

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

A Career Born of Babies

A Daughter Lovingly Gathers a Noted Photographer's Work

By CLAUDIA GRIVATZ COPQUIN

EAST NORTHPORT

SHORTLY before her mother died in 2005 at the age of 92, Lynda Hatcher, 50, began methodically sorting through her mother's collection of photographs, negatives and memorabilia. She is still at it.

Ms. Hatcher's mother was Constance Bannister, a noted baby photographer of the 1940s and '50s. "I would say I've been through almost three-quarters of the collection, and still find surprises and interesting things," Ms. Hatcher said, citing, for example, portraits made in the 1950s of the actor Christopher Walken as a child.

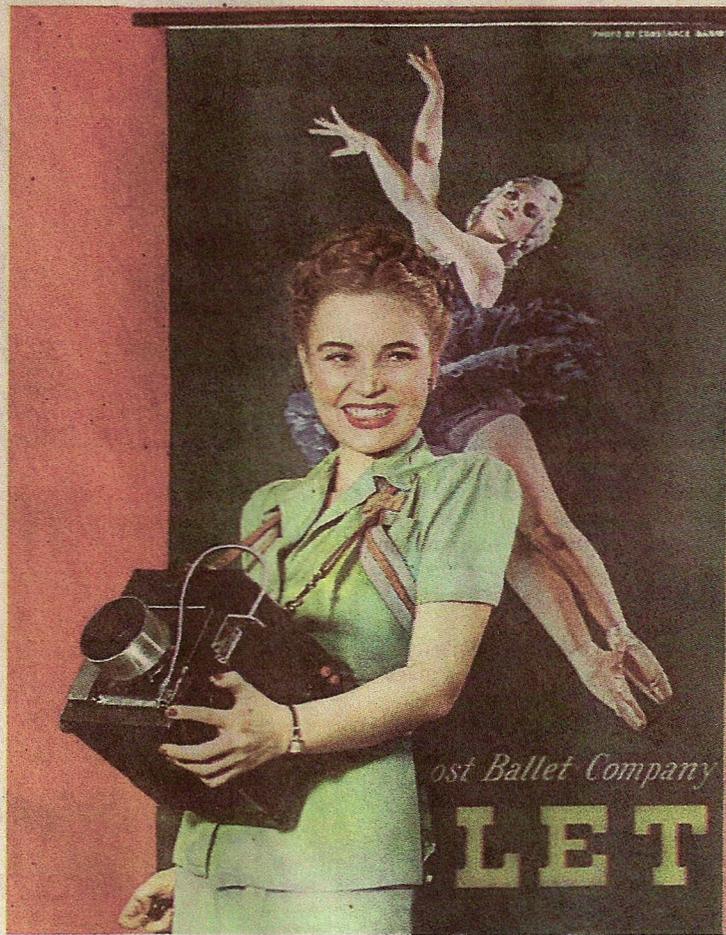
Two of Ms. Hatcher's three sons, the ones who are now in college, were relocated to the basement, so she could use their second-story bedrooms to house the collection, she said.

Stepping into one of the rooms is like wandering into a time capsule filled with prints, posters, vintage cameras and studio paraphernalia (including a feather used to tickle babies during photo sessions). "It's like living in the '40s and '50s, and the world doesn't exist anymore," Ms. Hatcher said. In the middle of it all is a self-portrait of the photographer at age 29, grinning while hoisting a bulky black Graflex camera.

It's a dazzling image, one of many that Lynda Hatcher wants the world to see. She recently assembled an exhibit at the Cold Spring Harbor Library for the month of May. "Out of the Darkroom: The Life and Times of Constance Bannister" includes prints that have not been seen by the public in 40 years, Ms. Hatcher said. Some former Bannister Babies, as they were called, are also expected to attend.

"I'm trying to take what she captured and share it," she said. She is also working on her mother's biography and is in

"Out of the Darkroom: The Life and Times of Constance Bannister," through May 31, Cold Spring Harbor Library Art Gallery, 95 Harbor Road, Cold Spring Harbor; (631) 692-6820. cshlibrary.suffolk.lib.ny.us.



CONSTANCE BANNISTER

the process of changing her surname to Bannister.

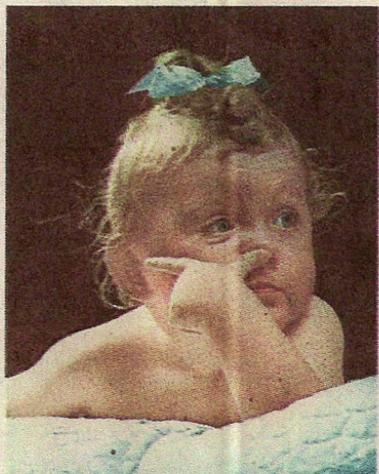
Constance Bannister lived as an adult in Syosset and then in Laurel Hollow, but was born in 1913 in Ashland City, Tenn., one of 17 children. After moving to New York and studying photography, she got a job with The Associated Press, which in 1937 assigned her to shoot high society in Palm Beach, Fla. Later, she returned to Manhattan and set up a studio on Central Park South.

She was married three times, and with her third husband, Joseph Hatcher, adopted two daughters, Ms. Hatcher in 1958 and her sister, Lisa Kelley, in 1960.

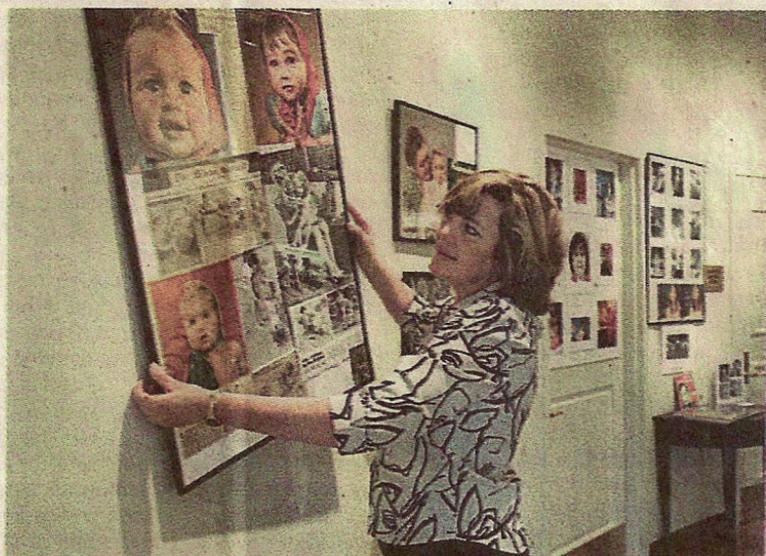
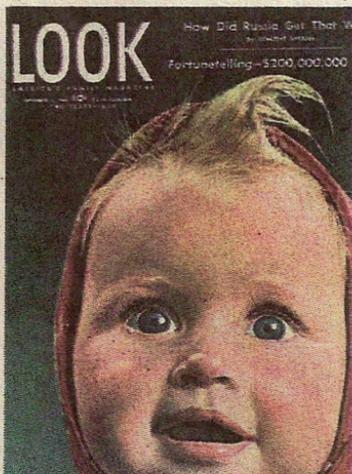
Ms. Kelley, 47, and her father, who is 89, recently moved to Naples, Fla., from Laurel Hollow.

Constance Bannister's portfolio included fashion, children and entertainment, but it was her amusing stills of diaper-clad infants that received the most attention. Those whimsical images were frequently featured in print advertising campaigns, calendars and magazines, including The Saturday Evening Post. Ms. Bannister also created humorous captions for her most animated subjects and compiled the captioned photographs into themed booklets.

"The photo release forms start



CONSTANCE BANNISTER



VIC DELUCIA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

KIDS GALORE Photos by Constance Bannister, left, in a self-portrait from around 1942, were sorted by her daughter Lynda Hatcher, above, and are being exhibited at Cold Spring Harbor Library.

Constance Bannister created whimsical images of infants.

around 1943," Ms. Hatcher said, sifting through one of seven file cabinets containing thousands of pristine negatives. While her mother had the benefit of only an eighth-grade education, she said, she maintained meticulous records. Besides 15 four-drawer filing cabinets full of 8 x 10's and other prints,

there is a closet containing a hefty stack of film and audio reels Ms. Hatcher has yet to go through. There are still boxes of material in the basement as well.

"She's done a phenomenal job," Ms. Kelley said of her sister's efforts to resurrect her mother's work. "Both me and my dad are very proud of what she's done, keeping my mother's legacy going."

The project has had personal rewards for Ms. Hatcher. "I strongly recommend doing a biography about your parent, famous or not," she said. "You fall in love with them all over again, and learn so much about yourself in the process."