

## **Joyce Robards**

By Suzie Jenkins

Joyce Robards is a long-time member of the Weavers' Guild of Rochester and currently serves as Class/Program Coordinator of the Guild's Weaving and Fiber Arts Center, in addition to teaching many weaving and other fiber arts classes there. New weavers frequently find their way to the Weavers' Guild of Rochester by way of Joyce's classes, which range from weaving to kumihimo, inkle weaving, wheat-weaving, and (way) beyond. The following interview appeared in the February/March 2006 issue of *The Yarn*, the newsletter of the Weavers' Guild of Rochester.

### **GETTING TO KNOW YOU**

*Where else have you lived and when did you come to Rochester?*

I'm a native Upstate New Yorker. Raised in Palmyra, undergraduate degree from SUNY Buffalo, assorted graduate courses at SUNY Brockport, Cornell, and RIT. I taught art in Carthage, then in Spencerport. Marriage and establishing a real home in Spencerport followed; then a master's degree from School for American Crafts at RIT.

*What was your first experience with weaving?*

I don't remember my first experience weaving: With paper strips in grade school? Or maybe my beloved potholder loom? I know however that loving both cloth and making things in general pre-dates my conscious memory. As to weaving on a "real" loom—with levers and heddles and beater and EVERYTHING ?? Well, I don't remember that either; but I never had long term access to anything except home-made picture frame looms until I was teaching and got my school district to invest in a Dorothy—that was a real adventure in self-education as I hadn't yet had any weaving instruction.

*Was it love at first warp?*

Well, it was love of the star-struck type—maybe more a "crush"—long before I made my first traditional warp. I do remember feeling, however, that first time I got to work on a loom at RIT, that I had finally come home. That developed into an unabated passion for the craft.

*Who were your early and/or most influential instructors?*

If you mean really most influential: it was my art teacher for almost 10 years in Palmyra and my high school math teacher. One taught me it was okay to imagine and dream; the other taught me how to think things through—that's a good double play for any kid!

My first weaving instructor was Neil Zamierowski—but only through the printed page in Step by Step Weaving. My first-in-the-flesh instructors, in school year 1969-70 gave me an adequate beginning—wedged in between campus riots and almost daily bomb scares that evacuated the building! (That was the year of Kent State and wide-spread Viet Nam protests.)

My most influential weaving instructor, however, is Elizabeth TerLouw! Betty, a long term member of WGR, took me under her tutorial wing, and operating on the premise I was helping her sort through her collection and teaching files getting ready for her move from the area to Florida, she gave me full range of her studio and notes. I'd drive from Spencerport to Brockport day after day, sort and categorize swatches and notes; ask questions and get a weaving education like no other!

And Randall Darwall!! I hope I never forget the short, but intense and intimate (only 6 people), seminar I took from him at MAFA one year—he helped me put my role as a weaver into perspective in my own life and into the scheme of the 20,000 years of weaving that had gone before; helped me to realize we must all take some responsibility if there is to be another 20,000 years.

*Do you have a favorite weave structure/fiber? What do you enjoy making?*

My most favorite weave structure is the one I'll be putting on the loom NEXT. I mostly enjoy exploration of fiber related techniques and put little emphasis on making "something useful"—my personal focus is making something interesting and beautiful, on learning something new and integrating it into my life.

*Tell us something about your teaching experiences.*

I've already talked about teaching art. I started teaching weaving with a few courses, mostly geared to color and design, at MAG, then expanded to fiber arts (knitting, kumihimo, finger braiding, inkle weaving) at RMSC—maybe in the late 70's—and took over the weaving classes at RMSC when Margaret Carr died.

I have also presented programs and workshops for several conferences and many Guilds. Most popular out-of-town choices have been Scandinavian Weaves, Lacey Weaves, and Finishing

Techniques. Non-weaving Guilds are apt to invite me for Kumihimo and knitting-especially lace knitting.

*Favorite weaver, or one whose work has influenced you:*

One single weaver?? Have to go with Randy Darwall again! His ability to meld color with structure is absolutely incredible!

*If someone thinks they might want to learn weaving, how would you advise them to start?*

Is that a trick question? Take a class: at WaFAC of course.

*What other fiber arts do you like?*

ALL of them. Even though I keep getting advice that if I really want a “name”/fame/”reputation” I’m going have to specialize. Never gonna’ happen; think my specialty is teaching.

*How did you find out about the Guild and when did you become a member?*

Heard about the Guild from Jean Vincent and Ruth Holroyd: early to mid 1970’s. All three of us were doing the same local craft show circuit.

*Other interests:*

Words: the looks of them, their meanings, their sounds, their histories, the way they communicate or obfuscate the magic they weave. And learning about and working with electronics and modern technologies as they change art and human communication at break-neck speed.

*If you had another lifetime, what would you like to do - besides weaving?*

Hmmm... Can’t make that choice until I see what options that new lifetime offers... I’d like to think I’d get a chance to do again what I’ve tried to do this time: recognize my “natural” talents, strive to develop them, and be generous in sharing them.