Weavolution: An International Woven Revolution with a Local Home

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The world is a woven work, says Poolesville resident Claudia Segal. “Everything in our world is either woven or knitted. Everything you wear, everything made of cloth . . . there are no other choices,” she explained recently from her basement studio.

Weaving is a solitary pursuit, more so than knitting, which often assumes a communal persona—think knitting circle, for example—but even hand weavers need a voice, a place to share ideas and examples of their work. So in 2008, Ms. Segal, with founding partners Tien Chiu and Alison Giachetti, three women living in three separate parts of the United States who shared a common passion, launched Weavolution, an international online social network and gathering place for hand weavers.

“Weavolution is for anybody curious about hand weaving, anybody who is a hand weaver from beginning to expert, in any part of the world using any type of equipment,” said Ms. Segal. Today, this virtual community includes more than 6,700 weavers who have shared over 2,000 projects online.

Before Weavolution was born, there was no one place where hand weavers could do everything, including discuss their craft, post photographs and drafts or blueprints unique to their work (crochet, knitting, and other textile work use patterns, but not unique drafts). While Yahoo and other social networking groups for hand weavers have existed for some time, they often are limited in how content can be presented. For example, a user cannot add photos or attach files to one’s comments, according to Ms. Segal.

Like knitting, which has become increasingly popular, hand weaving has had a boost in recent years, but it remains a small niche in the craft world, in part because of the perception that hand weaving is an expensive and complex craft that depends on skilled use of the large floor looms. Thanks to the availability of the rigid heddle loom, a small, portable, and relatively inexpensive loom, hand weaving is gaining popularity, especially among knitters; however, Ms. Segal noted that weaving

can be done with things everyone has in his or her home. Projects can range from simple potholders to complex creations. Like other women through the ages, Ms. Segal has woven with just about everything: plastic, sticks, straw, grass, and even metal.

“Textiles have always been part of my life,” Ms. Segal recalled. Her grandfather was a tailor and taught her how to sew without patterns and without books, and she has knitted all of her life. Though she first saw a floor loom in 1974, her life circumstances weren’t such that she could pursue weaving, but knitting and sewing have always provided a lot of satisfaction. At one point, Ms. Segal even supported her family with her skill, sewing both for income and to make clothes for family.

After her early retirement from child welfare services for the Montgomery County government, Ms. Segal had an opportunity to learn how to weave, and she needed to find a craft that would be kinder to her hands. Years of knitting had led to painful tendonitis. After a weaving class or two, she became infatuated with the craft. She now teaches beginning weaving classes on a rigid heddle loom from her studio.

“I fell in love with the ability to use really simple looms to create really intricate complex cloth. There are all these complex patterns you can create with yarn and a very simple two-shaft loom.” According to Ms. Segal, weaving offers greater and broader experimentation opportunities than knitting.

Weavolution is not just the Claudia Segal show, she noted. It’s a community of volunteers who actively communicate about interests and needs at the website. While Ms. Segal continues to manage the administrative duties the website requires,

desired changes and improvements for the website come from its community. Online video web conferencing, article posts, and news are now available. “I’m very proud that the website continues to expand and thrive and that people are talking about it and meeting each other as Weavolution connections.”

When Ms. Segal isn’t weaving or maintaining Weavolution, she’s likely to be knitting for Lotsofknots, a custom-knitting business she operates with housemates Janet and David Dykstra in Poolesville. They exhibit three or four times a year, often at the historic Town Hall.

There is also a monthly knitting group that Ms. Segal started when she first moved to Poolesville seven years ago that can still be found knitting in town though now with many new faces and a new leader.

For more information about weaving classes, Weavolution, or Lotsofknots, contact Ms. Segal at Claudia@weavolution.com.