

# Ann Jones Is Hooked On Weaving

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**MEYERSDALE** (Somerset Co.)— Ann Jones of Meyersdale in Somerset County not only teaches fourth grade children at the Salisbury-Elk Lick Elementary School but also has a whopping side business that probably demands more than her full-time teaching job. She weaves her own material and makes rugs, clothes and many other items to sell.

About 18 years ago, the mother of the children for whom Ann babysat was a weaver. Her work piqued Ann's interest. When Ann returned to the Indiana University of Pennsylvania that fall she took weaving as an elective course.

Later, after she settled in Some-

rset County, she got a job spinning at Penn Alps, Inc., Grantsville, Md. Penn Alps is famed for both its restaurant and crafts store and is located in the heart of a Mennonite and Amish community "where anything homemade sells to tourists like hot cakes." Additionally, Penn Alps, Inc. wants to preserve the crafts and skills performed by the early area settlers. Decrepit log homes have been relocated to the Penn Alps grounds and restored as a tribute to local history. In them demonstrations take place during Summerfest in July.

Ann did spinning for four years. Then she added carding, spinning and dyeing of sheep fleeces as part of her demonstrations, using native plants like goldenrod, apple

bark, marigolds, and dahlias, as the dye source.

As yarn piled up, Ann says she started weaving and experimenting with patterns, sticking to simple things like place mats and wall hangings.

Although she still makes those things, Ann has graduated into a more mature and complicated plane of workmanship. Her garments are skirts, tops, jackets, shawls, and very recently, a coat in a beautiful plaid that is primarily burgundy, accented by shades of teal and purple. Although Ann had a friend dye the material, she usually does it herself. Twenty hours of work went into the coat.

Most of her weaving is done at a four-harness loom. Her fingers fly as she separates and knots the thread ends to start a rug. She moves energetically and efficiently, alternately moving pedals one and three, then two and four of the floor mechanism causing the threads to weave around the material. As she pulls the bar forward ramming the weave tight with each row, the contraption bangs and clangs noisily.

"I play a lot with color," she says. "Traditional work is fun but you don't play with the color. It's more technical."

"Depending on what color of thread I use, I can change the look of it," she adds.

She weaves yards of material on her loom, then gently washes and pre-shrinks it before fluffing it gently in the dryer. Then it is ready to make into some garment. Her custom work usually occurs when the desired size isn't available at one of her demonstrations during shows that she attends.

Scurrying through her house, that on first sight might look like it will burst at the seams, Ann sidesteps her sundry pets laughing and chatting with them just as one would with children. There are four cats vying for her attention and two dogs.

"This place is a zoo," she laughs. The boxer dog escapes his enclosure, and begins, with unabashed joy to lick the leery guest's hands. His buddy, still a prisoner barking jealously, is a 50-50 mix of doberman and collie.

Ann says her animal menagerie is one of happy co-existence, declaring that they only compete for attention when there's company in the house. They are companions for Ann, who lives alone, and showers them with affection.

She owns her house in town, along with the abandoned carwash behind it. Blacktop covers the surface between them. It sounds unusual, but Ann says she doesn't like grass. Mainly, she hates to mow it and doesn't own a lawn mower. However, grass in front of her sidewalk is cut in summertime by a helpful neighbor. In the rear a narrow slice of dirt on her side of the dividing fence threatened to sprout fresh blades of verdant grass next to the blacktop, but Ann slapped in some herbs instead, and now uses them to fill the pretty little herb bags she sells.

The carwash building of faded sky blue may not look like the latest design in *Better Homes and Gardens* magazines, but it provides adequate housing for the 10 angora rabbits she keeps. Still, she wishes for a small farm. Realistically, though, Ann admits that she couldn't handle the increased responsibility, despite her longing for a horse and a pasture.

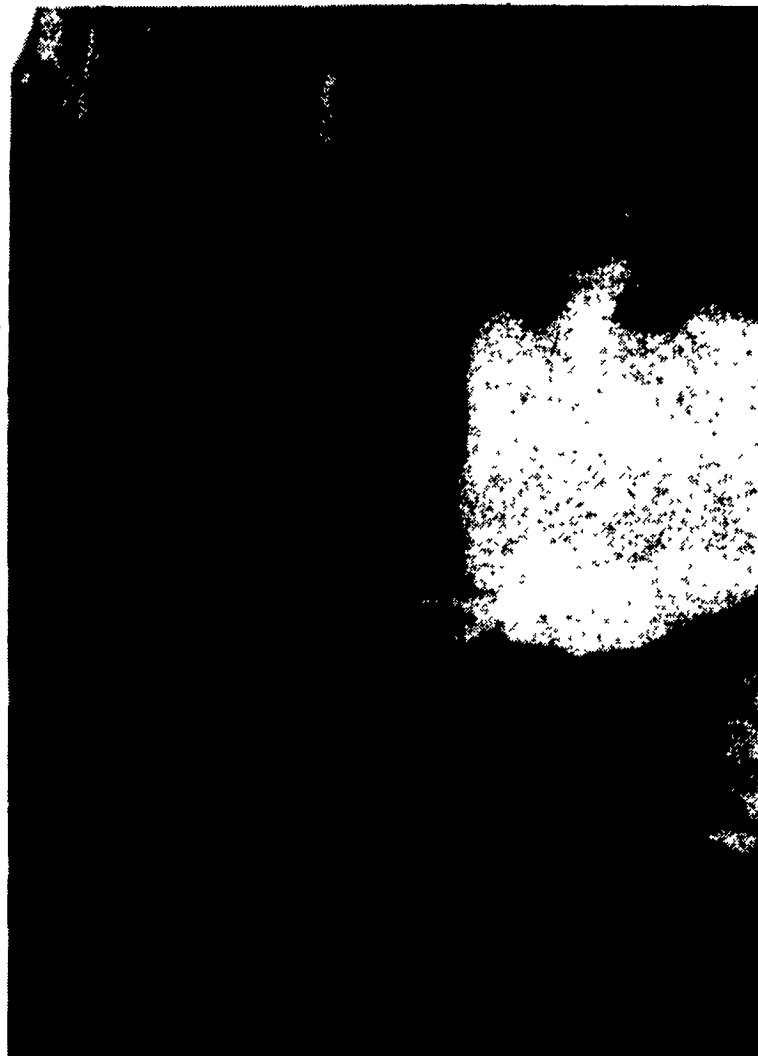
She's loved animals all her life.



Ann Jones of Meyersdale is working at her four-harness loom making a throw rug. She weaves material and makes clothing to sell at shows.



Ann Jones has 10 angora rabbits that she lodges in the abandoned car wash building on her property. Here she has one of them sitting on her picnic table.



Having woven the plaid material using her own color schemes of burgundy, teal and purple, Ann Jones has just completed her first coat.

When she was only three, she wandered from a wedding reception and was found petting the cows in a pasture.

Summer lifestyles for Ann are a bit nomadic. She travels to shows everywhere. Her work has been shown at the very selective Ohio Designer Craftsman Show, held at Hathaway Brown, a private girls school in Cleveland. "It was a real honor to go there," she says. Other shows accepting her work were the Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts at State College, and the Three-Rivers Arts Festival in Pittsburgh.

Each year she must prepare a new slides portfolio of her work. The volunteer models who wear the selected garments made by Ann have refused compensation because they get great exposure and publicity from it.

The professional photographer hired by Ann for the portfolio shootings allows her half the decision making during the sittings. But she has learned, a bit painfully, that finished photographs show how wrong some colors can be for this purpose. Sometimes one color overwhelms the others when it wasn't meant to do so.

"Green and yellow do not sell well, "unless someone just loves green. I make a lot of neutrals. Reds are extremely good, also black and white," she says. "I work with colors I like but I also do what sells."

She adds, "Some people also have fiber preferences." Ann uses cotton, wool, and silk. Pulling out a fat spool of silk fiber, she illustrates that all silk is not soft as is generally thought by most folks. It can be coarsely textured. One silk garment feels more like fine wool.

"Weaving is a very tactile craft," she says, "touch is important." After Ann weaves a bolt of material and makes garments from

it there are plenty of leftover pieces. She wastes nothing. "It is just too expensive to throw out," she says. So she makes ponchos, placemats, and mug mats which save the furniture from liquid stains. These make great souvenir items at festivals and shows. The really little scraps she plans to piece together for an original creation.

Her sources of yarn are the suppliers of the large commercial users who always have leftovers from filled orders. She buys a few hundred pounds at a time from outfits in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Crude shelves in the workroom are erected against one wall. They are bowing badly with the weight of the spools. White dominates the top shelf. Spools on the other shelves are separated by color and fiber.

Traveling to shows is a challenge for Ann because she takes all her things in her van. She manages to take her own portable booth and sometimes she adds one of her looms. It takes hours to load everything for one show. Once she even took along one of her large dogs for company, but the unforgettable experience cured her hopes that the arrangement

could become a routine practice.

"You get inventive," chuckles Ann, who has to be an optimist when one looks at the imposing size of the partially rainproof dismantled booth. "You're glad for friends and you don't make them mad. That way you know they will help out when you need them."

Ann also shows her Angora rabbits at places like the Maryland State Sheep and Wool Festival at the Howard County fairgrounds near Baltimore.

"People are amazed that you can pull it's hair out," says Ann, "and everybody want to pet it."

*Homestead*

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