

Raili Cohen



Raili Cohen has become a self proclaimed “knitting machine” for several hours each day within the warm and cozy walls of her 200 year old farmhouse on Bald Mountain Road in Bernardston. A walk through her back yard (on snowshoes, most likely, for this time of year) would bring you to modern traffic whizzing along on busy Interstate 91, but in Raili’s kitchen, with the deep farmhouse sink surrounded by comfortably worn old wooden shelves and drawers (somehow this spot escaped the fanatical drive towards modernity in 1950’s kitchen renovations that replaced this type arrangement with chrome and formica counter/cupboard combos) there exists an oasis of old world charm. topped off by a basket of soft and vibrantly colored wool. Raili’s infectious laugh intersperses her narrative told with a delightful Finnish accent. Says Raili, “This house is my retreat, my world; it is totally where I am most comfortable... I am always happy to be home.”

In this house, where warm woolens are contentedly generated on a daily basis, Raili also writes in a journal every morning--a ritual to clear her psychic pipes. She has also been engaged in the process of creating a family history for her sons, and re-examining the past as represented in the journals she has kept all her life. Looking back sometimes causes her to cringe at the actions of her younger self, and she ended up destroying one notebook that she didn’t



want her heirs to read.

Knitting, writing, reflecting; caring for house, car, self; nourishing friendships and going on fun poke-about journeys to treasure troves such as the Experienced Goods thrift shop in Brattleboro; and enjoying the role of shop keeper during monthly work shifts at the Shelburne Arts Coop, give her much satisfaction in her 7th decade.

Raili was herself a caretaker for the elderly and a licensed social worker for ten years. In a serendipitous turn of events, she connected with Michael and Tony of the Green Emporium restaurant in Colrain and ended up cooking for them. She had asked them on a whim if they needed help, and became part of the adventure as the two partners, who also had no prior restaurant experience, tried to figure out what to do.

Growing up in the post-war years in Finland, Raili learned to knit in grade school because it was something everyone did out of necessity. Sweaters were unraveled and reknitted, everyone constantly plying their needles while riding on public transport, and Raili admits to being a terrible knitter in those days. She preferred to sing and performed as often as she could, even getting censored at 12 years old for singing “Kiss of Fire” (teacher deemed this song inappropriate for her age).



After graduation, she took receptionist jobs in England and Europe, attending parties and having adventures, and eventually took an opportunity to move to the US. She lived in NYC and worked at "George Jenson's Furniture Showroom" where she met her ex-husband, Arthur. In some curious way that my coffee buzzed brain didn't quite follow, a trail of yarn led the couple to Bernardston, where they have both resided for almost 50 years.

Raili makes fingerless gloves, hats for all ages, wee sweaters, and sometimes "scarf-ey things" out of inventive yarn mixtures. She takes knitting commissions, and also creates pastel animal portraits upon request. The knitting evolves as she tries various items to sell; she doesn't want it to become something too business-like -- that would add



an anxious or fretful element to her days.

Nancy Baker introduced Raili to the Coop. At first she was a holiday time only member, but has been a full working member for several years of the "5-6-7-8 year?" total. "I can be very content in my own company for quite a while, but you have to have friends, social interactions, or you go cuckoo... I like working at the store, I see people I know, it's full of activity and I like that the interaction is structured, it makes it easier," summed up Raili.