

What's Your Story

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I was born and raised on the southern edge of the city of Syracuse, NY, founded on the salt brine pools beside Onondaga Lake, built by the creators of the Erie Canal and once the seat of the strong Iroquois Confederacy. The youngest of three daughters, my father was fond of saying that I "was a mistake." After a still-birth son in 1928, my mom was told she couldn't have any other children. Dad would say that Shirley (1932) was a miracle, Maralee (1941) was a surprise and that I (1944) was just a mistake, then he'd add with a quirky smile: "the best mistake I ever made."

My Dad, having immigrated from Canada in 1923, to find work in what were the paper mills along the St. Regis and St. Lawrence Rivers, eventually found his way to Syracuse. He retired from New Process Gear/Chrysler Corporation in 1968, after 37 years, as a skilled tradesman. One of his patented ideas for improving the gear mechanism in standard shift cars is still used. He met my Mom, in the boarding house she helped manage that was owned by Mom's aunt and uncle. As they heartily disapprove of their 17 year old niece, a recent high school graduate with a promising future, having any relationship with "an older boarder", my parents eloped. Mom went on to graduate from business school, while working in a law office, prior to having children. Both of my parents were strong advocates of education for women. Mom returned to full time work once I was in third grade, saving all her income for her three daughters' education. She retired, from Syracuse University's University College, as an Administrative Assistant to one of the Vice Presidents, just after I graduated with my BA. My parents always expected the best from their daughters and they found ways to make that happen.

I met my husband, Bruce, at church! As we were to both become ordained United Methodist Clergy, it now seems only fitting. When we met however, Bruce was a chemist, working for Allied Chemical in Syracuse and I was a freshman at S.U., planning to major in Religion and Psychology. As Bruce is eight years my senior, my parents were initially skeptical of our relationship...history repeating itself? Bruce easily won them over and three years later we were married. Following my graduation, we were off to New Haven, Connecticut; Yale seminary for Bruce and work for me in the Yale Divinity School library as a cataloguing assistant. It was a fun job with obvious perks, but didn't pay well. I eventually began working on a Masters in Education and teaching first grade in Meriden, Connecticut. Seminary for me was at Drew University in the early 1990's when our children were in college (Kristen) and high school (Andrew). Bruce retired in 2000, I retired in 2003. Our move to Silver Spring, in 2018, was prompted by Andrew's death and our desire to be closer to Kristen and her husband, Kevin, living in DC. It was our 10th move in 56 years of marriage. I know how to downsize and pack boxes. Most of the boxes with this move involved fabric!

My love of all things sewing began in seventh grade Home Economics. Dad went with me to chose fabric for an A line skirt, with a set-in waste band and back zipper. We chose a turquoise and tan polished cotton with palm trees. No, we didn't buy enough of that directional fabric! The palm trees were right side up on the front of the skirt and upside down on the back. But, because of the careful execution of the pattern, I got an A anyway. I loved that skirt and soon made many others, with vests to match. Dad and I learned to buy enough fabric when the print was directional or plaid! I went on to make wool skirts (the gold plaid one with pleats, belt loops and a covered 2 inch belt was especially memorable!) and jackets. I took Advanced Tailoring in college as one of my electives. I've made finely tailored suits, Gone With the Wind prom dresses and wedding dresses for my nieces and daughter. When my kids were young, I did alterations for an upscale women's boutique. (No, thank you! Not ever again.) Following my retirement from the Church, I worked at Calico Gals Quilt Shop in Syracuse; selling machines, advising on fabric choices, teaching classes and co-leading quilting retreats. I've tried everything quilt related from

applique and paper piecing of all kinds to pattern reading and editing for a professional designer (some of them were truly terrible). I've made a bazillion bags, totes and things with zippers. I have a modest collection of antique buttons. My all time favorite class to teach was a multi month group that created small projects using decorative machine stitches for quilting designs and raw edge applique. I use my multitude of decorative machine stitches on every project possible.

Just recently, I learned that my paternal great grandparents owned a prosperous Mercantile Store in Athens, Ontario, Canada. He was a Tailor. She was a seamstress. Until their untimely deaths, they supported 9 children and another family too. My Dad was always puttering in his basement workshop using re-cycled materials of all kinds, that most folks would have thrown away, to create usable items: bookshelves, cabinets and "thing-a-ma-jigs" for my family and our friends. So, I now know that my urge to create with fabric comes from deep within my DNA.

I especially appreciate guild programs that encourage being adventurous with color, pattern and design. And, the friendships I've made through the guilds I have belonged to, are just the very best.