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Midweek Moments

Wednesday 1 September 2010 - Issue #75

Welcome to Wednesday...

...and to spring, which is finally upon us after what seemed like a particularly grey, damp and windy winter. Just the right conditions to justify staying indoors quilting. In this week's edition we bring you the second instalment of 'Women Helping Women', our three part look at the Quilt Aid Project. This week we take a look at the pionering work of Dr Catherine Hamlin and the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia, which is where the funds raised by Quilt Aid are directed. See last week's issue if you missed out on our initial interview with Helen Stubbings, the founder of Quilt Aid.

Material Girl

Jackie's tips, hints, advice and info on products and fabrics

Product

Pre-printed fabric panels in all different sizes - 30% off!

Ideal for

Smaller projects like cot quilts, wall hangings, cushions and bags.

Jackie says...

"We've got a stockpile of these panels so we're having a '**Panel Party**'. The idea here is to give people a quick, easy project to work on. These panels are especially good for beginners as they're a manageable size and easy to work with. Why not use a panel in your next project? The Panel Party will go through to the end of September or while stocks last.



One of the panels currently available as part of the panel party

Click [here](#) to view the panels.

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Get ready for the Sew-a-thon

Thumbs up for 12 hours of heads down

It's baaaack! Grab your gear (and your stamina) because the famous Blueberries sew-a-thon is looming on the horizon once again. If you've ever longed for 12 hours of sewing bliss, uninterrupted by kids, spouses and pets, then this event is for you.

Last year's inaugural event was a punishing, but fun, all-nighter, from 6pm till 6am the following day. Eleven hardy souls from the original 30 were still going strong when the sun's first rays lit up the eastern sky. It was decided that the second event would fill a more civilized mid-day to midnight timeslot, and this proved to be the more popular option.

So once again it'll be 12 hours of intense sewing, as well as the laughing and camaraderie that we all know goes hand in hand with anything sewing-related. On Saturday 25 September the machines will be humming from lunch-time till the Cinderella hour. As catering isn't included this time, people are encouraged to bring along a plate (plus all the caffeine you need to get you to the stroke of midnight).



The stayers from last year's great all-nighter... bleary-eyed but triumphant.

Click [here](#) to see the photos from last year.

"Both events last year filled up quickly, so register today by emailing enquiries@blueberries.net.au," says Jackie. "Come along and show everyone that you have what it takes to sew for 12 solid hours. I can guarantee you'll have a rollicking good time in the process."

Women Helping Women

The Quilt Aid Project - Part 2 of 3: The Hospital by the River

Helen Stubbings already knew the basic story of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia when she read *Hospital by the River*, the strong and "often disturbing" book written by the hospital's founder, Dr Catherine Hamlin. Any doubts Helen may have had as to whether or not this was the right charity for Quilt Aid were well and truly gone after reading the book.

Obstetric fistula, although both preventable and curable, is nonetheless a nasty condition. The fistula occurs through damage to the bladder or rectum caused by complications during labour and can lead to incontinence, an ulcerated vaginal tract, severe infections and even paralysis. The baby is usually stillborn. On top of these horrific symptoms, women suffering this condition are often abandoned by their husbands and ostracised from their villages, forcing them into lonely existences of shame and isolation. The World Health Organisation estimates that between 50,000 and 100,000 women develop obstetric fistulas every year with up to three million women currently living with the condition, mostly in developing countries.

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Dr Catherine Hamlin

Dr Catherine Hamlin, an Australian obstetrician and gynaecologist, first became aware of the plight of Ethiopian women suffering obstetric fistula when she and her husband worked on a three year contract in the late 1950s to establish a midwifery school in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. As obstetric fistula had been completely eradicated in developed countries by the beginning of the 20th century, the Hamlins were unfamiliar with the condition. When local women who were incontinent, foul-smelling and often crippled and destitute, began presenting at the hospital, the Hamlins realised that the problem was widespread and began researching to develop techniques for a cure. No-one else at the hospital knew what to do with these women.

The Hamlins worked tirelessly to develop techniques to cure the condition, spurred on by the grim plight of its female sufferers, both medical and social. The Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital was finally opened in 1974, successfully treating almost 1,000 women a year until Dr Reg Hamlin's death in 1993. His widow continued their pioneering work, extending and upgrading the hospital, and in 2003 establishing Desta Meder ("Village of Joy"), an on-site community specifically designed for the 7% of fistula patients whose symptoms are so serious they're unable to be properly treated, preventing them from returning to normal village life.

The Hamlin College of Midwives was also established as part of the hospital, training young Ethiopian women with the goal of a midwife for every village, hopefully eradicating obstetric fistula completely. Dr Hamlin, now aged 86, still performs surgery every Thursday morning, and by 2010 the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital has treated over 35,000 women with a 93% success rate. It remains the only hospital in the world dedicated to providing free treatment for obstetric fistula. But without any government funding, it is completely dependent on charitable donations to continue its important life-saving work.

"When I learned about the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, I knew we'd found our charity," Helen Stubbings says. "It ticked all the right boxes, especially being global and about women helping women."

Helen knew they were ready to make the leap from planning to implementation. The details of Quilt Aid were in place - the 12 quilting shops throughout Australia and the 12 designers had all been selected. Now it was time to put it all together and help the thousands of Ethiopian women for whom it's so desperately important this necessary medical intervention remains properly funded.

Tune in next week to the final instalment of 'Women Helping Women' to find out how Quilt Aid operates and what you can do to help.

Who Wants to be a Milliner?

The Secret Life of Hats

Episode 25 - The Royal Ascot Hat

If you've ever wondered whether there's actually a name for that class of enormous, elegant ladies' hat so synonymous with up-market horse racing events the world over, then the answer is yes. Introducing the Royal Ascot hat, surely the most amazingly creative and eye-catching item of headwear we've yet examined in this column.

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The Royal Ascot hat derives its name from one of the world's original horse racing carnivals – Britain's Royal Ascot – which will celebrate its 300th birthday next year. This quintessentially British event is popular with horse racing fans all over the world, as much for the racing as for the ladies' hats. The association of horse racing with millinery was originally considered such an unlikely coupling as to be almost eccentric, something that's hard to believe today, given how prominent ladies' hats are with high profile racing events, including our own Melbourne Cup.

But back to the very first Royal Ascot. Appropriately enough it was a woman who came up with the idea. Queen Anne, who was a pretty enthusiastic horsewoman herself, came across an unused field not far from Windsor Castle near the village of East Cote (to be later renamed Ascot) and decided it was too good just for the cows and should be turned into a racing track. Apparently no-one disagreed and the very first Royal Ascot race was held there on 11 August 1711 with the Queen herself presiding over the festivities.

This was still a fairly low key event and didn't even involve a cup as first prize. The event had to wait 61 years for that to happen, when the Duke of Cumberland initiated the race that became known as the Ascot Gold Cup, the most important race in the carnival. By then, the Royal Ascot was the most popular racing carnival in England, a position it still holds over 200 years later.

These days, the Royal Ascot runs annually over four days in June and is the high point on the social calendar for many enthusiasts.

But what about those hats? At some point in the first few decades of the Royal Ascot's long life, someone decreed Thursday of Ascot week to be ladies' day. Although this sounds inclusive, it came with the condition that ladies weren't allowed to enter the exclusive Royal Enclosure without wearing a hat "that must cover the crown of her head" (yes, *more* of that historic paranoia about women's heads being covered!). This led to the tradition of women flaunting ever larger and more elaborate creations, most of which were made by Herbert Johnson Ltd, London's most exclusive milliner who has been making Royal Ascot hats for over 200 years.



Throughout the 20th century and to the present day, Royal Ascot hats have truly become works of art, pushing the boundaries of headwear to outlandish new levels. And if the women proudly wearing them actually know they look like they're balancing dinner plates, flower arrangements, exotic birdlife and even flying saucers on their heads, they don't seem to care.



*Eliza Doolittle
dressed for the
races*

Of course, no article about the Royal Ascot hat would be complete without mentioning what must be the most famous example of all – the stunning creation worn by Audrey Hepburn as Eliza Doolittle in the 1964 movie *My Fair Lady*. Cecil Beaton's black and white taffeta masterpiece seemed to evoke everything the traditional Royal Ascot hat was meant to embody – elegance, style and opulent extravagance. The only thing out of place, of course, was the string of profanities Eliza screamed at her horse as it rounded the bend, which just goes to show that the hat doesn't necessarily maketh the woman... not even the Royal Ascot.

And the Last Word...

"Every quilter has a masterpiece within."

Til next week!
The Blueberries Team