

Interview Log

Interviewee: Mary Lane Tape #: MAAF/KF/DE/FT8.20.228

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault # of Tapes: 1 of 1

Date: 8/20/98 # of Sides: 2

Location: Mary's home in Felton DE

Topic: crochet, personal narratives;

Corresponding Photography Log #: MAAF/KF/DE/PS8.20.200-214

Comments: File name: deft228.doc. *Italics* indicate song title or emphasis; "quotations" indicate direct transcription; [brackets indicate additional information not on tape or commentary by feldworker].

I initially saw Mary's crochet at the State Fair, and after asking around learned that she was considered one of the best and most prolific. She proved this when I went to visit her for the interview. Her entire living room was covered with crocheted items that she wanted me to see. Her husband asked to sit in on the interview, telling me that he thought his wife was "a very special and talented person." They were both honored to have me talk to Mary about her crochet.

SIDE A

[birds chirping in background periodically]

BIO DATA: bom in Glendale NJ; came to De in 1964 with air force; learned how to crochet from mother at young age; really picked it up in late 1960s;

known by all as a perfectionist in crochet; do it right or don't do it; stitches have to be uniform; if not then rip it out and start over; first stitch is the chain stitch; then single crochet and then from there to half double; double; triple; etc; they get longer;

tried to teach daughters; only one interested; how one daughter's life is too busy to do any of these things; youngest that is still home wants to learn;

Mary's mom made afghans and doilies; younger years made baskets that you would stiffen and she knitted and quilted; every wed had a quilting bee didn't always quilt; Mary would get a dill. School bus and go to the quilting group after school; did it every week; changed houses weekly; during breaks would crochet;

"I would rather do crochet. I love it, that's my life." No desire to do quilting; crochet is quicker to finish, move on to other projects; poking fingers with needles in crochet and quilting;

has already started for next year's fair items for display; made a sweater; entered 38 items this year; in 1996 entered 20 things; 1997 had 32; out of the 38 entries this year she had 29 blue ribbons;

[what do these ribbons mean to women?]

how husband helps carry stuff into fair; carries things into fair in large plastic tubs with lids; how women entering their textiles commented on how many she had; "must have worked all year to get that many" and she does "because that's my life. Take care of my house and try to keep my family fed and the house clean and cut the grass. I mean my husband works, don't get me wrong, but I love to do that. I tell them that when I go put a skein of yarn on my stomach and a crochet needle in my hand and I'll go happy."

Loves to make the crochet dolls; sold one but not a bride doll; \$250; customer works at doctor's office; made Mary bring doll into office to show it off, loved it;

Not that many different categories for the fair; so repeats some things; children's sweaters never win; hers aren't miniature enough

[see Stewart on the miniature object]

using bootie to describe techniques; forgets stitches after she makes them; following a pattern in pattern books; uses a gauge so many stitches per inch; explaining cross stitch crochet;

construction as all one piece;

making the dolls; started for the fun of it; belongs to pattern club; all children got bride dolls when married; youngest one's doll is made but she's not married yet; all on barbie dolls; dolls look like daughters;

just loves these dolls; intrigues here; how you must string the tiny pearls before crochet and then crochet them into the doll [see photos, but bride dolls are elaborate with crocheted period wedding dresses w/pearl and bead trims, feathers etc.]; hand-made gloves for dolls and people;

how crocheted items were not displayed correctly at fair; inside out and upside down etc; better this year than last year;

some of her own designs; trims for handkerchiefs etc; how own designs have to flow off the needle; more of her own designs on placemats, a basket weave; filet stitch for throws;

prefers Southmade cotton thread; needles she prefers: yarn use aluminium needles, steel for a thread; crochets tight so affects her needle choices;

crochet with thread is more intricate, delicate and more difficult to do as opposed to yarn; finds it more challenging;

Prefers to give things to family members; dolls are really for her "family if they want them when I'm gone" but has sold a few; can't really part with them now;

Had a craft store in Missouri, consignment store; husband did woodwork, she and her daughter painted it; willing to sell crochet but not sure what to charge for it; thinks it's worth more if it wins blue ribbons at the fair;

[goes to get piece; children's sweater in primary colors]

didn't win a blue ribbon, not small enough to win they like them miniature;

loves to see the finished product; that's the most fun; [showing me children's clothes]; how these all go into the fair; "the smaller it is the better they like it";

her own designs have not won blue ribbons; disappointed; [showing me items: afghans etc.]; states that I asked her to get some of her best things out and she thought well all of mine are the best; making sets of things for babies: afghans and pillows;

[interesting how these all match perfectly in color and stitch size]

[taking photos of things]

Granny squares with 3-D flower;

TIME: when she makes time to do this: watching her 2 soaps from 12:30-2 p.m.; describes her chair in the family room surrounded with yarn, books, and what she is working on "that's where I live"; always has a needle in her hand when watching TV or sitting there; working on getting cabinets in sewing room for storage space;

[Pulls out a rug: burgundy and green; keeps pulling out things from plastic tupperware containers 3x4 feet in diameter. Wants me to see every scrap like Stevon Sample did in VA; this is a performance in itself]

Mary also makes games that are crocheted; tick tak toe; checkers;

[taking photos of heavy duty blanket; very conscientious of how items are displayed and photographed]

how her baby hat won 1' place this year because she made it really small;

[taking photos of the dolls in the cases, minors behind them and trying to avoid flashback]

description of making the dolls; skills she had to learn and experiment with before trying this; finds the dolls challenging; dressing the doll;

if not done right then she rips it out and decides she can't do it; but wants to finish so starts again and tries; can't stand not to be able to do it; must master it;

have to be in the right frame of mind when starting a project;

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

Right Frame of Mind: must feel good, physically and mentally; really got into crochet when she was younger because worked in an office and until she was injured in 1985 only really took time off to have children; took a year off; was a book keeper so she was mentally tired not physically and would come home at night and crochet was stress relief;

If day not going well then she crochets; you are figuring out a pattern; 10 stitches her 5 there; you get mind off of yourself

[also there seems to be some element of control over what you are doing and making]

don't dwell on self; must focus on pattern and what you are doing; makes you feel better; leave the everyday world and enter your own;

[how does this mirror performance and the poetics of self?]

when starting a new pattern can't talk with others must be in own world; once started and rolling can chit chat; family knows this;

keep husband poor buying yarn; stash is huge

[similar to quilters who have large stashes]

how she could bankrupt them quick but sticks to the yarn needed for individual projects; prefers certain yarns without dye lots; red heart yarn is the best; has some in attic in boxes; prefers red heart because it doesn't split;

sometimes forgets how to do a stitch; but after a few tries with needles in hands it works; remembers best with needles; also does counted cross stitch and crewel embroidery;

have to be determined and put your mind to it to make crochet; everybody has talent must be brought out; doesn't know how she can do it but does it; God given talent; loves to decorate home and other peoples; seeing the finished product is fun; likes to hear people say they like her crochet; pushes her to do more; loves the results.

Describes her daughter's life: hectic, in school; husband has own business, not home until 7; dinner at 8; very hectic; Mary says she can't live like that; must have some sort of organization, and level;

How she grew up on a farm and picked tomatoes; stained skin and clothes green; had to use bleach to get it off also had a dairy farm; had to do for self;

Doesn't think her mother would believe that she is still crocheting; describes first afghan she ever made; got wider and wider; still has it, dog sleeps on it;

Relation of crochet to abstract mathematical skills; how she doesn't mark things like you're supposed to but counts the stitches "if 2 single crochets that's 2, then 10 more that's twelve; and works that way in her head; not dividing and multiplying but adding and reading a pattern or thinking abstractly;

Goes through a pattern with me; I read directly from the pattern and then Mary translates it; "blue CH 45, turn CH 15 etc.

Doubts while working on things; not sure if it will look good; how husband is fascinated that someone can take yarn and twist it up and have it come out looking like something

Exhibiting at fairs; was afraid to enter state fair thought it would be too competitive;