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## Fabricating Change

Despite what some may describe as my addiction to sewing, I have never bought a piece of fabric in my life. Avoiding this purchase is an unspoken rule in my house, as the fabric I own takes up numerous cabinets in the basement and an entire shelf across the length of my closet. Similar to Hope Jahren, author of *The Story of More*, my sewing machine itself along with the variety of sewing materials were passed down from my grandmother, and as much as the sewing obsession started as a way to clear up shelf space it has become a journey to promote sustainability and the well-being of those around me.

As soon as I was taught how to use a sewing machine I understood that it would be a way of building connections with my peers. Not only was it a fundamental part of my relationship with my grandmother, it was a way for me to express love to others in my life. One of the first things I learned how to make were pajama pants, often designed to fit different members of my family, gifted to them at Christmas or birthdays. In her overcrowded sewing room on whatever desk space remained free from pins, scissors, and Jo-Anne's latest release, my grandmother instructed me to fold the soft flannel fabric in half, align the pattern on top, and cut through both layers of fabric so that the pieces would reflect each other. Once the pant legs were cut out, only oddly shaped remains of the original piece were left, but "you can *never* throw out these pieces" said the woman with an entire room filled to the brim with stacks of fabric that she would not go through in her lifetime. "You never know when you'll need them."

Thus, I was also taught at a young age that most things have more than one purpose, and that does not include living in a landfill. I was meant to toss less and save more; by my early teenage years I had developed a habit of using things various times in various ways. One of my favorite means of doing so was stitching squares from old plastic shopping bags to the back of a piece of fabric to make lined, reusable snack pouches. No longer would I live with the guilt of eating out of single-use Ziploc bags or releasing plastic ShopRite bags into landfills, or worse yet, the ocean.

As my understanding of living sustainably expanded, so did the communities with which I used sewing to connect to. I loved gifting my creations to those close to me and began to seek out even more ways to keep less and give more through organizations that took handmade pieces as donations. Over the course of a summer, I cut hundreds of ten-inch fabric squares to be sewn into lap quilts made up of sixteen squares each and brought them to my local pediatric hospital along with vibrant pillowcases to brighten up patient rooms. Another project involved cautiously cutting one-inch wide fringes around large pieces of fleece to make knotted blankets, which were sent to third world countries with the organization Operation Smile. These pieces of fabric, cut out on my floor and stitched together on my small childhood desk, were able to bring comfort to

people around the world and make a small dent in the luxuries that they would not otherwise be able to access.

This journey continued into my later teen years, as sewing also wove its way into my self-expression and adoption of fashion trends. At the age when every girl in school could be seen sporting a scrunchie in their hair and on their wrist, I decided to make some of my own. Remember those funny-looking scraps from the pajama pants all those years ago? This is where they came back into play; they were just long enough to be cut into a thin rectangle and then sewn into a hair accessory. Using up these scraps was like a puzzle, and soon enough many of my creations fell under the patchwork category. From shirts to tote bags to full-size quilts, I was eating through my fabric and creating unique pieces that fit my style. And through all of it, I was bathing in the pride that everything had come from second-hand materials. I began shopping less and making more, as the act of visiting retail stores became a hunt for inspiration toward my own designs over anything else. In my personal quest for sustainability, this decrease in fast fashion purchases further grew my satisfaction with my lifestyle.

None of this can go without saying that like most things in my life, my sewing machine is electric. It plugs into the outlet in my wall and ultimately runs off fossil fuels. While it is fulfilling to reduce the purchases I make and the plastic I use, the process to get there requires an increase in electricity. Nevertheless, I have made a sacrifice in my habits to help the earth and those around me and therefore like to believe I am making a difference, however small it may be. Maybe the next step is to reduce electricity use in other areas; I already prefer natural light over artificial, and could surely use a break from my phone every now and then. When it comes down to it, progressing into a more environmentally friendly life can't be more daunting than progressing through my piles of fabric. Even if I don't use it all up in my lifetime, I hope the future generations of seamstresses in my family are able to finish the job on a healthy, stable planet Earth.