

## **My Mother's Clothes Are Not My Mother: Speaks the Truth About Letting Go**

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Piling up a bunch of fancy clothes with plans to give them away to Goodwill's sounds like a very charitable deed. The struggle, however, begins when you need to make a choice about what you let go and what you don't. It is then that what you keep, whether it is clothes or not, triggers you to think of that past with your clothes and loved ones. Portland writer and educator Elizabeth Peavey comes to Lewiston this month to speak the truth about the inevitable circle of life, where the passing away of a mother can hit you hard.

Presented as a truthful comic solo piece written by Elizabeth Peavey herself and directed by Janet Mitchko, *My Mother's Clothes Are Not My Mother* won the 2013 Maine Literary Award for Best Drama. On Friday, November 10, I ventured off campus to experience this personal work firsthand. I was not disappointed.

Written and performed as a series of connected monologues that make up a one-woman show, Peavy's piece walks its audience through her childhood, teenage, and adult relationship with her mom, to finally come to the present day. At the core of the play, a task is left for Peavy: rummaging through her mother's clothes and possessions and sorting them. Possessions and material reveal themselves to be essential to Peavey, each superficial and superfluous piece of clothing a signifier for deeper emotions.

The clothes are only the trigger; the memories and history each piece of clothing represents the main action of the solo piece. Peavy takes us on a journey in which we meet her mother, Shirley Peavey, without actually seeing her person onstage. She talks about her mother in an ambivalent way; she hates on her as much as she remembers to love her. Words become harsh and, as she reflects on herself being the last child in the house for her parents, she bitterly remembers her parents telling her "they did the best they could" when they raised her. As Peavy's narration progresses, her mother goes from an independent "super senior" to a hard-to-excite "condo mom." Peavey becomes then the parent to the mother that once parented her, and she starts to gain a better understanding of why her mom used to say "we did the best we could." Now, Peavey uses the same words her mom had used and realizes the difficulty of parenting the people that previously took care of you.

Though obviously more sympathetic to the Maine middle class population- for instance, she references places and situations 50 -year-old local middle class audiences can best understand – the tone set by Elizabeth Peavey in her narration of a lifetime with her mother is often skeptical of its target audience. As Peavey reminisces about her childhood, she starts singing Billy Murray's *A Man Without a Woman*, a song that was taught to her as a child. It is in that song's lines, in which women are compared to silver dollars that go from man to man, that Peavey reveals her desire to criticize the middle class mannerisms and sexist customs of her childhood.

*My Mother's Clothes Are Not My Mother* will be running at The Public Theater through November 19. As days get colder on campus, a visit to The Theater in Lewiston will help maintain that warmth of character.