

## Q&A for the Wardrobe Story in U on Sunday Magazine

Jane Milburn lives with husband Darcy and daughter Lily in Taringa. She is a rural communicator and upcycler. Jane established Textile Beat in 2013.

[www.textilebeat.com](http://www.textilebeat.com)

### How is your wardrobe set out?

I have a large collection although very few items were purchased new (except undergarments and a Veronika Maine wool suit). When our sons left home my op-shopping habits meant I gradually took over a number of cupboards, and the upstairs living room became my studio. The active part of the wardrobe is a set of drawers, two bookcases for rolled up knitwear (skirts, tops and scarves), and some hanging space. My current favourite garments hang on a rack in the studio. I do love variety yet I've settled on a few styles that work for me.

### Where do you buy your clothes?

I make or remake all my own clothes – except coats. If I need shoes, my first port of call is David Jones at Toowong. If friends want me to take them thrifting, favourite local op shops are Red Hill Baptist Church Thrift Shop, Yesterday's at Rosalie and various others around Sherwood.



### What are some special pieces in your wardrobe?

My special pieces are ones that hold meaning and have a story. I made what I call a history skirt, which incorporates cotton lace offcuts left over from dresses Mum made us as children – they form two panels of an eight-panel gored skirt – with the rest being created by refashioning linen and silk op-shop garments. There's only one like it in the world! I also love my denim pinny, which is made by repurposing discarded jeans and creatively stitching them together as a dress.

### What is the benefit of wearing natural fibres?

Natural fibres feel nice against your skin, they breathe and you don't have to wash them as much as synthetic fibres.

### What does sustainable fashion mean to you?

Sustainable fashion usually describes clothing with good ethical and environmental values. It is an oxymoron in some ways because fashion is an artificial construct that is ever-changing – which makes it unsustainable. If we reflect on clothing history, textiles were expensive and garments made by hand or dressmakers up until about the '60s and worn until threadbare. Now we have the endless churn of cheap fast fashion which has created a sense of disposable clothing that often ends up in landfill. The best way to be sustainable is to buy quality items you love and make them last.

### Do you always look at how to rework a garment?

I see clothing as a resource that can be reworked endlessly until the fibres wear out. It's the beautiful natural fibres, texture and colour that attract my eye, rather than the size and style.

### Did you learn to sew when you were a child?

I made my first dress at age 13, it was a blue floral cotton mini-skirt. Mum was a home-economics teacher who co-authored the textbook *Focus on Living*. I still have the Singer sewing machine she taught me on and it looks just like the one in *The Dressmaker* movie. I view home sewing as a life skill just like home cooking. It's empowering to be able to mend a hem and sew on a button because you are not dependent on others.

### Tell us about "Sew it Again?"

I went to a pre-loved Fashion for Floods fundraiser in 2011 and came away with Kerri Anne Kennerley's leather jacket bought at silent auction for \$70 along with 30 other items reduced to \$2 each at evening's end. This started me visiting op shops and I noticed how much quality clothing was being cast off. I launched Textile Beat in 2013 and Sew it Again became a 365-day campaign in 2014 when I upcycled and blogged every day to demonstrate creative ways to bring new life to old clothes. Then I became part of the global Fashion Revolution arising from the Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh which exposed fast fashion as unethical, as well as wasteful. I've developed a Slow Fashion manifesto that encapsulates 10 ways to reduce your clothing footprint which I share at workshop and talks to help foster a more sustainable clothing culture.

### **Have you met other upcyclers?**

What we wear is a statement about who we are. In the same way we've become conscious of our food, we are becoming more aware of the substance, not just the style, of the clothing we wear. It is great meeting people with shared values of authenticity and individuality, who are creative and resourceful and want to live more simply. At a Parliament House Canberra dinner recently a young friend proudly came over to say she was wearing a rescued dress purchased for 35 cents while working in Papua New Guinea. We generate an extraordinary amount of waste clothing in Australia, and export 70 million kilograms of cast-offs every year into the global secondhand trade. Average individual annual consumption across the world has doubled from 7kg to 13kg during the past two decades. It is good that people are becoming aware that cheap clothing equates to exploited workers, and they're starting to seek out ethical brands with transparent supply chains. Of course the most effective way to be ethical is to buy secondhand.