

# The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

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## Nosegay

*Mary Wilson Taylor*

A few years ago, after retiring to our dream house in Lenox, Massachusetts, Walter and I decided that we wanted to lighten up and downsize. Now, of course, as many of you know, this is a situation of fools rushing in where angels fear to tread. Yes, we thought it would be difficult, but never dreamed of the poignancy, pain, and emotional and physical work this would require from us. The first two years were spent selling our house and finding a smaller place right in the same community. Finally those pieces came together, and then the real work began. We were cutting everything in half: square footage, clothing, furniture, pictures, memorabilia from years past, and on and on. You recognize the situation. Fortunately, we have two sons who stepped up to the plate and asked for the family antiques we could not use. Actually, the real thanks go to our daughters-in-law who said “yes” to their husbands’ requests. This did not take care of everything, however; the pictures, books, and odds and ends that make up almost fifty years together gathered around us waiting. Which would stay and which would go to the tag sale? We became ruthless as we tried to fit things into our smaller space. Fortunately, we had made the move before our tag sale, so we could run back and forth from the house to the condo to see if this picture, or this antique tray, or this prized china wedding gift would work. When we couldn’t find a place for something, it went into the sale.

Time was running out, and deadlines were fast approaching.

Now, the heart of the story begins. What to do with Nosegay? For all of you out there who don’t recognize that name, it is a particular kind of Victorian flower print of a nosegay of roses, with colors of soft pinks, greens, and blues. This picture is among my earliest memories of my mother’s bedroom as I was growing up. She always had it hung by her side of the bed in every home. This print went with her from our family home in Michigan to my parents’ first downsizing, then on to the first retirement community and eventually to her one bedroom apartment in the final retirement community in which she lived. As Mom grew older, the print grew older, too, fading in its chipped but elegant antique mahogany frame. I realized that this was a metaphor of sorts for my mother’s life. I suspect she loved that print because in some way it revealed what was happening to her. She was fading. I suspect she could see the cycle of her own life and felt comforted by the picture. You see, Mom, in so many ways, enjoyed the process of fading. Always an elegant woman, but quite dependent on my father, she embraced the idea of

aging because she felt that less would be expected of her. Early on in this process, I can remember her saying to me, “Now remember Mary, I am not as young as I once was. I can’t do this, and I become too tired to do that.” She saw the process as a refuge, and I came to identify Nosegay with Mom’s refuge. Tucked away in this elegant but marred mahogany frame, Nosegay mirrored Mom’s declining years and was a close friend. I don’t think I recognized that friendship until Mom’s last move, when my sister and I were dividing the remnants of her life. As we were going through the few things she had kept after a lifetime, we discovered, carefully wrapped in tissue in an old hatbox in her small closet, a real nosegay, dried by years and faded as Nosegay. It was the corsage that she carried down the aisle at her wedding in 1934. The picture became clearer. I asked for the print as we shared our mother’s things, and brought it to Lenox where my husband and I had our home. It took its place in our bedroom, where it remained for several years until we downsized, until we moved. I looked for a place in our much smaller quarters, and finding none, sent the print down the street to the tag sale. It was time to move on, I told myself, as I hung it on a wall hoping to entice a prospective buyer.

The first night after the sale began, I awoke from a deep sleep. Thoughts of our new and former homes rushed to mind. Who got the wonderful Hepplewhite table? What about the antique chairs that came out of my grandmother’s attic? I tried to place everything in our sons’ homes and accounted for everything in our new condo. Then, startled, I remembered Nosegay and shuddered at how quickly I had discarded something that had been so close to my mother. Was it still there? Could I at least see it once more? Had someone already bought it? Morning finally came, and I rushed down the street to the sale. Making my way through the milling people, I walked over to where it hung and took it off the wall. A woman standing beside me immediately said, “No, I want that print.” I began to explain that it was no longer for sale, that it had been my mother’s favorite print and I just couldn’t part with it. The woman happened to be an antique dealer, and began to plead with me, saying that she would not hang it in her shop but would find the perfect place in her own home. I took her name and politely said that I would call if I changed my mind, and then quickly fled to our condo. Yes, I did find a place for it — right in our own bedroom, where it will stay until, in the future, our children face the same dilemma I did. Whenever I look at it, my mother seems closer; I know her better because of it.



Mary Taylor, together with her husband, Walter, retired in 1999 after a career in public and private secondary education. In retirement, she has continued her commitment to volunteerism through her involvement in The Community of Hope, Literacy Volunteers of America, and a number of environmental concerns. Mary and her husband are part of the leadership team of the Church Pension Fund’s Planning for Tomorrow and Enriching Your Retirement conferences.