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**Eternally yours: Bridal gown preservation**

By **SHEILA GARRETT**  
Special to the Record-Eagle

The wedding is over. The day that you planned and fantasized about for so long is now a memory. And the gown you wore is perhaps your most cherished souvenir.

With all the care, time and money invested in wedding gowns, most brides would like them to last forever. Many brides hope to save their gown for a beloved sister, daughter or granddaughter. Others treasure their gown for use on a special anniversary, or to wear to reaffirm their vows in later years.

The chances of keeping a bridal gown as lovely as it looked on the day of the wedding are better now than ever before. Today's fabrics and

preservation equipment provide special care for that special dress. Cleaning professionals say that they can do many things now that people wouldn't even consider trying years ago.

Pat Coddington of Coddington Cleaners & Furriers in Traverse City has some advice that applies to keeping the gown in excellent condition before, as well as after the wedding:

■ Have the gown professionally pressed before the ceremony.

■ Do not cut the loops off the inside of the garment. Many gowns will not stay on a regular hanger without them. A gown should never be hung from fragile shoulder seams, which can stretch or sag. Tuck the loops inside while wearing the gown, and always use them

when hanging up the dress. ■ Don't store a gown in a basement, where the outer storage box can draw moisture, or in an attic where there are extreme temperature changes.

■ Do not remove the care label from the gown.

Coddington, whose family has been in the dry-cleaning business since 1956, suggested that brides interested in the preservation of wedding gowns make their selection from the styles that feature the fewest beads, and that they are sewed, not glued, to the fabric.

Dry-cleaning professionals agree that gowns should not be stored in plastic dress bags or containers, as some plastics emit fumes that cause fabrics to yellow.

Having observed these precautions, a bride should be able to relax and enjoy her wedding without being too concerned about her gown.

"Have fun, don't worry. That's what we're here for," said Paul Conant of Master Dry Cleaners in Traverse City.

Conant said that ideally, the dress should be brought in "the sooner the better" for cleaning and packing.

However, if that is not possible, Pat Coddington observed that she has seen gowns that were brought in up to a year after the wedding that came back in very good condition. The staff will evaluate the condition of the gown with the customer when it is brought in, checking for any visible flaws.

Conant explained that cleaning specialists are far more successful removing stains today than in the past, due to the equipment and techniques now available. There is hope for the hem of a gown soiled from dancing, for trains muddy from bad weather and for seams pulled by someone stepping on the hem. The floors on reception halls are the worst problem, the experts said, because of the number of people that pass through them, creating a variety of stain scenarios.

Conant, whose family has been in the dry cleaning business for 25 years, said that standard dry cleaning is great for most items. However, a wet cleaning machine can be used to deal with wet side stains, such as red wine. There are techniques for dealing with oil-type stains from shoes or cars, or from cosmetics such as lipstick. Even a hole, such as a cigarette burn, can be re-woven, although this is a very specialized repair, said Conant.

It might be wise to skip the mustard at a wedding meal, or any other food that tends to

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