

7 December 1972

Dear Harold:

15: Something about weaving, in response to your note of Nov.

Yes, weaving, actually throwing the shuttle back and forth, is perfectly okay for arthritic fingers. It is excellent therapy too, for anyone who doesn't feel too well for almost any reason, because of the sense of accomplishment. Weaving gets results faster -- and they're perhaps more impressive, faster -- than knitting or crocheting, once you begin to weave. Getting to that stage is the problem. Tying up and threading a loom is tedious.

I suggest going slow on this, partly because it's a hobby that is relatively rare and therefore costly, both in terms of the loom and auxiliary equipment, and in terms of weaving materials.

Our loom is a 40-inch affair, meaning it will weave cloth a yard wide when you allow for drawup and shrinkage. It cost about \$175 some 20 years ago, and probably would cost twice that now, at least. The maker probably is dead or has gone out of business. He was an old man in Stockton who did beautiful work. This loom is of blond maple, wonderfully finished. Extended for work it takes up about the same floor space as a baby grand piano. Telescoped for storage as it is now, it occupies about the same space as an upright piano.

Weaving is simple once you get the loom threaded and tied up, but that is a bit complicated and full of little tricks that must be learned by doing, preferably with someone who has some experience handy.

The best suggestion I can make is that if you get a loom, be sure someone is available who can help you get started. Most weavers are enthusiastic and quite willing to do this.

And I would begin modestly, with a small table loom that weaves 11 or 12 inches wide, enough to make scarves and table mats, for instance, but not much beyond that. Anything wider, such as skirt material, simply requires a loom big enough to weave the cloth the width you want. Small table looms used to be available for around \$20 or less, but may be more expensive now. On such a small loom one can learn whether one really likes weaving and is interested in going to something larger. It will teach you the essentials -- how to lay in the weft evenly and so on -- without which weaving is likely to be pretty maddening and frustrating. A loom that small is about the size of an IBM typewriter.

Most yarn shops know of local weavers if there are any. Most craft shops are likely to carry small looms, or know where they can be had, and where to get the proper thread -- that's a whole field in itself. And many junior colleges, out here anyway, often have classes in weaving where you can see a loom in operation and get some idea of what is involved. Craft fairs are another possibility.

Another possibility is to watch the want-ads for a used loom. But whatever you do, don't buy one unless you can get a weaver's opinion as to whether it's operable, whether the beams haven't warped, for instance, whether the ratchets work properly, and unless you have someone lined up to show you how to get started. Most public libraries have books on handweaving for amateurs which quickly show one the essentials, but it's infinitely easier to learn from someone who can SHOW you. Takes only a few hours. Good luck.