

'Sewing' Virtues

Most 21st century 12-year-old girls ask for ready-to-wear clothes and accessories for birthdays.

Not me.

I giggled with joy when I received beautiful uncut fabric, lace, and buttons that I could *work* on to make into clothing. I eagerly asked my Grandma to teach me, as I had long admired her stacks of sewing projects: quilts, doll clothes, repairs, and hemming. Since then, I have dedicated hundreds of hours to cutting, marking, pinning, and stitching dozens of projects.

While stitching some tedious French Seams the other day, I reflected on the significant role sewing had in my character formation as a teen. Here are three important lessons I learned:

1. Patience – Before I began sewing, my mother rarely complimented me for any hint of patience. My hands regularly tore out incorrect stitches and re-stitched the same seam over again. But the more mistakes I made, the more opportunities I had for character growth.

I assume I'm not the only one to be impatient.

When children learn to sew, they learn how long it takes to master a skill. They learn what it's like to fail. And they also learn to press on in spite of failure. In the end, the satisfaction of finally completing the difficult project *and* the physical representation of their work fortifies their endurance for arduous tasks.

2. Sympathy – Sewing also teaches children to grow in sympathy.

I quickly discovered that I dare not use a hot iron on a lightweight polyester fabric. I did, however, have the freedom

to use as much steam and heat as I desired on shirting cotton.

As I began to understand the characteristics of different fabrics, I developed ability to show sympathy to an individual's unique personality.

Sewing helps children stop and think in advance about the consequences of their actions, because they have a physical object that shows their mistakes. They can't claim that object is "being unfair" or "mean." This understanding seamlessly translates into interpersonal skills as they learn to be considerate about the effects of their actions.

3. Humility – I once spent approximately ten hours constructing a dress made of lovely blue heather fabric. Despite hopeful beginnings, it has been hanging in my closet for years only worn once, rather unhappily.

The problem resulted from my arrogance. While the pattern clearly recommended a moderately sturdy fabric, I chose a very stretchy, lightweight fabric. At the time, I did not realize that this very silly mistake would teach me some intellectual humility.

Similar sewing mistakes teach children to think about the reasoning behind instructions. Their parents or teacher's directions no longer seem like arbitrary orders, but guidelines for acting well and completing a task admirably.

Sewing isn't the only handicraft that teaches character. All forms of manual labor can help cultivate virtues. I saw similar character growth in my brothers after my dad began involving them in home construction projects.

As our society heightens its disdain for manual labor, children lose opportunity to cultivate these character qualities.

Would we be wise to pull our children away from childish

activities which offer temporary satisfaction and teach them traditional crafts and tradesman skills instead?

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