**David Collyer**

Greensborough & Diamond Valley forgotten memories.... what’s your story?

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A FAMILY BOUND BY CRAFT TRADITION

It was more than disconcerting talking to David COLLYER of Greensborough. It  
was downright deflating. I have always been a competent knitter, but David  
took the winds right out of my sails.

He doesn't just knit. He knits lace. And that's something I've never  
attempted. David also crochets, embroiders and does some tatting. However,  
no-one who knows the COLLYER family finds that unusual.

David comes from a long line of knitting and crocheting forebears, both male  
and female. His Grandfather, who was a miner in Daylesford, crocheted a baby  
bonnet for David's father when he was born in 1917. David has since copied  
the bonnet, which is still held by the family, and written out the pattern.

His Great Grandfather made a vest for himself with buttons made from peach  
stones. His maternal grandmother, one of nine children, knitted socks for  
everyone. They were knitted on size 14 needles and each sock had a French  
heel, the pattern for which has been handed on down through the family. At  
92 she still knits socks.

David's father also knits, beautiful Arran pattern and cable pattern jumpers  
and cardigans, but his wife didn't know he could knit until after they were  
married. "He knitted all the baby clothes", she quietly boasted.

The work is not over when knitted lace is completed. In fact the biggest  
task remains. David explained that knitted lace cannot be washed and ironed like  
crocheted lace. After washing it is starched and then pinned out, one pin in  
every fine loop on the outside - literally hundreds and hundreds of pins -  
then the lace is left to dry. And each time it is washed the same process  
must be repeated.

Last year David's father also took up knitting lace, though ill health has  
prevented him from doing much of it.

Mrs. Collyer, David's mother, also knits and crochets, but it seems David is  
the one who has taken the limelight for his work. Using old steel needles  
called fairy knitting pins in size 16, he knits his doilies and cloths  
outwards from a central point.

Before he started knitted lace last July, David had done a lot of garment  
knitting and hand crocheted lace. He showed me a cardigan he designed and  
knitted himself. It had an ethnic flavour with rows of costumed people  
depicted from top to bottom of the cardigan. He also taught himself how to spin.

"In 1979 I knitted a layette for my niece. But I couldn't buy two-ply baby  
wool, so I spun my own wool I had sheared from a sheep myself." he said.

David can't remember when he hasn't knitted or crocheted. "I can remember  
learning to cast on though", he said. "It was red wool and I ended up with  
about 300 stitches but the knitting wouldn't come down. All I knew how to do  
was cast on."

David and his family have lived in Greensborough for 30 years and David went  
to Greensborough Primary School - "I didn't learn knitting there", he  
stated, emphatically - and later Macleod High School where he was the school  
pianist. "And I crocheted on the sly, sometimes fixing up the girls' work  
when they made mistakes."

Mrs. Collyer said she had five children. Four could knit and the other one  
used to make dolls clothes on the machine. David is also a skilled  
machinist, having made two evening dresses for his mother and a suit for  
himself.

As a young man in National Service training, David was sent to Vietnam, and  
was stationed in Nui Dat for three months. Later he spent three years in  
London, England. Now a trained nurse, he has lived in Darwin for the past  
three years. As well as teaching music in schools there, he also does  
nursing and knitting. "But because of the humidity I have to do my knitting  
and crochet about 6a.m."

Now while nursing part time, he is doing his Primary Teacher training,  
majoring in music. When he's qualified at the end of next year, he plans to  
return to Darwin to teach music full time. And knitting?

"I'll teach them to knit to music", he quipped. David is looking forward to  
returning to Darwin for other reasons too. It was there that an interest in  
Australian Pre-history was sparked and he'd like to spend some more time on  
that.

And he was responsible for classifying a unique lace collection now in the  
Darwin museum. "The museum was given a beautiful private collection of old  
lace dating back to the 1700s and I was asked to classify it", he said.

David has often repaired damaged pieces of old lace for people. "I'm  
prepared to take risks with it. I'll cut out parts and re-do them."

Recently an exhibition of David's own work was held at the Council of Adult  
Education in teh centre of the city. David's cousin lectures in creative  
knitting at the CAE.

David is now working on a knitted round table cloth. "It's not really very  
difficult, you just have to have a lot of patience," he said. Patient, I'm  
not, so I think I'll leave the lace knitting to David Collyer.

FOOTNOTE: David's knitting pins date back to before the Second World War.  
They are not available today, so he would be interested in talking to anyone  
who might have some old unwanted steel knitting pins, size 16, or smaller.  
Story by Linley HARTLEY Photo: Ron GRANT [Got a set of 5 size 20 needles as  
a result of this Footnote!!]