

# Weaving through generations

Blackmore has sold handmade Crow Hill Rugs for over 30 years

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Tucked in the back of Carol Blackmore's home in Chapel Hill is a rug weaving workshop that houses a 10-foot wide Swedish Glimakra Sovereign loom that she's owned for 22 years.

On her back porch lie several 20-gallon trash bins and 25-gallon blue tubs that are stacked on shelves from a grocery store – all of them packed with colorful fabrics. Blackmore's passion for rug weaving began 53 years ago when her father made a small potholder loom made of plywood and small-headed finishing nails.

"The one you can buy from the store wasn't really adequate for me," Blackmore said. "I told (my dad) how I wanted it and what would make it work better. I would say (my parents) didn't understand why I was so crazy about weaving, but they supplied equipment along the way."

Blackmore said she has been selling her rugs for over 30 years. Her business is named Crow Hill Rugs after a community in upstate New York where she used to live. In 2004, she began selling her rugs at the Carrboro Farmers' Market.

## The Student

She began to hone her craft in the summer of 1975 after her junior year of high school.

During that summer, she worked on a pig farm in Union City, Indiana. In exchange for her work, she received instruction on a Macomber floor loom from Betsy Peacock, a mentor and maternal figure.

Her responsibilities on the farm included haying and assisting with cultivation.

"There are volunteer soybean plants that come up in the corn and vice versa, so I spent a lot of days just walking out in the soy fields pulling out indi-



Carol Blackmore uses a loom in her makeshift workshop of Crow Hill Rugs, where she is surrounded by boxes of fabric. (Staff photo by Ben Coley).

vidual cornstalks," she said. "When I had days off, or when I was letting my blisters heal from the haying, (Peacock) taught me more of the mechanics of that loom."

Blackmore said that Peacock was such a strong figure in her life that she eventually modeled her parenting style after Peacock.

## Family Project

All four of her children – Melody, Ivy, Collin and Asher – were involved in the rug-weaving process.

While she lived in upstate New York, her children would help her find material in thrift stores located in church basements. During a couple of trips, she brought a GMC pick-up truck, and they would fill the truck bed with loads of material.

Blackmore said that her children loved to use the fabric for entertainment.

"As they were going through the stuff, they would find things that they wanted like for dress-up, and they'd stick it away," she said. "I kept a lot of wigs, old glasses, makeup and stuff. And they would go off and get dressed up. And they'd spend the rest of the day running around like that."

## Going Global

Years later, her second-oldest daugh-

ter, Ivy, helped her turn the rug weaving passion into a global affair.

In 2009, Ivy was serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in El Ocotil, Nicaragua. At the time, Ivy said she was looking for a way to create another source of income for the natives.

"Their incomes are tied to their land," Ivy said. "So I wanted to find some other type of income that could be a little more predictable. With agriculture, you're very dependent on whether it rains or it doesn't rain – stuff like that."

In response, Blackmore suggested a rug-weaving business for the women.

Later that year, Blackmore and Ivy founded a rug weaving cooperative that is currently known as Nica Tejidos, a name which Ivy translates to "Nicaraguan Weaving."

"They've taken what we've taught them and put their own little spin on it," Ivy said. "Now there are some technique and designs that they use where my mom's like, 'Well, maybe I should try that!'"

## Carrboro Market

On a more local scale, Blackmore said several clients have sought her rugs over the years.

Eileen McGrath, a retired librarian,

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said she met Blackmore at the Farmers' Market, and she eventually bought two small rugs and four large rugs.

McGrath said she enjoys Blackmore's custom rugs, and so does her cat, Walter.

"(Walter's) a fairly sizable cat, and he could wrap himself up in the rug and tear at it," McGrath explained. "But (Blackmore) was great about it. I was getting another rug made, and I mentioned how Walter had torn this one up a little bit. She said, 'This never happened before, but bring the rug back, and I will fix it.' And she did."

Blackmore said that many people are interested in weaving because they miss the feeling of creating something, such as building a house.

After three decades of accumulating fabric and selling rugs, Blackmore has managed to fill that void, and she said anyone has the ability to do the same.

"They don't really know how to put (the missing feeling) into words. But they see the pile of rugs there, and it's like, 'Oh my god, what is it that you're doing?! Can I do it too?' And I say yes."