

MY LIFE IN BEARS

Sarah Cox



Sarah reminisces about her life as an arctophile and teddy bear artist.

LEFT:

My lovely "Sarah Bear" from way back when.....

ABOVE RIGHT:

Valentine from the Fairy-Bear & Bug-Bear Collections

RIGHT:

Sarah in a rare moment of contemplation



SARAH COX



Teddybear maker since 1980

Creator of the famous Grant
The Cambridge grad bear

"My Fairy-Bears and Bug-Bears
have proved so popular I can't
make them fast enough!"

Sarah lives and works in the
historical city of Cambridge

You can contact Sarah directly at
email : sarahsbears@ntlworld.com
Facebook business :
SarahsBearsOfCambridge
or Facebook: sarah.cox.391

I was never into dolls, it was always the cuddlies for me and especially teddy bears - though I didn't know why they were all called 'Teddy' until much later in life. To me, bears were always... well, sort of ...themselves. My earliest memory of my very own bear, who's still with me today, is a bed-time chat with Mum (she'd been reading 'Winnie The Pooh', of course - I remember that), and we were thinking of a name for this special ursine friend.

'Bruno' suited him, as he was quite big and butch and, when originally bought for me, large enough for me not to chuck out of my pram! Not only was he hefty enough to stay put, he was large enough to wear some of my tee-shirts and a sun hat if we ever went to the sea-side, I remember that, too. We nearly lost him one day, he fell onto the road during a bike ride home with Dad. Not many motorists back then, but we were fortunate in one that spotted Bruno, picked him up and took him

straight to the police station. Always the first place to enquire when you have a missing person, we did, so Bruno and I were tearfully reunited, though I must say, I don't remember any of that! Bruno has long since retired. He gazes from the corner of the bear workroom through dusty eyes and has watched me create more than 4,700 bears and other creatures, over the last 30 years. He's not a bit jealous, he's part of the inspiration for me to make



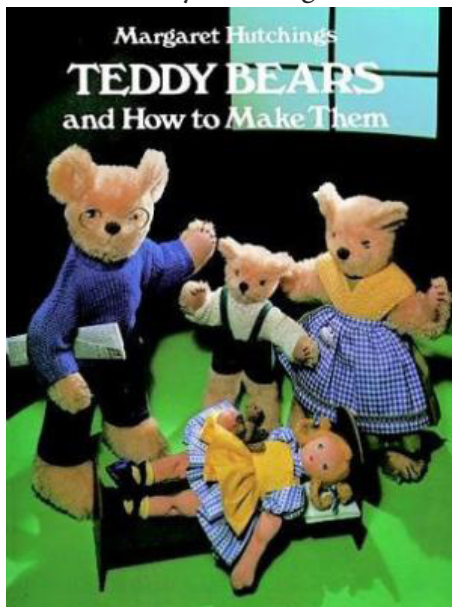
traditional mohair bears, although he could probably do with some of the more expert TLC old bears can get these days.

It wasn't until I visited my first bear festival and saw his double (original bell around it's neck, too) that I realised he is probably a Schuco. One look at that bell on this dop-pelgänger and the memories came flooding back. He still has a distinctive button-like tail. I really do owe my Bruno a make over. Never thought I'd make a bear!

LEFT:Mum and me at sea (no Bruno!) he didnt want sand in his fur.



Useless at school sewing classes, I found I wanted to create something, so my Mum (the only person with enough patience for my quick temper) talked me through getting to grips with fabric and patterns and let me loose on one of her sewing machines. We made all our clothes and would rush to finish the latest outfit for some 'do' or other, still working on them until the small hours. Worse still: going out wearing a dress with the hem still only tacked up! One day, Mum brought a book home, Margaret Hutchings' 'Teddy Bears and How to Make Them', so we got some fluff and stuff, and had a go. A couple of odd-looking under-stuffed pink bears with wobbly limbs were born, and we were hooked! I think it was the late MH that said something like: 'If a dozen people all made the same bear pattern from the same fur fabric, each and every resulting bear



would look entirely different from the other.' *We began to learn about the magic.* I finally managed to develop enough sewing skills to succeed at making something with a (nice) face, around the mid to late eighties. By 1988, I'd accumulated quite a crowd, still using 'toy' patterns and kits. I'd just about managed to give a bit of character to a few bears, dogs, pandas, foxes, etc., but no real style of my own. So I applied for a stall at a craft market in Cambridge town and got a pitch. However, it took years of practice, metres of acrylic fur, countless plastic eyes, and pounds of toy filling before I had the confidence to approach shops with my creations. I'd also just discovered mohair cloth. Although I always loved selling things, I found it was much more fun selling things I'd actually made. I'd chat for hours about my crazy ideas for bear characters and

that is where 'GRANT' the Cambridge grad bear was born. 'Degree Day' suddenly took on a whole new importance for me! One cold winter, my stall 'roof' filled with snow and the whole table-contraption (created from bits of exhibition stand) toppled over. The bears, mohair ones included, went flying and ended up in the slush and mud!

That marked the end of my craft market days. My critters needed to be looking out from a nice, cosy shop window. So, making the transition from stall to store actually came along quicker than I expected.

Once I was established enough to be a 'supplier', I really didn't feel like doing anything else. I'd happily work a stint in any of the outlets that

stocked my bears, as long as I could go home and make more to sell. I did a few fairs and festivals and

I could chat away all day to people about my new-found knowledge of teddy bears

and how I made them. The success of those early days now means that over 250 clever BAs, MAs, PhDs, LLMs, etc., etc, all have their very own gowned & mortar-boarded Sarah's Bear to show for their hard work at University.



LLMs, etc., etc, all have their very own gowned & mortar-boarded Sarah's Bear to show for their hard work at University.

TOP LEFT:

Me at the Cambridge Town Craft Market circa 1988

ABOVE:

'GRANT' the Cambridge Grad bear

LEFT:

Margaret Hutchings' 'Teddy Bears and How to Make Them'

I also used to sell at the American airbase Bazaars. Slightly ignored during the Beanie Baby years, my retaliation, by way of a bear just for them, paid off. 'GUY', named by the Logistics Group Wives, was born! He was the essential British hand made bear to take home to America from England, and they could acquire him right there on the base! He was a cousin of 'George' (UK flag paws) and 'Sam' (US paws), made in just about any size, using appliquéd ribbons to represent the Union Jack and/or the Star-Spangled Banner on alternate paw and foot-pads. I made and sold dozens of them, then 9-11 happened. Nothing was ever going to be the same again, least of all the Annual Bazaars. However, fun times with my newfound success at doing what I really loved far outweighed the few disasters, so still I find it's best to think about how I can adjust to change, renew my approach, move on and try and learn from it all. Going for a long walk, with the camera, whatever the weather, is still the best way to reorganise my scrambled thoughts and hatch new plans. Other successes include 'SID' & 'NANCY' the punk bears: over 150 of my punks rocking around the world, now, despite a nasty complaint about some of them having a ring through their nose! Goodness me, they're teddy bears, and



they don't care! The rabbits have also been numerous (of course) and in varying sizes and there have been pandas galore! I'm certainly no miniaturist, but the Fairy-Bears and, more recently, the Bug-Bears (3-4 inch winged bears and bears that think they're butterflies) have proved so popular I can't make them fast enough. Cambridge historical town centre is a crazy place in the summer months, so I stay home and craft, now, just as I always wanted to. I'm quite happy, never alone in the company of bears, and I become completely immersed in my craft, it's great! BUT.... I do sometimes miss see-

ing the magic happen..... If someone walks into a beary nice place and chooses something of mine.... who am I kidding? BEARS CHOOSE PEOPLE! Anyway, when I see this magic happen, there's no other feeling like it. I'll try to explain: it means someone else appreciates your vision of how that bear should look. It means someone wants to own... sorry, ADOPT something...(sorry someone) you've made. The work you've put into that piece, that fabric, those colours, that face! It means 'bear' gave someone 'that look'...and if any of mine give ME that look? Well, I have to harden my heart if I'm going to make any money, buy more for the mohair stash, pay bills and put food on the table. We still have 'Archie'. I demanded he be fetched from the 'stock' of bears on the old piano and brought to the maternity hospital after the arrival of my only son. Also one of two limited edition 'Sarah' bears stayed. Finished in 2012, another eventful, decision-making year for me, so I just had to keep her! She proudly sits among Steiffs and her photo is used as my Facebook profile picture, (semi-permanently), so that everyone knows it's me. Talking of Facebook, I wouldn't be without that vital contact with friends and collectors around the world. Social media, generally, is great for sharing pictures and chatting about what's just arrived in my beary world. A few other 'kept' bears are in residence, they lurk among 'the hug', (my personal collection), so are very hard to find sometimes, especially when showtime comes around - they hide.

