

Homestead Notes

# Sewing crafts show talent, skill, and creativity

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During the recent Lancaster County Pennsylvania Farmers Association Week at Park City, Lancaster, Sylvia May displayed a variety of sewing crafts for those who happened to be walking by the crafts' area.

Sylvia, a young widow who lives with her mother, Mrs. Herman Shirk, and her five year old daughter Lisa at her mother's farm along Cardinal Drive in southern Lancaster County, has been increasingly busier and busier with her hand-crafted gift items. Mrs. Shirk explained that Sylvia started making the dolls, pot holders, door stops, shoebags, tote bags and handbags when tourists who stayed at their farm tourist home expressed interest in obtaining such objects for souvenirs and gifts to take back home with them.

Sylvia's mother added that her daughter had always been happy to create things with her sewing machine. "Let her work with her machine all afternoon and she is happy!" her mother remarked.

At first Sylvia got ideas from crafts shows, magazines, and friends and relatives. She would copy or work out variations to suit the materials being used, to fulfill the wishes of the buyer or to facilitate construction directions. Sylvia says she likes to work best with cottons and especially small prints for the dolls and denim weight cottons for the handbags and totes.

She buys her materials locally and purchases her trims such as lace and rickrack at outlet stores in Ephrata.

Once the materials and craft supplies are gathered together, Sylvia spends many hours completing the many craft items. She explained that she can make two detergent bottle-based dolls in a day. "That is really working though," she clarified. "It is really surprising how much time these crafts take to finish."

Sylvia said she took her machine and many supplies along to Park City for the crafts display but she found that she actually had little time to get much accomplished other than to talk to people. As a general rule, Sylvia sews to fill orders since her supply on hand has been recently depleted at the crafts fair held at the Fuiton Birthplace this past August. Now that Winter is approaching and the necessity to keep the road banks, meadows and lawns of her mother's two farms trimmed has subsided, she hopes to get more things made before Christmas.

A survey of the many items she sews includes the popular detergent bottle granny and grandpa dolls. Neighbors keep her well stocked with empty bottles to await her decorative touches.



All the result of talented work, the collection of detergent bottle granny dolls include both granny and grandpa. They were created by Sylvia May.



Seen at her sewing machine, Sylvia works on a handbag.



Lisa, Sylvia's daughter, shows a variety of handbags to choose from. The handbag with the

mushrooms on the pocket is the topic of special directions in this article.

The ladies are filled with sand, faces are attached to styrofoam balls then glued to the bottle top, arms and hands are placed on the body with pipe cleaners and glue, then the slip, dress, apron, bonnet and pocketbook are added. Styrofoam balls are split in half and glued to the bottle to form the bosom.

Sylvia wraps the bosom or chest area with polyfill to make it soft under the clothing. She glues and pins on four pieces of one-way nap fake fur then brushes it all forward to style granny's hair then sprays the hair with a super-holding formula hair spray before putting the bonnet on finished doll. The creation of the granny doll includes the use of a lot of lace to trim the dress neckline, sleeve edges and hem. Lace is also used on the apron edges, the slip hem, the drawstring pocketbook and the hat brim.

Although the grandpa doll does not have all the lace trim, it requires special work in its own design. Sylvia cuts a wedged shape out of the bottom of the front and back of the detergent bottle. She then rolls small magazines such as TV Guide or similar shaped periodicals tightly and places them inside the two sections at the bottom of the bottle. She then wraps the legs with black cotton material and covers the bottom of the legs as well with the black material.

Grandpa's outfit includes bib overalls, print shirt, and straw hat. The addition of polyfill for hair-line and beard complete this doll.

The slipper slacks are more items Sylvia sews for gift ideas. They are constructed of cotton and are sewn to form a small pair of slacks. Shoes or slippers can be placed in each pantleg and stockings can be stored in the pants' pockets.

Decorative stuffed hens in two sizes — eight inches tall and five inches tall — can be used as doorstops or jewelry storing on a dresser. Made from small cotton prints, trimmed with rickrack and stuffed with polyfill and stones for weight, they are attractive and versatile.

Especially endearing to young people are the little girl or little boy shoebags. Complete with a ten-inch in diameter face trimmed with yarn for the hair, the shoebags hold three pairs of childrens' shoes. Sylvia makes these, using heavy material for the shoebag section and prints for the clothing features of the little boy or girl. She embroiders the facial features and trims the pockets with contrasting seam binding for a neat finish and durability. The top two shoe pockets snap shut since they appear to be the straps of the little boy or girl's overalls.

Totebags and handbags are also included in the list of Sylvia's handiwork. The larger tote bags measure fourteen inches by sixteen inches and are trimmed with outside pickets and appliques. The handbags come in two sizes and styles. The larger handbags measure ten by eleven inches and have wooden handles. The smaller handbag measures eight by twelve inches and has two pockets, one front and one back. Both handbags sport applique decorations on the pockets.

Sylvia has shared the directions for the handbag which uses no wooden handles. She explained that to buy the handles is expensive unless you have someone handy who is willing to make them.

**HANDBAG:**

**Material Needed:**

One piece of heavy cotton denim 13"x22"; two strips to form handles, 3"x30" each; two pocket pieces, 5"x6" each; one bottom piece 5"x13"; applique for pockets.

**Construction Directions:**

**Of Handbag Main Section**

1. Mark out placement lines on right side.
2. Sew applique to pocket fronts.
3. Turn top of pocket under one-half inch and sew down to form hem. Turn under twice for neat finish.
4. Sew side seams from top down six inches.
5. Turn top of handbag down to make one inch deep hem with small turn under to form neat hem edge. Sew securely.
6. Pin on pockets, then straps which have been folded in

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