

The Bag Lady of North Georgia

In North Georgia's craft show circuit from Woodstock to Dahlonega, an 82-year old woman running around in blue jeans, sneakers, and a baseball cap never fails to attract crowds to her booth. Crafter fans call Alice Markovic "the bag lady." If you haven't seen her yet, you might imagine her pulling an old-fashioned shopping bag on wheels, stuffed with everything she owns in the world, like the bag ladies I've seen on the downtown streets of Los Angeles.

However, this "bag lady" is different. She's a connoisseur of novelty fabrics, and designs the most enchanting handbags in the South. But, there's something else that makes her special: she's my mom. I've heard my mother called many things, but without a doubt, her "bag lady" nickname epitomizes the facet of her personality most endearing to me.

Mom's love for collecting remnants of beautiful fabrics is comparable to the passion of an art collector, who would spend their last dime for a work of art they covet. This explains her fabric collection that fills every nook and cranny in her house, and every box in her attic--not to mention the containers of cloth spilling over in unlikely places like her kitchen pantry. Textiles of gorgeous colors, luscious textures, and interesting designs are like a fine wine to her taste. She can't resist walking through a fabric store without bringing home at least one new piece to add to her collection.

Mom's new line of crafted handbags made from her personal fabric collection has not only earned her the eccentric title of North Georgia's "bag lady," but has proven to be successful fruit of her labor. That she has "worked her fingers to the bone" has been deeply inspiring to more than just the customers in her craft show circuit. As an eighth-grade girl who loved fashion, and never had a wardrobe big enough to satisfy me, my mother told me that if I wanted more clothes, I should learn to make them—which I did. By the end of that school year, I was voted the "best-dressed girl" in my class. By age 18, my originally designed

wardrobe was the best advertisement I could want, and led to my eventual career as a fashion designer and a host of opportunities that brought me design work on four continents.

For the past 40-something years, my mother has never ceased to inspire me when it comes to being innovative, driven by passion, constantly seeking new ideas to keep from living a mundane life, and cultivating God-given talents to make the most of what she has to work with in her remaining years. I doubt it will ever occur to my mom that she should think about slowing down and resting her bones a bit, because in her eyes, she is “only 82.”

Let me warn you in advance: In case you decide to go meet “the bag lady” in an upcoming craft show, her greatest pet peeve is anyone who acts sympathetic about her limp (stemming from arthritis in her hip) or her nagging cough (left over from her last bout with pneumonia). Don’t make the mistake of insinuating that she shouldn’t expect fast recovery after an illness because “she’s 82.”

Her retort will be, “What do you want me to do, crawl in a corner and give up because I’ve got gray hair?” Instead, just peruse her assortment of handbags and realize you’re talking to a woman who has the best outlook on aging you’ll ever run across: “The best is yet to come.”

I share that outlook with the bag lady, so I have my mother to thank for that inheritance.

- Karen Pressley