

## **'GrammaBurp' Cards Provide A Good Laugh**

By Jennifer Dermady, Transcript Intern

**Barbra Retzlaff of North Adams, uses old black-and-white photographs and funny captions to create the greeting cards in her GrammaBurp line.**

Monday, May 8

NORTH ADAMS — Do you ever wish the workplace would just lighten up a bit? Barbra Retzlaff got tired of the corporate scene and found a way to crack a joke everyday and still get paid for it.

Retzlaff isn't a comic, she is a local humor greeting card maker. Retzlaff has been residing in North Adams for 20 years. She has two grown children, Brad and Kristina, with her partner of 10 years, Doreen.

Retzlaff used to work as a professional photographer for several years and for a human services agency for 13 years. "I loved the work and I loved helping people, but over time it became very 'corporate' and they didn't appreciate my sense of humor," said Retzlaff.

During this time, Retzlaff had been doing freelance greeting card writing and finding it to be a successful adventure.

### **'Everything fell into place'**

"One day I was looking at some really old black-and-white photos and funny captions for the photos just started coming to me," said Retzlaff. "I was laughing out loud at myself!"

"That was the moment. I bought those old photos. After that, everything fell into place," she said.

She resigned from her human services job and went through Berkshire Works. Retzlaff was informed that she could work with Berkshire Enterprises.

"I took their intensive entrepreneurial training course, which ended up being one of the best things I've ever done in my life," said Retzlaff.

After that GrammaBurp was born. The name came about when her granddaughter Nora was staying over one night. "Nora didn't always

burp after feedings, but for some reason, I was almost always able to get her to burp — even when everyone else had failed," said Retzlaff. "Every four hours or so, my daughter would call out 'Gramma ... Burp!' And it just stuck."

Retzlaff had been in love with black-and-white photography ever since taking a photography course in college.

"I have not yet done any cards with photos I took, but there are several that feature friends and family ... and maybe even one of me, but I'll never tell which one," she said.

### **The ideas for the captions come from all walks of life.**

"Everyday life, memories, personal experiences, things I see, things I've heard as well as media; I watch a lot of movies, mostly comedies and drama," said Retzlaff.

Also sitcoms such as "That '70s Show" and reruns of "Roseanne", "All In The Family" and "The Carol Burnett Show" inspire her.

"I just let it all soak in till it's time to write a card," said Retzlaff. "Then I just stare at one of my old photos and let my right brain take over. A lot of the time the captions just come to me. Many times I can judge my work right then, by whether it makes me laugh out loud or not."

Retzlaff creates a good portion of her line by what other people have asked her to do.

"So many people have a hard time finding real life, down-to-earth, non-mushy, truly funny, make-you-laugh-out-loud greeting cards. I love doing special designs for people," said Retzlaff.

Retzlaff recalls one woman asking for a card for her husband's birthday. Retzlaff used a photo of a young man standing on a beach wearing shorts, holding a tall walking stick. "He's got very serious expression on his face and he's wearing bull horns on his head."

The card stated "Happy Birthday to the horny guy with the big stick!"

"It was a hit," said Retzlaff. "Now it's an important part of my line."

### **Can relate to Mother's Day card**

One of Retzlaff's favorite cards right now is a Mother's Day card.

"The photo shows a woman with a serious but patient and tolerant expression on her face while her daughter who is standing in front of mom, pokes herself painfully in the eye. The caption reads: 'Happy Mother's Day Mom! I may not have been the easiest kid to raise, but you've got to admit I kept it interesting.'"

Retzlaff finds that card to be special to her because she can relate to it.

"The mother-daughter relationship can be one of the most tumultuous relationships in life, while at the same time, one of the most precious," said Retzlaff. "Since my mom's mind has been stolen by Alzheimer's, designing this card and knowing that (if she could read and understand it) she would laugh out loud and love it, makes this one a very special card for me personally."

Retzlaff added 20 new cards to her collection last month. "I love every aspect of what I'm doing now, but I have the most fun when I'm writing new cards, so as a result, I come out with new cards frequently.

"I'm also having some of my cards printed onto rectangular fridge magnets," she said.

The cards can be found locally at Tupelo Honey in Williamstown, Next Door Beer and Wine in Pownal, Vt., and at The Party Place on Ashland Street in North Adams. The entire line can be viewed on her Web site [GrammarBurp.com](http://GrammarBurp.com).