

## **Lynn on sewing and clothes**

I started learning to sew at four. My mum helped me make dolls clothes. She always sewed, and showed me basic things. She brought home strips of textiles from work – she was in men's tailoring so we never got any floral patterns, we got dots and checks and things like that. She took me to markets on a Saturday and we bought remnants for me if there was a remnant stall. My Mum showed me how to cut out my dolls clothes and how to put the pieces together. We did not have patterns– my Mum could cut them freehand. One of the first dolls outfits I made was a pink flowery dress and pantaloons and my mother showed me how to smock. At school we learnt cross stitch and embroidery at 5 or 6 – it was part of your learning.

I was going to do pattern cutting at Newham. I did my City and Guilds dress-making, and started tailoring, but because there was more of an Asian community they stopped the tailoring and I could not do pattern cutting and tailoring. As a teenager I made some clothes. The first dress I made myself was a dogtooth check slip dress with cap sleeves. But everything was so cheap to buy at the end of the 50s beginning of 60s. When I wanted something really special my Mum made it. She made me the most beautiful overdress and wide leg trousers (like palazzo pants) for a wedding from grey silk jersey with a grey silk coat. Later a lady up in Islington made special things for me. I used to take her a picture, say from Vogue, without a pattern and she would just copy it and make it. She made me a coat fitted to the waist and then panelled so the bottom swung as you walked and this had a large hood and was made out of fine wool with silk in the most beautiful oatmeal and beige check design.

My Mum was a machinist for Moss Bros. She could do all aspects of tailoring – coats and trousers, she knew how to make button holes, linings, put zips into trousers– they moved her from department from department. It was not bespoke tailoring - they used to do bits of suits

I don't know if she sewed as a child, but probably she did - she went into service at 14. She was the eldest of quite a few brothers and sisters and had to earn money. I think she enjoyed her work at Moss Bros. When I went to school she became a piece-maker which worked better with me at school, as she could break off to pick me up and bring me home for lunch. I helped her

with linings for coats, I would turn things inside out with a knitting needle. We had a three bedroom house, a front room, a dining room (backroom) and a scullery. She had her machine in the backroom in a corner – we eat in that room – it was the warmest room with the coal fire. We did not have a bathroom or indoor toilet. She had a cupboard in a corner with all her sewing work and put things away so it did not interfere with our lives. When we dress-made we used a bedroom. In her early married life my mother made her own clothes – later on she did not have the time with me to look after, and a job, and getting my father ready for night work, making him sandwiches, – he went out about 11 or 12 pm and come home about 7 or 8 pm – he was a porter in the Covent Garden flower market, when it was in the West End.

My Mum was always up to date. She would bring things back and say “This is Harris Tweed”, “This is pure wool”, or cashmere based cloth, or bring home bits of linen; it was fascinating. As I got older I would go to Berwick Street and look at all the materials, bridal and couture. I was fascinated by how much work went into couture clothes with all the beading. I always wanted to learn beading, but I will never do it now. I looked at fashion mags and bought Vogue every month when I started work – before that only when I had money. As a teenager there was the West End, Carnaby Street, Kensington Church Street and Biba’s – fashion was all the rage then, the swinging 60s and Twiggy; it was fascinating. It was cheaper to buy than make. My friends did not share my enthusiasm for material shops – I went to those alone, but with my friends to clothes shops. They did not mind going round Liberty’s, but my friends skipped the haberdashery department, which was much bigger then. I love the Liberty’s building, it reminds me of an old Tudor house with the rickety stairs. I loved the liberty prints. There was an avant garde section for clothes in the 60s and early 70s. I would think no way would I spend £100 on that shirt – I could make better myself. Even now, though it is much smaller, I still feel it is an occasion to go there.

There are still dressmakers now but they are quite expensive. If you see something in a magazine, you can’t make it because there is not a pattern – that was why I wanted to go to pattern making class.

I started to go to Sonia’s class when a friend asked if had I done embroidery because her mother had died leaving a transfer design from an old magazine of all the countries that participated in WW2. Her mother had started it but not finished it. The transfer came from a magazine. My friend still had the

magazine though it was a bit tatty. It was for satin stitch and chain stitch and this kind of thing. I noticed in the Newham Magazine there was an embroidery class at East Ham Library so I got in touch and started to go along. I could learn the stitches by You-tube, but not get the feeling of embroidery. I completed it – that year was the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WW2. The Newham Recorder sent a photographer to do a piece about it- they came but they never ran the piece. I've learnt loads of techniques at Sonia's classes, things I would never think of doing and enjoy the people and the camaraderie. I haven't been on many trips – just to the William Morris Gallery and trips to the AWG.

I knitted since I was 7 or 8. My mum used to knit me dolls clothes, but when I was little sewing with running stitch was easier. I never learnt to crochet – I'd like to crochet, my mother never crocheted. I knew someone who crocheted me a dress for a wedding. Crocheting is coming back, with new designers coming up with crocheted dresses.

I'm knitting at the moment for Sonia for the Food Bank Project.