

Interview of Mrs. Donna Lehto and Jack Henkala

Interviewer: Evelyn Bendick

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EB: This is Evelyn Bendick and I'm about to interview Mrs. Donna Lehto about making rag rugs. Could you tell me your name?

DL: Donna Lehto.

EB: Okay. Have you lived here all your life, in Crystal Falls?

DL: Most of it. We were gone for 9 years. We lived in Illinois.

EB: Okay, nine years in Illinois. Like I told Steve earlier, we're here today talking about how you came to start making rag rugs and a little bit about them. When did you learn how to make them?

DL: I have to remember now...about 15 or 16 years.

EB: Okay. How did you learn?

DL: I had a lady friend that showed me how. She had been doing it for years. I was always kind of interested in doing rag rugs and I got the opportunity to buy a loom and she agreed to show me how and teach me how to do it. I've been doing it ever since.

EB: Oh. There's one thing that the _____ was asking about was the nationalities of people who make rag rugs. It sounded to me like he has found a lot of Finnish people make rag rugs. Was this woman that taught you a Finnish lady?

DL: Yes. It's mostly Finnish people, but I'm not Finnish.

EB: You're not Finnish. But she is.

DL: She doesn't do it anymore.

EB: But she taught you. How did you buy a loom? How do you find places to buy them?

DL: Through word of mouth. Another friend of mine knew of a lady that was selling her loom and gave me a call. I went and looked at it and bought it. That's how I got my first one.

EB: Are they expensive? Or at that time?

DL: Well all the looms that I have are all used ones. They're old. So I didn't pay a lot for them. But they can be very expensive depending on what you get.

EB: Is it a hobby that a lot of people have around here?

DL: No.

EB: So these looms, does anything ever go wrong on them? How do you get...

DL: All the time.

EB: How do you get them fixed?

DL: My husband used to do it. He used to fix them for me whenever anything went wrong. But now he had a stroke 3 ½ years ago. He can't do a lot of that kind of stuff anymore. I just kind of pray that they stay together.

EB: Okay. Are there catalogs you can order looms from?

DL: Oh yes. There's books you can order looms from. Books on how to do it and different ways of doing them. Ideas and things like that.

EB: How would you find information like that? Libraries?

DL: Probably, or from anybody that is doing weaving. There's not a lot of people anymore around here that are doing it because it's all older people and they've gotten to the point that they can't do it or don't want to do it anymore. There's not a lot of younger people taking it up anymore.

EB: That was something I was going to ask you a bit later on too, but I could probably ask you now. Do you think that has something to do with the price of material? How do you get your rags? Do you use real rags?

DL: I use real rags. Old clothes, anything.

EB: Stuff that you have? Or do you have to go out to St. Vinnies to buy the material?

DL: I get a lot of stuff from St. Vinnies, things that they can't sell they give away. They'll give to me for carpets. Friends are always saving things for me. I had a lady call me today that is giving up weaving and she has a lot of rags all cut. They're not sewed. She just wants to get rid of them. So tomorrow night I'm going to go and pick them up and work with them. So it's a lot of word of mouth.

EB: From people who make them.

DL: And where you get your rags from. Rather than throw them out people would rather give them to somebody that can use them.

EB: Sure.

DL: Old sheets, curtains, drapes, you can use a lot of different things.

EB: So you never have to pay for material.

DL: Sometimes.

EB: Sometimes you do. But you try...

DL: Through the company I order my warp from, I can buy rags through them.

EB: What's a warp?

DL: That's the strings that go through the loom. Then you have all brand new material.

EB: Okay. That's probably a lot more expensive than trying to find your own.

DL: Yes.

EB: Let's see, what else was I going to ask you here. Can you explain the process of making a rag rug? I know that first you get the material. It has to be cut.

DL: If you have a shirt or something, it has to be cut down into flat pieces. You take away all the seams and stuff like that. Then you strip it and cut into strips. Then you sew them together.

EB: My Mom knows a little about rag rugs, but not much. Something about 2 inches? The strips have to be a certain size?

DL: Not really. It depends on the thickness of the material. Anywhere from $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch to $1\frac{1}{2}$ or 2 inches for thinner material.

EB: And when you sew them together, how long do you have to sew them together to make the strip?

DL: I have a lady that cuts and sews for me and she does them into $2\frac{1}{2}$ long balls. She sews strips together until she has $2\frac{1}{2}$ balls.

EB: From that ball what happens?

DL: Then you can start to weave. First you have to set up your machine. You have to warp it. You measure off your warp as long as you want. Then you have to tie the knots onto the machine.

EB: Now the warp, that's the strings that go in between the rags.

DL: Yes.

EB: So you have to decide ahead of time exactly how long and wide? Or can you only make them a certain width?

DL: You can only make them a certain width.

EB: But you get to decide on the length.

DL: Yes. Any length.

EB: So you do that first. Then you weave the rags in between the strings?

DL: I could probably show you a little easier.

EB: Yes. I know you mentioned you have a couple looms downstairs. I'd like to see one.

DL: Six more.

EB: Good. Let's take a look at them after a while. I was going to try to ask you some questions about them. One thing I was curious about, what is the longest rug?

DL: The longest rug I've ever made was 12 feet long.

EB: What was that for?

DL: A lady wanted it for a runner in a hallway.

EB: And that was the longest. I had these questions all in a order, but they seem to be coming and going. With these rag rugs that you make, I know that you sell them. So you make them mostly for friends or for sale?

DL: Well it's more a hobby than anything else. But I sell them too.

EB: What's a common size? 12 feet is the longest. What do people normally ask for? What do you normally make?

DL: About the normal size is 4 feet.

EB: How do you price them?

DL: By the inch.

EB: How much do you charge?

DL: I charge 55 cents an inch.

EB: Okay. Has that gone up in the years that you've done it?

DL: Oh yes.

EB: Do you remember how much when you first started?

DL: It was something like maybe 30 cents an inch when I started. 25 or 30 cents an inch.

EB: And it's gone up since then.

DL: Yes. Because your warp gets more expensive. I have a lady that cuts and sews for me, so I pay her.

EB: Do you do any of the cutting and sewing yourself?

DL: I do some, yes.

EB: But mostly this woman does that for you.

DL: Yes, because I also have a full-time job.

EB: So this lady, do you pay her by the hour or by the ball?

DL: I pay her by the pound. I pay her \$2 a pound.

EB: Alright. That's all kind of interesting. How many rag rugs have you made? Do you know?

DL: Probably in the neighborhood of 2,000.

EB: Do you make a certain number per year?

DL: No, just what I have time for. I try to keep track. When I do carpets, when I do a roll of carpets, it's usually like 10 rolls. Ten carpets on a roll. I don't do just one carpet at a time.

EB: Oh, so you do them all long. Then how do you separate them?

DL: I separate them, I have newspapers that I use, because then you have the fringe. So I have newspaper the right width and put newspaper in between each one. Then I just have to cut them apart when I take them off the loom. Then you have to tie the ends.

EB: Yes, I was looking at the ones in your house. That brings me to lots of other questions that I wanted to ask you. With the fabrics, how do you decide what to do? Do you go by colors?

DL: Mostly by colors.

EB: You match them up ahead of time and see what you're going to use. How many of those 2 ½ pound balls do you have to use to make the average 4 foot rug?

DL: About 2 pounds will make a 4 foot rug.

EB: I've spent a little bit of time with some people in the Green Bay area who were Belgians and they learned how to make rag rugs too. I went to a craft show this summer and a couple of these ladies were selling rag rugs and that got me thinking about a couple different questions about material. Is there any ideal material that you use?

DL: Cotton is about the best. Or wool. Wool is the best carpet.

EB: Because it lasts longer or is it easier to work with?

DL: It lasts longer. People seem to like the wool carpets. But it's hard to come by wool.

EB: Is that because people are wearing less wool?

DL: Yes.

EB: So it's harder to find. I've seen rag rugs made out of denim? Do you do that?

DL: Yes.

EB: And what is that for? Do they last longer?

DL: They're more durable.

EB: Are they hard to work with when you get it into the strips and stuff?

DL: No.

EB: How about some other fabrics? Chenille?

DL: Chenille is real popular.

EB: Why is that popular?

DL: They like the looks of it. But that's another that's hard to come by.

EB: And the feel.

DL: Yes.

EB: I was kind of curious, with it being hard to come by, does it have to do with bed spreads and curtains less and less made out of chenille.

DL: Yes. So it's hard to come by.

EB: I was talking to one lady and she said that a lot of bed spreads and curtains have turned into rag rugs. But now it's been so many years since that was popular that it's hard to find. Do you charge more for those kinds of carpets? Or does it always go by 55 cents an inch?

DL: Some people do, I don't.

EB: I did stop into Wicks Woods. I know you take your rugs there to sell. I saw one there made out of bread bags which I didn't know anything about. Can you tell me a little about that?

DL: It's about the same as working with rags. You sew them together.

EB: And you use bread bags. How did you get that idea?

DL: Somebody told me about it. People didn't like them so I didn't make too many of them.

EB: I think they're real interesting. Do they work in the loom just as well?

DL: Yes.

EB: They mentioned to me in the store that that's the type of carpet people like to use in the kitchen for spills. It's easier to wipe them up.

DL: Yes.

EB: I thought those were pretty nice. A couple other materials I was interested in, corduroy? Is that something people use for rugs?

DL: That is mixed in with the cotton. It's good.

EB: And you've done those.

DL: Yes.

EB: One woman I was speaking to said she one time used nylon stockings.

DL: Some people do, I never have.

EB: Never have. But when you make the rag rugs you can use any kind of material. It doesn't matter if it's stretchy or strong.

DL: Yes. But you have to be careful with stretchy material. You don't want to stretch it out when you're weaving it.

EB: So the people that put the ball together have to make sure it's a loose ball.

DL: No, when you're weaving it you have to be careful not to stretch it.

EB: Then what would happen?

DL: The carpet would bunch up when it goes back down.

EB: Have you ever had that happen?

DL: No.

EB: You've known to be careful. I suppose with some of the polyesters that could happen?

DL: Not with polyester, no.

EB: Stretchy cottons?

DL: You have to be real careful not to mix wool and cotton together because wool will shrink and then you have bunched up carpets. If you're going to work with wool it has to be all wool. You can't mix it.

EB: So that's one thing you can't mix. The rest of the stuff you can mix and match. Do people use the rag rugs a lot for certain areas? Are they usually used for kitchens or bathrooms?

DL: They use them anywhere.

EB: Okay, what else was I going to ask you. I was going to ask if you have any helpers. You've got the one woman that helps with the balls and your husband used to help you with the looms. Otherwise you've done it yourself?

DL: All mine.

EB: And a lot of work. Oh, before I started to tape and I was walking in here, I saw that you were making mud rugs. Is there anything else you make with the looms?

DL: Place mats.

EB: And they all charge the same?

DL: No, different prices for those. I sell the mud rugs for a dollar a piece.

EB: And the place mats?

DL: \$4.25 each.

EB: And the bath mats same as the rugs?

DL: Those I sell \$10 a piece.

EB: Do you make those the same as the rugs or do you use different material?

DL: I use different material with those. They are a soft carpet. Those I buy. It's the tops of socks and they are a loop and you loop them together. That's what I make the bath mats out of.

EB: And you buy that through that company?

DL: Yes.

EB: So you get a bunch of those loop them together...I was just thinking of something else to ask and I can't remember what it was. Oh, do you sell your rugs at any other place? Have you ever taken them to a craft show?

DL: No.

EB: You just take them to Wicks Wood and they sell them for you. Okay. And do you mostly make them for friends or yourself?

DL: For anybody.

EB: Oh Now I remember. How long does it take you to make a rug?

DL: If you figured it out right from the very beginning to the very end, it probably takes about 24 hours for one rug.

EB: And that would be cutting rags...

DL: Sew them, warp your machine, wind it on, weave them, finish them off, yes. There's a lot of work in them.

EB: My next question was, do you ever custom make them?

DL: I have, but I don't do it anymore.

EB: People would call and ask for a specific...

DL: Colors and stuff, that's too hard to match colors.

EB: when you make the rugs, this one in the picture is reds and whites...do you do it like that or do you do some that are really varied?

DL: All different colors.

EB: What's your favorite kind to make?

DL: I enjoy doing all of them.

EB: Is there any one that seems to be more popular than the others?

DL: Not really. Well the denim rugs are probably the most popular.

EB: Fringe was another question I was going to ask you about. When I was talking to some women in Green Bay they no longer make fringe on their rugs. They weave that in.

DL: You don't have to. You can make it so it doesn't have the strings. I can do that.

EB: Do people like that more or less or does it matter?

DL: Most people like the fringe around here.

EB: I had never seen them before without fringe. We used to have rag rugs in our house that we had forever. My Mom said they were her mother's rugs. They had fringe. I was really surprised to see the ones without it. You've made these for 15 or 16 years. Have you wore out a rug yet?

DL: Oh yes. They last a long time though if you take care of them properly. They'll last 7-10 years.

EB: How do you wash them?

DL: I just throw them in the washer and dryer.

EB: And they come out fine. And with the wool ones?

DL: Same thing.

EB: Well what I think we'll do is stop the tape and go downstairs and look at your looms. Then we'll start it again and I'll ask you a few more questions.

BREAK IN TAPE

EB: I'll just start the tape again. We're in your basement looking at your looms. This one's for place mats. How much do you pay for these things.

DL: They vary in price. They really do. It depends on what you're looking for.

EB: Is this one a pretty expensive one? It looks pretty new.

DL: This one was a table model. Theses I paid about \$300 a piece for. All these older ones, the used ones, I only paid \$100 for. If you were to buy they brand new, they'd be a lot more.

Sound on tape is bad.

DL: I can measure off 44yards.

EB: They come like that when you order them?

DL: No they come all individual. I have to put them all together. They don't give you any break.

EB: And these over here are the material that has been put together. This must be old sheets. How much does it cost for one of those.

DL: For one spool?

EB: You probably need quite a few to make a rug.

DL: It's hard to say how many for just one carpet.

EB: Oh you do ten. How much for ten?

DL: I'll go through probably 12 spools.

EB: So you have to have a lot. Do you get now I see like with that it just seems pretty now I see sometimes the rug looks pretty plain with the strings coming down. But then this here is like a pattern and stuff.

DL: That's a four harness ?

EB: how do you know how to do a pattern? Do you get like books that teach you? But with the rugs themselves you probably don't do patterns.

DL: No because those are only two harness ?

EB: Oh so if you took maybe more of a plain material and you could use different colored warp, you could make a pattern that way. But with the place mats then you can come in and four harness. Where does the Oh for what you pull the . This is like a bobbin? What do you call it?

DL: This is what they call the weft.

EB: I see where the bigger one will have two and this one will has four. Do you self teach yourself on this one.

DL: No. ?

EB: The woman that you learn from. So she taught you everything you learned

DL: Pretty much. Some of it I taught myself.

EB: Which was your first loom?

DL: This was my first loom.

EB: How are they all different?

DL: (*sound is too low to hear*)

EB: So you've got five looms down here and then upstairs the ?. That's seven.

DL: There's the other one over in the corner.

EB: Is there anything else you want to show me down here.

DL: I don't think so.

EB: Ok. I'm just going to ask you a few more questions.

BREAK IN TAPE

EB: We just came from your basement and we saw all your looms down there. Is there anything you do when you make the rugs? Do you watch TV? Listen to the radio?

DL: I try to watch TV, but you don't really see much of it.

EB: That's one thing with crafts. One thing I do is cross stitch a lot, and you listen to TV. You can't pick up and watch much. Did you know any crafts other than maybe rag rugs before since you're relatively new to rag rugs, like cross stitching or crocheting?

DL: I did a lot of knitting, crocheting, cross-stitching.

EB: What do you prefer?

DL: I like then all.

EB: It seems like with the rag rugs you put a lot of time, effort, and money into them. You have quite a basement with all the different looms. Do you always have one or two going at a time.

DL: Yeah. Depending on what I need at the time.

EB: I know when you do crafts sometimes you can't do other stuff. Sometimes you have to really pay attention to what you're doing. Is it a pretty relaxing hobby?

DL: For me it is because I enjoy it. I like to do it.

EB: That's another thing I wanted to ask you. Do you think that you're going to be buying any more looms in the future?

DL: I don't think so.

EB: You're done buying them.

DL: I have no more room.

EB: Yeah, your basement is pretty much taken over.

DL: It is.

EB: So when you're downstairs you can do the bigger things and when you're upstairs you work on the small mud rugs. Do you make a lot off doing this? Is it something you could do full-time?

DL: You could never get rich off of it. No.

EB: It's never what you...

DL: No. People don't realize all the work that goes into making a carpet and the time. You have to really like what you're doing because you'll never get rich off of it.

****SKIP IN TAPE****

EB: I was looking up here where you're talking to me. That's a big project there. I think it takes an hour to do an inch of cross stitch I'm sure. Well for me.

DL: All of these here I did.

EB: Those are nice. You do that at night. My Mom does cross stitching in the morning because her eyes are better. Here's the latest.

DL: She's coming out with another one.

EB: Oh gosh.

DL: I don't know what it's going to look like yet, but it'll be coming out soon. Another angel.

EB: Her patterns are really good. They are very nice. And they're a lot of work. I did one of them a long time ago.

DL: I did the winter angel for my granddaughter. It has 730 _____

EB: Oh my goodness. So you've made quite a few of those angels.

DL: I did one for this granddaughter here. It was a special one because she has leukemia

EB: I have tons of patterns. I don't know if you ever need any patterns.

DL: I have tons.

EB: Well someday if you ever want to look through my books, your more than welcome. I can bring them by. I don't do much of it anymore, especially when I'm teaching. When I'm teaching I just have no time. In the summer I might pick it up. And people borrow my books and I'll make copies for what they need. With the rugs, have you made one for each of your grandkids?

DL: No. I've made for my kids...yeah I guess I have made for just about all the family members.

EB: Over 2,000 rugs. That's a long time. Probably my last question, unless you can think of anything else that you want to add, have you taught anyone else to make rugs?

DL: No.

EB: With all those looms, you should teach somebody I think. Is there anything else you want to add?

DL: I think you pretty well covered it.

EB: That's all I could think of. And the woman who taught you was Finnish. That's kind of important. Did she at all tell you how she learned or where?

DL: No.

EB: Did she come here from Finland?

DL: I don't believe so.

EB: She was born here. All right well that's everything.

EB: This is Evelyn Bendick again. I've just finished interviewing Mrs. Donna Lehto. It's about 6:57 pm and I'm about to travel now to Amasa, MI and talk to Mr. Jack Henkala who's grandparents, from what I've heard, had a loom that they brought back from Finland and he's spent a lot of time helping make rag rugs as a child.

EB: I'm at the Amasa Hotel Bar and I'm interviewing Mr. Jack Henkala about rag rugs. I was referred to talk to him by my mother, who was friends with your sister Ellen. She told me that when she was younger she would stay over at Ellen's house and while they were watching tv they would have to cut up the rags to make rag rugs. So that's how I know that you know about it. I'll ask you a couple questions. When did you learn how to make rag rugs?

JH: When I was a kid. Watching my grandma and my parents both make rag rugs. My grandma started making them ever since the '50s. Even before that, but that's when I can remember the rag rugs being made in the upstairs loft of our farm house at that time.

EB: The class I'm taking is called UP Ethnic Folklore. Part of the purpose of doing this interview is to find out what crafts came to this country from what places and the old country. Can you tell me a little about your grandma and where she was from?

JH: My grandma was from the northern part of Finland. They came over here in 1903. They homesteaded at Gilbert Lake in 1926. In that area. The house I was in was made in '26. They were probably there before that, but the house burnt down. So I remember that one. It is still standing yet from when I was a kid. It had a big upstairs. There were 14 kids in the family. That was one of their little hobbies that they did. They would make rugs and sell them and enjoy their time.

EB: My Mom said the loom was very impressive. Can you describe it at all? I know that you don't have it anymore. Can you tell us a little about the loom itself?

JH: The loom is still in the possession of our family. It's out in Vermont right now. My younger sister owns it. It was conceived of one tree. It stood about 6 foot with the arch on it. The hanging pounders and different treadles and everything else. But the main frame was from one tree. So it was a pretty good

size tree they cut this out of. It did have a few splits in it from the old age. They had to mend it to keep it together because it did crack open here and there. But it was still in one piece yet and it's still in operating condition.

EB: Does your younger sister make _____ with it?

JH: Yes she does.

EB: Now this loom, did they bring it with them from Finland or make it here?

JH: It was there at the farm when I was being born and raised, so I really don't know if it came from there or if they built it over here. But I know the Finnish people knew how to make those machines. We have had more than just the one machine around at one time or another. But that was the one that was there and still in operation. We had a couple smaller ones that we tried to restore and kind of gave up on them.

EB: My Mom said this loom was as big as a room. It was very large.

JH: It was about 6 feet tall and about 5 feet wide. It had a plain old plank bench on it. It wasn't elaborate. It had wooden tongs on it for different notches as you keep the tension on your string and so on. It was all made out of wood. The warp thing was made out of wood and so was where you rolled the rugs onto as it came across. There was no iron. It was put together with wooden pegs. There were no bolts. The only bolts that I can think of are where it cracked open. But it was all wooden pegged together.

EB: You don't make rugs anymore.

JH: No I don't. But like I said, my younger sister still does.

EB: When you were a kid, what was your part in making rag rugs? Did you do the weaving itself, or putting together material?

JH: Mostly we put together the material. Like your mother was saying, all of us kids would sit down and we had lots of used clothing that we had to cut up into strips about 1 inch wide, depending on what kind of rug they wanted to make. Then whatever length you get out of the clothing, they would stitch it together and make balls and we put them in a big box. When we started going we had many boxes of this yarn and it was color coded so we had different colored rugs, so they kind of matched. Unless it was a total mix match or something like that. That's how they did it more or less back in the old days. Grandma would sit at her treadle machine and sew these rags together end to end. Then all you had to do is snip the wire in between them and roll them up.

EB: So your job was basically cutting the material, maybe matching up. Did you ever get onto the machine and make the rugs yourself?

JH: Yes I have. But that wasn't part of my job. We started by taking the warp off the strings and a different kind of machine also all out of wood that you would wrap it around. It was skeins of yarn or string. Depending on how wide you wanted your rug was how many strings you were going to have in your rug. It comes through this wire mesh thing and onto the machine and the warp itself. They'd weave it on this machine and roll it onto this bigger drum where the warp would be at. So you had another machine where you held your fingers and worked it around. You came many times around through this thing and that's how you got your warp out before you got it onto the machine.

EB: When I was speaking to Mrs. Lehto she was showing me the warp that she bought and then also the contraction and different things where she could wind it into the different sizes for what she was going to make. Back when you were making these rugs, did you have to purchase that warp too or...

JH: We purchased it.

EB: You could buy it at the store? Or did you have to order it?

JH: Back in those days you could probably buy it at the store. If you had a certain color of warp you would probably put your order in for it or settle for whatever they had. We used to go to Crystal Falls to buy our warp when I was a kid. My mother made rugs also. So it wasn't that hard to purchase the warp and string itself.

EB: I think now it is. I think now it has to be ordered.

JH: Yeah, you probably have to order it now because this is getting to be a dying art.

EB: That's what she was saying too. In your family did everybody learn to make the rugs?

JH: Everybody pitched in. It was a family tradition. A family doing. Once in a while on a Saturday night or during the week, everybody would pitch in cutting the rags or whenever you had some idle time. It didn't make any difference. It was just part of the family.

EB: You did it. If you were sitting watching tv or had time.

JH: We ripped rags. We usually didn't have to cut them. We ripped most of them. Once you get them started you can rip them all pretty decently.

EB: Did your family ever have to buy material? It was a big family right? 14 kids, so was it mostly old clothes?

JH: A lot of it was old clothes and a lot of it was donated. There were people that would want rags or rag rugs. They'd want one or two rugs but they'd bring many bags and boxes full of material that had to be made into rugs. So we used to have just about a whole room full of used clothes and material, or material for rugs.

EB: I know, not making them now you might not remember, but was there anything... there's different kinds of rag rugs. Now they even make them out of bread bags and nylons, but back then do you remember any specific materials? Was it just cotton and denim?

JH: They kind of sorted the materials out for us by the rugs they were going to make. Denim, they'd make a denim rug. If it was jean material, which was a very strong material, they'd kind of sort these cloths out to give it a better quality for the rug. It was judgement on who was going to be pounding the rugs and what the people wanted.

EB: Did you have to be careful about what materials you mixed together? Like stretchy things or wool? Did you have to keep stuff separate that way too?

JH: In a way you had to because once you put the warp in there, it would give you different textures in the rug itself and it wouldn't wear as even. I know my grandma always talked about it. She would try to

keep the cloths as close to the same kind of cloth for the rug. If you're going to make a stretchy material kind of rug out of your bed spreads and stuff like that, they kind of sort them out if that would make one rug or keep it with the other bed spreads. Keep the same texture as far as the cloth goes.

EB: I would imagine if you didn't it could bunch maybe or wear.

JH: It won't wear as good. It will only wear as good as the material that you have. But if you mix and match, one is going to wear out quicker than the other. I found that out when I was a kid with my grandma's rugs around the house. The strings will eventually start to fray on the end. If you have good material, they will last quite a while.

EB: Your family made a lot of these rag rugs. Did they sell them primarily or trade? How did that work?

JH: A little of everything. It used to be one of the best gifts you could give somebody when they first got married. Give them a set of rag rugs that you hand made yourself. That was one of the best things you could get. My grandma did sell them.

EB: Where did she sell them?

JH: Just by word of mouth. She never had a shop or anything like that. And then there were so many people that wanted her to make their rugs for them, so she was fairly busy most of the time. Her and Mrs. Lottie, they'd spend all winter together. Two ladies up in their 60s, they'd spend all winter pounding rugs. They just enjoyed one another and stayed here at the house together and worked til dark at night, just making rugs. Take turns to go up and pound on the loom and the other would be down cooking or cleaning house or whatever. It is a dirty job in a way because you get a lot of lint in the house. When you do make rugs it is dusty. A lot of your fabric will fray off because you're pounding and stuff like that. So it does make the house full of...

EB: Did you have to wash a lot of these things too before you made the rugs?

JH: Usually they came pretty clean. I can remember if you wanted a certain color you used the old power dye and stuff like that to dye them a certain color. You could dye the material too to make it a certain color rug that you wanted, which was kind of unique in a way. They used to have the big drum wash tubs with the dye in them. They'd sit there and dye them and hang it on the clothes line and sew it together afterwards. But you had to sort each one of them out. That dying process was quite unique itself the way they did it back in the older days.

EB: One thing I thought was interesting, I've talked to a few different people that make them, and about pricing. I talked to a few women in Green Bay and they learned from the Belgians and even this woman I talked to now, all 55 cents per inch. You sell them by the inch that you make them. Do you remember at all if your grandma did it that way or was it pretty much so many dollars per rug?

JH: Back in the old days they weren't that concerned with the price that we have today. Britten's over here, they used to have a certain price per rug. But my grandma and mother and dad, they usually just wen to so much per rug. Some were \$5, some were \$15, some were \$20.

EB: More round numbers. It was real odd when I saw \$20.15. I thought that was a strange price to charge for something, but that's how they do it.

JH: Most of the rugs, unless they made them for somebody, they would give them so much for making a complete roll of rugs. When you take it off the loom you're not done with it yet. You still have to hand

tie the ends or put the warp in to make the tight ends. There's two different ways it can come off the loom.

EB: Are you talking about whether it has fringe or no fringe?

JH: Right. Fringe or no fringe.

EB: So with the fringe, you tie.

JH: You tie each individual string.

EB: It's probably about 300 strings or so.

JH: Well it depends on the width. That's what makes your width, the number of strings you have on your machine as you're making it.

EB: Or the machine can do that too.

JH: Well no, you have to have the strings there because it ain't going to do nothing without the strings. The machine can go wider even yet, but if you ain't got the strings to go through the machine.

EB: So if you want fringe you have to hand tie it. And those rugs without fringe, how do they do that?

JH: They use the warp then and weave the warp into it.

EB: Oh, they just finish it off with the warp.

JH: They finish it off with the warp and then they take a treddle machine and sew the final one in there with the warp and cloth on the end.

EB: And you remember making them both ways, with fringe and without.

JH: Oh yes.

EB: Did you ever make anything else other than rugs? Like place mats or coasters? Or did you pretty much just make the large rugs?

JH: We mostly made rugs. The width varied. If someone wanted a hall rug it was special and you didn't use quite so much warp. You aren't going to make a big long width one. It was a special order and then you'd have to redo the machine again after that. So whatever width you put on it warp wise was as much warp as you put on the machine itself.

EB: And you'd have that choice, you could make that width as big or small as you want on that loom?

JH: Yes. They go through I think it's called a knead. It looks like a, not a screen, a grate. Each one of those the strings come through first. Then that's where you put it through the treadles. Each string goes one way and the other goes the other way.

EB: And that's a two harness loom. That's where it separates.

JH: Right. You put the warp through the machine and have the treadle up. Put the warp through and pound it in tight. When you get done you trip it the other way and put the next one through. That's mainly the machines we had were made that way.

EB: Do you remember the longest one you ever made? Or saw made?

JH: I think the longest one was 24 feet.

EB: What was that for, do you know?

JH: Somebody wanted it for a hallway.

EB: That's a long hall.

JH: I remember my grandma making it. My mother made one pretty close to that for her own hallway. It takes a lot of material when you have 24 feet to try and keep the same pattern too.

EB: Yeah. With the patterns, do you decide ahead of time like you will put in stripes or different colors?

JH: Right. Then a lot of times you get a border and you can do that with one color.

EB: Okay, you have a border on the top and bottom.

JH: Right. You can match them. Make sure you have enough cloth to make both ends. You can judge how wide it is and how much material you have. Then they used to twist them together once in a while to give you a different pattern altogether, two different materials. Twist them together so you have a swirly effect. There were many different methods that they used to use to get different patterns in their rugs. A lot of it was with the material you used. How many times you want to go with this material and how many times you want to go with that one. They used to have 4 or 5 sticks with yarn on them. Whatever color she wanted to use, she'd take that stick and the next time she'd be going with the other stick. So she didn't have to keep redoing the sticks all the time.

EB: Oh, she would keep them all ready to go.

JH: Right on the machine. Next to where she was working. She'd get done with that one and turn the corner over and go with the other one. When she got done with that she'd do the same thing. It was interesting to learn some of that stuff in a way, to watch how they do it.

EB: Your grandma and her friend, did they ever read on how to do this? Or was it all word of mouth and learning from other people?

JH: They had to learn that probably when they were in Finland. They came over as young girls and my grandma was something like 10 or 12. They were already married and having their families when they were 16 or 17 years old. But that was from the old country. They came over here, I think there was one sister and two cousins that all came over at the same time and settled in the Amasa area here. But they all knew how to do it, probably from back in Finland before they came here.

EB: When you made these rugs, would you make one rug at a time? Or several at a time?

JH: You'd make a continual roll until your yarn was done, unless somebody wanted a rug. Then you'd have to cut it off and retie it to the stick again in order to keep that bottom row going and keep the tension going. You can cut the bottom rug out, but then you have to spend the time retying it on the bottom row.

EB: One lady I talked to said she makes about 10 at a time. The roll will make about 10 rugs.

JH: Right.

EB: What would you say the average size rug is? About four feet?

JH: Anywhere from 4 to 6 would be the average. Some wanted them a little shorter ones. They make 3 foot. Very few 2 foot or smaller than that. Unless it was special. The width was usually around 3 feet wide on most of them. Pretty close to that for the average throw rug.

EB: This is a hard question. If you had to take a guess at how long it would take, how much time would it take to make a rug, beginning to end? From cutting the material right to the done rug?

JH: That would be hard. A lot of time we did so much of that cutting ahead of time, that it's hard to judge how much of that yarn they used for a particular rug. To pound a rug that was maybe 4 feet long, grandma could put it out in 2 or 3 hours, 4 hours max.

EB: That would probably be the shorter end of the process.

JH: The cutting, sewing, dying, whatever you had to do. To give a determined time would be awfully difficult.

EB: Even getting that loom ready, tying all those ends to start. That's probably the most time consuming.

JH: Very tedious. Maybe that's why the two ladies worked together. They can only watch for so long. They have that little hook to pull the string through, so they don't miss any. Every slot had to have a string in it. That was really tedious and strenuous on the eyes back then. It did take quite a while to string a loom up.

EB: Back when you were making rugs in the '50s, they were making rugs from denim even then?

JH: Definitely. Denim, stretch, whatever.

EB: I know that's one I see a lot of now. Also chenille. I see a lot of that now. But the woman I talked to earlier said that's hard to come by with people using less, like bed spreads, it's been years since people had them. All that's already been made into rugs. There's not much.

JH: There was a lot of it back in the old days. It was a little more difficult to work with, too. You get your chenille in your bedspread, you get those bumps in there, and it's a little harder to pound because it's tighter in some places.

EB: You had to make sure that it was even and tight. That would probably be the difficult part. Ok. I don't really have any other questions. Is there anything else that you wanted to add.

JH: Not that I can think of other than the fact that is probably still one of the dying arts, and it's still a rug that will hold up for a lot long time than anything else you'll buy.

EB: Have you had some of these rugs from your grandma still around?

JH: Yes, I still do. They do hold up, and like I said if the tied off ends start fraying, you can retie them. You can shorten them up a little bit, too, if they do wear there, but they are difficult to patch if you do get a hole in the middle. You're not going to be able to thread something through and patch them. They do last for many years. I've had rugs at my house for at least 15 years.

EB: Alright, well thank you very much. I guess that's everything.