

Under Pressure?: The Sewing Machine Story

A bit ago Becky at Quilted Twins posed this question on her Facebook page:

“So...have you ever felt “judged” for not having an expensive machine (or if you have an expensive machine – for having one)?”

This had me yelling YES!! I got thinking about it more and more that I decided I'd write a whole blog post about as it got stuck on my brain and I thought of little else. So here goes with my sewing machine history.

When I was in high school for my 17th birthday my mom and day bought me a used Singer with a drop in bobbin. I was taking lots Home Ec classes that I sewed in. Mom sewed a lot and it was a natural gift at that time for parents to buy sewing machines for their daughters. I LOVED that machine. I loved drop in bobbins. It was great machine.

From there, I got married and had three of our kids. We were living in Chester, Iowa and Hubby was working for a farmer. About then sergers were the rage. We got a windfall (really not that much-but the young people we were thought it was a windfall) so I bought a serger. My friend at the time had bought one and she made it seem like a “must have” for me. I made lots of play dressed for the girls with it sewing a lot of T-shirt material things for them.

We ended up moving to Lawler, Iowa about a year after that and I hardly touched the serger. Then about three years into being married, I was 24 or so, and my highschool Singer machine died. Oh my word. We had no money and I was beside myself. I felt like I couldn't live without a sewing machine...and honestly, I really did NEED a sewing machine.

About then I had started making and selling crafts.

At the time stuffed dolls and the "country look" was in. I ended up buying this White machine.



It wasn't expensive (under \$500) and did what I needed it to do.

After a bit I started wholesaling the crafts and had a seller that I worked with. I found I needed another machine so that I had a back up and that I could have a project at each machine. I ended up buying another just like it.

At this time, I was home with my kids. I never got out and saw other people. I was a young mom with young kids. I had no social life to speak of. There was no one to influence my choices at all.

Then a gal that I did some crafting with opened a quilt shop. It was an awesome shop. I went periodically and they sold

Berninas. Before long I started to feel like my quilts would be nicer or better if I had a Bernina. It wasn't direct pressure but an underlying pressure. Then I started to go to a few of their classes and this project could be done with a "blanket stitch"...this was "so much easier with a machine that had needle down"...oh and look at these awesome projects you could make if only you had an embroidery machine. UGH. I started to feel like I NEEDED a Bernina...and not just any Bernina but an EMBROIDERY machine. So..I bought my Bernina 165E.



From there I bought into all the hype..more embroidery cards...more feet for the sewing. More, more, more. I regret this. I don't use it. I don't use it at all. I don't need all the feet that do all the things...I've never touched them. I bought my machine at COMPLETELY the wrong time. Mine uses cards...so can't do the designs I could have. Also, at the time, I didn't put two and two together. To be good at embroidery, you have to embrace technology..you have to be willing to spend more and more money for upgrades and more equipment. These are things I am simply not good at. I was in my late 30's time and hadn't yet admitted all that to

myself.

I found myself spending more money thinking I would suddenly like it or get good at it. It never happened. I bought cards for the machine...it was what everyone else was doing at the events I went to. I wanted to be "in". Then I found after I did a design twice, I didn't want to do it anymore. Hmm...cost wise this totally wasn't working out for me. Not at all.

Our daughter Kayla ended up working at the quilt shop and then I started hearing a little bit of the behind the scenes at the quilt shop. They were told what to emphasize when doing demonstrations. Before long, my brain FINALLY clicked. They were trying to make sales. This was all a sales gimmick. Yes...they were teaching me something but reality, it wasn't anything that was helping me as I never went home and did anything with what I learned. UGH. I'd love to have that money back now.

I did sew on it for several years and then I quit. I was frustrated with the machine and the foot. I had spent the money to get a perfect foot with the sidebar only to learn that the sidebar was not accurate at all. It wasn't 1/4"!! How frustrating. I had sewn with it for years only to find that my seam allowance wasn't accurate. The machine didn't patch jeans worth a hoot.

My Bernina was only used for a long time as a machine to fill the bobbins for my quilting machine. Since working on cleaning my sewing room, it's now packed away. I've thought to sell it but I don't have any other machines to do any fun stitches should I ever come to needing that. I doubt I will. So it sits.

Next came my Pfaff Grand Quilter. I bought this to quilt my quilts. Again...it was a bad move. I spent over \$3000 for a machine that was a LEMON.



As a quilting machine with the set up above, it caused WAY more tears than successes.

I ended up getting an APQS Millenium. I'd love to say finally I did something right as far as sewing machine purchases go but...I'm not quite there.



I love my machine. I'm glad I got my machine. It works wonderfully. I don't regret getting the machine BUT...I don't LOVE long arming. I can do it. I don't hate it but, part of me wishes I sent my machine quilting out to a long armer and now that I have machine and I'm stuck having to do it. Again...I don't hate it and love that I can ride a deadline right up to the deadline...but, if I knew my friend Carla was so close and so good, I don't know if would have bought one.

The good news is this...When I got done with the first long arm set up, I thought to try to sell the Pfaff and the frame. Then I thought NO. I WILL NOT SEND SOMEONE ELSE THROUGH A TEARFUL EXPERIENCE. So, I took the machine off the frame, threw the frame away and used the machine as a sewing machine.

I LOVE THIS as a piecing machine. It is the most powerful speedy machine. It only straight stitches...nothing else. It has two motors..one for the piecing the other to fill bobbins. In the past I've done all of my piecing on this machine.



Then the vintage machine bug hit me. I think I read a little too much of Bonnie Hunter's vintage sewing machine fetish and thought I'd check out what the whole buzz was about vintage machines. I didn't feel "pressure" to get one but I wanted to see what the hype was all about. At first I bought whatever I found, fixed them up and gave them away. I didn't LOVE any of them and didn't know what the hype was but I kept trying to figure it out.

Then Hubby found this at auction for me for \$5.



Yep...a Featherweight. I got a little more serious about vintage machines after that. I like the machine but don't regularly piece with it.

Then I got more serious about finding the "right" machines. This one I found at the thrift store... It's a Singer 301. This one sits and I haven't used it much at all. I don't have a spot for it so it can be set up all the time so it doesn't



often get used.

This one came next... This is my favorite machine right now. It's a Singer 15-91. She is my string piecing machine. For \$15, how could I go wrong?? I found out from this experience that I ADORE machines in cabinets. I adore cabinets. I adore good working old machines. ADORE. I would happily get rid of most every other machine I have, but not this one.



This one has a foot control that's part of the cabinet so my

foot control doesn't slide all over. It has good power...and most of all she's pretty. I love having a cabinet. Her cabinet is a [Singer #42](#).

Now...I still look for vintage machine but I've stuck to the main brands now. Singers are my preferred but that's not hard and fast...Singers I look for most often.

This little one joined the fleet. This is a Singer 99. It's a petite little thing. She was a garage sale find. I like this machine a lot too. It's set up in the sewing room and have a project at it.



The cabinet is really plain and I'd like to eventually get a really nice cabinet for her with drawers and the works. She's too pretty and works to well for a plain jane cabinet.

Other machines have entered my life and stayed...This is a New Home treadle I've never really sewn with...I really should fire her up one day or rather fire my feet up!!



This was my birthday present last year...it's a Franklin treadle. This one I have used some. It definitely gave me the treadle bug. The sad thing for me is that it is in the living room and a bit of a chore to get arranged for me to use regularly with the childcare kiddos around.



So do I feel pressure anymore....did I ever feel pressure from other people who sew?

The pressure I got came from the quilt shop I visited. I was young at the time and really felt like I wanted to "fit in". I thought buying and being a part of all that would make me "fit in". It didn't.

I'm older and know better now. I know what I want. I want a machine that I love. I want a machine that works and has good strong power. I'm not in the market for fancy stitches. I'm not in the market for anything new. I don't care what anyone else is sewing on and only hope for them that they love their machine-whatever style and type that may be.

I can say this with certainty. I will not buy a brand new machine ever. I love the old girls...I have no need for a new hot machine with all the bells and whistles. Bells and whistles hold no appeal to me. I like the older girls who are

tested and true.

It's taken me 50 years to know that...There are some really awesome things that come with age and better knowing myself and my preferences is one of those things.

I hope anyone who is reading this has found what they like in a machine as well. It doesn't matter what you like...or don't like. As long as it sews and you're happy, SEW ON FRIEND, SEW ON!!