

Meet The Original Designer Of The Popular Yard Sheep

BY LOU ANN GOOD

LITITZ — Two years ago the yard sheep craze began sweeping the county. Today, almost everybody seems to have a pair of the realistic sheep grazing on the lawn.

Who is the original designer of this popular fad? None other than local dairy farm wife Ella Faye Stoner.

The plywood frame covered with sheep fleece and stuffed with quilt batting that make up these durable lawn decorations did not happen by chance. Ella Faye recalls, "It was always my dream to create something that would go over big."

One night just as she was drifting off to sleep, Ella Faye got the idea for making yard sheep. "When my brain starts churning," she said, "I can't sleep."

That night brought no sleep to her. Early the next morning she started experimenting with cardboard. "My first sheep looked like a pig," she confided. "So I went out to a nearby meadow and sketched a sheep." Her next sheep conformed to the realistic measurements of the four-legged animals.

On July 4, 1986, Ella Faye placed her sheep in her yard. From then on, it was pay dirt for Ella Faye. To date, she has made over 1,000 of the critters. It's a family project that involves husband Ken and sons, Ken Jr. 18; Darwin, 17; Dean, 12; Wendell, 8; and Lynn 4.

One week, with all the family pitching in they made a top quota of 90 sheep.

Ken is supportive of his wife's endeavors, but Ella Faye confessed, "When I say to him, 'Guess what I thought of?' His eyes get that panicked look, because not all of my ideas work."

Since Ella Faye supplies numerous shops in Pennsylvania and New Jersey with her handiworks, it takes a lot of investment in craft materials. For the sheep project's initial beginnings, she brought 100-yards of the fleece. Add that cost to the plywood frames required which her husband cuts out, the quilt batting, and the spray for making it water and dirt repellent and you'll know the Stoner's were taking a risk.

For the Stoners, the risk turned out to be quite rewarding. They couldn't make them fast enough for the demand. Soon other craftpersons began copying the sheep.

Does Ella Faye regret that her idea was mass-produced by others and not copyrighted? "Well," she answered hesitantly, "I guess there's room enough others. We have more than enough orders to keep us busy." She paused, then added, "Besides it was an answer to my dream to create something that would go over big." Judging from the sheep that dot the countryside, her idea has definitely been a smashing success.

Where did Ella Faye get her talent? She answers, "I've been making stuff since I was five years-old. I drove my mom crazy because I always wanted to be making something with my hands." At seven-years-old, Ella Faye learned to embroider. "I wanted it to do it all the time, but my mother said, I should not embroider on Sunday because it should be a day of rest and not work." Ella Faye did not listen. She spent Sunday afternoon working on her project. When finished, she tried to pick up the hoop and was dismayed to see that she had embroidered the entire project to her skirt. She said, "That cured me. To this day, I don't work on Sunday."

She didn't compromise even when she had more than \$3,000 worth of wooden embroidery hoops to fill with her stenciled "Welcome" design. Nor when she quilted pillow tops or stenciled wall hangings."

Her original creations have been sold not only throughout the eastern states but in countries such as India and Belize. She remarked, "It's exciting and encouraging to see others appreciate my projects."

Ella Faye said, "I always say, the Lord has blessed me with this talent for a reason. Our children are in different private schools—it's a big expense. But this is one way that enables us to afford it."

With all her projects, does Ella Faye ever tire of it? "No, she says. "Especially, quilting. My idea of the ideal vacation is sitting under a tree while quilting."

She explained, "I feel a need to do it. I'd rather do crafts than eat or sleep." She gets the most satisfaction out of designing something rather than copying others. She said, "I look at something and think how I could change it to make it me."

She finds it easy to get up early if she knows she can begin making crafts. "I guess I'm like a child," she remarked, because I reward myself by deciding that if I accomplish a certain amount of housework, than I can spend time doing crafts.

Nothing seems to difficult for her. Typically, she does not follow directions or patterns, but figures out how to do things by experimenting. When first married, she



Ella Faye fashions one of the large bows on a wooden form that her husband Ken designed. "I couldn't do everything I do if my husband wouldn't help me," she said.

taught herself to reupholstered furniture. "I just tore a piece apart and noticed how it was put together." Soon she had a thriving reupholstery business, but lack of space caused her to shift gears and concentrate on other crafts. "I get a lot of calls," she said, "but I can't do everything."

One thing she does do often is donate her handiworks to non-profit organizations and fund raisers. Currently she is working on several projects for a Boston and a local fund raiser. "I like to help others," she said. "For me, it's easier to give than to receive."

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Wendell sits with the yard sheep that his mother, Ella Faye, designed and made. Her creation started a fad and now the popular sheep decorate thousands of lawns.



Wendell packs bows that his mother makes for selling.



The Stoner family gathers, minus oldest son Ken Jr., (from left) Ken, Ella Faye, Lynn, Darwin, Dean and Wendell.



A typical scene in the Stoner family is Ella Faye stuffing some of her yard sheep while Wendell helps. Ella Faye said, "My crafts don't interfere with family life. I think it helps encourage communications because we often work together on projects."