

Bear in Mind

An electronic newsletter from Bear Threads Ltd.

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From The Editor –

What a beautiful time of the year! My first tulips are blooming and my hostas are beginning to peak out of the ground. All of the fruit trees are in bloom along with the wisteria and Japanese tulip trees. The weatherman is predicting near 80 degrees for the weekend. It does not get any better than this!

We hope you enjoy this month's newsletter. It is our first themed issue and we are featuring aprons. I feel certain that each and every one of us have memories of times and events with our mothers and grandmothers wearing aprons. It was simply a part of their daily attire at home. Their pockets held everything from Kleenex to clothespins and all in between. Aprons from my family ranged from utilitarian to dressy. My mother even had aprons for Christmas, Valentine, Easter, and every other holiday for which she could design one. Sadly many of them are gone, but one vintage organdy with French lace is photographed elsewhere in the newsletter.

Tami Litton has done an outstanding job of organizing this issue for you. Actually, she formats and sends the newsletter every month to you. But this month she has done all of the articles and photography as well! Thanks, Tami.

We have some exciting guests planned for upcoming issues of *BEAR IN MIND*, but since this newsletter is for **YOU**, we would like to hear from you what you like and don't like, as well as what you would like to see added.

Happy Spring and Happy Easter to each of you, from all of us at Bear Threads, Ltd.

Sheila, Gail, Jim and Tami



Tami's Apron Story

Everyone who sews has a starting point, a beginning. My sewing career began when I was 10 years old and my mother decided that it was my turn to learn to sew. My older sister had learned two years prior and was quite the accomplished seamstress, designing and making her own doll clothes.

I had never really thought about whether I wanted to learn to sew or not. Sewing was just something everyone around me did. My mother sewed her own clothes, as well as, clothes for my sister and me. My grandmother sewed her own clothes from patterns made from newspapers, using butter knives as weights (no pins) as she cut out. If I'd thought about it at all when I was ten I would've just assumed I would learn to sew.

What I learned was—sewing's not easy.

My first project was an apron. I picked the fabric myself, a sunny, yellow gingham. My mom helped me cut out the pieces and explained very carefully how each piece went together. We went one step at a time and my mother was very patient. I was not. When I went to gather the skirt, I pulled the gathering threads too hard and they broke. I had to start over, of course. And I did start over after getting mad, stomping my feet, throwing the apron in the floor and exclaiming that "sewing was stupid." Like I said my mother was very patient.

This little drama was repeated several times. Each time my mother calmly made me pick up that apron and fix the problem before I went on the next step. And I did finish the apron. And I threw it in the garbage when my mother wasn't looking. That was the end of the apron. And that was the end of my mother's patience and, well, you can use your imagination to fill in what happened next.

Thus began my hatred of sewing. The more my sister excelled at it, the more I hated it. Over the years I learned enough about sewing to hem a pair of pants or sew on a button but I did not sew! My sister went on to major in Home Economics in college and made her husband a tailored suit. Oh, please! My sister even made my wedding dress, which was beautiful and fit perfectly.

My daughter, Garrett, was born in 1991 and, as with all new mothers of babies, my world changed. Everything I thought or did revolved around her. I loved classic children's clothing but found them difficult to find and expensive. I decided that I would learn to make what I couldn't find or afford. So I took a smocking class at a local Smocking, Heirloom Sewing Shop. I loved the class and I loved the shop. It was filled with beautiful, lacy, dresses, sweet bonnets and classic smocked garments. This was what I wanted to do for my little girl. So, I bought an outrageously (according to my mother) expensive sewing machine and learned to sew all over again.

Motivation is a strong ingredient in learning anything. My knowledge and skill increased exponentially. I was smocking and sewing like crazy. I completed my first "heirloom" dress when my daughter was three. The dress had lace-shaping and hand embroidery. It was breathtaking. I made everything my daughter wore, from church clothes to play clothes. I smocked and sewed with Garrett sitting on the floor next to my machine playing with fabric scraps and her baby dolls. I learned to do piping without pinning, so I piped everything. I learned to do appliqué really well, so all Garrett's play clothes were either smocked or appliquéd. The more I learned, the more I sewed.

I even found a wonderful group of like-minded ladies who shared my passion. We met once a month at each other's houses to sew and smock and share. We taught each other new techniques and inspired one another to try new things. One year we all used the same "Easter Egg" fabric to make dresses for our girls. Different patterns and different accent colors, but all the same base fabric. Our kids looked fabulous.

My love of smocking and heirloom sewing even lead me to my job at Bear Threads. Talk about heaven, working everyday surrounded by the loveliest fabrics, laces and embroideries in the world.

Many things have changed since that first sewing lesson. My sweet mother passed away in '97. My daughter is in college and has just turned 20. At Bear Threads I work more with computers than with the beautiful fabrics and trims. My sewing has also changed. I have moved on from smocking and heirloom sewing to quilting.

Many things have not changed. I still use my smocking skills for baby gifts and I have plans to start making heirloom items for future grandchildren. I still meet with my sewing group (every other month now) and we all quilt together. And I still remember the yellow gingham apron, wishing that I had not thrown it away.



With this month's issue focused on aprons, I decided to recreate my yellow gingham apron. I've added some embroidered insertion to dress it up a bit. I think my mother would laugh but she would be proud.

TL

History of Aprons

Aprons have been used for hundreds of years by men and women for a variety of tasks. Perhaps the first mention of the use of an apron is in the Bible when Adam and Eve sewed together fig leaves to make aprons to cover themselves (Genesis 3:7, KJV). We traditionally think of aprons being used for cooking, and while that is true, they have served as a cover-up for other tasks that tend to be messy. Because people had less clothing than what we have today, aprons were used to protect clothing during everyday chores.

The word *apron* comes from a French word, *naperon*, for napkin or small tablecloth.

Occupations such as butchers, welders and bakers have always used aprons to protect both their clothing and bodies from their work. The colors of the aprons indicated the trade of the wearer. For instance, English barbers wore a checked pattern, butchers and

porters wore green. In fact, men probably wore aprons before women did.

The cook's apron, in contrast, has been crafted from lighter materials, but has served much the same purpose. An apron serves as the cook's first line of defense against messes. It serves as a shield for their clothing and their skin, deflecting hot liquids and sharp edges. For centuries, it was a singularly utilitarian garment meant to absorb the mess of chores. Aprons were frequently included in the uniforms of many household servants, from cooks to maids. It was both a symbol of their status and a way to keep the rest of their uniforms clean from grime. Cooks turned their aprons to hide the stains but only once or the stains weren't hidden.

As pioneers and immigrants came to America, they brought their aprons with them. An apron also served as a convenient carry-all when gathered up, perfect for bringing in vegetables from the garden, eggs from the henhouse or firewood from the woodpile. The iconic image of a woman in an apron standing dutifully at the fire or oven comes from the last century.

The Depression years when fine cottons were hard to come by led people to be creative about aprons, using feed sacks, carpenter's cotton or any other recycled fabrics. The World War II came and everyone had to "make do without". A threadbare laundry day apron would be brightened up with a little embroidery or rickrack on the pocket.

It was not until the middle of the 20th century that the apron became closely associated with a homemaker, complete with frock dress and pearls, waiting with dinner for her husband to come home. Homemakers were dressing up to stay home and had aprons for every chore and special occasion.



There were theme aprons, holiday aprons, aprons that matched the tablecloth on the bridge table, mother-daughter aprons, and daughter-dolly aprons. Even husbands donned aprons specific for outdoor barbecuing.



When the feminist era struck, aprons were in large part abandoned as symbols of feminine

suppression. Aprons became less popular with younger women.

Today, aprons are enjoying resurgence as a practical and fashionable garment. Aprons have a retro appeal for many women, and designers have created stylish designs that recall past eras. Aprons are also available in a wide variety of designer patterns and styles to suit the taste of every modern woman.

Sheila's mother's apron is delicate and lovely. With lace insertion, gathered lace edging and ribbon ties, it makes the perfect hostess apron for that special occasion.



Apron Timeline

- 1900s Many aprons do not have neck straps. The top of the apron's bib is pinned to the women's blouse or dress near the shoulder.
- 1910s Herbert H. Hoover is in charge of the U.S. Food Administration during and after the World War I. An apron style is named for him. The wrap-around full "Hooverette" or "Hoover apron" is popular into the 1920s
- 1920s During the Roaring Twenties there is a wider choice of apron styles. Wealthy women wear fancy aprons. Stores sell kits to make aprons with embroidered designs.
- 1930s During the Great Depression women can't afford many pretty dresses. Aprons-some made from feed sacks-protect their clothes. In 1939 Dorothy wears a blue and white gingham pinafore-style apron in the hit movie "The Wizard of Oz"
- 1940s Women wear aprons or jumpsuits at work in World War II factories and flowery print aprons at home.
- 1950s During the "baby boom" homemakers wear a variety of aprons from fancy holiday styles to useful cobbler aprons. TV moms on *Ozzie and Harriett*, *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best* lead the fashion trend.
- 1960s More women work outside the home and use automatic clothes washers. Terry cloth half aprons are popular.
- 1970s Permanent press fabrics and improved laundry products mean less need for aprons. Novelty aprons with printed humorous or cute messages become popular
- 1980s The barbecue apron is a popular style for both men and women. Aprons become collectibles to look for at antique and flea markets.
- 1990s Aprons with logos are often part of a worker's uniform in food stores or restaurants. The barbecue-style apron with prints of lighthouses, cats, hot peppers or clever sayings is a popular travel souvenir. But you don't find aprons in many homes anymore.
- 2000s The resurgence begins. Vintage styles become popular. Books that remind us of the history of aprons appear in book stores. These books make us remember our mothers and grandmothers wearing aprons. Books with patterns included follow.
- 2010s All major pattern companies have apron patterns, even Vogue. Aprons are again used as first projects for boys and girls learning to sew.

Sheila's new apron is just perfect, made from Bear Threads' Striped Seersucker in Blue/White. The pocket is made from an antique handkerchief with embroidered edging.



To make the pocket, Sheila turned the hankie on point to keep the design aligned. A pretty mother-of-pearl button hides a snap. When unsnapped the top of the hankie forms a flap for the pocket.





Antique aprons are becoming a favorite collectible. The pink/white apron on the far left was my grandmother's. Stained and mended, it has seen many family dinners. The Christmas apron is just like one that my other grandmother wore every December. The red striped reminds me of one that my mother wore most of my growing up years. My daughter wanted a no-nonsense apron so I made the blue one. It is the simplest apron imaginable. It takes a cotton dish towel and a wide grosgrain ribbon. This ribbon is from Bear Threads' vintage ribbon collection. Sew the ribbon across the long side of the dish towel. Now you have a colorful and practical apron.

*When I used to visit Grandma
I was very much impressed,
By her all-purpose apron,
And the power it possessed.*

*She used it for a basket,
When she gathered up the eggs,
And flapped it as a weapon,
When hens pecked her feet and legs.*

*She used it for a hot pad,
To remove a steaming pan,
And when her brow was heated,
She used it for a fan.*

*It dried our childish tears,
When we'd scrape a knee and cry,
And made a hiding place
When the little ones were shy.*

*Farm produce took in season,
In the summer, spring and fall,
Found its way into the kitchen
From Grandma's carry all.*



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