Sweet Revenge

Payback was a pleasure for a slightly obsessive seamstress mother of five daughters.

By Lorraine Cole Schuettpelz

My family told me I had a problem, a compulsion, an irrational drive. That obsession gave me great pleasure for many years, but it was not really appreciated by some of my daughters. It started when I was a girl in my early teens in the 1930s, when a small-town doctor in Canada delivered the world's first quintuplets, five beautiful little black-haired baby girls who became instant celebrities.

I, like the rest of the world, fell in love with them and collected pictures of the quints—on writing tablets, calendars, newspapers, paper dolls and coloring books. I made scrapbooks of them and never tired of looking at pictures of those adorable little girls always dressed alike.

Being quite naive and as yet uninformed about the birds and the bees, I was determined that when I grew up and married, I was going to have five little girls like the Dionne Quintuplets and dress them alike.

I hung onto that dream through my teen years, but by the time I was married, I realized what a rare occurrence it was, and that my chance of having quintuplets was very slim. I never even had twins, though I always wanted them. The closest I got was twin grandsons. But I did have the five girls I wanted, one by one, over the next 15 years.

My first two children were girls, and I was delighted. I learned to sew and made them look-alike dresses before the youngest learned to walk. I became quite skilled at sewing, having learned from my dear mother-in-law who was a seamstress. Having her to consult whenever I had problems gave me courage and confidence.

Our third child was the boy we hoped for, then three more girls followed.

With six children to care for, my days were busy. But even with my full schedule, I sewed most of my family's clothing. And I loved to sew matching outfits for my five girls.

One Christmas I sewed matching green corduroy jumpers for the five girls and myself. The youngest still complains about how many green hand-me-down jumpers she had to wear!

The author (left) and her five daughters wore identical green jumpers, Christmas 1960.

After the two oldest girls finished high school and were on their own, I still continued to sew matching outfits for the three younger girls.

When my oldest daughter became engaged, she asked me to sew her wedding gown and five bridesmaid's gowns. I was ecstatic!

A few years later the second daughter married, and I made her wedding gown and five bridesmaid's dresses—all alike, of course. I loved every minute of it.

Over the next 11 years, all of our children married and had big weddings, and my sewing machine turned out dozens of matching dresses.

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But all too soon, the youngest left the nest and my sewing machine fell silent.

But then the grandchildren came along—15 in all, and half of them were girls! So it started all over again, to my delight. I made baptismal gowns, matching dresses with pinafores, and sailor outfits for both the girls and the boys. They seemed to enjoy wearing the same outfits as their cousins; at least, they didn't complain as their parents had!

But all too soon, the grandkids grew up, and that enjoyable part of my life came to an end. There is, however, an interesting conclusion to this story.

When we were approaching our golden wedding anniversary, our children helped plan the celebration. When the big day arrived, they had a special surprise for me. One by one, the girls appeared, all dressed alike in lovely blue dresses of taffeta and lace. I was bewildered but pleased. I'm still not sure if they planned it that way to please me or to get revenge, but it had its reward. Many guests commented on what a unique idea it was to recognize our daughters. This revenge was sweet. ❖

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