



Susan Dollar

Tatter

Susan learned to tat from her eighty-eight-year-old maternal aunt. She had never seen tatting before watching her aunt. Ms. Dollar, who was fascinated by the craft, asked her aunt to teach her to tat. Susan learned the basic knot in a week, but she said it took six months of practice before she was ready to try a pattern. She says, "There's not a lot going on in Itta Bena, Mississippi so you learn to tat and chat at the same time."

Tatting has been handed down by the maternal aunts in Susan Dollar's family for a number of generations. Ms. Murphy "Sister;" her sister Willie, who is now deceased and known as "Bibi;" were taught to tat by their great-aunts. Each summer Sister and Bibi's great-aunts came to stay with the girls and their family, and they used this time to teach them to tat. Sister and Bibi's father rode his horse to town to buy the girls their first tatting shuttles. Susan now has possession of her aunt's first tatting shuttle. Ms. Dollar plans to carry on her family's "aunt tradition" by teaching her young nephew who has shown interest in learning to tat.

Tatting is a form of lace made by tying knots in thread with a shuttle. Some believe it originated from knots that fishermen tied in their nets. Tatting is known as "poor man's lace" because it is inexpensive to produce. A tatter only needs thread, a shuttle, and a pair of scissors to create a beautiful piece of lace.

Shuttles are made from many materials. Sister and Bibi's first shuttle, circa 1915, were made of celluloid. Later shuttles were made from metal while most modern shuttles are made of plastic and resemble the early celluloid versions. Ms. Dollar's shuttle collection contains wooden, horn, and bamboo shuttles.

Patterns may be the most creative aspect of the craft. Ms. Dollar and Ms. Murphy have invented a way to keep up with all of the designs they tat. They each have a book containing a photocopy of each design they use and the pattern directions for recreating it. The women find designs in books, leaflets, and in old pieces of tatting they find in antique shops and museums. Ms. Murphy likes to make changes in these patterns to enhance their design or to make them more appropriate for her uses. She then writes these improved patterns in her book and shares them with Susan, who prefers the traditional patterns because of their link to the past. She also prefers to tat bookmarks because of her love for books

and the utilitarian qualities of the finished work. Susan likes to experiment with coloring her thread with natural dyes such as tea and red cabbage. Ms. Dollar has participated in the Natchitoches-NSU Folk Festival where she was entered into the Louisiana Folklife Center's Hall of Master Folk Artists in 1999.

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