

On Becoming a Weaver

This month I'll celebrate my seventh anniversary with my first loom. In the spring of 2001, despite never having woven before, I used a rare weekend off to drive up to beautiful Harrisville, New Hampshire, to buy a kit to build a 4-shaft floor loom. I spent the remainder of the weekend building the loom, bought some completely inappropriate cotton yarn from a local yarn shop, and wove some of the most hideous kitchen towels ever seen. I was hooked! I pored over Deborah Chandler's *Learning to Weave*, discovered *Handwoven* magazine, and devoured every issue I could get my hands on. I spent the next several years learning all I could about weaving.

But it took until just over two years ago for me to turn into a "weaver." Until then, when people asked me what I did, I would answer "I'm a lawyer" or, subsequently, "I'm a stay-at-home mom." But now I say, "I'm a weaver. Oh, and I'm home with the kids." Of course, some days I'm lucky if I manage to get a bobbin wound during daylight hours (though my daughter, who is now four, loves to help wind bobbins).

The weekend is prime weaving time. My very supportive husband runs around after the kids—and spends a lot of time retrieving our son from underneath my loom. (He loves to "help" by lifting and lowering treadles I'm not using or by pressing down on the brake—nothing quite like losing all warp tension in the middle of a pick! As his sister did before him, my son has spent an inordinate amount of time crawling around with the beam handle in his mouth.)

My transformation into a weaver can be attributed to two events. The first was taking a weaving class at the Worcester Center for Crafts. I signed up for the Tuesday evening weaving class, mostly as a way to carve out a little time just for myself outside the house, and wound up learning far more than I expected. The teacher, Rita Steinbach, managed to push me completely outside my comfort zone and got me working on a shawl woven in a myriad of colors inspired by Barbara Herbster's beautiful shawl in the *Handwoven's Design Collection #19: Scarves and Shawls*. I credit Rita with giving me the push I needed to develop from a hobby weaver into thinking about creating my

own designs and even about trying to sell some of my work.


Then I stumbled across Etsy.com. Etsy is a unique online marketplace for "everything handmade." Artists and artisans from all over the world sell handcrafted artwork, ranging from jewelry to pottery to original paintings on Etsy. There is a wonderful community of fiber artists selling everything from roving to finished products. To find some of their fantastic fiber art and yarn, you can search for "EtsyFAST" on the Etsy website to bring up items created by the multitalented members of the Fiber Arts Street Team.

There are several challenges facing any seller who wishes to be successful in marketing products online. First, you have to learn how to take excellent photos of your pieces—this is especially important for weavers. Since a customer cannot touch your work to find out how it feels or drapes, good photos are critically important, and photographing textiles is a real challenge!

It is also important to list new items for sale on a regular basis to avoid being lost in the shuffle (jewelry artists on Etsy list several new pieces daily!).

I danced around the kitchen "whoohooing" like a lunatic and scaring the cats (and kids) after I sold my first item. On that lovely spring day in Harrisville, I never thought that in seven years' time I would be an actual weaver, selling work both online and locally.

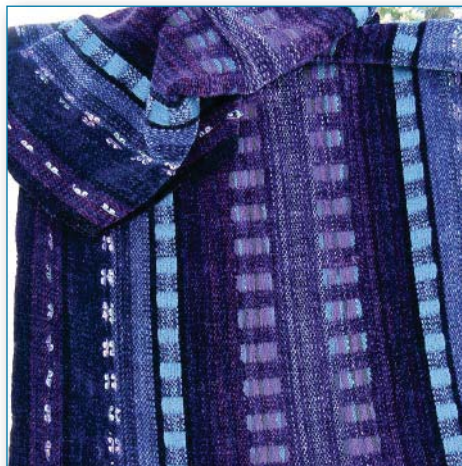
It will be interesting to see where the next seven years take me. I'm in the midst of searching for affordable out-

side studio space (my looms, equipment, dyes, and yarn are rapidly taking over our little house!). I'm also hoping to build up enough inventory to sell at one or two juried art and craft shows each year. To continue my weaving education, I have recently started weaving swatches to apply for HGA's Certificate of Excellence. I feel as if I am just beginning my journey into the world of fiber art, but I know that wherever life takes me, I am now and always will be a weaver. 

KRISTIN KELLEY of Chelmsford, Massachusetts, is the granddaughter of a "mill girl" weaver from Quebec. A graduate of MIT and former attorney, Kristin now attempts, with varying degrees of success, to balance caring for her children with studying, exploring, and learning all she can about weaving!



Conall helps improve warp tension.



Shawls inspired by Barbara Herbster started Kristin's journey as a designer.