



Trashmagination Podcast #23 – Wedding Dresses

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown.

One of my favorite podcasts is *Happier*, hosted by Gretchen Rubin and Elizabeth Craft. They share tips on how to build life habits which will increase your happiness. They also address common reasons why you might not be happy, which they call "stumbling blocks." In this week's episode, a listener wrote them asking for advice on what to do with a wedding dress. It had belonged to this listener's mother and the listener did not want to keep holding on to it. However, they were nervous about donating it to a thrift shop because they imagined it being treated disrespectfully as a costume. They also did not want to make the dress into something new.

Gretchen and Liz advised the person to find a place to donate the dress where the dress would definitely be used by a bride and producer Kristen said she really loved wearing a secondhand dress at her own wedding.

This discussion inspired me to make my own episode about creative reuse of wedding dresses and accessories. So here are some tips on what to do with this very sentimental item.

I should note that I still have my own wedding dress in the closet and I have not made it into something new or given it away. My thinking is that maybe my daughter would like to wear it some day, and if that doesn't happen, I can find a new use for it then.

My own dress was secondhand. It was not my original plan to wear a wedding dress per se, but just a nice dress. However, my mom brought me to a place that specialized in secondhand wedding dresses, and when I tried this one on, I really love it. Plus it only cost a few hundred dollars. I did have to get it tailored to fit me better, but luckily it had this giant bow on the back so we took the fabric from that bow to add fabric where needed. I'll post a photo of myself in my wedding dress in the show notes.

Places to Donate Secondhand Wedding Dresses

So Gretchen and Liz are correct that there are many organizations which help brides find secondhand dresses. I'll post a list in the show notes. Many of these organizations use the profits from the sales to help a charity, so buying a secondhand dress not only saves you money and reduces waste, but it also helps someone else. Examples are:

- Brides Against Breast Cancer - <https://www.bridesagainstbreastcancer.org/>
- Brides Across America - <http://www.bridesacrossamerica.com/> - They give a military or first responder bride a free wedding gown during an "Operation Wedding Gown Event"
- Brides for a Cause - <http://bridesforacause.com/> - located in Portland, Oregon and Tacoma, Washington
- Adorned in Grace - <http://www.adornedingrace.org> – they are also in Oregon and their profits support organizations to help victims of sexually trafficking

The limitation of most of these charity programs is that they only want dresses that are less than five or seven years old. So that does not help the person who wanted a new home for her mother's wedding gown.

However, fashions come and go, and sometimes the dresses that were really popular 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago – these might be exactly what young people are looking for today. So I think it is worthwhile to search for “secondhand wedding dresses” in your area and see if a local company will take the dress.

For example, I live near Washington DC and I found these companies that offer secondhand gowns, often on consignment from brides:

- Fabulous Frocks in Alexandria, Virginia (<http://www.fabulousfrocksbridal.com/>)
- Fairytale Brides in Rockville, Maryland (<https://fairytalebrides.org/>)
- I Do, I Do in Gaithersburg, Maryland (<https://www.idoidoweddinggowns.com/>)

If there are no local companies, there are websites where people post their dresses:

- Nearly Newlywed - <https://www.nearlynewlywed.com>
- Still White - <https://www.stillwhite.com/>
- Pre-Owned Wedding Dresses - <https://www.preownedweddingdresses.com>

Creative Reuse Ideas for Wedding Gowns and Accessories

Now the person who asked Gretchen and Liz for advice specifically did not want to remake her mother's wedding gown into something new, but for many people, this is a great option. For example, you might want to keep a small piece of the gown for sentimental reasons, but the rest of the fabric could be made into something new.

Also, it might make it easier to give away the dress if you had a piece of art inspired by the dress. I found an artist who specializes in drawing wedding dresses in a frame-able sketch - <http://www.mydreamlines.com/how-it-works/>.

There is a very compelling program called Angel Gowns which takes wedding gowns and makes gowns for babies who will not come home from the hospital. The families receive these gowns for free and the gowns are sewn by volunteers. <https://www.nicuhelpinghands.org/news/angel-gowns-program-needs-shipping-help-meet-demand/>

I have also gathered ideas for projects on a Pinterest board including:

- put lace in a locket – there are many artists on Etsy who can help you do this - <https://www.etsy.com/listing/156563829/wedding-lockets-custom-memory-lockets>
- put lace in a frame – some people used it as a background for their wedding invitation in the frame - <http://www.weddingpartyapp.com/blog/2014/04/09/5-ways-save-piece-wedding-years-come/>
- make a scarf – either one that wraps around your neck – or here's a tutorial for a scarf that combines lace and t-shirt fabric - <https://natashagoes.wordpress.com/2012/01/06/upcycle-diy-wide-t-shirt-and-lace-scarf/> and <https://kikisrewinddesigns.wordpress.com/2010/12/26/turn-vintage-dresses-into-scarves/>
- make earrings if you have lace that has a solid flower, feather or similar shape you can cut out - <https://www.etsy.com/shop/whiteowl>
- I found a seamstress who will make a miniature version of the dress – like a doll-sized version – which you can frame - <https://www.etsy.com/listing/516451278/framed-miniature-repurposed-keepsake>

There is a company called Fairy Godmother Creations who make all sorts of items from wedding dresses, including christening gowns, communion dresses, memory bears, doll clothes, purses, pillows, blankets, tree skirts, stockings, tooth fairy pillows and fabric flowers - <http://www.fairygodmothercreations.com/custom-gifts-mto/what-to-do-with-a-wedding-dress/>.

Renting Wedding Items

You can reduce the impact of your wedding by renting items. The podcast Side Hustle School (<https://sidehustleschool.com/episode/184/>) shared a story of a business that rents wedding accessories called Happily Ever Borrowed (<https://www.happilyeverborrowed.com/>). They rent accessories – not dresses, but that can be a great savings as well.

The company Rent the Runway (<https://www.renttherunway.com/shop/bride/productsRent>) does rent wedding dresses. I heard a great podcast interview the founder of Rent the Runway, Jenn Hyman, on *How I Built This* (<http://www.npr.org/podcasts/510313/how-i-built-this>). Another company that rents wedding dresses is Borrowing Magnolia (<https://www.borrowingmagnolia.com/>) – they send the dresses for you to try on at home.

Sharing Your Wedding Flowers

While I'm on the topic of weddings, I wanted to share the idea that there are many organizations who will pick up your wedding flowers after the event and share them at nursing homes and other places:

- The Full Bloom - <https://www.thefullbloom.org/>
- Random Acts of Flowers - <http://randomactsofflowers.org/>
- Rebloom - <https://www.rebloomit.com/>
- Petals with Purpose - <http://www.petalswithpurpose.org/>
- Repeat Roses - <http://www.repeatroses.com/>

If you make items from wedding dresses or accessories, I would love to hear about your projects at trashmagination@gmail.com.

Until next time – may you see wedding dresses as just another source of creative reuse in your life.

Additional Resources for this Podcast

- Trashmagination Pinterest Board for Wedding Dresses and Accessories - <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/wedding-recycling/>
- *Happier* Podcast - <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/happier-with-gretchen-rubin/id969519520?mt=2>
- Bowman Bears Keepsake Teddy Bears - <http://www.bowmanbears.com/Wedding-Dress-Keepsake-Bears.html>