

# Yarning - Tales from Birmingham podcast

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## TRANSCRIPT

Hi, I'm Venetia. I am 37 years old, I live in Erdington in Birmingham and I'm a maker.

I knit by hand and machine and I crochet. I would also like to say that I do a little bit of spinning, but I admit I haven't touched my spinning wheel for two years now, so I can't really say I'm competent at that.

I started knitting when I was about seven or eight years old. My mum taught me the basics, and I forgot. But then when I was ill one time, and I had to have a couple of days off school, my mum just needed something for me to do to occupy me. So she just gave me some needles just taught me basic knit stitch, and then I made a garter stitch scarf. And that was kind of the beginning of it all.

She also taught me the basics of crochet when I was about 14, and I kind of went along with that. And I'm now better than her, I will admit that!

For my machine knitting, I started that probably about five years ago. I've always had the idea in my mind of getting a knitting machine. My mum did have a couple of them in just kind of in storage at the top of her cupboard a few years ago. I never used them, but my older sister did a few times. They were always a bit of a curiosity for me but, even though I never actually tried to use them.

But then about five years ago, I had the idea in my mind that I really wanted a knitting machine. And it kind of niggled at me in the back of my mind for a while and then I decided to take the plunge and just buy one off eBay. And from there, it's been really good. I've got about another four now. But one of the things you do realize with machine knitting is that no one machine can do everything, do you'd have to buy a range of them in order to get as much out of them that you like.

Yes, I am very much born and bred in Birmingham. I did go away to university, I went to Bristol, and spent three years there, but then I came back to Birmingham. And now I live about a mile and a half from where I grew up. I think that is one of the things I kind of regret in life. I wish I was taught a bit more financial kind of, you know, nuance and started saving money earlier. I share a house and I currently can't afford to be able to buy my own or even, you know, be able to afford to live on my own which I think it's something that I would really like. I do value my independence.

My family, they are crafters, like my mum knits, my sister knits, as well as other members of my family knit as well. So they would give me all their little hand me downs. So I had my little bag that had my knitting and stuff like that. So I would pick it up, off and on. So from the age of 11 onwards it was something I'd just pick up and put down. It was just something to do you know, you know, if I had an hour or two after school or anything like that. Yeah, I did kind of consciously keep it up.

I have quite a large family and we're all kind of living our different lives. But there's always been a grain of kind of making undercurrent going along. Because even my mum's mum, she sewed as well. And she's told me stories about how her and her sisters like, you know, on a Friday night, they'd be you know, they'd watch the telly like, watch Top of the Pops or that kind of thing. They'd see an outfit then Saturday, they'd go to the Bullring market, buy the fabric, by the evening they had an outfit ready to go out at night.

And also I remember a knitted jumper she made for me. When I was about four years old, it was a mohair jumper. I can actually describe it to you. It had like a stair step sort of intarsia design like one half was green, and the other half was white. And I remember there was a girl in my primary school or maybe it might have been nursery. I think her mum made her exactly the same jumper. I remember on a photo day like that. I wasn't wearing my jumper at the time, but she came in with that jumper and like I have that jumper!

I could probably say, a pivotal moment in my knitter kind of career as such, if you wish to call it, was when it was my final years at university and I should have been revising but actually, I spent most of my time knitting a blanket for my friend's 21st birthday. Because he was going to a festival. I think it was V festival then that would have been in August. So I had a couple of months to like, make this blanket for him. So I was like knitting squares instead of revising for a lot of time.

It was just lots of garter stitch squares that I just sewed together and then did a border on it. And remember my friend he absolutely loved it because he was saying, "I was so warm. And my friend ended up buying like a really crappy blanket." And like, you know, his blanket was like, really terrible, but my friend's blanket was amazing. He was a really good friend. He still is a good friend now.

Knitting is something I tend to go for instinctively over crochet, though, I do really love the portability of crochet. And I'm a lot more gung ho about it. But the kinds of things that I typically make during my 20s up until now, probably more likely accessories, because I don't have to worry so much about sizing. So things like hats or shawls. I have made a couple more garments recently, which is one of the things that I really like the knitting machine for because these large scale things that, you know, that require a big time investment. It's not so hard when you have a knitting machine because it can go along a bit more quickly.

I think shawls tend to be my go to because I don't, again, think about sizing. I don't have to worry about the size so I can concentrate focus more on, you know, pattern and construction and colour. For me, those are the biggest things when it comes to crafting. It's just is this thing visually appealing to me?

I'm very much drawn to very much graphic kind of things and then in colour. So what I make, they don't tend to be things that are very textural. Like, with knitting, we've got some knitting things like bobbles and cables, very traditional kind of knitting styles, they don't appeal to me. I think for me, it's more about the surface design. And you know, very much pattern.

I don't understand when someone sees a pattern, and they see the yarn and they see the color, they have to do the exact thing that is there. I think one of the beauties of being a maker is that you can take those decisions into your own hands. And that, why create something when it's just going to be a faithful rendition of the original? I mean, you have that opportunity to make it much more than that. You can make it yours, you can make it truly individual to you.

It's just something that's kind of become inherent to me, I think, the idea of making. I think, maybe it's a part of, you know, seeing my family members, they just do it. It's just something that we do, you know. The idea of, maybe for my parents as well, for like my mum back then buying clothes was a lot more expensive than it is now. So if it was a case of, you know, if you want it you have to make it because that's the only way you can afford it. And well, as you know, nowadays, crafting is far more expensive than actually buying new.

I think it's just the possibility. I think maybe being a maker is just like, the possible, you know. You can kind of ... like it was the creation, just the creation. Just the ability to create, I think that is the biggest thing maybe for any maker, you know, just to have an idea in your head and turn it into a tangible object. I think for me, that is a big thing.

Like, one of the things I love about yarn is that it's just a piece of string. You know, I can take this essentially one dimensional thing and create a three dimensional thing that has purpose. You know, it may have practical purpose or it may just be a thing of beauty, you know, purely aesthetic.

I think as well part of it, it's to get away from the tedium of everyday life. I think, you know, I have a job. I won't talk about what the job is, but it's boring. I like the people who I work with, but it's not something I would have thought I'd be doing now. But you know, money, I need money, I need, I need to pay my bills. Unfortunately, you know, I don't know any millionaires.

And I think it is very much that kind of escape from the tedium in the sense that making for me is productive in a way that my job isn't, you know. I know that, you know, if the world ended tomorrow, and we had to reestablish a new life, my job could be obsolete. You know, it's not something that is essential or needed, or anything like that. And I think that's what really kind of came to me during the pandemic, like being on furlough, because I couldn't do my job, because shops were closed. And I was I was furloughed on full pay, which I was very grateful for. But it kind of made me realize that, you know, I didn't want to be doing the job that I do now. And it kind of gave me a different perspective on my job, really. And it has increased my desire to not be there. I absolutely loved being on furlough, because I had so much time to just create and just do what I want. I could knit, I could crochet, I could bake, I could dye yarn, I could just have a walk if I wanted to, even though I think I did about two walks.

It was just that freedom to have that absolute freedom to do whatever you want in that time was just so good for me. I think for some people, it was a bad thing, because they kind of felt stifled and you know, they weren't out in the outer world to experience. Some people they probably need to experience things to create. But for me, I just need time.

I think the only change really, for me is that I seem to have more ideas, but I don't have the time to commit to them all. But then sometimes, it has made me a bit complacent in a way. I kind of, I always think, oh, I can do it another time but I realize, actually, you know, months have gone by and haven't actually done anything with an idea sort of thing. That's the kind of downside with me, in my making, I think I have too many ideas. But I don't always have the follow through to actually push forward.

Newness is my downfall. Everything, it's new. I always have so much passion at the very beginning. And then yeah, I lose enthusiasm quite quickly, either because a new idea comes along, or I realize this idea is going to take more kind of work to actually fully flesh out into something worthwhile.

I've got shawls that all I need is either blocking or weaving in the ends. So I've done all the knitting but it's just the finishing haven't done yet. I don't really like sewing up, but I've kind of had to embrace it a bit more as a machine knitter because, because of the nature of the machine, more often than not, you have to knit in flat panels unless you have either a double bed machine or one with a ribber or fancy schmancy hundreds of 1000s of pounds industrial machine.

I like the idea of weaving, but then I've seen them when they have to warp the machine, and that just seems like so much effort. I don't want anything that has so much pre work

to do. Sticking with knitting machines. I would quite like the idea of learning how to program an industrial knitting machine, because that just seems amazing. Some of the stuff that they could produce.

Craft wise, maybe, I quite like getting back into some of the artsy things I did because I remember being at secondary school I knew lino printing, that was quite fun. I quite like printing. Sewing, I should try and do that. Because I've got my mum's old sewing machine. She gave it to me years ago and I haven't really done much with it. And I mean, I did do textiles when I was at secondary school but, apart from that, I haven't really used a sewing machine much anymore.

The idea of knitting is against the kind of norm because we're in a very consumerist society. The idea of fast fashion, buy it now, buy it now. And we can kind of subvert that by creating things that take time. If you were to buy it, it would cost you, you know, hundreds of 1000s of pounds, because, when you're making something by hand, that idea of, most of the cost comes in the labour, it's not the finished article itself. And I think that's one of the things that a lot of people generally they don't quite understand. They see the price, and they see the finished article, and then they're wondering "What am I getting for this?". And, when you see a t shirt at Primark that costs five pounds or something like that. And you think the reason why you get that is because the people who are making it are being paid pennies, whereas, if you made a t shirt, if you had the skills to make a t shirt, you would truly understand how much work goes into making something like this.

Yeah, that kind of autonomy of, you know, carving your own little niche and carving your own little path.