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The Value of Investing Time, Energy and Creativity to Comfort Others

By Anjella Warnshuis

UCF Forum columnist

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A motif of a lap blanket that was crocheted as a gift for a friend with cancer. (Photo by Anjella Warnshuis)

When our loved ones die and their estates have been settled, we usually expect it to be the end of their giving. Sometimes it is, but oftentimes the ripples of their memories continue in ways we might not expect.

Some people make fun of me because I like crocheting. They tease me about being a little old lady. Those people don't realize that when I hold a crochet hook in my hand it reminds me of the time I spent by my grandmother's side, her laughter ringing in my ears as I desperately tried to crochet into my overly tight stitches on the previous row of yarn.

Some people inherit money. I inherited a legacy of giving, using skills taught by my grandmother, who also taught my Aunt Cynthia. Both women were known by family and friends to make and give their handcrafted works of love to those around them. No birth on my dad's side of the family passed unmarked without hand-stitched blankets from one or usually both of them.

My Aunt Bea, my mother's sister, didn't have much money but she would spend the year crocheting so that when it was time for the annual holiday party she had a variety of handmade items to present to the family. She had such joy watching us unwrap those gifts.

I learned a lot more than stitches from these matriarchs. They taught me the value of investing my time, energy and creativity into creating something tangible to comfort another.

When these women passed on I inherited their yarn. I donated some to various charitable causes but mostly it sat in my stash, waiting for the right project. When I found out that my cousin was expecting a little boy, I was excited to be able to continue the legacy that my relatives had started.

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The finished product was a labor of love that was touched by three generations of women. I'm sure this isn't what my grandmother and aunts had in mind when they picked out these yarns but I know they would all be glad to know that their yarns and the skills they taught me are being shared with the next generation of our family.

Of course, love flows further than bloodlines. In 2015 I joined a Facebook group, Tracey's Cancer Journey. One of the most generous and loving friends that I knew was facing her third bout of cancer.

I met Tracey Sullivan through Knit or Knot, a knitting group. Her passion for life and making a positive impact was unrivaled. I was searching for a special project for her when I got the opportunity to test a new crochet pattern. The Cancer Support Motif Lap Blanket by pattern maker Peach Unicorn was one of the most time consuming and complex projects I had ever taken on. So time consuming, in fact, that I had to ask a friend to assist with quickly completing a couple of the words.

I once again dove into the yarn that my family had left me, as well as yarn that had been given to me by my knitting group. It took several weeks and lots of careful counting to spell out words like Strength, Hope and Conquer.

By the time the blanket was finished, Tracey wasn't strong enough to be able to attend our meetings. One of our friends volunteered to take it her. A week later I received a card from Tracey thanking me for the blanket and, in true Tracey fashion, expressing her desire to comfort others. Her instructions were for the blanket to be returned to me when she passed and for me to loan it to another member of the group when they needed comforting. It currently is at another group member's house.

While my daughter doesn't share my love of yarn – at least not yet – my passion for making homemade crafts has planted a seed in her that has taken root. She spent several hours recently making a card for her grandmother, carefully planning exactly how it should look and what words to say. I've seen her spend the whole day in the

kitchen baking special treats for her friends. I've helped her get supplies for art projects to celebrate her friends' triumphs.

That she chooses to invest her time and energy to create unique gifts for those she loves is part of my legacy.

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