

I learned to sew from my mother, at a young age. Back then, sewing was an important part of domestic skills, creating clothing for the family, household textiles, drapes and upholstery. Though a child of the 60's, and not interested in perfecting my domestic skills, I loved the sewing machine and the magic it held. A flat piece of cloth, any cloth, could become something creative, inspired, personal, and I could wear it. I sewed my own clothes and started a small dressmaking and alterations business when I was 15.

My love of fiber and textiles only grew when I went to art school and discovered a fully equipped textile studio at Montclair State. I learned to spin wool, dye with natural dyes, print on cloth, and most importantly, I learned to weave. Or rather I was introduced to the loom. I say that because handweaving represents a set of skills that can take a lifetime to learn, and yet still feel like they only scratch the surface of possibilities.

The ability to create cloth to sew garments was obvious to me from the beginning. Though my art degree focused on conceptual ideas, communication of thoughts and social commentary, function played an important role in the direction I took with my work once I left college.

I started my career working for a handweaving designer, creating mohair yardage for them, and even a few garments. Eventually I began to create my own line of handwoven textiles and exhibited them in craft fairs all over the northeast. There is no greater teacher of efficiency than production and no greater teacher of the human body than creating custom clothing for clients.

Eventually I backed away from the intense world of craft fairs and started to teach. There I found my true calling, empowering others to make clothing for themselves from their own hands. That left me to explore, experiment, and play with works that didn't have to be reproduced for sale, and that I could pour my love of textiles into, without worrying about price point. I could hand paint warps, I could dye my own yarns, I could weave complex structures, and I could create my own patterns, or use a commercial one.

I continue to weave, to play, to experiment, and to enjoy my passion, one I've held for more than 60 years. The Covid years, which stopped all of my travel for teaching, left me time to develop a digital legacy, one where I could continue to empower students to make their own garments, potentially from their own cloth. My daughter helped with the technical end of filming, editing, and developing more than eighty videos for a YouTube channel, The Weaver Sews. I began writing articles for various textile publications back in 2000 and have written more than 100 articles and digital content. That legacy will outlive me and allows me to keep playing with whatever fiber or technique crosses my path.

-Daryl Lancaster