

## It's All Relative

*by Maddy Cranley*

I must admit that I have never done a survey and my conclusions would be considered unscientific, but I am fairly certain that when any of us think of who taught us to knit, a family relationship or special friendship comes to mind. How many of us learned our knit and purls from our mother, aunt or grandmother? Should I mention in these days of political correctness, perhaps it was an uncle or grandfather who showed us a wandering cable or two-color knitting?

Possibly, it was when we were about to change or add another title to our life's label, for example from "wife" to "wife and mother" that we began to explore the craft of knitting. "Knitting little booties" is a common expression that describes an expectant mother, assuming that once you have babies you must knit for them. I have it on good authority from a friend who wishes not to be identified, that it was the birth of her daughter that prompted her to investigate the possibilities of knitting. The pattern she ambitiously chose was a "pram set" consisting of a double-breasted sweater, leggings with a drawstring waist, and a hat with pom-poms. Our adventurous mom-to-be had not yet been introduced to the glories of correct gauge and yarn weights. For the selected pattern, written in fingering weight, she bought a worsted weight yarn. Yarn is yarn, right? When finished, she realized that baby would have to wait at least until the first day of elementary school before placing a delicate limb into that outfit. Isn't this how we all learn? Mistakes are never failures, just postponed success and always a darn good lesson.

I learned to knit from my mother who had learned from her mother. My grandmother by all accounts was an avid knitter who would knit a sweater for anyone who asked. I distinctly remember my first project. After patiently learning to knit, my mother sewed the knit sections together as it seemed just too much for a novice knitter to handle. I can't imagine learning how to knit by following a graphic or a photograph in an instruction book. You just need those arms around you, guiding your fingers, positioning the needles and wrapping the yarn in the right direction to create a stitch.

Didn't those first few stitches seem awkward and clumsy? Did you ever think you would be able to knit in a darkened room or when watching television? I know one thing is certain, you invariably hold the needles and throw the yarn in the same style as the person who taught you. Some methods promise a more even tension or perhaps speedier knitting but once you have learned a certain style, it seems difficult to undo and so it becomes your own knitting style. It takes a concentrated effort to change your knitting technique and as knitters we all want to get on with the next project at hand, not wanting to slow down our productivity with the awkwardness that comes with changing our ways. These knitting styles also follow along cultural lines and ethnic traditions passed down through generations of knitters teaching young family members to knit. These styles also remain particular to geographical areas or countries as styles have come to be labelled as French, Scottish, German, Norwegian, or Greek.

An enthusiastic knitter will likely have no trouble remembering where and how their knitting skill was learned. Taking the time to pass on some of that familial knowledge will surely result in someone who will look back in a few years and remember the kindness shown in demonstrating how to throw that yarn or knit into the back of a stitch. Our knitting skill is a tradition that all of us can attach to a smiling face and a loving pair of hands.

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