

Rylee's Loom

By JOE CERNIGLIA



Have you ever wondered what was going on in the many homes, farms, or private businesses you routinely drive past while traveling down a stretch of country highway? Romantic thoughts of freshly cut hay, or a hearty farm-to-table meals may creep in for a few milliseconds until more pressing concerns crowd them back out. Imagine what may loom bright were you to summon the courage and follow your curiosity, engaging vulnerability while stopping to knock at that stranger's idyllic barnyard door.

Photographer Tim Mayer is one such explorer who, for the subjects of his photos, summons the courage to make regular stops at places others choose to drive past. Thus, he happened upon a warm story weaving mentorship and wisdom, gathering the sum of its threads to engage our curiosity.

The farm and cattle belong to Art and Rheta Richardson. The story behind the farm is an awesome tale for another day. Art is a retired Industrial Arts teacher, who long ago determined to leave the world a better place by making a positive impact on those who help him on the farm. And

so it was that he met a 13-year-old girl, whose brother and father have both worked on the Richardson farm, when she came to assist with chores one day. What now looms behind his shed doors is a testament to home spun craftsmanship, passed down through generations.

"Why a loom?" I asked now 14-year-old Rylee. "Because of the fiber art I do with the wool my Targee sheep flock provides me. I can now weave rugs and do more with it."

Targee sheep?

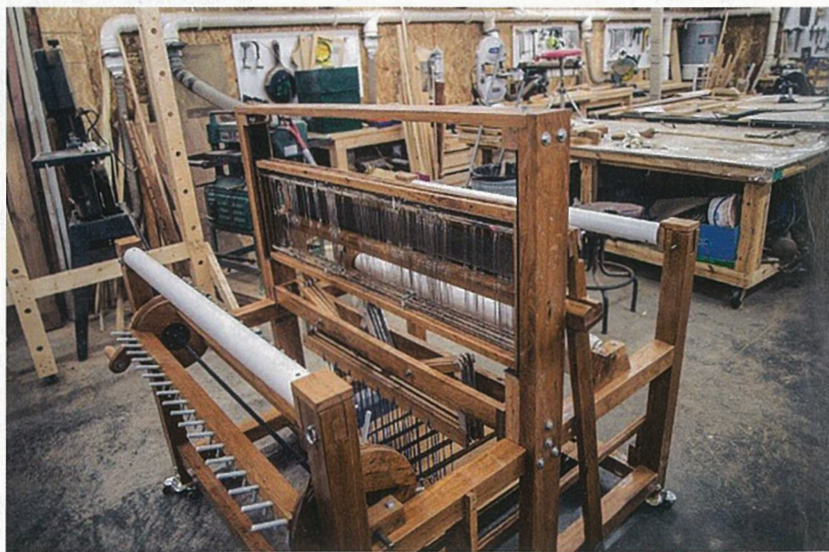
"I won them from a national composition contest 4-H sponsored, which my mom encouraged me to enter as a source of wool for our crafts."

So, when Art encouraged her to "build something," as is a requirement for those who help him on the farm, she looked for a way to weave the soft, curly wool she shears from her prized sheep into larger handcrafted treasures. Rylee also shared that her high school's shop teachers are unaware of what she and Art have created. Just think about their surprise when an unassuming student passes by their shop classroom doors possessing her extraordinary creation.

Rylee's loom is a little shorter than a double bed. The cherry wood used to construct it came from the

Richardson's land. Rylee liked learning how to work through problems, adjust to situations, and persevere. She particularly enjoys how weaving takes an otherwise underappreciated byproduct that many simply discard and turns it into something of lasting value.

Consider the next time you're rolling past one of those nondescript country driveways, and pondering what may be inside that unassuming barn, what



stories there are to be discovered. They may be woven, if you just have the courage to stop and get out of the car to knock. It may end up, as Rylee hopes others find in her endeavors, the start to your own handmade delight.

Joseph Cerniglia enjoys the extraordinary in our average lives. He is a husband and father, making average observations from Neenah, Wisconsin.