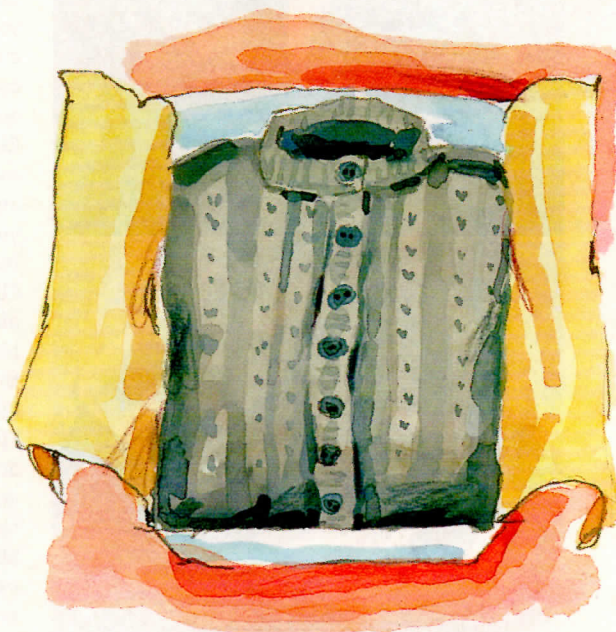


# a sweater to remember



## Concrete reminders of her love, Grandma's sweaters encircle and warm us, like hugs.

**O**ne day many years ago, shortly after I met the man who would become my husband, I mentioned to him in the presence of his four-year-old son that I needed a new sweater. Hearing this casual remark, my future stepson perked up. "If you need a sweater, you should ask Grandma Rowie to knit you one," he piped. By Grandma Rowie, he meant his father's mother, Rose, whose name he'd transformed by a childish inability to pronounce the letters. In his limited experience, *all* sweaters came from Grandma Rowie. And he was half right; all the good ones do.

I didn't know that back then, but by the time my future mother-in-law offered to knit me one of her beautifully detailed cardigans, I'd realized their worth. And I felt honored at being invited to join the select group of individuals valued enough to own one. I wore my first Rowie Sweater—a deep-gray cable knit with puffed sleeves and a high neck—as proudly as other women wear their engagement ring. I own several now, including the delicate, peach-colored pullover I was married in. I have few possessions that I treasure more.

When my son was born, two tiny sweaters by Grandma Rowie, each with its own beribboned hat, were the prized centerpieces of his layette. Eleven years later, when his sister finally arrived, she too was kept cozy by newly knit hats and sweaters, solid expressions of her warm welcome from Grandma. My daughter also got to wear the two sweaters that had originally been

knit for her big brother. I'd kept them carefully tucked away all those years, hoping I would not have to wait for grandchildren to reuse them.

I always knew that I *would* reuse them, one way or another. Rowie's Sweaters are not things you'd ever give away, no more than you would give away your grandmother's pearls or your mother's wedding ring. As heirlooms, they are just as cherishable—and they keep you warmer.

Also, unlike pearls and wedding rings, Rowie's Sweaters don't have to be kept locked away in a vault. They are as integral a part of my children's lives as their birthdays. New ones arrive every year in asked-for styles and

colors. Each year, too, my little one inherits another one or two from my bigger one's outgrown supply. These hand-me-downs, far from being resented, are doubly dear to my little girl because they come from Grandma by way of her adored big brother. As is true with any treasure, their value increases with their history. What will they be worth, I wonder, on the day my daughter unwraps them from their tissue paper and puts them on her own newborn?

Now that my mother-in-law spends much of the year living in a retirement community an airplane ride away from us, her sweaters represent her in her absence. Concrete reminders of her love, they encircle and warm us, like hugs. Sometimes, on a winter evening when I notice that all four of us are wearing examples of her handiwork, I smile to myself and think how

she is still taking care of us, even though she is a thousand miles away. And I wonder if, when my children are grown and perhaps themselves a thousand miles away, in their own homes, they will look at Rowie's Sweaters, redolent with memories, and recall the warmth of their childhoods.

Rose is 87 now, and sometimes she remarks she won't be around forever. But when I picture her grandchildren, and eventually her great-grandchildren, cuddled inside the bright, timeless products of her love, I can't help but think she may be wrong. ♦

.....  
Bette-Jane Raphael is a writer and an editor-at-large for FAMILY CIRCLE.