would use all natural supplies. She was the queen of 'reduce, reuse and recycle' before it was mainstream, most certainly a way to stretch every penny. We would scavenge for pinecones, cornhusks, teasel and interesting chunks of fungus and she would magically transform them into beautiful flowers and cute creatures chalked full of personality."

Deutschmann went with her grandmother to craft sales where they sold the creations. The granddaughter managed the cash box.

"She would brag about me and gifted me some of the profits," Deutschmann recalls.

Restemeyer was also an artist, concentrating on landscape and still life. Deutschmann thinks she inherited her artistic gene from her grandmother.

"When she passed away, I was lucky enough to acquire a large landscape of a sunset over Lake Huron in Grand Bend, the place she loved so much. It hangs proudly in our dining room," says Deutschmann. "She was one of those ladies who was captivating and lit up a room. I can still hear the sound of her voice and every Christmas I try to emulate her molasses krinkle cookies."

Her grandmother's first name might sound unusual these days, but it was perfect for her unique personality, her granddaughter says proudly.

"She suited her name. She was one of a kind. A spitfire." 🍷



AMY DEUTSCHMANN
Granddaughter of Rugee Restemeyer

Fashion stylist and blogger
amydressed.com



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