

Knitted Together *through* Time

JACQUELINE BLIX

UNLIKE MOST NEEDLEWORKERS, I'm linked to the past through a man. When I first took up the needles a few years ago, my mother told me that my grandfather also had learned how to knit and had even made a shawl.

At twenty-six, Joseph Sheldon Long was older than the average American infantryman who served during World War I (1914–1918). After the war, during which he had received a field commission and a Silver Star for bravery, he married my grandmother, Grace Hight, in 1920. The couple soon had two children, Joseph Jr., born in 1921, and my mother, Kathryn, born in 1922.



When Kathryn was still a toddler, Sheldon fell ill, suffering from a lung infection brought on by being gassed in the trenches in France during the war. He was hospitalized 50 miles (80 km) from the family home in Riverside, California, at Sawtelle Veterans Hospital in Los Angeles. During his recuperation, his occupational therapy of choice was knitting. Back at home, Grace returned to teaching school, and Sheldon's parents moved in to take care of the children. The story ends happily as Sheldon eventually recovered and rejoined his family. He went on to serve as mayor of Riverside in the late 1920s and early 1930s and as state commander of the American Legion in 1937.

I was a teenager in 1966 when my grandfather died, but I remember him as a man of great wit and charm. He seemed to be one of those people who do many things well: after he retired as vice-president of a title insurance company in 1956, he took up woodworking and made a maple desk for me that I still have. I, therefore, was not too surprised when my mom mentioned that he had also taken a turn at knitting. What did surprise me was that Mom still had the shawl he had knitted for her mother, Grace, and that it was far from the gray serviceable triangle I had pictured. Instead, Sheldon had crafted a snappy striped shawl in shades of coral and aqua fitted with a pocket and a clever twisted tassel finish. (He also made a shawl for his sister, Esther Hentschke.) The shawl was part of Mom's childhood home, at first draped across a chair or other piece of furniture but eventually stored in the cedar chest where my grandmother kept family treasures. Its excellent condition indicates the care with which it was treated over the years.

Recently, Mom passed the shawl on to me. When she pulled it out of the drawer in her nightstand, I knew



Photograph of Joseph Sheldon Long in his Army uniform.

Photographer and location unknown.

Circa 1917.

Photograph courtesy of the author.

Shawl knitted by the author's grandfather, Joseph Sheldon Long. California.

Circa 1924.

Photograph by Joe Coca.

immediately that it was a treasured keepsake and that it was only fitting that I knit her a replica.

The original shawl is worked in a twisted knit-and-purl rib stitch. As I knitted swatches to duplicate the pattern, I wondered how a novice knitter would have maneuvered his way through the literal twists and turns of the stitches. I learned that some knitters work their stitches twisted as a manner of course in a style called Eastern knitting. Perhaps Sheldon learned to knit using this method, so for him it would have been nothing special, just plain knitting. Because this twisted style is unfamiliar to me, I chose to knit my version in a Mistake Rib pattern that echoes the strong columns of knit stitches in the original.

Its hand, luster, and a burn test suggest that the original shawl is made of rayon. Rayon, a man-made cellulose fiber, was produced commercially in the United States starting about 1911. It was called “artificial silk” until acquiring the moniker of “rayon” in 1924. Many 1920s knitting patterns call for artificial silk yarn. The colors in the shawl reflect the colorful palette that burst forth during that decade as a reaction to the somber khakis and olives that characterized knitting for the soldiers during the war years. Fashions in a 1923 issue of *Harper’s Bazaar*, for example, sport combinations of green and rose; maize, magenta, and rose; brown, mustard, and mauve; and dark wine combined with enamel-like blue and yellow. Even children’s knitwear is brightly colored: The copy for a little girl’s knitted dress advises, “If she would be truly chic let her wear shrimp-pink.”

I am thrilled to have a memento from my grandfather that he made during a crucial time in his life. Reflecting on the circumstances of its origin, I am struck now by the double link that was forged during his time in the hospital. The first is the close relationship that my mother developed with her own Grandpa Long (Sheldon’s father), which began when her grand-

parents came to stay while Sheldon convalesced. The second, of course, is my own connection with my Grandfather Sheldon, brought to light with the shawl that he knitted more than eighty years ago. In turn, I like to think that I am forging a link with future generations with the things I knit today. ❖

FURTHER READING

- Collier, Billie J., and Phyllis G. Tortora. *Understanding Textiles*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000.
- Gibson-Roberts, Pricilla. “Making Stitches: A Multicultural Approach.” *Interweave Knits*, Fall 2000.
- MacDonald, Anne L. *No Idle Hands: A Social History of American Knitting*. New York: Ballentine Books, 1990.
- Modesitt, Annie. *Confessions of a Knitting Heretic*. South Orange, New Jersey: MadeKnit Press, 2004.



Photograph of Kathryn with her grandfather, Joseph B. Long. Photographer and location unknown. Circa 1923.

Photograph courtesy of the author.

Knit an “All Shall Be Well” Shawl

JACQUELINE BLIX

As I knit my version of my grandfather’s shawl, I found a quote running through my mind from Julian of Norwich (1342–circa 1416), an English mystic. She acknowledges the pain in life and then adds, “But all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.” This comforting message spoke to me not only of the healing power of working with my hands, but also the hope with which I am sure my grandfather, Sheldon, knit his own shawls.

Photograph of Joseph Sheldon Long with his children: the author’s mother, Kathryn, and her brother, Joe. Photographer and location unknown. Circa 1925.

Photograph courtesy of the author.



Mistake Rib Pattern Stitch (multiple of 4 sts plus 3)

Row 1 and all subsequent rows: *K2, p2; rep from * to last 3 sts, end k2, p1.

INSTRUCTIONS

Notes: The rib pattern produces fabric that looks the same on both sides. Choose one side to be the RS, and change colors consistently, always beginning the new color by starting with a RS row. You may find it helpful to mark the RS with contrasting scrap yarn or a safety pin to identify it more easily.

Shawl

With MC, CO 111 sts. Introducing each new color beg with a RS row (see Notes), work rib pattern in stripes as follows:

9 inches (22.9 cm) MC, 2¼ inches (5.7 cm) CC, 1 inch (2.5 cm) MC, 2¼ inches (5.7 cm) CC, 40 inches (101.6 cm) MC, 2¼ inches (5.7 cm) CC, 1 inch (2.5 cm) MC, 2¼ inches (5.7 cm) CC, 9 inches (22.9 cm) MC—piece measures

MATERIALS

Cascade 220 (worsted weight), 100% wool yarn, 220 yards (201 m)/100 g skein, 5 skeins of #8888 periwinkle (main color)

Cascade 220 Quatro (worsted weight), 100% wool yarn, 220 yards (201 m)/100 g skein, 2

skeins of #5016 pale lilac (contrasting color)

Needles, size 9 (5.5 mm), 24 inch (61.0 cm) or longer or size needed to obtain gauge

Crochet hook, size I/9 (5.5 mm)
Tapestry needle

Materials are available at yarn stores or from mail-order or online resources.

Finished size: About 69 x 15½ inches (175 x 39 cm), excluding fringe

Gauge: 28 sts and 26 rows = 4 inches (10.2 cm), unblocked

ABBREVIATIONS


beg—beginning
BO—bind off
CO—cast on

CC—contrast color
dec—decreasing
k—knit

MC—main color
p—purl
rep—repeat

RS—right side
st(s)—stitch(es)

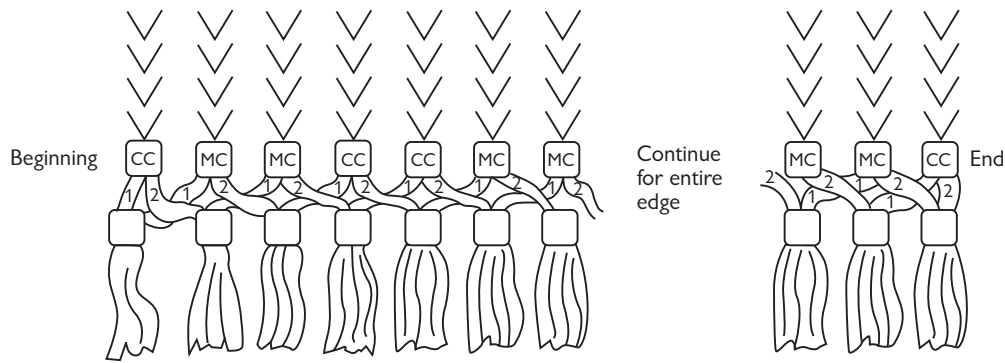
St st—stockinette stitch
WS—wrong side

A vibrant blue and purple knitted shawl is draped over a light-colored upholstered chair with a dark wood frame. The shawl features a wide, horizontal band of purple and pinkish-purple stripes across its center. The bottom edge is finished with a thick, braided fringe in alternating blue and purple strands. The background shows a window with vertical blinds, through which some light is visible.

Jacqueline Blix's modern
adaptation of a shawl her
grandfather knitted while
convalescing from an
injury he received during
World War I.

Photograph by Joe Coca.

Double-Knot Fringe



about 69 inches (175 cm) from CO. BO all sts in pattern. Weave in ends.

Pocket

CO 27 sts with CC. Work rib pattern in stripes as follows, beg each new color with a RS row as for shawl: 2¼ inches (5.7 cm) CC, 1 inch (2.5 cm) MC, 2¼ inches (5.7 cm) CC. Beg on a RS row, p 2 rows for fold line. K next row, dec a total of 5 sts—22 sts. Work in St st (k on RS rows, p on WS rows) for about 1½ inches (4 cm) for facing at top edge of pocket. BO all sts. Weave in ends.

Block the pocket. Make the pocket tassel by cutting 4 12-inch (30.5-cm) strands of each color. Knot the strands together in the middle using a square knot (tied right strands over left, then left strands over right). Adjust strands into pleasing arrangement and trim to desired length. Center the knot on MC pocket stripe on RS of the pocket as shown, sew the tassel in place with yarn threaded on the tapestry needle, and weave in sewing tails on WS. Fold the top edge of the pocket down along the fold line, and sew the facing to the inside of the pocket using a 12-inch (30.5-cm) length of yarn and the tapestry needle. Center the pocket in the middle of the shawl aligning the stripe patterns and sew the pocket in place around the sides and bottom.

Double-Knot Fringe

Note: The shawl is trimmed on each end with 28 knots of fringe, 14 each MC and CC. The color order of the knots begins with 1 knot of CC at the edge, followed by (2 knots MC, 2 knots CC) 6 times, ending with 2 knots MC, 1 knot CC at other edge.

Align each fringe knot with a column of k sts across the CO or BO edge of the shawl; there will be 27 k columns, so the last knot corresponds to the 3 stitches at the end of the row.

For each fringe knot, cut 8 strands of yarn 18 inches (45.7 cm) long. Fold the 8 strands in half to create a loop at one end. With RS of shawl facing and beg at one side, insert the crochet hook into the edge of the shawl from the back to the front about 1 row up from the end of the shawl. Draw the fringe loop through from front to back, then pass the ends of the fringe knot through the loop, and snug the knot into place against the edge of the shawl so that the fringe ends are even. Continue in this manner, following the color order given above.

When all the fringe knots are in place, beg at the left edge of the shawl, divide the first CC and MC knots into two halves of 8 strands each, and flip the right-hand halves up and out of the way on the surface of the shawl. Knot the left-hand section of the first CC fringe to the left-hand section of the adjoining MC fringe (both marked 1 in the illustration above) about 1 inch (3 cm) below the original knot. Divide the next MC knot (third knot from the left edge) into two halves of 8 strands each, again placing the right-hand section out of the way. Bring the right-hand section of first CC knot (marked 2 in the illustration) down and *over* the MC strands of the previous knot, and tie it to the left-hand half of the second MC knot. Continue in this fashion, using the illustration as a guide. Trim the fringe ends even. Rep for other end.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND DESIGNER. *Jacqueline Blix has been knitting for ten years and quilting for more than twenty. Her interest in history made researching this article a pleasure. Coauthor with her husband, David Heitmiller, of Getting a Life: Strategies for Simple Living Based on the Revolutionary Program for Financial Freedom, "Your Money or Your Life" (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1999), she lives in Seattle, where she has served on the board of the Pacific Northwest Needle Arts Guild and is a member of the Seattle Knitters Guild.*