

Have you ever thought about how many rags to riches stories there are in the United States? It seems that a great deal of our heritage is based on these types of stories. Stories about people starting from very humble beginnings, with only an idea or concept for a product that ends up making them rich and changing their lives and those around them. On a small scale my mother was that type of person.

My family did not have a great deal of money when I was growing up. This was at the time when women held jobs but left them once they had children. The few women that did work once they had children had to find private babysitters to care for them, there were not day care centers. My mother was always looking for ways to bring in extra money for the family, while still staying at home with us children. She sold garden produce as well as apples from the apple orchard, this was great in the summer, but did nothing to supplement the income in the winter months. My mother was an excellent seamstress. She saved a great deal of money by making our clothing and altering out dated clothes so they would remain in style. One year for Christmas she made each of us custom stuffed animals as a gift. Each one was different and very detailed. She made the custom stuffed animals out of remnants as well as pieces of clothing that could not be salvaged. I received a stuffed bear that was made from an old brown wool coat. He was very cute and cuddly. I took him along to a friend's house when I went to visit during our Christmas break.

The friend's mother loved the bear and asked where I had gotten it. I explained that my mother made custom stuffed animals for all of us. This woman contacted my mother and asked her to make one of the bears. She had an old fur coat that her grandmother gave her. She never wore the coat and wanted to have some remembrance of her grandmother. She thought my mom could make a bear out of it. This launched a business for my mother. Soon people found out that she would make bears and other custom stuffed animals out of used clothing. She was getting so many orders that she hired another woman to help her make them. She ended up having a sewing shop that employed six people. She sold it to one of the employees when she retired. She ended up having a very good income and she and dad were able to buy a second home to spend the winters in.