

Sarah: Morning, Kerry. Thank you so much for coming on the show.

Kerry: Thank you Sarah, it feels a real honour to be in Episode two.

Sarah: Right, so you've been part of the online quilting and dressmaking community for many years now. How did your sewing journey begin and what prompted you to take it online?

Kerry: I was a really creative child. My mom went to art college and so she was used to doing arty things and so although we didn't have lots of arty things in the house, it was always encouraged to be an arty child. Her sister was a sewer as well. When we went to her house and she used to bring out scrap bags for us to play with, this is before the age of six really, just to entertain us. So I was used to that being our way of playing in a way. I also went to a very creative primary school, so I think at the time, probably quite a radical primary school, although it was just primary school, so it didn't seem any different to me, but everybody was doing creative things. Everybody sewed, they were great resources, and this is the '70s but I remember there being just loads of threads to choose from.

Kerry: We all had embroidery rings, everybody had an embroidery hoop in their tray. You'd have your pencil and your pen, your spelling book and an embroidery hoop. There was also clay work there and calligraphy, so I was doing all these things before the age of 12 and that was just part of school.

Sarah: That's amazing isn't it?

Kerry: It was a great start and I still think back really fondly to that primary school. And when I've ... I'll give a little mention, it's [Deighton Gates and I know I've been contacted when I've mentioned it before on Instagram, I think someone contacted me from the school, who'd been in school and she'd also had a very positive experience back then. So I think it was really the making of my creative side because once I'd done it all through primary school, I wasn't just going to stop.

Kerry: So it carried on, arty, drawing, painting, that sort of thing, but also into making my own clothes, sewing bits of cushion covers and just odd bits and pieces all through my teens. At university I was making, I made a cocktail dress for something and then into my 20s when I was ... I qualified as a teacher and I looked to carry on the dressmaking, so I went and did a pattern cutting, fashion design HNC, I think, to keep that side going. So I never really dropped it, but the quilting filtered in and out of things. So I did a little bit of that as I was a child, a little bit in my 20s and then I came to it really in my 30s.

Sarah: Is that something you were self-taught or did your mum help you with that journey?

Kerry: No, they're pretty much self-taught on that, out of magazines. When I was a kid I was doing EPP and making patchwork cushions from my toys and things like that, little mini things because ultimately, if you could sew an overcast style stitch, you could do EPP. So I used to love a craft kit or a craft book, nothing would be a better gift for me than that.

So I think that's probably where my quilting started. Then after that, I think when you get into your 20s and friends start having babies and you want to make them something, even before I knew about the world of modern quilting, I did start doing that just from fabrics that I picked up from car boot sales or charity shops and I can't even remember what sort of equipment, it must have just been squares.

Sarah: I think for many people, that's when it starts isn't it?

Kerry: Yes.

Sarah: When the baby comes along and you want to make something.

Kerry: And then your own child.

Sarah: That's right.

Kerry: And making them toys and clothes and things like that.

Sarah: Brilliant, and how would you describe your quilting style?

Kerry: I think it is pretty traditional really in terms of shapes and blocks. I really like a traditional block. I think my fabric mix is a mix of traditional and modern and that's where I probably express the modern side of quilting more. So I might take a very traditional block and some pretty fabrics, but I like to put something else in there and maybe text prints or something that shakes it up a bit or an odd color-way, or something that tells a story, just a bit of a twist so it's not totally predictable.

Sarah: You like a cute motif, don't you?

Kerry: I do, but I don't like it all cute. So it's taking that balance of a kitten or something or a retro, vintagey sort of image, I love that sort of thing. But then something in there that is a little bit unexpected, whether it's just a really bright color or text prints, I just love a text print. Oh and fussy cutting a text print that's telling a bit of a quirky story around that kitty. So it's not just kitties and pretty, it's just a little extra thing as well.

Sarah: And it really works, doesn't it? I think your aesthetic's absolutely gorgeous.

Kerry: Oh thank you.

Sarah: And very distinctive, you can definitely tell when it's something that you've made, and I love that.

Kerry: It's funny because you don't see it yourself at the time and then you look back over things. I mean, these days you go back through your Instagram feed and you can see how something has been quite a cohesive theme over a few months, like colors or prints or a certain block. You can see, even if you're not planning it, it filters through when...

Sarah: Quite often subconsciously, isn't it?

Kerry: Yes, yes.

Sarah: You end up with this coherent style.

Kerry: Yes, colours particularly. Pallettes seem to come in and out and you suddenly realize, oh I seem to be working with bright primary colors, or everything's very ... Or it's like when you order fabric and then you realise when it all comes through, it looks like a whole set of things together even though you've just picked out things you like, but it looks like a quilt waiting to be made. So yes, lots of subconscious things coming through.

Sarah: Tell us more about Sew-Ichigo. Why is it important for you to collaborate with other quilters in this way?

Kerry: So, Sew-Ichigo, it's a foundation paper piecing pattern company really and I do this together with Penny Layman who is Sew Take A Hike and we met online, she's in America and obviously I'm in Britain, but we met online years ago through Flickr and we were in the Ringo Pie quilt bee, which a lot of quilters from around the world were in at the time. We were all into foundation paper piecing and we all got to know each other through that bee. We often knew one person in there and was introduced to other people and Penny and I, we just clicked. We like similar aesthetics, we're the same age. We like the same sort of fabrics and it was just an idea both of us came up with and neither of us really wanted to do it by ourselves but we both liked designing blocks.

Kerry: So we had a dip in doing it together and it just worked really well together. We both realized we liked the back-up of having someone else to bounce ideas off, which was ... We started off selling pattern sets. So instead of just selling one pattern, you'd sell a theme. So we'd have a theme, lots of kitchenalia themes to start with because we both love that and it meant we could brainstorm together, get the ideas out and we'd each have ideas that the other hadn't thought of. You could also knock ideas out more easily together than perhaps you do by yourself.

Sarah: I think that's the thing with quilting. So often you're at home on your own working by yourself and it is really great to have that opportunity to collaborate, to like you say, bounce ideas off each other and really spark off each other as well.

Kerry: Yeah because otherwise it is ... I think can be quite isolating and you can doubt yourself, a lot of us ... I think every quilter always has that voice on their shoulder saying, "Oh, that's not good enough. You don't really know what you're doing." Or, "That idea doesn't cut it." If you can talk to someone else, like we've done over at Great British Quilter and lots of other things, you just get ideas out there and we both are prepared to talk things through and accept the other's recommendation.

Kerry: So Penny will say, "Oh, I like that, but I don't like that." And I'll say the same to her, and that's okay. It's a bit like when you're talking with a sibling, you've got license to criticize each other, but kindly, and I think that really helps.

Sarah: For the greater good as well. It's so that you can put out your best isn't it?

Kerry: And it brings the unexpected out. It will take you into a place that you maybe didn't dare go by yourself and it encourages you to leave your ego somewhere else. Sometimes you can really thrash things out. You've both got a design, you know it's going to work, but you can't quite think what's not quite right about that? Is it the handle, is it the leg or whatever the object is that you're trying to draw and that other person's viewpoint can really just help me break through. I think when we've both been through periods of doubt, the other person has picked something up.

Sarah: Stepped up.

Kerry: Yes, and said, "Actually I think that's better than you think it is." We saw each other through some difficult times, she's lost her parents, I lost my father with difficult circumstances and we both saw each other through that. And Sew-Ichigo comes and goes for us. It's a constant, we're not always working on it because different things go on in our lives, but it's always there and we always come back to it and the patterns are always available. We Skype each other every now and again and just catch up on ideas, and there's always more ideas there, it's just some times other life things ... We both have jobs and day jobs and things and other things get in the way.

Sarah: But that's great that you don't have to put yourselves under too much pressure and it can just be an ongoing thing.

Kerry: Yes, it's a pleasure to do, it's the sort of thing that I don't want to be a chore, so we just keep it at the pleasurable level of enjoying what we do.

Sarah: Yeah. That's great. Tell us more about your sewing space. How do you make it work for you and do you have any tips for staying organised?

Kerry: So I'm lucky, I now have a sewing room. I started off at the kitchen table and I live in a small house, not that many rooms and the rooms are quite small. When I was in the kitchen table, I had to just have a small machine that I could set up and take down and put everything away, and just a box of fabric, just way back in the days when I just had a box of fabric. Now I have lots of boxes of fabric, so I'm in what would be a dining room in an old house. It also is an office space for my day job and it's got a computer in and it's got a piano in and music stuff because my day job is music related. So it covers all those areas as well.

Kerry: I will say, I have a lot of stuff in my sewing room and it is quite a messy space because I am quite messy person, as you know Sarah, but I am a organized and I do plan and that applies to my sewing space as well. So I do know where everything is and I think if you are a messy person, there's no use fantasizing about having clear space and a white room with lots of empty walls, it's just not going happen for me. Never, however much I try, it's not going to be there. So what you do have to try and do is think, I need regular places to put everything, and stick to those regular places so that you don't spend your

whole time looking for things because that can be quite undermining to actually doing anything.

Sarah: Productivity, yes.

Kerry: Yes.

Sarah: And you don't want that frustration of not being able to find something, you just want to get going, don't you?

Kerry: Yeah, so I try and make sure the tools that I use the most are all in certain places, I've got little mini Ikea hanging rails, lots of little drawers and zip pouches and things that I know, that in a certain zip pouch, that's what my Hera marker is, and there's another little pouch with all my thimbles in and all my hand-quilting stuff and just everything has its place but if someone else came into the room, they may not be able to see that immediately.

Sarah: But it's your room and you know where things are.

Kerry: Yes.

Sarah: So that's the most important thing, isn't it?

Kerry: And I think I'm happier, well I know I'm happier working in really quite a messy environment. I do go through and tidy it. I think one thing I have found important is to go through and look at projects that I haven't completed, old works in progress, things like that, and really evaluate them. Am I really going to finish that? What am I holding onto that for? Because it's a bit like with clothes, are you just holding onto it because you think you may fit into it again or you may wear it for an occasion but it's actually something you haven't had for two years and hasn't been seen?

Kerry: Sometimes with projects, I just let them go, pass them onto somebody else, sell on, destash, something. There are times where I planned a whole thing and that time has just passed and it's no use just clogging up the room with boxes of things that I'm not going to complete. So I try and quite regularly go through and have a bit of a mental clear-out of what I am and am not going to do.

Sarah: I think that helps you think more clearly then for looking forward and working on new projects, doesn't it?

Kerry: Definitely, because directions change, don't they, all the time?

Sarah: They do, absolutely. Social media. So you use social media a lot and you have done for a long time. How do you use it to connect with other quilters?

Kerry: Well on social media, I think I started with Flickr. So I was really early internet user way back in the '90s and Flickr was the first sewing related thing that I really found. I found fabric and stuff like that, but not really blogs. I can't remember how I found Flickr, but I did in the early days and it was all about commenting and sharing and groups and it was such a community and it was so global as well. The idea of meeting sewers in that global sense, you talked to someone and they were in Australia or you talked to someone, they'd be in Texas, or you talked to someone and they'd be in London.

Sarah: It's quite exciting isn't it?

Kerry: It was crazy, and people ... We were sending each other stuff. We were doing swaps. I ended up in the quilt bee, the Ringo Pie, which is where I met Penny and where I really got to know Lynne Goldsworthy as well. I knew her a bit beforehand, but I got to know her a lot better. I met Jo Avery of myBearpaw on Flickr through doing doll quilt swaps and it's how a lot, I think, of the modern British quilting scene as we think of it today, is how a lot of us started out and Flickr's still a community that I'm not really part of now but I'm nostalgic about, as I think many people were, because it was so unspoiled. But you have to progress and things have to change. So I think I've been through lots of different things, I went through a Twitter phase when that was really big.

Kerry: I did a Periscope phase a few years ago when I was doing the farmer's wife quilt-along. Periscope was new and it was all about that instant connection and video. These days I think it's Instagram is my main community. I still blog as well, but blogging has changed a lot since Instagram has exploded. Instagram, I remember getting my first iPhone so I could go on Instagram because my Blackberry and my previous ... my Nokia, they weren't up to that sort of thing. I loved Instagram when I started it on it. I think it has changed a lot since the advertising crept in, since the algorithms have changed and the timeline is different that's quite frustrating. I feel that that notion of following people that you want to follow and having people recommended, it's very difficult to do because the algorithms are pushing you on to other accounts, maybe ones that you are interested in, but often not, and every few posts are an advert.

Kerry: I think people have needed to monetise more opportunities to make money out of being on Instagram, being an influencer and I've had a part of that to some small degree as well, but it has become a very commodity-focused channel now. I find that quite sad because I do love Instagram and I found it really positive community. I've had very few, if any, really negative experiences on it. I've seen a few negative things happen, but the huge majority of it is really, really positive. I'd be reluctant to leave it, but I'm cautious as to its future, I think, because Facebook and Instagram are so closely linked and because of the shopping element that's coming in more and more, you know-

Sarah: Yes, absolutely.

Kerry: ... you can just click on something and buy it, that's changing the relationship. So you know something ... it will change and other social media will change but I like social media in general. I think there's a lot of negative stuff talked about social media, but I've made a huge number of friends out of social media. I've met people in person, I find it a

good confidence boost at times. It can be challenging as well. You can feel that you're not doing anything and everyone's doing everything else, but I think overall it's very positive and it's certainly been a very significant part of my journey as a modern quilter.

Sarah: I think it's instrumental really, to modern quilting, to bring people together. That leads me on nicely to my next question. What does it mean to you to be part of the British quilting community?

Kerry: I think I feel really proud to be a little tiny bit of how the British voice has got louder in quilting, and part of the modern quilt movement because I feel when I was first doing modern quilting and Flickr and all that sort of thing, you didn't really hear much about British quilters and British designers and British companies. It was very much the American market, maybe Australia a bit as well. The magazines, a lot of them were American and we didn't have much here and I felt a bit sad, but as that's grown, particularly quilting magazines, and their influence on quilting, it's been really lovely to be a part of that, and I've definitely benefited. I've written projects and columns and things and met people from the magazines and seen how they work and that's been amazing.

Kerry: I think I've also really enjoyed when we did Great British Quilter last year and I was helping with that, that was amazing. I think the lovely thing about Great British Quilter is it's such a focus. You can just go on that hashtag and that cuts all the other Instagram stuff out. You can just go through and have a look, put it on recent, go through chronologically and-

Sarah: I think it's strengthened our identity, hasn't it?

Kerry: Absolutely, and you meet people you don't know or people who have been in quilting a long time but you've never heard of and they're amazing.

Sarah: And sometimes you find they live down the road from you as well, which is lovely.

Kerry: Exactly, exactly. So yeah, I really enjoy being part of the British community. Then at a local level, it's South West Modern Quilt Guild which you founded, that's been amazing for me. People that I know there, but also people that I didn't know before and I now count as great friends and I really look forward to going each month. So on all the different macro and micro levels really, it's an important part of my life really, quilting and otherwise.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely, me too. Okay, finally we'd like to offer top tips to our listeners and it might be related to social media, it might be related to quilting. What advice have you got? What would you like to share?

Kerry: Okay, I've got a couple. In quilting, I tend to quilt quite small. I tend to piece small blocks. I was going through some old blocks and I was trying to find something that was a 12 and a half inch block and I couldn't find one, they were all really small. So for me accuracy is really important, so the tool that I recommend to most people, certainly if

I'm teaching people will know this, is a stiletto or a tailor's awl, a sharp one, which is basically a pointy metal stick with a curved handle and it's a really useful way to get accurate points when you're sewing on the machine. It's like having an extra finger that can go much closer to the needle than your own finger can, and it's much safer, and it's just incredibly useful. It's good for dressmaking as well but for quilting where you've got lots of little seams that need to nest together, it's just so, so helpful. They're often like £2, the cheapest ones, you don't need an expensive one, you just need one which has a cover on it because they're very sharp.

Kerry: I think in the social media world of quilting, this quite basic advice but it's just to acknowledge people. So that might be, if someone's commented, give them the little heart like and comment back, reach out to people, thank people.

Sarah: It's making those connections isn't it?

Kerry: All the time. Even if it is..., you haven't got to have loads of time. Certainly when we were doing Great British Quilter, you couldn't write on everybody's post every day because there was hundreds and hundreds but do like things for people and just remember-

Sarah: And people appreciate that, I think, don't they?

Kerry: They do.

Sarah: They really do.

Kerry: There's always a person there and sometimes the tone of things to people can be a bit impersonal. You often see the comment, "Where's the pattern? What's the pattern?" But nothing else. Don't forget that there's somebody behind there and acknowledge the person as well.

Sarah: Yeah, definitely. Oh, well, thank you so much, Kerry. It's been wonderful talking to you and I wish you all the best with your quilting journey. We look forward to carrying on following you on Instagram and seeing what you're up to. It's been a real pleasure. Thank you.

Kerry: Oh, thank you, Sarah it has been really nice to chat to you and I wish you all the best for your podcast and I'm looking forward to hearing the episodes as they come.

Sarah: Thank you.