

OF WEAVERS

CONFESSIONS OF A HANDWEAVER'S HUSBAND — by Eric Broudy

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Being a weaver is one thing, but being the husband of a weaver is, as the man says, a whole 'nother smoke. To take the simplest example: communication. I remember when a lease was something you signed to get an apartment, a temple was a house of worship, and a shed was for storing tools. A harness held the reins on a horse, and a lamm was something gansters took-on-the when they got into trouble.

My loominary education began about five years ago. It began innocently enough—my wife was given a rigid heddle loom for Christmas, a small unassuming frame, which, at first glance, seemed designed for weaving giant pot holders. A closer inspection revealed warp and cloth beams that turned—thus accommodating pot holders of extraordinary length. But, that was just the beginning.

One learns quickly that true weavers fall into a special class of fanatics characterized by the following: a tendency to finger the wearing apparel of total strangers; the onset of withdrawal symptoms when separated from the loom for more than a few hours; a craving for endless cones of color near at hand; and perhaps most calamitous, an irresistible acquisitiveness for more and bigger looms.

We now have six looms in what I fondly remember as our dining room—the initial rigid heddler, an equally unassuming tapestry frame, a 32-inch Macomber, a 40-inch Macomber, a 36-inch LeClerc (borrowed for one of her students) and, because the Macomers are too big to test designs on, a Structo 8-harness table loom for samples.

The walls are covered with shelves of yarn, cone after cone, skeins of handspun hang from hooks in the molding, a warping reel and spinning wheel sit in corners, a warping board hangs from the one free spot on the wall, an entire flotilla of boat shuttles, stacks of spool shuttles, piles of extra reeds, heddles by the thousands, a half-cord of lease sticks, and bobbins. Yet, both Macomers are empty. Nothing depresses me more than a naked loom.

"What are you doing?" I asked once. "Weaving the Emperor's new clothes?"

"Very funny," she said. "I'm waiting for yarn to arrive."

I looked around the room. I saw reds, pinks, and aquas, ten shades of gray, fifteen shades of white, browns, oranges and ombres, purples and cerulians, fat yarns and thin yarns, smooth yarns and bumpy yarns. Turning back to my wife I asked, "You say you're waiting for yarn to arrive?"

"Yes."

"I know this might sound like a foolish question . . ." But she has already anticipated my question. Weavers are smart that way.

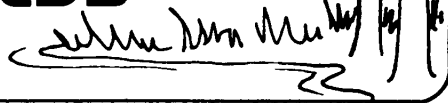
"These yarns are not right for what I want to do now. The yarn I need is coming from Scotland."

"From Scotland," I repeated. "The yarn she needs is coming from Scotland." With my head nodding dumbly, I left the room.

I've gotten used to it now. It has been five years and I learned to accept certain facts. I have long ago reconciled myself to eating in the kitchen. I have learned the weaver's tongue and can field strip a Macomber in minutes for transportation to a

vacation house. In fact I must confess I even derive a modicum of pleasure from walking through the dining room. I admire my wife's weaving, and when company comes, it is I, not she, who pulls out the pillows and ponchos. She is modest . . . I am proud.

FROM WOODS & FIELDS



by Connie Magoffin

Frederick H. Gerber has recently published a 59-page book entitled *Indigo and the Antiquity of Dyeing*. Most dyers know the author from his numerous articles on dyeing in *Handweaver and Craftsman* and in *Shuttle Spindle and Dye-pot*. During the several communications with Mr. Gerber concerning questions I have had about indigo dyeing, he reassured me that no one is immune to having problems with indigo and, in fact, the dedication of the book is to his students, who because of their frustrations with indigo vats, demanded answers to their questions. The book is intended to be a supplement to existing dye books and, thus, the central portion of the book is not concerned with reiterating the numerous and varied indigo recipes found elsewhere, but instead explains why many of these don't work. He does, however, include one of his favorite indigo recipes using yeast and ammonia. The development of indigo vat techniques is traced from direct dyeing with the extracts of fresh indigo plants to the use of urine and why it works, on through the use of other organic and inorganic compounds in indigo recipes to the modern hydrosulfite vat. He also discusses problems that might occur in the use of the hydrosulfite vat or with the synthetic indigo that we are encountering so often recently.

Another area of the book discusses the antiquity of dyes. Mr. Gerber believes that the dates for the initiation of the art of dyeing are far earlier than we now attribute to it. In support of this theory he discusses the philosophy of cultural diffusion (cultural advances due to contact and exchange between groups) versus convergent cultural evolution (the discovery by different cultural groups, in different times and places, of common methods applied to different starting materials to obtain similar products). For example, peoples from different parts of the world obtained a blue dye from diverse plants using basically the same process. Finally, Mr. Gerber proposes and explores another of his theories, that the indigo plants grown in our colonial period were not, as many books for many years have stated, the *Indigofera tinctoria* of India, but more likely the *Indigofera suffruticosa*.

At first glance one might say that this book is only for dye scholars. However, both Mr. Gerber and I agree that dyers are not just "doers" of the craft. If anyone gives anything more than a passing glance at dyeing, he begins to be interested in where dyeing started and when. Many of us are beginning a dye garden at home or are interested in working on the dye garden planned for next summer at the Arboretum. We must know more than the common names of our dye plants to properly obtain and to cultivate them successfully. In our dyeing, if we ever want to successfully obtain a blue color we must understand which indigo recipes work and why. In his book Fred Gerber attempts to clear up many of the questions we have concerning one of the most exciting and yet most mysterious of dyes—indigo.

The price of the book is \$4.75 plus postage from Fred Gerber, P.O. Box 1355, Ormond Beach, Florida 32074. Mr. Gerber has been kind enough to offer us the special price of 40% off plus postage if we order 12 copies or more. This means that each book, including postage, would be about \$3.00. If you are interested in a copy at this reduced price please let me know as soon as possible.