

LUCETTA WALKER

When you walk in the front door of the Walkers' house, your line of vision across the hall and living room ends on a small blue tapestry. The design, based on a 12th century lady spinning from a distaff on to a drop spindle, has great balance and harmony. Wonderful economies of line and color changes suggest shadows and masses. The whole piece suggests tranquil, measured movement, turning about a steady center. It is a perfect keynote to Lucetta's tranquil living room, which she has kept in the same green-blues since she was first married.

The tapestry, by a major Finnish artist, Eva Antilla, is the favorite piece of Lucetta's collection, found on a trip to Finland in 1986. After the fourth and youngest of the Walkers' children (all daughters) graduated from high school in 1974, Lucetta made a deal with her husband: "Dick would go to any fiber place for me if I would look at boats too." Since then, Lucetta has amassed a store of memorable experiences: watching tweed weaving in Donegal and Harris, visiting the Gobelin tapestry school in Paris; ordering fleece still on the hoof in Australia; taking a weaving class in Finland along with weavers from Japan, Poland, France, Switzerland, and Germany. She reminisces, "We probably missed a lot of the things you're supposed to see. For example, most people go to Lyons for the wine and food. We went to see the working museum about the Canute weavers; their looms were the end of the historic Silk Road."

She has also amassed a large collection of textiles from many countries, ranging from rugs to runners to laces and embroidered pieces. Her tastes are catholic, and her interest unlimited. She has also shared her "finds" at many a session of Show and Tell.

Lucetta's own textile work has also covered some of everything. She learned to spin on a drop spindle (like the lady in her tapestry) and made enough yarn to knit a cardigan. She sewed all her four daughters' clothes. She has woven yardage for clothing, some of it still in wear. But she has most enjoyed weaving textiles for domestic and personal use: towels, upholstery fabrics, aprons, skirts, even baby's bibs. She especially loves the loom-manipulated lace weaves. It is satisfying to her to produce textiles that will do their job well, and will last, as well as having esthetic value. They fit her seriousness about having a house run right, in smooth and stable fashion. "I took Domestic Science in school," she says, "and to me it was science." She conserves household possessions as well and consistently as her textile collection. The Walkers still have pieces of furniture they bought when they were first married, some reupholstered several times, sometimes with fabric Lucetta wove.

Before the Walkers retired and built a new home in La Conner in 1988, (they had owned a cottage there for 10 years) they farmed the last of their family-owned apple orchards in the Yakima Valley. Lucetta belonged to the Yakima Weavers' Guild, a group of about 40. When the guild began in 1949, most of the weavers were older, but Lucetta and other twenty-somethings welcomed the meetings as an opportunity "to talk about something other than babies and bottles."

The prime mover of the guild was Lucetta's first teacher, Clara Chapman, a major figure in Northwest weaving through the 1950s to early '80s, who also organized the San Juan Islands guild, and at different times belonged to the Whidbey and Olympia guilds. Through the Yakima guild, Lucetta took classes from such early luminaries as Mary Meigs Atwater (1952) and Marguerite Davidson (1953). Other teachers who influenced her interests in weaving were Mary Pendleton of Sedona AZ, from whom she bought a Pendleton loom; Irma Robinson, whose home base was with the Seattle guild and who taught an invaluable class on the optical blending of colors in weaving. She took also a 6-month study of block weaves from Virginia Harvey. The notebooks and samples from these classes are an enviable resource.

Lucetta was introduced to the Whidbey Weavers Guild by a member friend in about 1977. Thereafter, the Walkers' visits to the cottage were usually timed to coincide with guild meetings. When they retired, it was a natural that they settle where Dick could motor his boat, and Lucetta could keep company with weavers. Lucetta became very active with the guild, serving as its President in 1991-93.

It is difficult to talk about Lucetta without mentioning Dick Walker, whom she met ice skating at the Yakima outdoor rink in 1940. Lucetta had lived in Yakima since her parents moved there from Tacoma in her junior year of high school. Dick was a banker at the time they met, but he was drafted into the army in October 1941 and spent most of World War II training fighter pilots. They were married in 1943, and after the war went into the Walker family's apple business, soon buying Dick's grandfather's orchards from an uncle. Decades of working together in the business of farming helped build a very close partnership. While Dick ran the farm, Lucetta, a bookkeeper before her marriage, took care of the financial records and paperwork. Dick also made time for babysitting when Lucetta had to go into town – not a fashionable male pursuit at the time, but one that strengthened family bonds. Dick also has always been supportive of Lucetta's fiber work, buying her first loom (built by the son of an early Northwestern weaver, Margaret Bergman), and making special hanging devices for wall pieces, besides sharing her textile-oriented travels.

Though Dick is an only son and Lucetta's only sibling died early in an accident, family is a 'given' in Lucetta's world. Her hallways and stairwells are a gallery of photographs, daughters and grandchildren, cousins, second cousins, grandparents and their parents. Lucetta's Norwegian immigrant father was the youngest of ten children, and when Dick and Lucetta visit her relatives in Jessheim, near Oslo, they go to the family farm, which has been in the family since 1938. Lucetta also treasures artifacts that were handed through the family. On her hearth is an 1821 linen spinning wheel that came to her father from the old homestead, which she loves but does not spin on because "you can only do what it wants!" She also has a grey woolen blanket, woven by her father's mother, who made one for each of her ten children. Textile work is also a tradition in Lucetta's mother's family; her mother was an excellent seamstress and needlewoman, and her German immigrant grandfather was a tailor.

It pleases Lucetta that all her daughters are skillful needlewomen. It is a special satisfaction that her third grand daughter, besides having a degree in education, is a committed weaver, who will eventually inherit and use her looms and spinning wheels. Continuity is assured; as time spins on, the family and a fiberwork tradition will continue twining smoothly together.

---- Shirley Owen - 2000