

Finding Inspiration in Unexpected Places

Newspaper articles inspire a hooked series

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY GWEN DIXON



The Bridesmaid, 12" x 14½", hand-dyed and recycled wool and cotton string, on burlap; vintage veil, cotton binding edge. The Bridesmaid was inspired by a wedding announcement from 1948, typical of the day, which described in great detail the clothing worn by the bride, her attendants, and her mother, the wedding decorations and music, and the roles of servers at the reception.



Keeper of the Light, 12" x 14½", hand-dyed wool on burlap in wood frame; needle felted cat. This piece was inspired by an obituary about a man who had been a lighthouse keeper at Martin Head, New Brunswick, for 26 years. This image was also inspired by an old photograph I had seen of a lighthouse keeper.

WHERE DO YOU FIND INSPIRATION for the rugs that you make? What moves you to pick up your hook to start a new project?

Inspiration for rug hooking is everywhere. It is in our everyday surroundings, landscapes, family, friends and pets, seasons and holidays, and also in life's everyday events, milestones and life-changing events. And sometimes inspiration can come from unexpected and new places, from sources that one may not think of as being "inspirational."

For me, that unexpected source of inspiration was a collection of newspaper articles about people living along

the Bay of Fundy shoreline in New Brunswick, during the 1940s, -50s, and -60s. The articles were collected by a woman named Ruby Anderson, who was born in 1916 and lived most of her 94 years in these small rural coastal communities.

Ruby was known to my family, especially my father, through family and genealogical connections. In 2004, she offered her collection of loose newspaper clippings to my father and he compiled them into "Ruby Anderson's Scrapbook." Most of the 100 copies of the scrapbook were sold for genealogical purposes, but some were given as gifts, which was how I received mine.



The Winner, 6" by 6", hand-dyed wool on burlap, sewn onto canvas, in wood frame. This piece was inspired by a tragic farm accident in 1963. A farmer, who was also a member of the Shorthorn Cattle Breeders Association and the secretary and treasurer of the Albert County Agricultural Society, was fatally gored by a prize-winning Shorthorn bull he had purchased for \$4000.



In Rain or Shine, 14" x 25½", hand-dyed wool and recycled cotton on burlap; wet-felted flowers, cotton binding edge. This piece is based on an article about a bridal shower held in 1942 at which the bride was advised to "do your best in rain or shine."

Not long after my husband and I moved back to New Brunswick, after having lived on the west-coast for 15 years, my father gave us a copy of the scrapbook. It was obvious that he had taken great care in putting it together. The newspaper articles were alphabetized and the pages were numbered. Many of the articles were dated and anyone mentioned in an article was indexed in the almost 100 pages of indexing. The only information not included were the photos taken for some of the articles. I thanked my father for the gift, put it away in the bottom drawer of an old dresser, and forgot about it.

Now, over 10 years later, my father is 85 years old and enjoys telling stories about the people in the scrapbook. I am older too now, and see the stories as a way of engaging in conversation with him, and as a way of finding out what he thinks was important, funny, and interesting about the things that he remembers.

His stories caught my attention and prompted me to take a closer look at the articles. The articles have inspired a series of 12 fiber art pieces, eight of which are hooked. To make the rugs, I took some of the articles that inspired images and tried to recreate those images. Because the photos were removed and because I didn't know the people in the newspaper articles, my mind was free to imagine what they might have looked like. As I hooked each mat, other ideas, images, and my personal thoughts about the events appeared, further making the images reflections of my own personal interpretation of events rather than representations of the actual people or events.

Each of these mats was designed and hooked by me in 2017. They were shown at the Tidnish Bridge Art Gallery during the Nova Scotia Fiber Arts Festival in 2017 in Amherst, Nova Scotia. I hope that you enjoy them and that you have the pleasure and joy of finding inspiration in unexpected places! **RHM**

Gwen Dixon is a fiber artist who lives in New Brunswick, Canada. When not searching for fiber, she is beachcombing or thrift shopping for vintage items to use in her work and home. Gwen takes many online courses, and gives workshops on needle felting and rug hooking. You can connect with her on her Facebook page: [GwenDixonWoolArts](#).



Albert County Paratrooper Home On Leave

Sgt. Rio Smith of Upper New Horton Twice Injured In Action.

Home on leave after serving on the Italian and Western battlefronts as a paratrooper, Sgt. Rio Smith is at present visiting his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Smith of Upper New Horton, Albert County. He is recuperating from injuries received overseas and does not yet know whether he will be discharged as the result of his wounds.

Sgt. Smith, who, incidentally, is a nephew of W. V. Spencer of this city, saw his first action in Italy, being among the first troops to arrive in Rome. He fought in that area and later throughout the Italian campaign before being transferred to duty with the U. S. Seventh Army in France in mid-August last.

He relates that he lasted only ten hours on this campaign before being wounded, his second time, and after that was transferred to Great Britain for recuperation, later being despatched to Canada, arriving on the latest hospital ship.

In regard to paratroop fighting, Sgt. Smith said that he didn't consider it any more dangerous than any other type of warfare. It is all dangerous, and the men in the infantry and artillery have just as tough a job. But, he added, it is a thrilling experience to get in first when one's unit is opening a new offensive.

Sgt. Smith is one of the original Canadians to enlist in the U.S.A.-Canada First Special Service Force. He trained at Helena, Montana, and went overseas in October, 1942. Others from this district who were also among the originals in their force, but who have made the Supreme Sacrifice in Italy, were Lieut. Col. Cull MacWilliam and Staff Sgt. Frank Harvey, both of Moncton, and Sgt. Guy Davidson, son of Mrs. William Morris and the late Harry Davidson of Harcourt. N. B., who first enlisted in the 100th Battalion, R.C.A., in 1940, and volunteered to serve as a paratrooper in the U.S.A.-Canada First Special Service Force. After receiving his paratrooper's wings at Helena, he went overseas in 1942 and was killed in Italy in May of last year. He was a nephew of Mrs. E. C. Anderson, 24 Dominion street, this city.

The Paratrooper, 14" by 18", hand-dyed wool and recycled silk on burlap, sewn onto canvas, in wood frame.

This was inspired by an article about a young man from Upper New Horton who served in the USA-Canada First Special Service Force in World War II. "In regard to paratroop fighting, Sgt. Smith said that he didn't consider it to be any more dangerous than any other type of warfare. It is all dangerous and the men in the infantry and artillery

have just as tough a job. But, it is a thrilling experience to get in first when one's unit is opening a new offensive." This article was undated but based on the units this soldier served with and where he served, it is most likely from the first quarter of 1945.

In the Woods, 9½" x 12½", hand-dyed and recycled wool on burlap, sewn onto canvas, in wood frame.

Too Afraid to Answer, 9" x 10", hand-dyed wool "stump" mat and 6½" x 3½" needle felted figures. These two pieces were inspired by an article about two little girls who were lost in the woods overnight. The girls and their two-year-old brother "started out to find their father, a lumberman." The girls were three and four years of age. It was in November and the children were "dressed in woolen coats, little wool stockings and low shoes, the two little girls were without mittens." Their brother Teddy was found the evening before. The girls had "seen the lights and heard men calling them last night, they said, but were too frightened to answer," and weren't found until the following morning.



Warren's Wives, 20" x 16", hand-dyed wool and silk, recycled yarn on burlap; cotton binding edge. This piece was inspired by a story told by my father and by a newspaper clipping about our relative, Warren Dixon. Warren was married to three sisters: Mary, Sarah, and Lucy May Lyman, in that order, all of whom died of cancer. He then married Annie May Simmons, who also predeceased him. He was said to refer to his wives as "Two of the best and two of the damndest." It is the three sisters who are featured with Warren in this mat.