



THREADS



Rotarian Fellowship of Quilters and Fiber Artists

Knitting in Finland Past and Present By Leila Risteli

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CHECK IT OUT

Festival of quilts

Birmingham England

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During my childhood in the 50ies, Finnish mothers used to fit their children for the cold winters largely with knitted clothing - not only mittens, socks and woolen caps, but also sweaters, romper suits, pants, leggings ... The patterns could be elaborate, with several colors and traditional designs.

Since then, knitting has become more a hobby of the initiated than a necessity. Yet manual skills still have an established position in the general education in Finnish schools. During their first years at school practically all children, irrespective of gender, are taught how to knit. In junior high school, the students can then choose between textile and technical handicraft; most girls will take the former and most boys the latter, but there are more and more exceptions to this rule. Some years ago a young man from my home town started a business selling knit caps he produced himself.

Technically, Finnish knitters use a simple, fast version of continental knitting that includes very few hand movements. My grandmother was said to have knitted a pair of men's sturdy socks in a day, together with her other duties as farmer's wife. Naturally, this was with pretty thick yarn.



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More Knitting in Finland

Some patterns are clearly bound to certain regions in present-day or historical Finland. A famous model, considered to crown one's career as a knitter, is the traditional sweater originating in the Swedish speaking parish of Korsnäs in western Finland (see picture 1). It combines crocheted and knitted parts in several colors dyed with natural (or natural-looking) colors. For me this was a project that I worked on during many years, but I finally got it ready.

Finnish publishers seem to publish one knitting book after the other -as they are so numerous there must be a demand for them. Most are translations, but a nice exception was the appearance of the book *Sukupolvien silmukat* (Stiches of generations) last year (see picture 2). This gives instructions, adapted to present-day yarns, for over 40 mitten and sock models that originate in the eastern parts of the region Carelia that Finland lost after the war. The originals had been collected from museums, archives and private homes.

The Finnish journals dedicated to knitting and crocheting tend to change their names quite frequently, but at present there are at least *Kauneimmat käsityöt* (<http://www.kauneimmatkasityot.fi/>), *Novita* (<https://www.novitaknits.com/fi/fi/novita-lehdet>), published by a major yarn producer, and *Kotiliesi Käsityöt*, related to the women's journal *Kotiliesi* and until recently called *Moda*. Some yarn producers and other companies have their own internet journals, such as *teetee* journal (<http://www.tekstiteollisuus.fi/index.php?id=58&kieli=1>). *Ullaneule* (www.ullaneule.net) is a net journal made by knitting amateurs. Unfortunately, none of these are in English. Also general women's journals often give their readers instructions for knits.

There is a very active blog landscape related to knitting in Finland, and part of the blogs are even in English:

Dances with wool (<http://lenealve.blogspot.fi>)

Marjut Katajala's blog in two languages (<http://www.katajala.net/marjut/neuleet/blog/>): here you also have an English-Finnish knitting vocabulary (<http://www.katajala.net/marjut/neuleet/sanasto.shtml>)

Ikomi - a blog about the several interests of the blogger, including knitting (<http://www.ikomiblog.com/search/label/yarn%20crafts>)

Those interested in visiting some knitting blogs in Finnish can try one of these:

- <http://villapallo.blogspot.fi>
- <http://puikkomaisteri.com>
- <http://kaisaneuloo.blogspot.fi>
- <http://pujoliivi.blogspot.fi>
- <http://kutomus.blogspot.fi>

As many of these show, the modern Finnish knitter often actively uses parts of traditional designs and patterns, but adapts them to express her own creative spirit.

The holidays are just around the corner. As Literacy Chair for my Rotary District I am always on the lookout for books for kids.

Here are several books that would be great additions to your school's library or for a child in your life. While this is a "short" list I hope to be able to send along more titles in future editions. Any suggestions from you would be most welcome.

Children's Books about quilt stories:

The Crazy Quilt by Kristin Avery, Good Year Books, 1900 E. Lake Ave., Glenview, IL 60025; 16 pages; \$3.95
The Crazy Quilt by Kristin Avery, Good Year Books, 1900 E. Lake Ave., Glenview, IL 60025; 16 pages; \$3.95

Who's Under Grandma's Quilt, Rachel Waterstone, First Story Press, 1800 Business Park Dr., Clarksville, TN 37040; 1997, 32 pages, \$13.95; hardcover

The Much Too Loved Quilt, Rachel Waterstone, First Story Press, 1999

Fall in New England

By Esther Arlan

'Tis the time of year when the days grow shorter and the nights are cooler. This fall the leaves are not as bright due to a lack of rain. Here and there you can see some bright reds and oranges and along my drive to Rotary there is a stand of trees that are bright yellow. One thing I have noticed is how many more days of sunshine we have here in Nashua than when we lived in the Adirondacks.

Housekeeping has been "on hold" for several days. With the temperature in the low 70s and crystal clear blue skies we left the dust and vacuuming for another day and drove out for lunch at a "hole in the wall" clam shack along the New Hampshire coast. Not only was the fish fresh but we got a chance to take a long, slow walk on the beach. It will be nice to remember it when we are buried in snow.

After trips to museums this past year I got to wondering about what women did to occupy their time as the United States was being formed. I contacted the Smithsonian Institute about *First Ladies* and their skills with needles. I was fortunate to get a quick reply and have since then read several books on *First Ladies* and how they spent their leisure time. So here are some things to reflect on:

Martha Washington knit George 12 pairs of socks every year. She did not put her needles down when that project was completed but continued to knit socks for soldiers in the army.

Abigail Adams was remembered for reminding John that "without pins and needles" they would not be able to make clothing. Remember the Broadway Show - 1776 - Dear John, remember the ladies!

Letitia Tyler, the first wife of John Tyler, was an avid knitter. And Margaret Taylor was known for her needlework. Eliza Johnson was a quilter and Ida McKinley crocheted 3,500 pair of house slippers which she offered to sell for charity.

Eleanor Roosevelt was known to spend time at meetings with her hands wrapped around her knitting needles. She said she could listen and knit at the same time.



No doubt there are more *First Ladies* from other countries that spent their free time doing needlework. Let's hear about their accomplishments.

I will be following up on our First Ladies by writing letters to all the Presidential Libraries asking for information about the handwork of the ladies. A great winter project.

Rotary Connections in Fabric

By Lynn Raymer

As an artist wannabe, I have always been fascinated by color and design. In fabric, I love the bright colors and bold designs of African fabrics. Visiting tropical areas like Hawaii, I fell in love with both the large floral designs and the intricate designs that show the influence of Asia. I also admire the breadth of design in clothing. The loose, flowing design of caftans and traditional muumuus. The form fitting designs of Western Central Africa. The simplicity of design of Kimono, paired with multiple elaborate fabrics. Last year in Australia, I was pleased to meet Rotarian Anita from Ghana and chat with her. Her dress, made of Rotary fabric was lovely and fit her tall, curvy form perfectly. Over the past year, we communicated via email and phone and she had planned to visit our area this summer and fellowship with some of the Rotary clubs in our area but she was called home suddenly. When she let me know, she wanted to send me a package, with a dress she had made for me. I was trying to imagine, first, how ridiculous I would look in a dress like hers as well as how she could make something to fit me without sizes or patterns. So I was delighted when I found a beautiful caftan that fit me perfectly and was much more appropriate for this older woman. She even sent the shoes to match! Thank you, Anita



Anita Nsiah in Sydney

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Lynn Raymer wearing the caftan Anita made. >



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