

BEYOND PAPER

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First-time mom to-be Mackenzie O'Deay applies wallpaper to her nursery with assistance from her grandma, Suzanne Roe, who will become a great-grandmother upon arrival of the new baby.

LAYERS OF LOVE

Wallpapering a nursery inspires a grandmother to pen a reflective letter to her granddaughter.

by Jen Wainwright

Mackenzie, Decorating the nursery together today was a joy, one that you cannot yet know. But you will, all in good time. As you prepare to become a mother, Mackenzie, I'm preparing to become a great-grandmother—an adventure you simply cannot understand yet in your youth.

In this precious time in your life, imagining what it will be like to hold your new little bundle, you couldn't know that as I stood next to you today, sharing in the excitement with you and Tom as we carefully applied your hand-chosen wallpaper and began delicately transforming that plain old room into a nursery, I found myself remembering, too—back many moons ago, as your grandfather and I did the very same thing, preparing for the arrival of your father.

Your grandfather laughed at me. He thought putting wallpaper up was a waste of time, but he helped me anyway because that's who he was. Oh, Mackenzie, I can still see the tiny, floppy-eared bunnies on the wallpaper that I picked out for your father's nursery, over 40 years ago now! Where does time go?

Grandmother and granddaughter hold a newspaper clipping from 1993 that depicts five generations of family members present at the time of Mackenzie O'Deay's birth. Clockwise, from upper left, are Suzanne Roe; Sally Ann Stratz; Rose (Nana) Ball; Mackenzie O'Deay, and Mackenzie O'Deay's father, James O'Deay II.



You couldn't quite know today how I used to sit in that nursery for hours, staring at those little bunnies and the small tufts of grass sprinkled about, daydreaming of what it would be like to be someone's mom. What a magical time you are experiencing right now! Hold tight to every hope and every dream you have for your new little one and your growing family. I can assure you that one day, you will remember this time fondly, just as I do now, looking back.

Mackenzie, do you know that Nana stopped by on the day your grandfather and I put up that little bunny wallpaper? Ever the feisty one, Nana was! (Surely, the stubborn streak that courses through our veins began with your great-great-grandmother herself, Mrs. Rose Lucille Ball!) I'm smiling as I write this, just thinking of her. You've got to remember that Nana wallpapered her first nursery in 1934 during the Great Depression—the nursery that would belong to your great-grandmother Sally Ann—and she didn't take kindly to your grandfather's jokes, especially about wallpaper.

"We had to save and scrimp," she told your grandpa that day, her gnarled finger poking at his chest. "The last thing we

could afford at that time was wallpaper. But I told him that our firstborn deserved the best, and that's what we provided! You ought to feel lucky that you can offer your firstborn the same!"

Oh, Nana, how I miss her. She and I were close the way you and I are, Mackenzie. In her age, she'd already experienced what was still ahead of me in my youth, and she was always willing to lend a wise word. Looking back now on what you are just beginning, I realize that what you simply cannot yet know is what I know now and what Nana knew before me.

One day, Mackenzie, the wallpaper we hung so carefully together today will come down. In its place will come new wallpaper, the fairy wishes or racecar dreams of your little 6-year-old, and then followed by the popstar décor that your 13-year-old must have. And one day, you'll find yourself putting up wallpaper in your guest bedroom, as your children are out of the house living the lives you prepared them to have. You cannot yet know these experiences, but you will, all in good time. And you cannot yet know how, with every change, you will both celebrate and welcome the new stage just as you grieve and say goodbye to the previous.

I'm writing you this letter now, Mackenzie, because as I watch you grow from the little girl with wide-eyed wonder and pigtails into the amazing woman I stood next to today in your nursery, I'm both struggling to let go and to let my heart soar over what will be.

And I want to share with you something that Nana told me on the day she helped me take down the little bunny wallpaper. "Loving a child will prove to be both the most beautiful experience of your life and the most bittersweet. You can't have one without the other, but you'd never choose any other way."

I love you,
Grandma Suzanne