

The Conscientious Knitter

November 2005

Exploring Community, Social Justice, Environmental Respect and Spirituality through Knitting.
“We Get the Point”

Unitarian Knits—from Romania to US

For the Romanian women who participate as knitters, the Partner Church Circle (PCC) Handicraft program is an opportunity to practice their art, contribute to their community, and earn a small income. For those who buy the hand-knit items, the program provides an opportunity to own beautiful one-of-a-kind knits, knowing that the money they spent on them is benefiting the knitters and the community they live in. But for Rosalie Clavez, The PCC Handicraft program is much, much bigger than the items knit and purchased. For Rosalie, the program is an opportunity to preserve and promote an art form that is underappreciated.

“My mother was interested in crafts and textiles,” Rosalie explains. “She liked to sew and knit herself. Some of my earliest memories are sitting next to her with my toy sewing machine, making a doll dress.” Because both of her parents were admirers of craft traditions, they instilled in their daughter an appreciation for handmade things.

It was no wonder then, that Rosalie became involved in the PCC Handicraft Program at its birth in 1994. That was the year that Partner Church Circle members Mary Tripp, Rita Lazar and Rosalie visited UUCF’s partner church community of Szentgerice, Romania. At that first meeting they met with women from the parish house, and began by identifying local handcrafters who were interested in participating. They determined early on that proceeds would benefit both the individual crafters, and the larger Szentgerice community.

Since then, the program has blossomed into a smoothly run business. Rosalie or another PCC member trav-

els to Transylvania and collects the items that are to be sold in the US. Each one is tagged with the maker’s symbol and priced. When the items are sold at craft fairs, UU churches and other events, the proceeds are split between the handcrafter and a foundation that benefits the entire Szentgerice community.

In that first year, about 50 items were sold. Since then, the number and size of the crafts has varied, including tatted and knitted lace, woven rugs, towels, and knitted goods. This year the handicraft program offers a choice of around 200 items, from delicate crocheted snowflake ornaments to large colorful bed spreads, to intricate knits. “There are a number of beautiful hand-knit children’s sweaters,” comments Rosalie. “In fact, there are so many here I wonder what the kids in Szentgerice are wearing!”

While there is a trend toward modern designs, Rosalie’s personal taste tends to more traditional knitting. “Many women there know how to spin, and use their own sheep’s wool. In fact, I have a photo that shows the women with their drop spindles and beautiful, hand-carved distaffs.” Many of the sweaters feature the natural brown and white colors of the native sheep. “I’ve been given some sweaters that I just love,” says Rosalie with enthusiasm. “There is one in soft, natural ivory with cables. These sweaters are really spectacular because of their originality, the skill of the work—the seams are just beautiful—and the materials they used.”

It is not hard to see why Rosalie is so touched by these traditional knits. “It’s an opportunity to promote crafts, and to inspire others,” she says. And Rosalie is doing her best to get the word out, selling handicrafts on November 27 at the UU church in Mount Vernon VA, on December 3-4 at UUCA in Arlington, and December 11 at UUCF. To book the Handicraft sales booth at your church or event, simply e-mail Rosalie at Rclavez@netscape.net.



Cool Company

In their October Catalog, Knit Picks yarn and craft equipment announced a new program, Knitting the World together, designed to be the "charity" arm of their business. Their editors explain, "Four times a year Knit Picks will focus on a specific charity to combine knitting with compassion. Our intention is to raise awareness of each charity through exposure to the knitting community via our catalogs and web site, various activities and relevant knitting patterns."

The first organization Knit Picks is highlighting is the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. Based in Portland, Knit Picks sponsored a Knitting the World Together team for the Race for the Cure® there. They are also collected chemo hats for distribution to Portland hospitals in October.



Those of us who don't live in Oregon can also participate in the Knitting the World Together program. Knit Picks is donating 100% of the proceeds from their new bed jacket pattern, titled Sweet Mary Jane (pictured above) to the Koman Foundation. Commissioned by Knit Picks from designer Celest Culpepper, the lacy cardigan is knit with Shadow yarn, made from Marino wool in heathered colors achieved by brushing solid colors together before spinning.

Celest Culpepper describes herself as the kind of knitter who might forget her purse, but never her knitting. She designed the bed jacket as a tribute to her mother Mary Jane, who died of breast cancer in 1984. She also donated a portion of her designer fee to breast cancer research. Currently, Celest lives in Canada with her husband and her daughter, Fairfax, who models the blue version of her mother's creation above.

To order Celeste's bed jacket pattern, check out the Knit Picks web site at www.knitpicks.com, or call for a catalog at 1-800-574-1323.



The Knit Picks team at the Oregon Race for the Cure in September.



Currently, Knit Picks is doing research for future Knitting the World Together featured charities. They're inviting suggestions and ideas by e-mail at: charity@knitpicks.com. You can also learn more about the Susan G. Koman Breast Cancer Foundation and Knit Pick's support, download free chemo hat patterns, and of course view other Knit Picks catalog items by checking out their web sites.

All goes to show, you're only as cool as the company you keep!

StitchFest 2005

"A day of knitting to end Domestic Violence."

Knitting is so hot, we've been invited to an event with the cool kids in Boston!

You are cordially invited to the Boston Stitchfest, 2005. Come join us in making a blanket and other knitted and crocheted goods to donate to Renewal House, a local domestic violence shelter. This is a chance for stitchers of all levels, including those who want to learn how, to come join us in a creative, constructive space and raise awareness about the problems of domestic violence.

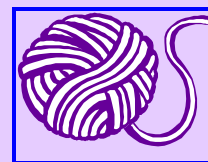
When: Saturday, Dec. 10

Time: 11am-9pm

Come for the whole time or just stop by for a bit

Where: The Beacon Hill Friends House,
#6 Chestnut St. Beacon Hill

What about food? Lunch is at 1pm, Dinner at 6:30



This event is being put together by the Boston Chapter of the National Organization of Men Against Sexism (NOMAS) and Unitarian Universalist Men Against Domestic Violence (UUMADV).

Contact Matt Meyer with any questions or to volunteer:
617-875-7694



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If you ask Jackie Durham why she learned to knit, she'll explain, "Well, I had to make over 200 mufflers in nine months, so I thought I'd better work on my knitting skills." While that may sound a little harebrained, Jackie is actually a very down-to-earth, practical person. This fact is evidenced by her work as a volunteer at Miriam's Kitchen in the District. And it was in that capacity as a volunteer that Jackie found herself knitting enough winter scarves to run nearly the length of two football fields.

Since 1983, Miriam's Kitchen has served homeless individuals in the District of Columbia. Approximately 75% of their guests are sleeping on the streets and in shelters. The services they offer include daily breakfasts, therapeutic classes and groups, transitional housing, case management, medical services and more.

Jackie and her husband have been volunteering at Miriam's Kitchen since 2002. They cook there on a monthly basis, do office work every Wednesday, hand out toiletries to the homeless once a month, and help with an annual major donation drive/cocktail party titled "Bowls".

Jackie explains, "I came up with the scarf idea when I found out that it's relaxing to knit something simple. I thought it would be fun for me and a way to make sure that people with very little got at least one Christmas present that would provide warmth."

Such a project makes perfect sense from a number of standpoints. In addition to providing warmth to those who fight the elements in the middle of winter, December is the season of gift giving, and Miriam's Kitchen already has a connection to knitting. Each morning after breakfast, Miriam's Kitchen guests are encouraged to attend groups designed to engage creativity and offer support. These include yoga, poetry, visual art and...knitting!

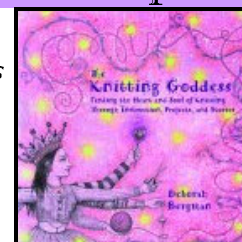
Despite the obvious benefits of Jackie's plan, there was one serious drawback. 200 is a lot of scarves. In fact, roughly 600 hours of knitting. That's a lot of knitting, even for a super-woman like Jackie. Fortunately, knitters are helpful people as a group, and as Jackie's knitting classmates and friends learned of her goal, they began to contribute scarves to her collection. As of mid-October, Jackie has about 150 scarves, is continuing to knit during most of her waking hours, and is still collecting donations toward her goal.

Using your jUUstice NEEDles to make scarves for Miriam's Kitchen is easy. There is no set pattern, length or type of yarn specified (although something warm and washable is recommended). Scarves appropriate for men are especially welcomed. Just make a scarf, and mail it to Jackie Durham before December 19 at: 909 26th St. NW, Washington, DC 20037.

This is truly an enjoyable project, because it allows knitters to try out new stitch patterns, is portable, doesn't include much finishing, and doesn't necessarily require concentration. Plus, you may save Jackie from repetitive stress syndrome!



The Knitting Goddess
Deborah Bergman
Hyperion: New York,
2000



Deborah Bergman's *The Knitting Goddess* is actually three books in one: myths and legends dealing with knitting and fiber, meditations and philosophical meanderings regarding knitting, and patterns. Certainly the concept is an interesting one. Few people I know just knit; they usually make gifts, meet with friends to do needlework together, meditate while knitting, create art pieces, and a myriad of other activities, but few just knit. Because knitting is satisfying in so many ways, it stands to reason that an exploration of knitting experiences beyond the knit and purl would be worthwhile. And in just that way, the book is useful; it shows the reader that the act of knitting can be deep and satisfying. For me, however, it is weak in the execution.

Bergman explores well known characters from many cultural traditions in the storytelling sections, but it seems they are a stretch, in that none of them are specifically related to knitting. Penelope (Odysseus's wife) was a weaver, as was Arachne; the Fates spin, measure and cut thread; and Rachel was a shepherd's wife. All of these women's lives are wound up in fiber (excuse the pun please) but none of them knit. It seems they are borrowed just to make a point, and therefore their use is contrived. Of course, one could say, "Fine! Who is she supposed to use, Madame Defarge?" Well true, somehow weaving and spinning have been seen as more romantic, and maybe we can overlook the lack of knitting in the knitting myths, at least so we can get to the philosophy Bergman espouses.

Each story in *The Knitting Goddess* is related to a pattern. And because the stories don't include knitting, it's this relationship—the philosophy that ties the story to the

Conscientious Calendar



Saturday, December 3, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Sunday, December 4, 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Mistletoe Mall: A holiday arts & crafts festival (PCC Handicrafts and knits) www.uucava.org



Saturday, December 10 11a.m.-9 p.m.

Boston StitchFest: Knitting to End Domestic Violence
Call Matt Meyer with any questions or to volunteer at 617-875-7694



December 19

Due date for scarf donations to Miriam's Kitchen. Send mufflers to: Jackie Durham, 909 26th St. NW, Washington, DC 20037.

Knitter's Knots

- There will be no Conscientious Knitter Drop-In session in December (Christmas Week). Enjoy your holiday, and see you in January!
- For more information about Conscientious Knitting programs, contact Ann Richards at Ann@BassetLane.com or 703-476-5810.
- For more information about UUCF Adult Religious Exploration, contact Marian Forte at ae@uucf.org or 703-281-4230.

Knitting in the Spirit cont.

pattern—that makes the book. Despite my intense skepticism, I have to admit there were moments that I was sucked in, contemplating along with Bergman the times when I became frustrated with a project and left it for weeks or even months waiting to be inspired to pick it up and finish it. Bergman ties this feeling to the work of Lachesis, one of the three Greek Fates that measures yarn, therefore determining the length of a project. That holds some interest for me, but Bergman loses me when she suggests making an alter to this Goddess when struggling to finish my project. I'm not inspired to knit at that moment, let alone create some sort of alter.

Finally, Bergman offers the pattern to go with each myth. While she takes some time to explain the relationship between pattern and myth and I find her explanations to be interesting, I don't always follow them. Why is a ribbed scarf associated with Ariadne? I'm not sure. The drawing of Ariadne shows her bare breasted, wearing a long skirt and the scarf around her neck. Maybe she could move the scarf a few inches lower and gain enough coverage to leap from the pages of this ethereal knitting book and into my more public, pragmatic knitting world.

Conscientious Knitters

c/o
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