

### SQUEEZE THE DAY



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## Saying goodbye to old pal

To this day, I'm still not sure where he came from, or even exactly what he was. All I know is someone, but I don't remember who, gave him to me at a baby shower when I was pregnant with our first child.

For the longest time, I thought he was a baby deer, but then some kids — who certainly ought to know better than anyone — told us it was a baby giraffe. He was Jolie, a cuddly toy animal no bigger than an adult's hand. He came with two pea-sized black eyes and a pale blue ribbon tied in a bow around his neck. He had tiny pink ears and next to those, even tinier yellow horns. Inside of him you could feel a small round noisemaker so he made an annoying rattling sound whenever he was moved.

He was a bit unusual-looking, but kind of cute in an odd sort of way. Certainly not your typical darling bunny or adorable teddy bear, but somehow he was strangely endearing. So I put him, along with a few other stuffed animals, in our daughter's crib when she was just an infant.

Eileen, who began sucking her thumb at about six months old, went to daycare part-time and had a hard time adjusting at first. She cried at nap time and didn't sleep well. Finally it dawned on me that she had grown attached to this little creature in her crib. At home I watched her hold him at her face, lovingly rubbing his right horn and sucking her thumb at the same time. Once he began accompanying her to daycare and later to preschool, she was completely happy.

We called him Jolie, simply because that was the name on the copyright tag attached to his little behind. (Over time, however, after countless washings and the never-ending love Eileen gave him, his tag eventually read, "olie.") Over the past five years, Jolie traveled to northern Michigan, the Upper Peninsula, New Jersey, Maine, Florida, and California. He endured numerous mishaps, including accidentally falling into the toilet, being thrown up on, and having a variety of food-and drink spilled on him.

As you might guess, Jolie's appearance changed dramatically over time. His sunny yellow color faded to what could best be described as beige, his bright sky blue ribbon was now silver-ish-looking, his deep black eyes had white scratches, and numerous sections of his once-soft and fuzzy neck and head had given way to thread-bare patches. But what was most pathetic about Jolie was his right horn. Though I had repaired it numerous times, I finally realized it was a lost cause. The horn was now practically non-existent. It had sadly separated into a few strands of raggedy fiber from Eileen's constant rubbing.

As much as Eileen loved him, there were times when I hated that little giraffe. I hated having to always frantically look for him at bedtime or accidentally leaving him at different places. Once I placed a call to McDonald's to see if he was there. Other times I had to race to Academic Gardens preschool two minutes before closing time because he was left behind, and the thought of a night without Jolie was just as terrifying for my husband and I as it was for our daughter.

But mostly I hated Jolie because he was synonymous with thumb-sucking. Over time, we convinced Eileen to only use Jolie at night. But attempts to get her to give him up were futile. Then one day I read *The Velveteen Rabbit*. It's a classic tale about a little boy whose favorite toy bunny is real



STAFF PHOTOS BY TOM HOFFMEIER

**Black-tie affair:** Valerie Welling-McFarland, owner of Special Occasion Ladies Dress Rental and Tuxedos, shows off an Audrey Hepburn-style dress available to rent at her Walled Lake store.

## Going to Detroit's royal ball

### Dressing like a princess without hefty price tag

BY NICOLE STAFFORD  
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Done up in a strapless Jessica McClintock gown speckled with white rhinestones, Gloria Holmes of Clarkston feels like Cinderella.

The matte gold dress is practically an original. Only two were made, and this particular gown, the one that Holmes plans to wear tomorrow evening to the charity preview of the 2002 North American International Auto Show, appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*.

Holmes, a local marketing executive, attends the gala, along with several other black-tie affairs, every year.

Today, one week before what could be described as Detroit's royal ball — the who's who of the automotive world flock to the event — Holmes feels a bit like Cinderella waiting for her prince.

Oh, the makings of fairy tales — a gold gown and pair of glass slippers.

Except in Holmes' case, it's not the gown's color, but price, that has her dancing on air.

Just like Cinderella, Holmes' ball gown is a loaner.

Actually, she's renting the \$900 dress from Special Occasion Ladies Dress Rental and Tuxedos in Walled Lake for \$75. "I was buying a dress every year to attend this event," she says, ecstatic.

The topper: The gold gown is nothing like her usual gala get-ups. "I would have tried on this dress, loved it, but not purchased it, because of the money," she says, adding, "every woman likes to play dress-up, and now I can."

**Dressing up is hard to do**

Every woman dreams of showing up in a stand-out gown. Unfortunately, the cost of outstanding ones exceed most budgets. A high-end designer frock can easily run in the thousands of dollars.

The paradox within: When a woman turns out in an eye-catching ensemble, she'll be hard-pressed to wear it again, especially in high-profile social circles.

"I have several black-tie affairs to go to each year," Holmes says. "I buy a gown, wear it and then it sits there." After a few years, the dress can't be worn because it looks dated, she says.

So go the woes of women.

Men, on the other hand, despite the penguin problem and their complaining, have had a much easier time in their history with formal social attire.

Those who own a tux only need change the tie to look fresh and up-to-date. And, although Europe has been renting black-tie attire to women for some time now, men have had the luxury for longer.

Surprisingly, the idea for Special Occasion Ladies Dress Rental and Tuxedos, which has 1,500 formal designer dresses, did not come from the men's formal wear tradition, says store owner

**Special Occasion Ladies Dress Rental and Tuxedos**  
Where: 861 Pontiac Trail, north of Maple, in Walled Lake  
Hours: Noon-6 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, noon-8 p.m. Thursday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and in the evening by appointment  
Information: Call (248) 755-3744 or (248) 366-7609 or visit [www.ladiesdressrental.com](http://www.ladiesdressrental.com)

Valerie Welling-McFarland. The Livonia native saw a similar shop in Pennsylvania and filed the concept as a future business idea. "I'd like to take credit, but I can't," she says.

Gown rentals start at \$39, and the racks cover all sizes, include petite and plus. Dress designers carried at the store include Nicole Miller, Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein and Vera Wang. Faux and real furs, hand bags, wraps, bridal wear and tuxedos, are available to rent, too.

Welling-McFarland opened the store with 300 dresses in February 2001 but plans to double her inventory by summer.

"This is our first auto show," she says. So far, almost 100 dresses have been reserved for Friday evening's festivities.

### The new savvy

The truth is most women who attend black-tie affairs can afford to buy a new gown.

But that doesn't mean they want to or should, and today's women understand their options.

"It's not that they're not going to go to Neiman Marcus and pay full price for a gown," says Carolyn Joseph, co-owner of Bellechius Upscale Resale in Royal Oak where sales of gently used formal wear for this year's auto show gala have been strong.

Simply put, today's women are more savvy about wardrobe expenditures. Many plan on buying and selling at the resale level, Joseph says.

"We're seeing an increase in what we call cross-over clients that both consign with us and shop with us."

At the same time, there's growing approval for the idea of wearing used clothing and a sense among working women that clothing is, first and foremost, an investment in image and career.

"In the last, maybe, 10 years, the idea of wearing something that was previously owned has become much more palatable, and women are becoming smarter about their investments in clothing," says Joseph.

With an increasing number of women in influential positions in the automotive industry, a wave of smart wardrobe shopping in Detroit only makes sense.

"Resale benefits ... the shopper who is looking for an exceptional value or who wants to get something outstanding and can't afford it otherwise," says Joseph. "On the flip side, how many times would you wear a gown. I might even be a little bit

more inclined to spend a little more at retail, if I know I'm going to get something back at resale."

### New formal

Another black-tie option gaining popularity with local women is what Cheryl Hall Lindsay, fashion and special events director at Saks Fifth Avenue in Troy, calls "evening sportswear."

The elements are satin, lace or leather pants combined with beaded or sequined cashmere sweaters, says Hall Lindsay, adding she's noticed two distinct camps among gala attendees who shopped at Saks, one being the wearer of the evening sportswear look.

"It's a very casual chic, but it's very elegant," says Hall Lindsay.

Such pieces can be worn again and again with ease; a leather pant can go just about anywhere, and a cashmere sweater dotted with sequins comes as no surprise in today's workplace.

Hall Lindsay also sees individualism behind the practical, but daring, trend. "New vistas ... provides more options for more women and more body types."

The look also reflects an overall trend towards leaner silhouettes and more youthful dressing, she says.

"The other camp is the gown group, and we are selling many gowns," says Hall Lindsay. "But the gowns are in the same vein as the sportswear. They're not ball gowns. They're mostly column dresses. And it's a less voluminous look. The silhouette is a lot closer to the body."

So much for Cinderella.



**Ready for the show:** Gloria Holmes of Clarkston takes a final look at the gold silk gown she's wearing — at a cost of \$79 — to the gala preview of the 2002 North American International Auto Show.

## Motivational speaker addresses Child Abuse and Neglect Council luncheon



By JON HUBRED  
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Imagine someone with the personality of comedian Robin Williams giving a pat on the back to people in Oakland County who make a difference in the lives of abused kids — and you'll have envisioned motivational speaker Dave Pelzer.

An author whose four books have made national and international best seller lists, Pelzer will keynote this year's Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland County's Circle of Friends luncheon, held Thursday, Jan. 17 at Glen Oaks Country Club in Farmington

Hills. The event gathers council supporters and raises funds.

"Circle of Friends, now in its sixth year, is an example of how people can come together to make a difference for children," said event chair Carol Larson Wenzel of Bloomfield Hills. "Children just shouldn't have to be abused."

No one knows that better than Pelzer, who has broken the cycle of abuse in his own life. He doesn't like to talk much about his "overcoming enormous obstacles to find success" story, recounted in *A Child Called "It"* and *Lost Boy*. But that story is compelling. At the hands of a mentally unbalanced mother, Pelzer was subjected to horrific abuse

until his teachers risked their careers to notify authorities. At age 12, he was removed from his home and placed in foster care until he enlisted in the Air Force at age 18.

"In the military, they mentally and physically break you down," he said. "You really get to look inside yourself to see what you can do this."

Given what he'd already survived, Pelzer decided he could. As a member of the armed forces, he participated in mid-air refueling of the highly secretive aircraft that played a major role in Operations Just Cause, Desert Shield

Please see **SPEAKER**, C6