

Lace Collar

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Lace – a reminder of a time gone by. But I am always amazed at its intricately patterned designs when I view the masterly works of Rembrandt and Franz Hals as they so accurately recreated it in paint.

The recent exhibition of Rembrandt's portraits at Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum was accompanied by an exhibit of actual lace, including lace collars. As I admired its delicate workmanship my memory was flooded by my grandmother and the visits to her house in Dobruska in pre-war Czechoslovakia.

She had a rather prominent goiter on her neck and was determined to camouflage it. So she wore a white, high lace collar with whatever dress she was wearing. It was part of her distinctive uniform. When she was shipped off to the Terezin concentration camp in 1942, she wore a lace collar as usual. In the squalid conditions of living in one room with a dozen others she still managed to wash that collar each day in order for it to be fresh every single day. It was her quiet way of affirming her dignity and individuality under extreme conditions. Survivors invariably commented on that act whenever they remembered my grandmother.

(Grandmother survived Terezin, but returned home in 1945 without her husband who succumbed in the concentration camp. Six weeks after being freed she died of a burst appendix.)

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