

TAKE IT FROM HERE

CLOTHED IN DIGNITY: WEAVING THREADS INTO DREAMS

E.A. Lepine

By D.G. Wynn

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE WHEN THE LORD PLANTS THE FIRST SEED OF CALLING IN YOUR HEART? IT MAY BE JUST A FLICKER OF A VISION, BUT IT'S ONE WITH ETERNAL POSSIBILITIES. MOST CALLINGS NEED TIME TO GROW FROM THAT SEED INTO A MATURE PLANT THAT CAN PRODUCE LIFE. SUCH WAS THE CASE AS E.A. LEPINE LEARNED TO SEW IN HIGH SCHOOL, DREAMING OF A FUTURE IN CLOTHING DESIGN.

E.A. went to college because that was the practical thing to do. “Everybody has a dream that hangs out there loosely that they want to do after they secure a more practical trajectory,” E.A. shared.

But it wasn't just practicality that had E.A. studying psychology in college. The Lord was guiding her with each step—the relationships she developed, the classes she took, and even the sorority she joined. When one of her sorority sisters planned a short-term mission trip to Honduras in her sophomore year, E.A. jumped at the chance to be a part of it. While this particular trip focused on construction and various work projects, it was the opportunity her calling needed to grow roots.

The trip provided an occasion to meet the ladies of Mi Esperanza—a nonprofit organization, based in Honduras that educates, employs, and empowers women to break out of the intergenerational poverty that plagues their communities. Mi Esperanza provides free classes in sewing, jewelry making, cosmetology, and more. The women pay only for their transportation to and from the classes. These women—both those learning to sew and those leading the organization—became new sisters to E.A. and played a critical role in her dream.

That trip became the first of many. E.A. went back to Honduras to work with the ladies of Mi Esperanza every opportunity her college schedule would allow, including quick trips over her breaks. And she went down for months at a time as an intern during the summers. She went back to Honduras at least twice a year for the next several years, even as she moved into her master's program at Denver Seminary.

“I felt called to seminary; it was just in my mind. Denver Seminary was unique because it allowed me to think from a clinical and a biblical perspective at the same time.”

ARROWROOT

Between her first and second year of seminary, E.A. planned her wedding. This was when the roots of her calling finally burst to life. She

flew down to Honduras to join the ladies of Mi Esperanza and asked them to outfit her entire wedding party. Within a couple weeks, the ladies had created her wedding gown, 10 bridesmaids' dresses, and the suits for her groom and all 10 groomsmen.

“That was a light bulb for me. I thought, *If we can do this with these wedding clothes, then we can do this with regular clothes too.*”



Fast forward through her graduation from Denver Seminary in spring of 2013 to Christmas of that year. For months, E.A. and her husband had been praying and saving for plane tickets to Honduras to see if they could set up a clothing company. At her family's Christmas gathering in 2013, E.A. opened the present from her parents: two tickets to Honduras. The tickets were just the confirmation she and her husband needed.

Soon after, Arrowroot was born.



The name Arrowroot comes from E.A.'s long-standing affection for vintage clothes. It is wrapped up in the idea of the old inspiring the new; "root" looks to the past, and "arrow" represents moving fashion forward.

"We do anywhere from two to four lines a year with nine to twelve dresses in a themed 'look book' for the season. Generally, we make spring and fall production trips to Honduras, but at this point, I can just send the patterns and the material and know they are going to do a great job."

ETHICAL PRODUCTION

One significant thing that sets Arrowroot apart is their production philosophy: "We believe good clothing isn't just aesthetically on point, but uplifts the people who made it—physically, emotionally, and financially."

Arrowroot's commitment to ethical production isn't just in the sewing of the clothes, but extends all the way to those who grow the cotton. The fashion industry is known throughout the world for unethical treatment of workers and harmful effects on the environment, but E.A. found organizations that share her commitment to lifting people up and protecting the environment in the process.

"To ensure that each of our dresses is ethically produced, 100-percent of our production happens through partnerships with amazing organizations who are committed to providing fair wages and safe jobs for women who need them."

She found growers who produce organic cotton and taught the women of Mi Esperanza how to hand dye the materials and use stencils with fabric paint to create the patterns for her clothing. This results in unique fashion with a clear conscience. She knows that every person in the chain of production has been protected, uplifted, and valued in the process.

The blogging community is abuzz with E.A.'s designs. Arrowroot is growing rapidly, consistently shipping product with each new season. While all sorts of buyers find their way to her at shoparrowroot.com, her primary buyers tend to be Millennials who see the dresses as an irresistible combination of fashion made with compassion.

NEW IDEAS

Still in its infancy at just over two years old, Arrowroot has birthed its first offshoot. "We launched a line of breastfeeding dresses that are going so well we had to launch a second website: latchdressco.com." Latch is exploding in its popularity and positive response from consumers.



The unique design of the Latch dress eliminates the need to carry bulky coverings often used by mothers for discreet breastfeeding in public. The top of the stylish and comfortable dress is the hood, and the cut-away underlining allows the mother to provide easy access for her baby. The mommy-blogging world is on fire with praise for this creative solution to the daily challenges moms face.

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The ladies of Mi Esperanza have become like family to E.A., and she has realized her long-held dream of designing and selling her own clothes—all by the age of 28. “Ultimately, whether I am doing this or counseling for the rest of my life, I hope I will continue living on mission. God is slowly redeeming the world to Himself, and our calling is to take part in that.”

E.A. Lepine

MASTER OF ARTS IN COUNSELING

E.A. Lepine is a 2013 graduate of the master of arts in clinical mental health counseling program, who has rallied her natural concern for people into a thriving business that better the lives of all those connected with it: Arrowroot, and its new spin-off Latch Dress Co.



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