

KNIT, PURL, HEAL

How I Found Peace, Clarity and Possibility Through Knitting

"G

OT TIME for a coffee?" Missy called to me from her car in front of the high school. She was someone I'd known for most of my daughter's school life—a casual acquaintance whom I socialized with on occasion. Knowing that I had been dealing with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) for a number of years, Missy always seemed interested in hearing how I was doing.

RA had cost me my career and impacted my parenting with its accompanying pain and fatigue. I didn't enjoy discussing it, so became eager to change the subject. As we sipped our coffees, I turned the conversation to the cardboard box of old, gently worn, knitting needles that I had recently inherited from my mom. Mom had knitted my children booties and my only daughter a soft pink hat. I didn't have the heart to give the box away, knowing how important its contents had been to my mother. Missy's eyes shone as she told me that she was a lifelong knitter and would love to teach me. Figuring it would be too difficult for me to learn with my uncooperative fingers, I politely declined, acknowledging that RA was the killjoy once again.

Several months later, I was speaking with a newly acquired friend. She mentioned that Missy had offered to teach her to knit. Surprisingly, I felt my interest stir and we soon connected. The three of us began to knit each week. Very slowly and methodically, Missy taught us to do simple projects. It was hard at first; coordination had never been my strong point. Additionally, RA had affected my concentration, and learning took a great deal of mental effort.

The disease caused intense fatigue that led to mental confusion and even word loss. At the time I started knitting, I had trouble retaining the directions for more than a row at a time. As my health improved, so did my mental acuteness. I think that knitting might have stirred a portion of my brain that was left idle.

In the beginning I used my mom's needles. While they were worn and a little splintery, it felt good to know that she had once



Nancy Fagan says that knitting helps relieve stress and has positively affected her health.

When I was in the yarn store, I was stunned at the beauty there. Feeling sorry for myself because I was not in the best of health didn't seem to be an option amidst the rainbow of wools and cashmere.

held them. As I really started to embrace the craft, I bought my own circular needles, then sock needles and eventually square needles, appreciating that they are often easier for those with joint issues. I soon had a stash of yarn. The knitting and the company became part of my weekly routine—something I looked forward to.

Before I knew it, I was knitting up a

storm. It started out as a way to create little handmade gifts and soon turned into more. If I had a problem, I began knitting, and as each row blended into the one before, my problem seemed to work itself to an end.

When I was in the yarn store on one of our "field trips," I was stunned at the beauty there. Feeling sorry for myself because I was not in the best of health didn't seem to be an option amidst the rainbow of wools and cashmere. I stroked the baby llama yarn and delighted in all the textures. I found that I was able to knit despite my aching fingers. It was not easy to follow a pattern without making mistakes, but I soon realized that I learned so much from fixing those mistakes that knitting became a true-life metaphor for me.

After several months of meeting for our weekly "stitch and kvetch," I realized that my fingers were not going to cooperate forever. I went to my rheumatologist and was expecting him to give me the news that I had to stop my relatively new activity. It

JOB SEARCHING?

**WE CAN HELP...
COME IN AND ASK US HOW!**

The **Scarborough Centre for Employment Accessibility (SCEA)** is an Employment Resource Centre offering **FREE** job search support services to **ALL job seekers**.

Specialized accommodations are available for **persons with disabilities**.

Scarborough Centre for Employment Accessibility

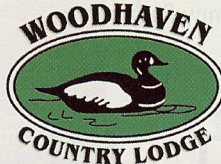
3478 Lawrence Avenue East, Unit C006
Toronto, Ontario M1H 1A9
(rear of the building, North/West corner at Markham Rd.)
Tel: 416-396-8100 TTY: 416-396-8095
Fax: 416-396-8099 Email: scea@tdsb.on.ca
www.accessibleerc.com
Hours: Monday-Friday 8:30am - 4:30pm



Employment Ontario programs are funded
in part by the Government of Canada



**EMPLOYMENT
ONTARIO**



Woodhaven Country Lodge on Sandy Lake

**A four season small lodge
and one rental cottage**

- Wheelchair accessible
- Dog and child-friendly
- Fireplaces, library,
satellite TV
- Special senior
weekday rates
- Group rates, meal plans

Tel.: 1-866-416-9663

E-mail:

Woodhaven@sympatico.ca

**or visit our website at
Woodhavencountrylodge.com**

made me sad because I was really engaged and knew that knitting was working a part of my brain that had been stagnant.

When I told the doctor my issue, he offered me a series of injections that would allow me to knit again with minimal pain. The injections consisted of small syringes laced with a corticosteroid and local anaesthetic, inserted into the palms of my hands, near my fingers. The discomfort from the needles was brief, and over the next week my fingers started to improve. My doctor intuitively understood that I had changed enough of my life for RA, and it was time to take control and not allow it to take any more away from me—again, a life metaphor.

And so it continues...perhaps not every day but as a frequent pastime that results in lovely scarves, cute washcloths and cool socks. I can see myself making my grandchild a soft little hat just like my mom did for my daughter. It's a pleasant part of my life that involves three women who are walking parallel, trying to maintain some sort of balanced centre as our children grow away from us in a natural order. We sit and knit and chat for a few hours each week. Maybe one of us stays quieter on some weeks as a problem works itself out with each knit, purl and yarnover. We drink tea from cups embossed with images of the Madonna knitting and we trade our frustrations and share our joys while creating memories from beautiful yarn.

A connection with my mom continues, and as I see my college-bound daughter making her own scarves, I realize that it is crossing generations. One day she will inherit my needles and perhaps pass them down to her own daughter.

My RA has improved, and I believe that knitting has helped to relieve stress and relax my mind, playing a part in making me healthier. Socializing with these two friends has brightened my mood and compelled me to get out of the house on a regular basis, so I don't feel as isolated.

Every few months, my rheumatologist injects my hands, which allows me to continue to produce handmade memories for my family and friends while setting aside thoughts of RA for a few hours each week. I can see beyond my disease and now recognize the possibilities that are perhaps endless. It all started with a box of gently worn old knitting needles that sparked a conversation with a woman named Missy who is no longer just a casual acquaintance. Knitting is a blessing that was sent to me when all I was seeking was a cup of coffee and a little conversation.

Nancy Fagan is a registered nurse living in Massachusetts.



MedMe
Canada's Medical Marihuana Provider



**Medical Marihuana is
a safe, effective
treatment for:**
Multiple Sclerosis
Arthritis
Cancer
AIDS
Glaucoma
Epilepsy
Chronic Pain
Fibromyalgia
and more

Are you considering this safe, legal treatment? Are you having difficulty finding information? Contact us for information about Health Canada's Medical Marihuana program.

We provide legal, affordable quality medical marihuana.

Toll free: 1 866 823 6521

Email: admin@medme.ca

www.MedMe.ca

AbleNet—Tash

Talking Keyboards

ProxTalker

www.SpecialNeedsComputers.ca

Assistive Technology

Computer Ergonomics

1-877-724-4922

ReadIt CCTVs

Height Adjustable Tables

Attainment