



Marlys Hansen with an order of Memory Bears

Marlys Hansen has a knack for making adults fall in love all over again with the irresistibly classic teddy bear. Though not just any teddy bear, her bears are memory bears, made

from an article of clothing from a deceased loved one; a cherished keepsake to help keep their memory alive.

Though originally from Viborg, SD Hansen moved to Verdell, NE and later moved to Crofton, NE in 1976. She has three children: a daughter in Nebraska, a daughter in Everett, Washington, and a son who passed away about twelve years ago. Her children blessed her with five grandchildren, and she even has one step-great granddaughter and another great-grandbaby on the way.

Hansen's bear making journey began in June 1996 when her father passed away. A friend of hers previously had one made and when Hansen saw it she could remember the person wearing the shirt the bear was made from. "I thought it was a great idea," she explains.

After finding the pattern for the bear in a magazine, she made a memory bear for each one of her family members. Her mom showed her bear off to everyone around her in the nursing home. Her grandchildren in Washington took their bears to school for show & tell and her sister-in-law brought hers to work with her. Hansen suddenly began to get orders for bears. Soon after that she was asked to be featured in an article for a local newspaper and she hasn't had a dull moment ever since.

Hansen enjoys making the bears, as sewing is a primary hobby of hers. She learned how to sew from her mom and in home-economics class at school. Her mom sewed most of her clothes and Hansen sewed many of her own children's clothes as well.

"I just like to sew. I like the creativity of it and the finished product."

Besides sewing the memory bears, Hansen likes to counter cross stitch, embroider, knit, crochet and would like to quilt more if she

could find the time. She also reads, plays piano, plays organ for her church and makes scrapbooks for her children and grandchildren.

Hansen doesn't use any special equipment to make the bears, just creativity, time and her trusty sewing machine. She laughs when I ask if she can remember how long she's had her sewing machine.

"Yeah, I bought it with my high school graduation money. It's a Singer, a floor model and has only had one minor repair job on it, for less than \$100." As I pick my jaw up off the floor, Hansen laughs again, "So it's been a number of years."

Hansen takes very good care of her dependable sewing machine, regularly oiling it and cleaning it has obviously helped it to make thousands of stitches over the years. Though she also has a newer machine, she still likes to use her standard Singer machine to make her bears. Hansen makes a few stitches by hand on each bear, sewing their smiles and the seams on their backs by hand and adding their little black hand-made nose.

Hansen has used various types of fabrics to make the memory bears. She's used different types of shirts, bed sheets, pants, jeans, sweatshirts and has even used an old-fashioned suit and wedding dress.

"Some material is easier to work with than others," she explains. "Some bears are softer than others because of the material. Some material has more give than others."

Never working on them one at a time, Hansen works on them in groups, like a one-person assembly line. The patterns are drawn out on all of them first before she cuts them all out, and then all are sewn and stuffed as a group.

Each bear takes 12 different pattern pieces, though she ends up cutting twice as many pieces because she also cuts out an inside lining for each bear, which is sewn into the seams of each bear. Though no part of the process is harder than another, Hansen explains that "the head is the most time consuming to stuff, to get the shape. It really depends on the material."

"I have even gotten more creative with the bears now than what I did originally." She's had several special orders, making bears wearing sports jackets, hoodie sweatshirts, western shirts, vests and ties. She uses her creativity to adjust her standard pattern pieces to fit the look her customer seeks.

Hansen's largest order was for 25 bears at one time. From this order, she made more than just another happy customer, she made a lasting friendship. She has remained in contact for over 12 years with the lady who placed this order, corresponding with her by phone and letters.

❖ BEARS *continued on page 23*