

Roslyn Heights artist restores 66-year-old photo

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The photo was damaged during Hurricane Sandy in 2012

Fischetti's photo before restoration © 2015 Xiomaro.com

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By Harrison Marder

When Hurricane Sandy hit Long Island in 2012, 87-year-old Massapequa resident Sue Fischetti feared she had lost all the photos that were a part of her wedding album.

Fischetti was right with one exception.

Leah Welsh, Fischetti's neighbor, found a photo from the album buried in a pile of debris that washed up on her lawn.

Welsh held the photo for two years before finding Fischetti who lived only four houses away.

Last Thanksgiving, while watching television at home, Roslyn Heights artist Xiomaro said he came across Fischetti's story while watching the local news.

"[It was a] compelling, heartwarming story," Xiomaro said. "It kind of moved me."



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At the end of the news report, Fischetti said she wanted to have the photo restored, but Xiomaro said “the thought may have already been in [his] mind.”

He already had previous experience restoring photos.

“I am frequently commissioned by the National Park Service to photograph historic homes such as Theodore Roosevelt’s Sagamore Hill,” he said. “So I have an interest in preservation and conservation.”

The photo was a picture of Fischetti and her father Charles from her wedding day in 1949. It was the only photo salvaged from the 100 photos that were part of the album.

Lorraine Hopes, Fischetti’s daughter, said that prior to Sandy hitting, her mother was in the process of moving so she stored some of her mother’s personal items in her garage temporarily.

Hopes said she put the wedding album in a plastic container in her garage, but when Sandy hit, the water was three to four feet high in her garage, causing everything in the garage to be washed out to sea.

Despite having the one photo back in her possession, Fischetti doubted it could ever be restored after the damage it incurred from Sandy.

After researching Fischetti’s story further, Xiomaro found an email address for Welsh, who then put him into contact with Hopes.

After speaking with Hopes, Xiomaro said he was able to go to Fischetti’s house and view the photo.

“[The photo was in] pretty bad shape,” Xiomaro said. “[It had been] pummeled with sand, water and mud.”

That was when Xiomaro began the “tedious process” of restoring the photo at his studio.

The process entails placing a grid over the photo so that the photo can be restored “methodically and systematically,” Xiomaro said.

Xiomaro employed a number of digital techniques to make corrections to the photo, including restoring the contrast of the picture and adding texture to the picture that was lost from the damage.

At one point during the photo’s restoration, Xiomaro said, he accidentally lost all of the work he had done on the photo because he lost the photo’s digital file.

Instead of reverting back to an earlier saved version of the photo, Xiomaro said, he started to work on the photo again from scratch.

“I was multi-tasking and I don’t even remember I what I did,” he said. “I couldn’t give up on [the photo.] I had a job to do. I promised [Fischetti] I would do it and I believe to sticking to my commitments no matter what happens.”

After finally restoring the photo last spring, Xiomaro needed to choose the correct type of paper to print the photo on.

Xiomaro said he chose the most expensive paper in his studio on which to print the photo.

“[The paper] was not pure white,” he said. “It had little bits of yellow and brown in it. [The paper had a] warmer quality that is easier on the eyes.”

Fischetti also requested that the photo be restored to its original black and white color, rather than leaving the natural yellowing that the photo incurred.

The next step was purchasing a frame for Fischetti, Xiomaro said.

"I want[ed] to give her something nice," he said. "[A] brown [frame] with nice matting. It picks up on the photo itself."

However, since finishing the restoration of the photo and getting it framed, Xiomaro said, he has not given Fischetti her photo back yet, mainly due to both Fischetti and Hopes relocating after Sandy.

Fischetti moved to Valley Stream after Sandy hit, and Hopes now resides in Copiague Harbor.

Despite the distance, Xiomaro said that he really wants Fischetti to have her photo back.

"[I want to] give her a nice presentation," he said. "Something she can hang on the wall immediately."

With the three-year anniversary of Sandy coming up, Xiomaro said, he hopes to get Fischetti her photo within the next week.

With all the attention Fischetti's story has already received in the media, Xiomaro said, he wants to make the presentation of the photo in front of the public.

"People want to see some closure to [the situation,]" he said. "A happy ending."

Fischetti, like the public, wants some closure as well.

"I never expected all this," she said. "I'm anxious to see the picture. It's going to be a lifesaver. It will be a great reminder of the picture itself. [It will] bring back memories. I'm not the type to show my emotions, but when I see it I will probably cry."

Hopes said that Xiomaro has been "very accommodating" throughout the entire process of restoring the photo.

“This is really heartwarming,” she said. [There are] good people [in the world.]”

But, just in case anything were to ever happen to Fischetti’s newly restored photo, Xiomaro said he already has a backup plan.

“I also gave [Fischetti] a digital file of the picture,” he said. “[So she will] have some insurance.