

\*<sup>i</sup> I am Pamela Cross, an obsessive collector of traditional textiles especially from southeast Asia and southwest China. This has always been a private passion not a professional endeavour.

As well as collecting textiles I also collect books which allow me to identify my textiles and understand something of the culture from which they come. In 2001 \*<sup>ii</sup> I launched a website to provide some of the information that I would have wanted to find myself and later, with the help of a computer expert friend, \*<sup>iii</sup> developed an international forum community seeking to share and to learn about traditional and tribal textiles (tribal in the sense of identity and unique culture) – [www.tribaltextiles.info/community](http://www.tribaltextiles.info/community)

I first came under the spell of Batak textiles in 1996 when I was on a business trip to Medan, Sumatra. \*<sup>iv</sup> As a textile obsessive I was hunting for textiles in an antique shop and found a stack of ulos tucked away in a cabinet and purchased my first Batak textile. If I had known then what this would lead to a decade or so later would I still have let myself be seduced? YES!

I returned next year to Medan \*<sup>v</sup> and added on a short trip to Lake Toba and the Toba and Karo Batak areas. \*<sup>vi</sup> I found current weavings in the markets and one or two special, older pieces. I even found a Toba village of \*<sup>vii</sup> traditional houses near Balige with one or two women still weaving and I was fascinated \*<sup>viii</sup> by Toba and Karo architecture.

10 years later in January 2006 a forum friend who deals in tribal artefacts, knowing of my interest in Batak weavings, gave me a virtual introduction to the representative of a Toba Batak family wishing to sell some family weavings \*<sup>ix</sup> with a strong provenance going back to the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The story of my acquisition over the next \*<sup>x</sup> three years of a collection of 19 weavings and supporting family history and \*<sup>xi</sup> photographs is for another day. However, they have been the catalyst for several friendships and my passport to today.

Although we are here to launch 'Legend in cloth' I want to introduce you to an earlier book of Sandra's, \*<sup>xii</sup> 'Batak Textiles and Clothing: A Dynamic Indonesian Tradition' published in 1993. This is a book that, in 2006, I had had for some years, dipped into several times and had by my bed as insomnia reading.

As the story of 'my' Toba Batak family unfolded, the book came to life and became compulsive reading. I must be the most avid of Sandra's readers of this book since it, and the history of 'my' Batak family, seemed to mirror each other. The photo on the cover became fixed in my mind as enshrining the essence of my family and its star weaver, \*<sup>xiii</sup>

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Ernestina br. Hutagalung, the daughter of a HKBP mission teacher in the Silindung valley, who wove her beautiful ulos 100 years ago before she married Theodorik Lumban Tobing. \*xiv I am wearing one of her very fine shoulder cloths today.

I obtained Sandra's article in the Textile Museum journal of 1988-89 and 'Motifs of Life in Toba Batak Texts and Textiles' based on her PhD thesis published in 1985. However, Sandra herself proved more illusive. The trail ran cold from University of Alberta. Then, in March 2006, \*xv I found her biography on the old *Bona ni pasogit* (Association of Batak tribes in Europe) website. There was mention of a \*xvi current exhibition, 'Woven Worlds', that she was curating at the Tropenmuseum, and of an exciting new book to be published at the end of 2006, subject to funding. This led me to the \*xvii Tropenmuseum website, information on the exhibition which I determined I must visit, and information on departments within the Museum. Very keen to try and trace early photos of 'my family' I contacted the photo department. The rest, as they say, is history! Janneke van Dijk, then Conservator of the photo and film collection, forwarded my email to Sandra Niessen – for which I will be forever grateful! Sandra immediately responded \*xviii to me with wholehearted support, advice and enthusiasm: **"I find your project of looking at a family's textiles very exciting and novel. I wanted to encourage you with it and wish you success. I will be very interested in the product."**

Sandra was amazingly welcoming and open. When she knew I was coming to Amsterdam for the exhibition she offered to meet me and, miraculously, the date of a special visit by Sandra to show the \*xix exhibition to her friend and mentor, Rita Bolland, former curator of textiles at the Tropenmuseum, coincided with the dates I had planned to visit. Very graciously Sandra, and our host today, Director of the Museum, Lejo Schenk, included me in the special lunch to honour Rita and I was able to join Rita's special tour \*xx of the 'Woven Worlds' exhibit with Sandra as our guide.

I took with me to Amsterdam a big book of my email correspondence and photos of the ulos from 'my' Batak family to show Sandra. Sandra, as she has done from the moment we were introduced, shared her immense knowledge on Batak textiles helping me with identification and understanding. \*xxi Amazingly we discovered that Sandra, in the 1980s as part of her fieldwork in North Sumatra, had even interviewed Vera Tobing – the source of my textiles - when she had a business 'Vera's Ulos' commissioning weaving and turning it into fashion for which she won an award from President Suharto.

From that special time at the Tropenmuseum has grown a very solid, mostly virtual, friendship which has extended far beyond the boundaries of Batak textiles but which, I

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think, has been blessed and wrapped in them. Metres and metres of emails have been exchanged between us. \*xxii

‘Legacy in Cloth’ represents 30 years of Sandra’s life from her first research to the launch of this truly amazing volume. I have only been on hand (to keyboard) for the last three but perhaps they have been the particularly difficult teenage years of bringing up an offspring and launching it into the world. Sandra has had the vision and determination to want a book which includes detailed information on the technique of the craft of weaving; is academically sound and comprehensive; brings together an immense resource of images of cloths and of archive photos; is truly beautiful; is user friendly; and, above all, is the very best that it could be. It was these last aims which drove her search for a book designer and her choice of Cecile. \*xxiii At times it has felt that ‘the Tome’, ‘tT’ as we called it, was more like ‘the Tomb’ as it drained the lifeblood from these two perfectionists. \*xxiv

‘Legacy in cloth’ is a tremendous resource for museums, academics and collectors both the occasional collector of one or two Batak cloths or the passionate obsessive like myself. I have been totally selfish in my support of Sandra during these last three years. I have fervently wanted this book – and the more I have seen of it the more impatient I have become to see it turn into a reality.

And the Batak... surely they were very fortunate to capture the attention of the \*xxv young Sandra Niessen 30 years ago. My experience with my Batak family is that knowledge of their textiles – their techniques, patterns and usage are disappearing fast, indeed, have in many cases already disappeared. \*xxvi What this book provides, however, is not only knowledge but, I hope, a pride in a priceless textile heritage.

When I started to think about what I would say today words like KIDNAPPED, HIJACKED, BEWITCHED, SPELLBOUND... came to mind and I thought, I can’t possibly say that that is what Batak textiles have done to Sandra and to myself – the Batak in the audience will be insulted! However, I leave you with the thought that there is some very strong force in Batak weavings which attracts and I believe and hope that ‘Legacy in cloth’ can both demonstrate and share that power with you!

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