



More Inspiration

Timeless Stitches – Quilt Capital of Kansas

Sharon Vesecky

My early sewing experiences were much like Liz's. I, too, grew up in a family of needlewomen. When I was about three my grandmother brought me her button jar and showed me how to string buttons. I've been playing with needle and thread ever since! It hasn't mattered much what size needle or what size thread—I've focused mostly on sewing and quilting, but I have also done hand embroidery, counted cross stitch, needlepoint, crewel embroidery, silk ribbon embroidery, smocking, knitting, tatting and a little crochet. I enjoy the handwork most because I find it relaxing, but making samples for the quilt shop means using the sewing machine for most of the work.

My mom was an accomplished seamstress and a perfectionist. When I was in eighth grade, the school principal announced that the student council was going out for dinner in a restaurant! Mom had purchased fabric for my new spring dress but had not started it yet. When I came home from school the next day, the dress was finished and, of course, it was perfect!

I got a lot of my experience at hand sewing making doll clothes; although, I really wanted to use the sewing machine. We had a treadle machine and it took practice to coordinate the pedaling with guiding the fabric under the needle. I didn't get much machine time because my sister was learning to sew too and she had 4-H sewing to do. One day she and Mom were going to a 4-H project meeting so I was left at home with Grandma. My sister threaded the machine for me, and she and Mom left. I sat down at the machine and discovered that she had threaded it with RED thread. The doll dress that I was working on was black dotted Swiss! I was only six years old and had not been schooled in the threading of sewing machines yet. Grandma came to the rescue. She replaced the red thread with black thread and I was ready to sew.

My sewing experiences continued to grow. I made the regulation hemmed tea towel, apron and gathered skirt my first year in 4-H. From there the garments got more complicated. My sister and I shared one blouse pattern. Since she was in high school and I was in elementary school, we did not wear the same size, so I learned to alter patterns when quite young. We changed style of collars, placement of pockets and even put tucks down the front of the shirts trying to make each one different using that one pattern. I remember making a red gingham skirt and blouse with a cross stitch pattern going around the bottom of the skirt. One requirement in my 4-H project was to make a made-over garment. Mom had me rip my sister's old winter coat apart, turn the fabric, and make a coat for our younger sister. Another 4-H project was a blue party dress that had a lace bodice and cummerbund. It received a purple ribbon at the Kansas State Fair!

As an adult I continued making my dresses, skirts and tops and sewing for my children as well. I started quilts for my daughters out of their dress scraps, but when Laura was in first grade, she discovered jeans and T-

shirts! That was the end of the dresses except for church. And what about those quilts? They finished out at wall hanging size. I've made four wedding dresses. The most complicated one involved working from photographs. I made the bodice from one photo and the skirt from another photo. Sewing the 2700 pearls on it became a family project.

I would take the girls shopping and come home and make the outfits they liked or help them make those outfits. The preteen years were difficult. There were not many choices for that age group. That was the inspiration for my business! I would make preteen fashions! But marketing was the problem—the internet hadn't been born yet. An adjustment in the business plan found me making custom-made knitwear and marketing it at parties similar to Tupperware parties. As the business grew, I hired my mother to help me sew. When we reached 3000 garments, I lost count. The time had come to move the business from the kitchen table to a storefront. About that time quilting was regaining popularity. I moved the business to a small boutique in Baldwin City and a few months later to the present location of Quilters' Paradise. The fabric store/t-shirt factory morphed into a quilt shop! And the rest is history!