

With this RING...

Vintage jewelry is loaded with history and mystery. But there's one piece **Claudia Chung** can't bring herself to wear

I am draped in decades of other people's lives every single day. When I get dressed — silk for the summer, Apple watch, flats made to hit the pavement — I also slip on my gold rings from the 1930s.

When I place my iPad and iPhone inside my purse, my bracelets from the 1970s are always looped on my right wrist.

And as I leave my apartment, I take one last look in the mirror and twist one of the vintage cameo earrings from the 1940s.

My daily sartorial style, an expression to the world of who I am, twinkles with dead people's jewelry.

I've always been attracted to vintage — from custom-tailored dresses, to the silver serving platters on top of my dresser that hold my lotions and potions. I believe in things made before H&M, Pottery Barn, and Zales took over our minds and wallets;

"stuff" made with care, pride, and a thoughtfulness to detail; especially products that were meant to evoke pleasure. And what brings more pleasure than jewelry? Its sole purpose is to be pretty and make the person

wearing it feel special, cared for.

There is something beautiful and tragic about jewelry left behind. It holds so much more than the history of ownership; it holds a mystery and story. It makes me wonder what it meant to someone else and how it made them feel. Who was the person that got to wear it first?"

that got to wear it first? Did he or she wear it every day like me? Was it a gift, or a little magical treat bought with their own money and confidence?

I've gotten my fair share of jewelry from men — some

About CLAUDIA

Claudia Chung is a writer who moonlights as a school teacher. She is currently working on a book of essays and stories on the trials, tribulations, and the funny in being a young widow.



I lost, some I sold, and the rest is just rotting in the back of my closet. I don't look at it, let alone wear it. The pieces I wear daily are the ones I bought myself. Each ring, earring, and bracelet I searched, bid for, and cleaned. They come mostly from estate sales, meaning the previous owners are most likely dead.

The only vintage jewelry I refuse to wear is my engagement ring — an art deco-style setting with a princess-cut diamond. It's everything. It's old. Very old. It belonged to my guy's mother. Now it belongs to me. I can't bear to slip it on without my heart wanting to stop, just as his did on a random, unexpected Saturday morning. And I'm not sure what makes me more afraid: that I will never wear it again, or that I will put it on and never take it off. What kind of message would I be sending to the world by wearing it? And what would I say when people compliment it and ask where it's from?

Recently, I dug out the little white box from my underwear drawer, after two years of pretending it didn't exist. Just looking at the box made me want to disappear. I gazed at it and wondered what it all meant — the survival and miracle of this little ring. The first life was a marriage that lasted almost half a century, producing five children and three grand children. Then it came to me. We never made it to the altar. It produced no children, although we were planning to get a dog and name it Pal Sutton.

I respect this ring, not because it is absolutely gorgeous (which it is), but because it was here before me and I hope it will be here after me.

Where will it go? Who will wear it? And what will it mean to them? I don't have an answer. All I know is I am finally open to seeing the possibility.