



Keeping Current on the Latest Dance and Cheer Styles

© Deborah J. Nelson/President of Satin Stitches®Ltd.

(As published in Cheerleading Dance & Drill Magazine January/February 2005)

Satin Stitches is a Generation X-er company which came into existence in 1978.

We celebrated our 26th birthday last spring. Staying "current" in the fast paced world of fashion design is always a challenge. My name is Deborah J. Nelson and I am the Head Designer and Founder of Satin Stitches Ltd. I continually strive to stay current on everything related to the world of dance and cheer by continuing what I have always done - lots of research on a daily basis! I have always immersed myself in fashion and costume design, including all the aspects of this artistic medium. By doing this, Satin Stitches and all of our customers can stay ahead of upcoming trends and stay on "the cutting edge"!

Now a baby-boomer, I started designing clothing for myself when I was a teenager. I wanted to wear the very latest clothes! I had already honed my skills as a sewer (please don't use that antiquated term "seamstress"!) by hand sewing doll clothes as a child and then sewing from "store bought" patterns as a pre-adolescent. Fashion has been my passion since my childhood.

Of course I then attended the Minneapolis College of Art & Design (one of the few local colleges offering apparel design courses). I majored in Fashion Design. After achieving my Bachelor of Fine Art Degree, I immediately went to work in the garment manufacturing industry in Minneapolis, working for four and a half years for what would be called today "bridge apparel". I was hired as an assistant patternmaker and I worked my way up to be assistant designer, head patternmaker and head of the cutting department. I had one of the best design jobs in the Twin Cities - working on five "designer" lines a year, using beautiful imported Italian fabrics.

But - Minneapolis is NOT New York! I wanted more. I was married and was planning on having a family, so I wasn't ready to uproot myself and head to the "big apple". I had interviewed with the costume shop at the Guthrie Theater, a prestigious regional theater, when I had first graduated from college. But, I couldn't afford to work there, as the pay was minimum wage with no health insurance benefits or even the promise of full time work - year round. So I gave up on my costume design dream at this time. When I decided to try my hand at an entrepreneurial venture - I decided I would give in to my inner quest for "glitz and glamour" and start custom designing wedding gowns and dance costumes (and anything else that would pay the bills). The 70's equivalent to having a web site was placing a listing in the Yellow Pages. That is how it all began, back in 1978!

I had learned all of the design and production aspects of owning an apparel design manufacturing business from my previous jobs (I had free-lanced in addition to my "real job"), including very high quality construction techniques. Because I was an excellent

sewer, in addition to my design, patternmaking, and fitting expertise, Satin Stitches was born, with me wearing all of the "hats". I continued my "real job" for a full six months before I went solo with my own business. I hired my first employees within another couple of months. Our sample maker is still with the company, and she continues to be responsible for figuring out how to put together all of the thousands of styles that we custom design every year.

Satin Stitches has continued to grow to 2600 square feet of showroom and production space. We are still a small, very specialized company, as we currently have eleven full and part-time employees, besides myself. Other employees include our customer service person, patternmaker, cutter, production supervisor, sample sewer, and all of the other sewers that all together make your costumes happen.

My job has transitioned over the years. I obviously no longer do everything. I currently supervise patternmaking, fitting, cutting and embellishing. And my job continues to include supervision of all of our marketing and Internet efforts. I continue to research new fabric and trims and to continually expose myself to all of the new trends in the fashion world. I am a member of Fashion Group International, I read Women's Wear Daily and numerous fashion publications. I read as many dance publications that I can find and search the Internet for additional inspirations.

All entertainment performances can influence dance costumes. My favorite inspiration is Broadway musicals - which I attend as many and as often as I can. Period costumed movies are also a "must"! I collect vintage musicals on VHS and now on DVD. I also have a large collection of fashion and costume reference books - wonderful picture books on all the top designers - past and present, along with depictions of movie and theatrical costuming. My favorite things to do, in New York (which I love to visit), besides Broadway shows - is to visit the costume exhibits at various museums - especially the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Fashion Institute of Technology. My fashion "hero" is still Bob Mackie - who has designed some of the all-time most glamorous costumes around! He is famous for dressing Cher and many other glamorous women. His fashion retrospective several years ago at FIT was incredible! I collect his famous "Bob Mackie Barbie" dolls" which all have incredible workmanship on their exquisite gowns.

At Satin Stitches, the biggest segment of our customers is high school, college and studio dance teams. Other group performance costumes that we create include costumes and uniforms for ice skaters, ballroom dancers, frontlines for marching bands, baton twirlers, professional dance/cheerleaders for the NBA, NFL and various professional sports, and groups where we are able to do lots of "boy" costumes - high school and college show choirs. We still do solo dance costumes and various entertainers' costumes. These include our favorite "Elvis", pageant queens, fitness contestants and burly wrestlers! So you see, it really doesn't get boring around Satin Stitches - we make so many varied and interesting things!

And our customers constantly keep us challenged. They may bring in, or send in a photograph or tape of something we haven't seen. Or get really creative with their sketch of what they want. Only after analyzing what will work best for their performance, do we collaborate on their costume design.

We are constantly perusing magazines and catalogs - in and out of the dance world, to see what is being shown, and what may be the next "big thing". We also continue to research new and different fabric and trim supply companies. I attend fabric trade shows annually, along with getting all of the updated swatch cards from our current suppliers.

And then of course, there is the Internet, where companies continue to post their wares Online.

Another phenomenon in the dance world is regional style. I attend many high school dance team conferences and competitions around the country. This allows me to see and hear what may be the "norm" in any particular state or region of the country. I also present seminars on costume design and can talk first hand with dance team coaches and directors about their specific needs in a costume or uniform. Displaying at these events with many of our costume samples shown at our Satin Stitches booth, also creates interactive dialog with dancers. I hear what they like and don't like. All of this is added research to be able to help our customers design a costume or uniform that really works for them.

All of these things add up to what influences the costume styles that we create, here at Satin Stitches. As a dance team coach, or cheer or baton team director, you can also stay current on what styles of costumes and uniforms are available, and why. Do your homework, as I do, to help you research what is current or what might be the next trend in costuming for your group. And all of the influences that I have mentioned can help give you ideas for your perfect team costume!

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