

# The Conscientious Knitter

October 2005

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

## Ode to a pair of socks

Maru Mori brought me  
a pair  
of socks  
that she knit with her  
shepherd's hands.  
Two socks as soft  
as rabbit fur.  
I thrust my feet  
inside them  
as if they were  
two  
little boxes  
knit  
from threads  
of sunset  
and sheepskin.

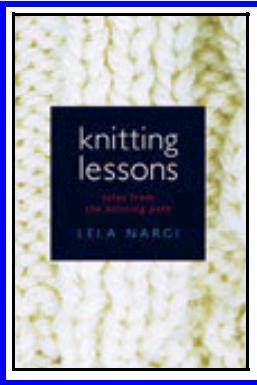
My feet were  
two woolen  
fish  
in those outrageous socks,  
two gangly,  
navy-blue sharks  
impaled  
on a golden thread,  
two giant blackbirds,  
two cannons:  
thus  
were my feet  
honored  
by  
those  
heavenly  
socks.  
They were  
so beautiful  
I found my feet  
unlovable  
for the very first time,  
like two crusty old  
firemen, firemen  
unworthy  
of that embroidered  
fire,  
those incandescent  
socks.

Nevertheless  
I fought  
the sharp temptation  
to put them away  
the way schoolboys  
put  
fireflies in a bottle,  
the way scholars  
hoard  
holy writ.  
I fought  
the mad urge  
to lock them  
in a golden  
cage  
and feed them birdseed  
and morsels of pink melon  
every day.  
Like jungle  
explorers  
who deliver a young deer  
of the rarest species  
to the roasting spit  
then wolf it down  
in shame,  
I stretched  
my feet forward  
and pulled on  
those  
gorgeous  
socks,  
and over them  
my shoes.

So this is  
the moral of my ode:  
beauty is beauty  
twice over  
and good things are doubly  
good  
when you're talking about a pair of  
wool  
socks  
in the dead of winter.

Pablo Neruda

## Knitting in the Spirit



*Knitting Lessons: Tales from the Knitting Path*

Lela Nargi  
New York: Jeremy P.  
Tarcher/Putnam, 2003

Lela Nargi's *Knitting Lessons: Tales from the Knitting Path* was not intended to be a treatise on the spiritual aspects of knitting. Nargi explains in the introduction that the book was an effort to answer the question "Why? Why do I find myself so inexplicably drawn to knitting? Why do so many others?" To explore this, Nargi interviewed knitters across the nation, asking them how they learned to knit, what they knit, and why they continue to knit.

Leafing through the book for the first time, it seemed to me that this was a fairly flimsy concept for an entire book. I mean, who wouldn't want to knit? Why on earth would anyone have to explain or justify knitting? But then I noticed that Nargi interviewed members of the Church of Craft in Los Angeles, that she quotes Seng-Tsan's *On Believing in Mind*, she uses excerpts from Pablo Neruda (whose poem [accompanies this article](#)) and the Upanishads. The book is also peppered with religious references: Barbara Walker's texts as a bible, Zen knitting moments, knitting as an opportunity for spiritual bonding, etc. and it dawned on me that the question of why someone knits is almost always a spiritual one (or at least spiritual in a UU sort of way.)

My initial concerns about the book turned out to be true in some instances as I found some of Nargi's interviews to be more interesting than others. But one thing was common to almost all those she spoke with; there was some philosophy behind their attraction to knitting. One member of the Church of Craft said, "It reminds me of everybody sitting around...doing those things that used to be part of a social ritual—a religious group, because it was usually a religious group that was the center of a community...I always thought that I was a very unspiritual person and not into those ideas of connection and



Please join us for a **Knitting Bee** Sat., Nov. 5, 2-5 p.m.



— Knitting for Social Justice —

We'll be working on projects for local Katrina evacuees and the homeless. Bring a project, or pick one up when you come.



Please RSVP to [Ann@BassetLane.com](mailto:Ann@BassetLane.com)

## Knitting in the Spirit (continued)

communication and community. But I watch it happen every single time we have a meeting."

Another knitter featured in the book said, "I have this really great cotton/wool yarn I got in Johannesburg a couple years ago. These women had spun it and dyed it, and there's something post-apartheid about it: women's work, black women's work. It seemed so loaded that I had a cry about it. I bought this wool 'cause it's so powerful..."

When asked about his knitting, Nyle Sebright from Artfibers in San Francisco said "...I am reminded of trees when I knit—they are made up of carbon-based molecules, and the carbon is drawn from carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and precipitated by light via photosynthesis. Knitting is structure that appears out of thin air, like a tree or a galaxy precipitating from interstellar vacuums. These thoughts lead me to feel at one with the mystery of creation when knitting—perhaps as much spirituality as I will ever have in me, but enough."

So there it was, examples of environmental respect, community, social justice and spirituality; in other words, Conscientious Knitting mentioned over and over by the knitters profiled in *Knitting Lessons*.

I will say that, reluctant as I was, I found myself examining my own reasons for knitting as I read the book. As one interviewee or another would make a point, I would think, "Yes, that's so true," or "How could she think that?" All in all, a fairly painless way for someone like me to explore spirituality.

Thinking about this book and what it meant to me as a Conscientious Knitter, I was reminded about how I came across it. I first heard of it through The Knitter's Review, an on-line newsletter ([www.knittersreview.com](http://www.knittersreview.com)). A number of readers were featured in the text, and I remember how contagious their enthusiasm was. Then, out of the blue, a former knitting student and current friend handed me a copy of it after our knitting circle. She said, "I've finished it. Would you like to have it? I'd rather recycle it to another reader than have it sit on my shelf." I guess *Knitting Lessons* is all about Conscientious Knitting after all.

Ann Richards

## Cool Company

Many Unitarian Universalists are familiar with UniUniques, the boutique that sells items of special interest to UUs. Only Conscientious Knitters would shop at UniUniques specifically for knitting equipment though! It's true, the UU shop carries a wide range of bags perfect for knitting projects, all with inspirational UU logos and catch phrases.

Of course, knitting bags need to be made of sturdy materials (canvas or quilted fabric) to avoid being punctured. The boutique carries these in a wide range of colors and with a variety of straps and designs. Many knitters find they prefer bags with a secure closing at the top to avoid the dreaded "project dump," and pockets for little items like stitch holders, stitch markers, pencils and T-pins. UniUniques offers bags with these handy features as well, in prices ranging from \$15 to \$25.

While this is an excellent source for bags for the hand-crafter, resourceful knitters will want to browse through the other products UniUniques offers. For example, it's often useful to keep a notebook to record pattern ideas, recommended reading, web sites worth investigating, and other

Jumbo Bag with Zippered Top:  
12 oz. Cotton canvas bag w/  
natural color web handles. White  
printed UUA emblem on Navy or  
black. \$18



Tote Bag: Handmade of durable 65/35 poly/cotton, with 3 inch side gussets, and a choice of black or rainbow polypropylene shoulder straps. \$22-24

memorable scraps of knitting information. The blank books pictured here, designed by Kathy Bell, and offered for from \$7-10, are perfect for this purpose.

UniUniques is a self-sustaining service that provides visibility for the work of UU artisans throughout the UUA as well as expanding the availability of religious objects to UU congregations and individuals.

For more information on UniUniques or to place an order, check out their web site at [www.uniuniques.com](http://www.uniuniques.com).

## jUstice NEEDles

As the details of hurricane Katrina's devastation become known, knitters nationwide continue to use their talents to support relief efforts. Those in the DC Metro area can take advantage of Capital Crocheters and Knitters (CCK) upcoming events to support local evacuees.

Vienna, VA yarn shop Uniquities will be holding two knitting afternoons to benefit Katrina evacuees on October 8th and 15th from noon to 4 p.m., as part of the CCK program. Knitters are invited to stop by and help out at those times, or drop off knitted items at the Knit Out and Crochet Too event sponsored by CCK on October 23. For more information on the Uniquities events, call 703-242-0520. To find out more about Knit Out and Crochet Too, check out the CCK web site at [www.knit-out.org](http://www.knit-out.org). Please note that Brenda and the rest of the staff at Uniquities will continue to collect blankets for Project Linus as they have in the past.

Nationally, the folks at Warm Up America continue to provide blankets to homeless shelters, women's shelters, nursing homes, hospitals, AIDS clinics, and many more worthy institutions. Working through the Red Cross and other social justice organizations, Warm Up America will be providing blankets to those displaced by Katrina.

To make the Warm Up America blankets, volunteers donate their time to crochet or knit a 7" X 9" rectangle (or more). Sections are either joined by individuals or groups in a community and donated locally or sent to Foundation headquarters for joining and distribution.

Warm Up America maintains an excellent web site at [www.warmupamerica.org](http://www.warmupamerica.org) that gives information about how to participate in the program, the history of Warm Up America, how the blankets are distributed, tips on making and assembling the afghans and much more. We've included one of their particularly interesting stitch patterns for a 7"X9" square below.

### Warm Up America Pattern Suggestion

#### SHADOW TRIANGLES

Work in multiples of 5 stitches.

Cast on 35 stitches.

Row 1: Knit all stitches.

Row 2: \*Knit 1, Purl 4, repeat from \* to across the row.

Row 3: \*Knit 3, Purl 2, repeat from \* to across the row.

Row 4: Work the same as Row 3.

Row 5: Work the same as Row 2.

Row 6: Knit all stitches.

Bind off in pattern.



## UUCF Blanket

The famed Navaho blankets are looking over their shoulders! The Shroud of Turin is jealous! Basotho tribal blankets pale in comparison!

Our auction blanket is turning out to be a real beauty. Thanks to Laurreen Branting, Lynn Gaaserud, Su Davis, Ann Richards, Mary Tripp and of course Susan White for agreeing to knit a strip.

While we have twelve capable hands working on it, there are still some opportunities to help out with the project. November 5 is our Knitting Bee, and we will be examining knitters' social justice opportunities in the DC metro area, providing patterns for donated items, and working on items that will be donated to local Katrina evacuees. One of the social justice projects we'll be working on is assembling the strips for our auction blanket. Knitters can drop by to help out with that finishing touch. Then, there's the auction itself. Please make sure you stop by to see the Conscientious Knitters afghan in all its glory, and make sure to bid on it. Non-knitters are welcome to help with this end of it too! If you know someone who doesn't knit and feels the need for a gorgeous hand-knit afghan, let them know that this may be the chance to fill that gap in their life!

If you have questions or want more information about the Conscientious Knitters auction blanket, please drop designer Susan White a note at [suzyknit@cox.net](mailto:suzyknit@cox.net).

For more information about Conscientious Knitting programs, contact Ann Richards at [Ann@BassetLane.com](mailto:Ann@BassetLane.com) or 703-476-5810.

For more information about UUCF Adult Religious Exploration, contact Marian Forte at [ae@uucf.org](mailto:ae@uucf.org) or 703-281-4230.



# Conscientious Calendar



Saturday, October 15, noon-4

*Charity Knitting Afternoon*, Uniquities yarn store. Drop in to work on projects to benefit local Katrina evacuees. Call 703-242-0520 for directions and further information.



Sunday, October 23, noon-5 p.m.

*5th Annual Knit Out and Crochet Too*, on the DC Mall, free admission. Join other knitters for fashion shows, a visit to the knitting doctor, or assisting in the “charity corner” assembling blankets for worthy causes, and many more activities. Check [www.knit-out.org](http://www.knit-out.org) for more information.



Wednesday, October 26, 7:00 p.m.

*Conscientious Knitters Drop In* group, UUCF Programming Building. Bring a project you’re working on or need help starting.



Saturday, November 5, 2-5 p.m.

*Knitting Bee*, UUCF Programming Building. Stop by to help complete the blanket to be auctioned off, and assist with projects to be donated to the Katrina relief effort. Pick up free patterns and learn more about other social justice programs in the area. Please RSVP to [Ann@BassetLane.com](mailto:Ann@BassetLane.com).



Saturday, November 19, 6:30-11 p.m.

*UUCF Annual Auction*. *UUCF Sanctuary*. Come watch the Conscientious Knitters blanket be auctioned off, or even make a bid on it yourself!

Conscientious Knitters

c/o

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