



Fatima Bey

CA Woman with a Cause

COVER STORY

By Jenna Caputo

Photos by MarkBolles.com

Sewing was once a standard part of everyday life, not only in the factories but within the home as well. As this once essential skill becomes more of a forgotten hobby, Fatima Bey is working to keep this lost art alive here in the Capital District. Owner of Abishai on Plank Road in Clifton Park, Fatima infuses her passion for sewing, teaching and helping others into everything she does.

Originally from Minneapolis, MN, Fatima also lived in Salem, OR and Schenectady, NY before settling full-time here in the Capital District. She was always creative and crafty, constantly learning new craft skills – especially enjoying hand embroidery and crocheting since she loved the challenge of all the details. But her love of learning didn't just end with sewing. "I loved figuring out how things worked and why. I always needed to know why," she says. "I also loved teaching. I didn't recognize it as teaching at the time, but that's what it really was."

She really came out of her shell in high school and started her school's Culture Club, focusing on multiculturalism. She was also chosen to represent her school on an interview board to hire a principal for the new combined school that is now Schenectady High. She was involved in many other things at her school as well, but

she always kept coming back to her first love of sewing. Her mother was also a seamstress and Fatima picked up the skill at an early age, often making some of her own clothing. She started a part-time business from her home called Gourmet Pillows, designing and custom-making all types of home décor. She eventually took a job with David's Bridal as the Alterations Manager for about 10 years before striking off on her own and opening Abishai in 2010, specializing in alterations for wedding gowns. Abishai also offers alteration services for both casual and dressy clothing for men, women and children as well as custom-made dresses, veils and fashion accessories. She recently won the "Best of Weddings 2017" honor from The Knot as the only Bridal Alterations business in NY to receive this award and was featured on "Today's Woman" on NBC in February 2016.

The name Abishai (pronounced abba-shy) means "source of wealth" and comes from the biblical story of the nephew of King David. Abishai was a chief and a relentless and mighty man. He was known for getting results and became David's most dedicated warrior. Fatima not only wanted a name with meaning but also wanted meaning for her business. "What I am most passionate about in the world is the plight of young women and children. There is no other matter that affects young women and children

on a world scale like trafficking in all of its forms. It really angers me! I wanted to do something about it, but didn't have the monetary means to physically go out and do something. I decided to focus on what I CAN do, instead of what

I can't. I can give a little something to those who are already helping them. Every little bit counts."

As a "warrior" for women and children, Fatima donates a portion of every single sale with Abishai to this cause that is so close to her heart. She hopes to one day be able to do more than just donate money, but for now, the more she makes with Abishai, the more she can contribute.

Each donation goes directly to Kinship United. After researching the various options to give the money to, Fatima realized that Kinship United really stood out to her. "They do more than just give money to the poor. They rescue orphans, which is truly a form of combating human trafficking because orphans are the traffickers' number one targets! They rescue trafficking victims and help to educate them and teach them employable trades. They are also a Christian organization. I like the fact that they help the WHOLE person. They help with not just food and shelter, but personal and spiritual development."

Fatima wanted to make sure that her donations were truly being used for the intended purpose and was happy to see that Kinship United was endorsed by big-name charity evaluators that ensure financial integrity. She is proud of how she has been able to make an impact in the lives of others and treasures a picture frame that Kinship United sent to her as a thank you for her donations over the years, depicting some of the women and children that she helped. She is also looking forward to a trip to one



At her final fitting, bride Jenna Huff was more than pleased with Fatima's work.



of the Kinship United homes next year in the Dominican Republic and says she can't wait to hug all the children. "When a person does

business with me, they are not just paying for services rendered. They are automatically contributing to helping make a huge difference in someone's life!" she says.

Fatima works by appointment only to ensure that she gets uninterrupted time to focus on the details of her work and to be able to give her clients her undivided attention.

There are no cutting corners to save time in this business. It takes the time that it takes and that time management can be difficult along with the other demands of a growing business, but it is all worth it in the end to Fatima. "What I do is very detail-oriented and I am particular about what goes out into the world with my name on it! This can sometimes add stress, but the end results usually make me smile. I genuinely enjoy my time with clients. I love getting to know people and making them feel comfortable. I've actually had some clients become friends. I love seeing them look and *feel* gorgeous on their special day! I love what I do!"

Fatima also spends time out in the community teaching various sewing skills from Sewing 101, to how to make your own alterations, kids sewing classes or open sew to work on any type of project, as well as private lessons at her studio. Fatima enjoys working with people of all ages and abilities. Teaching is as much a part of her blood as sewing is. "I *love* teaching! I love helping people understand difficult concepts and helping people realize their own potential. The details that I teach them open their eyes and allow them to see and understand things they never paid attention to before. The more fascinated they are, the

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more invigorated I am. I feed off of that energy and love it! Teaching has also made me a better sewer. If I don't know something, I make it a point to learn it. If I run into a challenge with a student and do not know the answer, I make it a point to learn the answer next time."

Besides sewing, Fatima is also an avid salsa dancer. "I've always been interested in salsa dancing. I always loved salsa music as a child. I just didn't know it was called salsa until I started to learn how to dance to it. One day, many years ago, I decided to just go ahead and learn to dance to the infectious rhythm that I absolutely loved. Once I learned it, you couldn't get me off the dance floor! I eventually taught lessons on it here and there. There is a regular Latin night every Wednesday at the Albany Railyard and at Newberry's every Friday in Saratoga. There's also the Capital Region Salsa Social that happens once a month in Troy. The best salsa dancers in the Capital Region can usually be found in one of these venues."

She also loves visiting the historical sites in the area and relishes the many water resources we have – beaches, lakes or creeks. Fatima enjoys traveling and is very good at

languages. She used to teach English as a second language and speaks some Spanish. She picks up accents and languages very quickly. "I love learning how to say things in other languages. In fact, on more than one occasion, I've had a Chinese person teach me how to say something in Mandarin, and they were shocked because I sounded Chinese, not American."

Human interaction is a major part of who Fatima is and she carries that over into her work as well. "Human and genuine customer service has become somewhat rare. I like to be rare and offer that one on one service. Abishai is a business with a cause. When you do business with Abishai, you're helping children around the world." Meanwhile, Fatima will just keep sewing to help save the world.

For more information on Abishai's services, or Fatima's community sewing classes, visit <http://myabishai.com>. ■

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