



Wednesday 21 October 2009

Welcome to this week's issue of Midweek Moments. Well, we've looked at the stories behind the creation of things as diverse as windshield wipers, liquid paper and the world's first computer program (see last week's issue for that particular story – it's fascinating). But no examination of the history of women inventors could be complete without a mention of Mary Phelps Jacob, who patented the first brassiere (bra) almost 100 years ago. Quite a fitting way to conclude our journey of female ingenuity and engineering. Next week, we begin another journey – the fascinating life story of the woman who is widely believed to have contributed more to 20th century fashion design than anyone else. Tune in next week to find out who it is.

Also, keep those contributions coming for our 'Show and Tell' column. Why deny your most brilliant sewn item its 15 minutes of fame?

Mothers of invention

Mary Phelps Jacob - keeping abreast

Women all over the world owe much of their everyday comfort to this New York socialite, who, at the tender age of 23, was the first person to be granted a patent for the modern bra (or more technically, brassiere) back in 1914. Welcome to our final (and most feminine) instalment of Mothers of Invention.

Up until the time of Jacob's invention, the world of female undergarments was dominated by corsets, extremely stiff, uncomfortable and restricting items made of steel and whalebone, and which were responsible for a range of female health complaints, the most serious being broken ribs from sneezing too hard. (Ironically, this most torturous and personally disempowering garment was also invented by a woman).

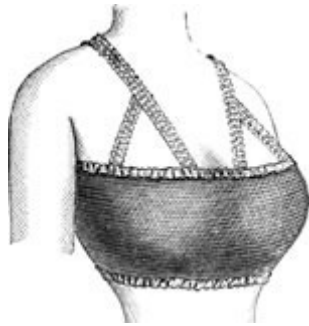
Jacob invented her "backless brassiere" after she observed how noticeable the ugly whalebones of her corset were through the new sheer evening gown she had just purchased for her New York society debut. With the assistance of her maid, Jacob improvised with some silk handkerchiefs and some ribbon, so that she was able to dispense with the corset, but still retain her modesty. Very soon, she was receiving numerous requests from female friends and family members for a copy of her invention. The potential market for the brassiere was obvious from the very beginning.

Jacob established a company called Caresse Crosby Brassieres for the commercial manufacture of her invention. The word 'brassiere' was a derivative of an old French word meaning 'upper arm' and the immediate popularity of the brassiere was due to its softness, light weight and its tendency to separate the breasts comfortably instead of squeezing them together. It was a watershed in the history of women's fashion.

Unfortunately, Jacob wasn't a very enthusiastic businesswoman, and she soon sold her brassiere patent to the Warner Brothers Corset Company from Connecticut for \$1,500. At that time, only about 300 brassieres had been manufactured. Warner Brothers (no connection to the film studio) recognized the huge potential of the item and ended up making a huge profit over the next 30 years.

Mary Phelps Jacob died in 1970 at the age of 78 from pneumonia. By that time, her invention had been a standard item of women's undergarment for over half a century.

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The Brassiere



Mary Phelps Jacobs

Victoria & Albert Mugs

The V&A mugs have now arrived in store, each mug comes in a beautiful box making them a great gift idea or just grab one for yourself! There are 11 types in the selection and cost \$20 each, click [here](#) to view the full range.



Floral Bouquet



Victoria



Kilburn Silk



Newsham Blue



Newsham Brown



Newsham Pink



Walter's Iris



Gold Anthemion



White Anthemion

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Show and Tell

Show us the item and tell us the story

Trish Carlino

What's the item you'd like to tell us about?

It's a Cathedral Window cushion. I started learning to do one many years ago, but never really progressed with it. So this time round when I decided to have another go, I managed to finish it.

What first attracted you to this cushion?

The fabric panels. It's like a 3D thing, like the window in a cathedral, hence the name. I was really attracted to the pattern. I first saw it on a desk in Jackie's shop and I liked it. Plus, it has nice, bright colours. I did it in one of the Blueberries classes.

How long did it take you to finish it?

I finished the top part of it in the day class and then the rest of it took about three hours. A small item like a cushion doesn't take long if you just put your head down and don't stop doing it.

Have you made other cushions before?

No, it was the first one I've done. I generally do a lot of appliqué quilts, though.

What are the differences between doing a quilt and a cushion?

Well for starters it's not such an overpowering object because a cushion is quite small and a quilt is a lot bigger. Apart from that you're just working on that one square so it's much easier to see how you're going. Also, it makes a change working on something that will end up being in more than one dimension.

How long have you been a sewer?

I started quilting about 10 years ago but I've really become very involved in it over the last few years. And I've sewed for the kids and my nieces and I did small items. I was just around the corner from Jackie's shop when she was up here in Maitland. I'm very involved in quilting with Jackie's shop because she has such lovely fabrics. So when she moved from up here I followed her down there.

Don't forget to become a fan of Blueberries on our Facebook page and follow us on Twitter.

Til next week!

The Blueberries Team.



Cathedral Window Cushion made by Trish