**Dress with creativity**

*by Jane Milburn*

The clothing we choose to wear is a simple way of bringing creativity into daily life. Everyone can be creative when they follow their heart and allow themselves to be inspired by difference.

Natural fibres are woven into my story from childhood on a sheep farm in New Zealand through agricultural science study in Queensland followed by a career as a rural communicator.

Yet my creative journey only really began when I allowed time to play with toddlers. Now my children are grown, I have the space and time to bring all the threads of my work together as an advocate for ways of dressing that reduce our clothing footprint.

After more than a decade of ‘disposable’ fast fashion, there’s growing interest in ethical and sustainable clothing with a good story to tell. That’s why Textile Beat is undertaking The Slow Clothing Project in 2016 to create a collection of 40 garments handmade by local makers.

Fast, processed food has had a dramatic impact across the population in recent years and similarly there has been a transformational shift in the way we consume fast, manufactured clothing. As conscious eaters are now sourcing fresh whole food and returning to the kitchen – conscious dressers are seeking to be more engaged in how they dress.

Clothing is integral to wellbeing and tastes vary depending on our age, stage, work and wallet. What we choose to wear impacts how we feel and how we present to the world. It is worth noting the difference between fashion and clothing. Clothing meets material needs for warmth, protection and modesty – fashion meets non-material needs such as wanting to make an impression, to stand out, to display wealth and social standing.

By nature, fashion becomes obsolete after a brief period of currency. It has a perceived use-by-date after which it fails to satisfy the emotion that drove the original purchase. With that revolving door comes waste, exploitation, dissatisfaction and disempowerment.

When we apply creativity to the way we dress, we do away with the need to follow fashion because we can reinvent and repackage existing garments – in our own wardrobes, swaps from friends or discards at opportunity shops.

This way of dressing requires time and space, confidence, embrace of imperfection and perhaps some sewing skills. It requires owning your style and not being afraid of what others think.

At this time when climate change is an acknowledged reality and countries are committed to slowing global warming, we can all help by changing the way we consume limited resources. When it comes to our material footprint, this Slow Clothing Manifesto summarizes 10-point ways to minimize it:

* think – make thoughtful, ethical, informed choices
* natural – treasure fibres from nature and limit synthetics
* quality – buy well once, quality remains after price is forgotten
* local – support local makers, those with good stories and fair trade
* care – mend, patch, sort, sponge, wash less, use cold water, line dry
* few – live with less, capsule wardrobe, have one best style, unfollow
* make – embrace home sewing as a life skill, value DIY and handmade
* adapt – refashion, eco-dye, create new from old to suit yourself
* revive – enjoy vintage, exchange, op shop, and swap
* salvage – donate, pass on, rag, weave, recycle or compost

Upcycling or adapting clothing is a way of making everything old become new again. Creative thought is used when you view discarded clothing as a natural resource, study its current form and details then recast it in a fresh design. Each upcycled garment is individually conceived and recrafted – and the environmental reward is extending textile life by diversion from landfill.

It is a wonderful way to engage our creativity, practice textile artistry and sewing, experiment with design and all the while produce interesting, original and environmentally responsible art to wear.

The Slow Clothing Project will celebrate handmade, natural fibres and local production – with some focus on upcycling and textile reuse. The project will gather a collection of garments, generated across 40 weeks from February to November – with the collection showcased at various opportunities.

Each garment becomes a different story about mindful and sustainable resource use. You can follow the project at textilebeat.com.