

**old photos, from page 17**

ents is the childhood image of Granny Bee, my mom's stepmother. With her floppy hair bow and high-top shoes, little Bee looks like a Victorian china doll with an attitude.

Always feisty, she became that rare sort of grandma who wore platinum blond wigs and metallic shoes studded with colored rhinestones. (She was married to the hellion of a grandfather who shot at the roof of his house). I loved her flashy clothes and costume jewelry — and I adored my "step granny" just as much as I adored my other, more reserved, grandmothers.

Since Bee never had children of her own, I'll have the honor of passing her heirlooms to another generation of feists who'll appreciate them. I think of her whenever I hear the adage, "Blood isn't thicker than water." Bee knew that unconditional love, which she lavished on me during every visit, is the only glue that binds relatives to the heart.

Other childhoods are represented on my wall of fame. When I contemplate the odd-looking little ones in their ruffles and linens, I can't imag-

ine how they grew to be the great aunts and uncles and grandparents who seemed so "old" to me when I was a child. And I can't believe that all of them are buried now, in cemeteries across the Midwest.

One photograph, in particular, al-

ready to conquer the world in his stiff cardboard collar.

More than any others in my collection, those two photographs of Albert speak of the fragility of youth, of life itself.

And there's the hand-tinted glamour shot of my mother, taken by her stepfather in the 1940s. In it she is a young woman, pausing for a moment before the big dance. Her lipstick is ruby red, her hair almost auburn.

This photograph belies my mother's incredible inner strength, the hallmark of her character. Looking at it, you wouldn't guess that her life, like the other lives in my photo gallery, would later become a complicated series of tragedies and celebrations.

American writer Gerald Johnson said "the past that influences our lives isn't the past that actually happened, but the one that we believe happened."

No matter. My old photographs and their stories weave a compelling tapestry of the pioneers who paved my way. Only for the time being, I am the curator of their legacy.

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*The older I get, it seems, the more I appreciate my connection to the ancestors whose faces peer out at me from the sepia-toned photographs*

ways haunts me. It shows the funeral procession for my father's uncle, Albert Gullion, a casualty of World War I who was buried in his hometown of Kirkwall, Scotland. In the photograph, young Albert's horse-drawn casket follows a bagpipe and drum corps through the narrow streets of Kirkwall. I'd rather remember Albert as he posed in another photo — as strapping and handsome as Christopher Reeve and

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