Selling A Wedding Ring

by Roz Warren

I somehow ended up with my father's second wife's wedding ring. Although it could actually be his third wife's wedding ring. All I know for sure is that the delicate, hand-crafted gold ring was among Dad's possessions when he died. Sorting through his things, I recognized it. Kind of. I knew it was a wedding ring. I just didn't know whose.

“Is this Enid's ring?” I asked my sister, once we'd returned to Philadelphia after Dad's funeral. “Or is it Madalyn's?”

Dad's marital saga, through no fault of his own, was quite an odyssey. After our mother, his first wife, died of cancer, he married Enid, who also, eventually, died of cancer. Then he went steady with Evelyn, but ended up marrying Madalyn, who left him after he had a seizure (So much for “in sickness or in health…”) After another interlude with Evelyn, Dad ended up spending the last 14 years of his life, happily unmarried, with Anita.

My sister and I decided that, even though she'd left Dad, Madalyn would probably have kept her wedding ring. If she'd returned it, it was unlikely that our father would have hung onto this reminder of a failed marriage. So we were pretty sure this was Enid's ring.

Enid, dad's second wife didn't like us. We didn't like her either. So it was odd and a little unsettling that her ring ended up in our hands. We were there when Dad first slipped it on her finger. My sister and I had flown to Detroit from Philadelphia for the occasion. They were married in a brief ceremony by a really cool, locally famous, gay atheist Rabbi. It was a good marriage, but Enid was a rotten stepmother. She adored my father and hated having to share him with his daughters. Her attitude toward us was, to put it mildly, adversarial. My sister and I were forever grateful she'd come into

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Dad's life after we were grown and out of the house. Otherwise, it would have been Cinderella city.

Enid died after a long battle with the same kind of cancer that took our mother. I learned of her death while on vacation in Bali. (I didn't fly home for the funeral.) Enid apparently wasn't buried with the ring on her finger, and Dad's love for her went on, because our usually unsentimental father stored the ring in his office safe through several moves, another wife, and two more relationships. And so it ended up with us.

“What should we do about Enid's ring?“ I asked my sister from time to time. One thing was certain: although it was a lovely ring, neither of us were going to wear it. That would be just too weird. When Mom died, I inherited her beautiful diamond engagement ring, which I wear whenever I want to feel close to her. The last thing my sister or I wanted was to feel is close to Enid, a woman we struggled to tolerate when she was alive.

We thought about tracking down Enid's daughters and giving the ring to them. But they hadn't liked us any more than she had. And after Enid died, they'd sued Dad over the house. And there was the slight chance this wasn't actually their mother's wedding ring after all, but that of the woman he'd married after her death. However much you disliked someone, you wouldn't want to track them down and present them with that.

A wedding ring isn't jewelry. It's a symbol. This ring meant something, to Enid, and, until his death, to our father. But the moment he died, that value was gone. The ring had no sentimental value for us. If anything, it had reverse sentimental value. It brought back memories of a woman we didn't want to think about.

When a pawnshop opened in my neighborhood, I brought the ring in.

“We can't resell this. But we could melt it down,” the guy behind the counter said. “I can give you a hundred for it.“

“Sold!” I said.

If I were a better person, I could report that I donated the money to a charity that Enid would have approved of. Perhaps breast cancer research. Or, taking another tack, that my sister and I used that cash to take ourselves out to lunch to celebrate the fact that, despite everything she'd put us through, we'd outlived this particular evil stepmother. But in fact, we did neither. We just put the cash in our wallets and went on with our lives.

One moment, a symbol of enduring love. The next, carelessly cashed in and melted down. Maybe it's karma. What goes around, comes around? Maybe selling Enid's ring didn't mean a thing. It could be that the ring wasn't even hers. Like so many things in life, that ring will always remain a bit of a mystery.