

Down By The Berry Patch

"The Graduation Gown"

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Many mothers dream of their daughters wearing their wedding gowns; many daughters dream of wearing their mother's wedding gown. Then there are daughters who want their own gown. Guess I never thought of wearing my mom's gown. After all, she weighted 102 when she married my dad; I weighted 127 when I married Lorain. I don't even think it was the size that made a difference. I never even thought of wearing her gown.

I had worn Mother's wedding veil for my First Holy Communion at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Caro, Michigan. I still have the veil that matches the pictures I have of the folks' wedding. What a keepsake!



When Lorain and I announced our engagement, mom's first comment after a hug was, "I will make you a wedding dress." I was elated to think this wonderful mother and seamstress would do that for me. The dress was beautiful--lace over net over toile over taffeta. There were dozens of little hand covered round shaped buttons down the back-- with hand made hoops. It no longer fits me, but it did fit beautifully on the dress form I had made in college in one of my classes in 1952. I had it on display for our 50th Anniversary party in 2003.

Now, let's get back to the original idea of this story--the "graduation gown." I had started my doctorate in 1960, but did not continue with it because of a number of reasons: the cost was too great, my family was too young and needed my time, my full time job plus family were already a drain on my time, the distance to classes was too far to travel, and my husband only had a Master's Degree. Would it be advisable to have more formal education than he did?

Things changed in 1984 when I was working as an administrator at Bay Arenac Intermediate School District. Western Michigan University of Kalamazoo, Michigan, contracted with the ISD for space in their facility to conduct classes toward an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership. The timing seemed right for me to complete this unfinished phase of my life. Numerous administrators from the area took the entrance exams, completed the interviews, and 25 people were admitted to the program. Two nights each week,

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Photo Caption: Lorain and Judy Berg wedding photograph. Lorain and Judy were married on 29 August 1953. Rachel Liberacki, Judy's mother, made the wedding dress for her. Judy created her Doctorate in Education from Western Michigan University. This photograph was taken when she was receiving her diploma on 25 June 1988.



professors from the university were flown to the local airport and picked up by class participants. The pilots were trainees from a pilot program at the university.

As I recall, about seven of the original group made it through the four years of classes, the interviews, the orals, the dissertation, and the final graduation--not all the same year. I was one of those fortunate survivors. On June 25, 1988, I received an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Western Michigan University, the same university where my folks met over 50 years prior to that date. Of course, it was not a university at that time; it was a teacher's college.

I don't recall a lot about the graduation speeches, but I do remember that Nelson Mandela¹ was awarded an Honorary degree. I remember that my mother could not attend because of poor health, but the rest of my family was there: my husband, Lorain; son's Mike and Steven; daughter-in-law, Janice; and three month old grandson, Alex.

The black gown with the identifiable three velvet stripes on the sleeves that were of significance for doctoral candidates was heavy and elegant. I had rented it for the occasion. The mortar board hat and blue velvet cape type collar were purchased. When it was time to turn in the rental gown, Steve said, "Don't turn it in, Mother; buy it." I really pondered that because the cost was \$165.00 and what good would it do me hanging in the closet. But purchase it, I did.

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