

## Here's a Yarn: A Former Nurse Finds Focus in a Knitting Business Stitching together a new life

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Susan Wolcott is a child of the '60s. As soon as she graduated from high school in 1969, she left her hometown of Olympia, Wash., and "did the hippie thing," she says, taking the time to find out what was important to her—community, listening, spirituality, holistic health, creativity, the environment.

In 1976, she found a profession that reflected those values—nursing. It felt right. "Nursing to me was kindness and compassion for human beings," says Wolcott, now 56. For 12 years, she worked as a clinical nurse in hospices, home care, hospitals, and rehabilitation and outpatient clinics. Eventually, she moved into higher-paying managerial positions at managed-care companies and software firms specializing in healthcare.

But as healthcare began to be driven more by insurance and less by patient care, Wolcott became disillusioned. She kept her day job but went back to school, earning a master's degree in social and organizational learning from George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., where she had relocated with four adopted children during her divorce. In 2002, she started moonlighting as a life coach, helping people deal with personal and professional transitions. While coaching others, she realized she needed to make some changes of her own.

Knitting was her answer. "My earliest memory of knitting is the peaceful sound of my mother's knitting needles clicking together," says Wolcott, who began knitting at 9. She had recently picked the needles up again, after a hiatus of 16 years, during a weekend in Santa Fe, N.M., with her mother and two sisters. "I soon found that in a tense or tired moment, knitting a few rows brought me back to calmness and centeredness," she says.

Before long, she and her sister Jill, an avid knitter, started a business called Y2Knit, a series of teaching retreats. It hit the market just as the knitting boom was taking off nationwide. According to the Craft Yarn Council of America, the number of women ages 45 and younger who knit regularly has doubled since 1998, to almost 1 in 5. "Knitting relaxes people by giving them something to focus on," Wolcott says.

Homey. As their workshop business grew, Jill, a knitwear designer in San Francisco, began designing patterns for Y2Knit to sell. Meanwhile, while scouting out a location for a retreat, Wolcott had an odd but good feeling. Driving through the rolling Maryland farmland 70 miles northwest of Washington, D.C., she sensed that this could be home.

It was then she decided to quit her job as a director with an online physician-patient communications network and buy a place in the country. It would be both home and yarn store. "It hit me with a total assurance," she recalls. She was over 50 and felt a "deepening of this desire to do something that was meaningful and purposeful."

She eventually landed in quaint Funkstown, Md., as the owner of a, well, funky, pink log house dating back to 1780. In the summer of 2003, Wolcott opened the brightly painted Y2Knit retail shop.

Today, Y2Knit is in the black. It has an active client list of 5,000 knitters and a growing number of retail yarn shops that carry its pattern line. Wolcott covers her rent and living expenses, though she earns only about a quarter of her last job's pay. "My change was about lifestyle," she says.

The rewards have been plentiful. She is her own boss, operates in a creative world, and buys much of her food from local farmers. She has no commute to work. Her '92 Honda is usually parked.

More important, the entrepreneurial venture has reconnected Wolcott with the altruistic values that led her to nursing. "I have a ministry," she says. "Not in a religious way, but it's about ministering to people and meeting their needs." Her days are filled by connecting people with resources. Women stop by to talk about kids, spouses, recipes, job interviews, movies, dreams, and frustrations.

"I have no regrets about giving up the paycheck," Wolcott says. "My life is not about money—it's about my spirit."