

# The Virtues of Learning to Sew

I find myself feeling nostalgic these days. My kids are growing up in a different world than the one I knew at their age. My childhood encompassed a time before personal computers, cell phones, and the internet. We had five channels on the television—my family lived so far out of town that we didn't have cable TV until I was in college. To make a playlist, we called the radio station to request songs and recorded them on a cassette tape with our boom boxes. My best friend and I rode our horses to the store. We were free-range kids decades before anyone knew to call us that.

The internet and communication technologies have created a vastly different childhood experience for my kids. More information than we could imagine is now at their fingertips. They are instantly connected to their friends through cell phones and text messaging. They are instantly connected to their parents as well, a change I wholeheartedly endorse. More access to information has changed parenting mores, and letting your children be free-range kids is now controversial in some quarters. Most kids spend more time indoors in front of their screens than outside with their friends. Their lives are scheduled. Their activities are organized.

Despite the changes, or maybe because of them, I want to give my kids a connection to their past and to a time that was simpler.

Every summer I spent a week with each set of grandparents. At Granny Brown's house, we did a lot of sewing. She was a skilled seamstress. One didn't get married in White County, Georgia, without having my grandmother make the bridal gown or the bridesmaid's dresses. I watched her make beautiful fabric roses and the lovely trimmings for the dresses. I loved to be

there when the brides and bridesmaids came to have Granny do their fittings. They looked so glamorous in their pretty frocks.

Our sewing ritual was the same each summer. On our first day, Granny Brown took out her tape measure and carefully recorded my new measurements in the tiny spiral bound notebook she kept in the drawer of her sewing machine cabinet. I had to stand up straight and be very still so she could get them just right. Measurements in hand, we headed for the fabric store. To this day, I still love the bright colors, the textures, and the thumping sound of the bolts of fabric unwinding on the cutting table. I loved Miss Odessa, the sweet lady who ran the local fabric shop. Granny and I browsed through the pattern books, and I carefully chose the dress I wanted her to make for me. We selected the fabric and notions and took our bundle of purchases home.

I stood well back while Granny cut the patterns out of the delicate tissue paper so as not to accidentally tear it. She arranged the patterns on the fabric she had spread on her kitchen table, and then I watched as she carefully cut out the pieces. To keep me busy while she worked, she sat me down at the kitchen table and let me sort through all the beautiful spare buttons she had collected over years of sewing. I still remember what it feels like to run my fingers through the smooth, slick buttons poured out on the table. At the end of the week, I had a beautiful new dress. I proudly told everyone who commented on it that my grandmother had made it just for me.

After I got married, I bought myself a Kenmore sewing machine from Sears and signed up for a class. In time, I became proficient at sewing a straight line and made curtains, pillows, and the queen size quilt that covers my bed. Sewing clothes is not my thing—I wish I had spent less time sorting buttons and more time learning how to actually sew at Granny's house—but I have made some pretty darn cool Halloween costumes

over the years.

When my daughter was old enough, I taught her how to sew. We followed the same ritual I learned from my grandmother all those years ago. She was as fascinated as I once was of the beautiful bolts of fabric at the fabric store. Her first projects were for Sally, her American Girl doll. To earn her Girl Scout sewing badge, she made a quilt and a nightgown for her doll. She and I dug through my scrap basket to find just the right fabrics, and she did a beautiful job piecing her quilt and used buttons from my own spare button box to decorate it.

Few people know how to sew today. It is often cheaper to buy things from the store than make them ourselves, and besides, who has time for sewing these days? However, I want to keep my kids connected to their past, and I find a great way to do this is passing on the skills my grandmothers taught me. In the summer, we make jars of pickles, and we bake biscuits year round. When we do, I tell my kids about the great-grandmothers they never had the chance to meet.

Generational love is a precious and valuable thing. I cherish the time I had with my grandparents, and I am grateful that my kids will have special memories with their grandparents. While I'm sad that my children never knew their amazing great-grandmothers, sewing with my daughter gives me the opportunity to pour my Granny Brown's love directly into her. I hope as she gets older she will come to feel a connection to the wonderful lady who would have loved her every bit as much as she loved me.

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