



The Power of Beauty in Everyday Life: Five Stories
a Whimsy & Tea offering



The Power of Beauty in Everyday Life: Five Stories

There are so many ways to weave beauty into daily life. Admiring a sunset. Dressing in clothes that make you feel beautiful. Treating yourself to fresh flowers in the house. Listening to music that makes your heart sing. Drinking tea from your favorite mug.

My contribution is to weave textiles to be used in everyday life – towels to dry your hands on as you cook dinner; table runners to pull together the colors in your dining room or make the table festive; napkins to pack with your lunch for work.

At farmers' markets and craft fairs where I sell my textiles I often hear comments like "I could never use that as a kitchen towel" and "It's too beautiful to use." For me, that's the point – to use something beautiful in an everyday ordinary way.

The everyday is where you spend most of your life. The seemingly mundane tasks of daily living, such as cooking, washing dishes, doing the laundry, and getting the children off to school, are all part of how you care for yourself and others. Why not bring as much beauty as possible to these tasks?

I believe that using beautiful objects in the tasks of daily life matters. But what *is* the difference that beauty makes? How *does* it affect your life?

I've interviewed five women who own a Whimsy & Tea napkin or towel (or two or three or four) to help me explore these questions.

I chose each woman for a specific reason: Caryn received her towel as a gift; Carol asked for a special design; Molly purchased her towels online; Cindy uses her towels as art; Deirdre loves linens and handmade objects. I also wanted to talk with women of different ages, professions and geographical locations.

While each conversation had its own focus, there were recurring themes. For example, Molly and Cindy both talk about how beautiful things help you feel grateful and good about your life. Carol and Caryn speak of the connecting qualities of a handmade item – be it a connection to the artist or their own creativity. Deirdre and Molly comment that the objects in your home are a way to express yourself and your values.

At the end of each interview, I offer ideas and suggestions for small things you can do to incorporate more beauty into your everyday life. Things like lighting a candle at breakfast on a rainy day or taking three deep breaths when you see a particular object in your home. Integrating beauty into daily life doesn't have to be hard or complicated. Little moments add up and enhance your quality of life.

Make yourself a cup of your favorite beverage, settle into a comfortable spot and savor these reflections about the difference beauty can make in your everyday life. Experiment with the ideas and suggestions and see what happens when you implement them.

I am honored that Carol, Cindy, Caryn, Deirdre and Molly let me interview them and am excited to share our conversations with you. May these conversations deepen your understanding of the difference a handwoven textile makes in everyday life, and by extension, how beauty enhances life.

— Marilyn

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Gratitudes

So many people have helped me with this ebook. My deep gratitude goes to

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“For me, it’s
about connection.”

Carol

Carol and I were in an online writing program led by Debora Seidman. After hearing each other’s voices for four months, it was wonderful to meet in person at Debora’s writing retreat in Taos, NM. In the course of the program, I often wrote about weaving, so I took along some towels to show Carol.

A couple months after the retreat, Carol asked me to weave her a towel. “I think what I want is a white one with some big solid lines and a few small black lines in it. Whatever is easy for you is fine with me. I know your talented hands will create something beautiful for me,” she wrote in her email.

I was pleased to receive a special request and appreciated that she gave me creative license. I was in the middle of some other projects and Carol was in no hurry. Another project I was working on inspired the idea of warp stripes in white and shades of gray woven with a black weft. I sent Carol photographs and let her choose the towel she wanted.



I asked to interview Carol because she asked to have a towel woven specially for her, trusting me to create something beautiful for her rather than choosing something from my existing inventory.

What I love about this conversation with Carol is how it kept circling back to connection. Her Whimsy & Tea towel, and the other handmade objects she owns, connect her to the object itself as well as to friends and memories, to artists, and to herself.

[What made you decide to buy a handwoven towel?](#)

That’s easy. Couple of things. I had seen your towels when we were at Debora’s last year and I thought they were beautiful. You were showing me different patterns that I could choose from or work with you on designing. I loved what you came up with because it was exactly what I wanted. I appreciated you listening to what I was saying with the choice of colors and the stripes.



And the most important thing to me is I love anything that is made by somebody's hands. That's such a strong connection to someone – to have and use something that somebody has imagined and then brought into reality using their hands. I think that process is just magical; it's so old and primal.

For me, it's about connection. The connection not only to the person who made the item, but also to people thousands and thousands of years ago who were making pottery, who were weaving, who were making jewelry, whatever their art was. I don't know when I started feeling so strongly about things made by hand. It goes as far back as I can remember. There's always been that respect and awe and love for anything that someone made by hand.

Do you remember the first thing you bought that was made by hand?

I have a feeling it was pottery. The other day I was looking at some pottery I keep on my stove and I remembered exactly where I bought it. I was with a very dear friend of mine who has since died and it brought back all those memories of that day that we shared. Driving out from Washington DC into Maryland, there was a pottery show going on. Being with my friend Noreen was precious because she was sick for many, many years and it was rare that she could go out for a half day much less most of a day. Looking at those two pieces brought that all back to me.

What was it like to have a towel made especially for you?

It made me feel very special. It made me feel like I had a part in this creative process. I knew you wanted me to be happy and to love this towel, and I did too. It was a partnership with you, the creator. I was looking at it as "This is something I plan to use every day and enjoy for a long, long time." It created a strong bond with you because I could kind of see through your eyes what pattern you created, what came out of your imagination, the colors – the different gradations, hues, textures and tones. It's like

“There are things there that make me feel happy, make me smile or bring back a memory or there's some history there. There's connection in that history.”

a part of me going into this too. You were listening to my thoughts, my ideas for what I wanted.

I think it's really special when you have something that is made just for you. It doesn't happen to me very often that somebody says, "What do you want as far as texture and color and pattern?" Whenever I've bought pottery, the pot's already made. So it was an exciting, new experience. It was very connecting. Again, back to that connection with the artist who made it.

How do you use your towel?

I have a bar on the front of my stove and I put it right in the middle of this bar. I fix it just so, so I can see the stripes I want to see for that day, so it's like a piece of art in my kitchen. Every time I look at it, I think "God, that's beautiful. This was made for me. This was made by somebody who cares for me. Who cares about my tastes. Who wants me to enjoy this." And I do, every time I use it. It makes me feel good. Every time I see it.

If my hands are wet, I use it to dry my hands on. If a handle is hot, I use it to pick that up.

The feel of the towel has changed. It's gotten softer. I love that. I've never had that experience with a towel. I think you told me that the feel of it will change over time, and that's started happening. It's beyond a tactile experience. It's a connection every time I touch that.

You keep talking about this sense of connection. What difference do you feel that kind of connection makes in your daily life?

It's extremely important. If I don't have some kind of connection with people or nature or something that I enjoy doing creatively, I feel out of balance. There's something missing from my day. I don't feel quite as grounded as I would. Connection keeps me content and grounded and goes into a spiritual connection for me. It permeates every part of my life.

It sounds like for you the connection doesn't have to be a face-to-face or on the phone or even with a person. Touching something that's handmade can provide you with that connection.

Absolutely.



I find it an interesting way to think about it: when you feel isolated to look around and see what's in your home, what's in your kitchen, and say "Wow, there's all this connection here."

Because there are things there that make me feel happy, make me smile or bring back a memory or there's some history there. There's connection in that history. I was just thinking about whenever I use the towel you made for me, I'm putting something of myself back into that material and it's changing the way it feels. It's like alchemy to me. It's an amazing process.

Could you say a little more about that – your feeling that you are putting something of yourself back into the material.

Every time I rub my hands on the towel, it's changing something about the make up of the texture. The tactile part of that towel. That's a different experience for me, to have something that responds in a very definite way to touch.

Touch is important to me. I'm making a connection with that towel in some way, that's changing the material and making it softer. I think that's such a kick and so amazing that something can change as you use it.

I love the feel of that towel. It's my favorite towel. It just feels so soft and yet it's durable and strong at the same time. There are a lot of descriptive words I think about when I use that towel. You know, like I can lean on this towel. It's going to last for a while. It isn't going to fall apart on me. There's a strength to this towel and there's also a softness. A yin and yang in the towel.

You said that when you asked me to weave this towel for you, you knew all along that you were going to use it.

Oh yes.

Was it hard for you to use it?

A part of me was a little bit concerned about that. When I first saw it, I thought, "Oh my god, this is so beautiful." I took it out, and thought, "I'll just put it on the bar on my stove and let it sit there for a day or two." Then I used it the first day I put it out there. It was a done deal.

What eradicated that concern about using it was the way it felt. It was soft. It was strong. It was almost as if that towel was saying to me, "It's good for you to use me. I know I'm pretty. I'm also a workhorse. I'm made out of good, strong material, so just relax. It's okay. Please don't leave me in your drawer here. Take me out and use me."



Carol Chambers retired after working with the federal government and being a self-described "adrenaline junkie." She now lives in a lovely place full of artists and writers of all kinds in North Carolina. This rich array of creative people feeds and delights her soul and creativity as a writer and painter.

Ideas & Suggestions

for bringing more beauty into your everyday life

- ❖ Look around your home and pick an object. Remember the story about how it came into your life. How does this object connect you to someone you know?
- ❖ Buy yourself a gift that has been made by somebody's hands.
- ❖ Consider collaborating with an artist to have something made specially for you.
- ❖ Carol's concern about using her Whimsy & Tea towel was eradicated by the way the towel felt. She said it was almost as if the towel was saying to her, "It's good for you to use me. I know I'm pretty. I'm also a workhorse. I'm made out of good, strong material, so just relax. It's okay. Please don't leave me in your drawer here. Take me out and use me." Find something that you have been reluctant to use and give it a voice. What would it say to you?
- ❖ Carol talks about the feel of her towel – how soft, durable and strong it is; that she can lean on it without worrying that it will fall apart; that it has a yin and yang of softness and strength. Choose a favorite textile or article of clothing. How does it feel? What descriptive words come to mind?



“I use the heck out of them.”

Molly

A few years ago I enrolled in a nine-month business coaching program with Molly. One day towards the end of the program when I was checking email, I was delighted to see that Molly had purchased a towel. A month later, she purchased a second towel. A month after that, she purchased two more.

I wanted to interview Molly because she purchased her Whimsy & Tea towels online. Buying a handwoven towel online requires a certain kind of trust because you are dependent on words and images. You don't get to see and touch the actual towel until it arrives in the mail. Hearing me talk about my weaving, reading descriptions and seeing photographs, no matter how detailed, is not the same as an in-person experience.

As I talked with Molly, I kept smiling at her descriptions of “using the heck out” of her two pairs of towels. I recognized a kindred spirit – someone who, having made the investment, was willing to give her towels “a work out” and, in the process, experience moments of grace and gratitude.

What made you decide to buy your towels?

It really does come down to that beauty in everyday life thing that you talk about. That's a value of mine too.

It's a combination of them being beautiful and so darn durable that it was easy to justify [the purchase]. Sometimes you think, “I would love

to have that, but would I really use that?" or "I would love to have it and it will wear out and then I won't have it any more." But your towels are so beautiful and durable that it was a no brainer really.

How did you know they were going to be durable?

I know about fiber and I recognize some of the materials you were using and I've used them in [my knitting] in the past. I just thought, "That's good stuff." I might have read testimonials on your website about how durable they were or it could be that you had a photo of one towel that was several years old next to one that was new. So it was the combination of personal experience, things I read on your website and it just made sense.

You mentioned this feeling of having to justify the purchase. Could you say a little more about that?

For me it was a stretch to pay more than – I don't know what I've paid for my other kitchen towels – maybe \$10. Certainly not very much money compared to the fine towels you make. So it was an investment for me. I asked myself, "Why would I spend that much money?" And for me, the answer is: Because I get something beautiful every day.

How do you use them?

I use the heck out of them. I would love to say I have elegant teas and that I use them to keep my scones warm. But I have one hanging on the oven door handle and one hanging on another cupboard door handle and I use them. We hardly ever use our dishwasher as there's just the two of us. I don't like having a dish rack sitting on my counter so I wash them and dry my dishes for each meal as I go.

They get a workout. They get washed once or twice a week. I think I have four of them now so I get to cycle them around. They get used; I put them through the wringer.

What difference does using these particular towels make in your daily life, if it makes any difference at all?

It feels nice to have something beautiful. It's a little moment of grace. You know? Just a moment of grace.



And on the practical side, they do such a nice job. They are so gorgeous I feel a little funny talking about how well they work, but I dry dishes several times a day and they really work. They are so absorbent and they are so soft. They do such a good job so it's very gratifying to use them. I have a number of other towels and I just don't use them. I just don't – except maybe to mop up a spill on the floor. Nothing else that I have is anywhere near as beautiful and frankly nothing else works as well. Nothing else is as absorbent.



This moment of grace. What difference does that make?

There's a way in which they help me to settle down. Really where it goes for me is gratitude. When I see them and they are beautiful and I enjoy them, I have this moment of grace and I feel grateful. I feel good about my life. It's a small thing, but it makes me feel good about my life.

What difference does feeling good about your life make?

Feeling good about my life might be the fundamental value. I don't want to overstate it, but feeling good about my life and that all is well with the world is a really nice place to be. I don't know about anybody else, but it seems to me that we all want to feel good about our life or to feel fortunate in the moment. To feel some sense of appreciation and well-being. The towels really do connect me with that. It kind of boils down to being happy; they make me happy.

At the beginning where you said that beauty in everyday life is a value that you hold. Can you say more about that?

Well, it's interesting because we don't have a fancy home. It's not about having everything just so. I value things that are beautiful, especially things that are handmade that are beautiful both in their form and in their function. Beautiful in the way they appear and in their utility. I appreciate the vision, the creativity and the care that goes into making things like that.

The idea of making things fascinates me and delights me: that as human beings we can make stuff; and that

we can make things that take on form. I find this particularly with fiber – you know I am a knitter. The idea that we can take something like yarn, which literally is three dimensional, but there is a way in which it is almost a two dimensional thing. It's got a very limited sort of existence until you put it together in weaving or in knitting and suddenly you've got this

*It kind of boils down to
being happy;
they make me happy.*

three dimensional, functional, beautiful object. I think that is so amazingly cool. Having things like that around connects me to that creative capacity in myself. It wakes up my own creativity.

Is this something that you've always valued or is there something that felt like a pivotal moment for you?

I'm not remembering the exact moment, but I think the pivotal thing for me had to do with trusting what I like and giving myself permission to value what I value and like what I like in art and in craft instead of looking outside of myself for some validation: Is this good? Is this worth the money?

Another thing I like about owning things like these towels is it gives me a way to express myself by my choices. Somewhere along the line I realized for me that I could express myself not only in the things I make, but in the things I buy, the things I invest in, the things I use in my home and it is a way of expressing my own creativity and expressing myself.

Is there anything you want to add?

Well just that in talking with you I'm thinking, "Gee, I've been thinking about these for myself. I need to start thinking about these for gifts." It's funny how we think in one track. Seriously, that just occurred to me. I have a friend who is hard to buy for. I need to take another look.

I just enjoy them so much. I use them every day. So I guess the last thing I'd say is they are like potato chips: You can't eat just one. We need at least four. We need two to be using and two to be in the laundry.



Molly Gordon used to knit with fibers. Now she knits the threads of common sense, perennial wisdom, and delight in the limitless creativity and resilience of the human spirit to co-create with her clients the lives and work they love.

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Ideas & Suggestions

for bringing more beauty into your everyday life

- ❧ Find something that you use a lot and doesn't function as well as it could. Consider replacing that item with something that functions well and is also beautiful.
- ❧ Find something that you've been saving for a special occasion and use it in your daily life.
- ❧ Treat yourself to something that is handmade that you know you'll use regularly in your daily life. See if you can find something that gives you a sense of well-being when you use it.
- ❧ Think about something you bought recently. Do you think it reflects your values?
- ❧ Look around the room where you spend the most time. Does this room reflect you? If not, what's one thing you can change so that the room more fully expresses you?
- ❧ What wakes up your creativity capacity? Do you have things in your home that wake up that capacity?

“...taking the time
to be intentional.”

Deirdre

I first met Deirdre almost twenty years ago in graduate school. Much to my delight, I recognized her name in a teleclass about business writing led by Isabel Parlett five years ago and reached out to her. For the past couple years we've both been in Isabel's online forum to support small business owners.

One day I was sorting through my inventory and came across a few individual napkins (I only had one rather than a pair) and some seconds. I didn't want to sell these items. I decided to offer them for free to the people in the business group to which Deirdre and I belong. In exchange I asked them to talk with me about their napkins after they'd been using them for a while. Deirdre was the first person to respond to this offer.

As I talked with Deirdre, I was particularly moved by her intentionality



– the loving, nurturing way she starts her day as well as her intentionality about living her values. She values things of beauty and likes to have things that aren't “cookie cutter” and finds ways to express these values in her home.

Deirdre jumped into the conversation about how she uses her Whimsy & Tea napkin.

What attracted me to your work is I have always loved quality linens. When I saw your work, it reminded me of linens that I grew up with in my Lithuanian grandparents' home. What always amazed me is their linens were decades old and still beautiful, and they weren't just saved for fancy occasions. They were used every day. It was a way of bringing something of high quality into everyday life and, for them, making life beautiful in some pretty darn difficult circumstances.



I like quality items. If you are going to buy something that you are going to use, why not buy something that's the best quality you can afford? It will last you longer and over time you'll get more use out of it. I remember my mother saying, "It is better to buy something that's a little more expensive if it's better made because in the long run you'll enjoy it more. It will last you longer."

When you are surrounded by beautiful things that you enjoy, you feel more positive, more interested in your environment and happier. Barbara Fredrickson is a psychologist known for her work on positive emotions. She's found that they increase your flexibility and creativity, and can't we all use more of that in the world? Having a beautiful napkin that you use everyday can make you feel a little bit happier before you head out to work. With this more positive attitude you can be more effective, creative and innovative at work.

It sounds like you've been using beautiful things in an everyday way for quite a while.

My whole life.

At my mother's house we would use cloth napkins that my mother had made. My mother was always interested in functional pottery – plates, bowls – so we had pieces that she had made as well as pieces she had bought from artisans or craftspeople.

We grew up going to craft shows. I think from that kind of environment, it was clear to us that there is real value in seeing what artisans have created, and that supporting people who create things from hand is a good way to invest your hard-earned dollars.

The same was true at my father's house. He didn't necessarily have as many physical objects. He had more art on the walls and good quality books and those sorts of things. My sister and I were always surrounded by things that were practical and beautiful.

We have this thing about rarifying art. It's only for rich people or it's in museums. Why isn't art for everybody? Everybody has some level of creativity. Everybody knows what they like even if they aren't an art critic. Especially if they aren't an art critic. Having beautiful objects that you use everyday is a way of saying everybody should get to participate in art.

How do you use your Whimsy & Tea napkin?

I use it every day with breakfast. I have my little morning ritual. I'm the first one up in the house, with the exception of the cat, and I have a civilized breakfast every morning. I'm not

standing over the sink eating a pop tart. I have brewed my tea and use one of the mugs I really like.

If it's nice weather out and not crazy hot, I'll go sit on my back porch. If it's crappy weather, I sit at our dining table. If it's really lousy weather, I will do something my mother taught us to do: have breakfast by candlelight.

I like the way the napkin feels on my legs, when it's draped over them. It's got this nice weight to it, so there's this lovely transition between "oh, I'd still rather be in bed, but I'm going into my day."

This breakfast ritual is part of taking the time to be intentional, to have some quiet time, to nurture myself literally with what I'm eating and also with how I'm starting my day. It can be the only time of my day that doesn't feel coo-coo.

I don't let anyone else use this napkin. It's special. It's MINE. It just makes me smile to look at the darn thing.

What difference does using this napkin make to your breakfast, to your morning routine, to your day?

There are a couple of things.

It may be, depending on the day, the only beautiful thing I encounter in a day.

When I use it, I have the same kind of reaction as when I use other things I've bought for myself that are handcrafted: I've invested in something that's representative of what's important to me.

I want to ensure that handcrafted things are preserved. I want to help people understand that fast is not always best and that slow and specific can be better in the long run. When you are creating something by hand, it's probably going to be slow and specific.

"I've invested in something that's representative of what's important to me."

There are some days when I'm eating lunch in my home office and I'll pull it out, especially if I'm having a kind of coo-coo day. To me there's something about feeling that fabric – the texture, the strength of it and the supple nature of it – that is calming. It's like how people would use a worry stone. You can rub it between your fingers.

We live in a world that's so go, go, go and very demanding. With lots of things coming at us, it's very easy to go into sensory overload. When you can just focus on one object you think is beautiful, it can help you shut out that craziness in the world.

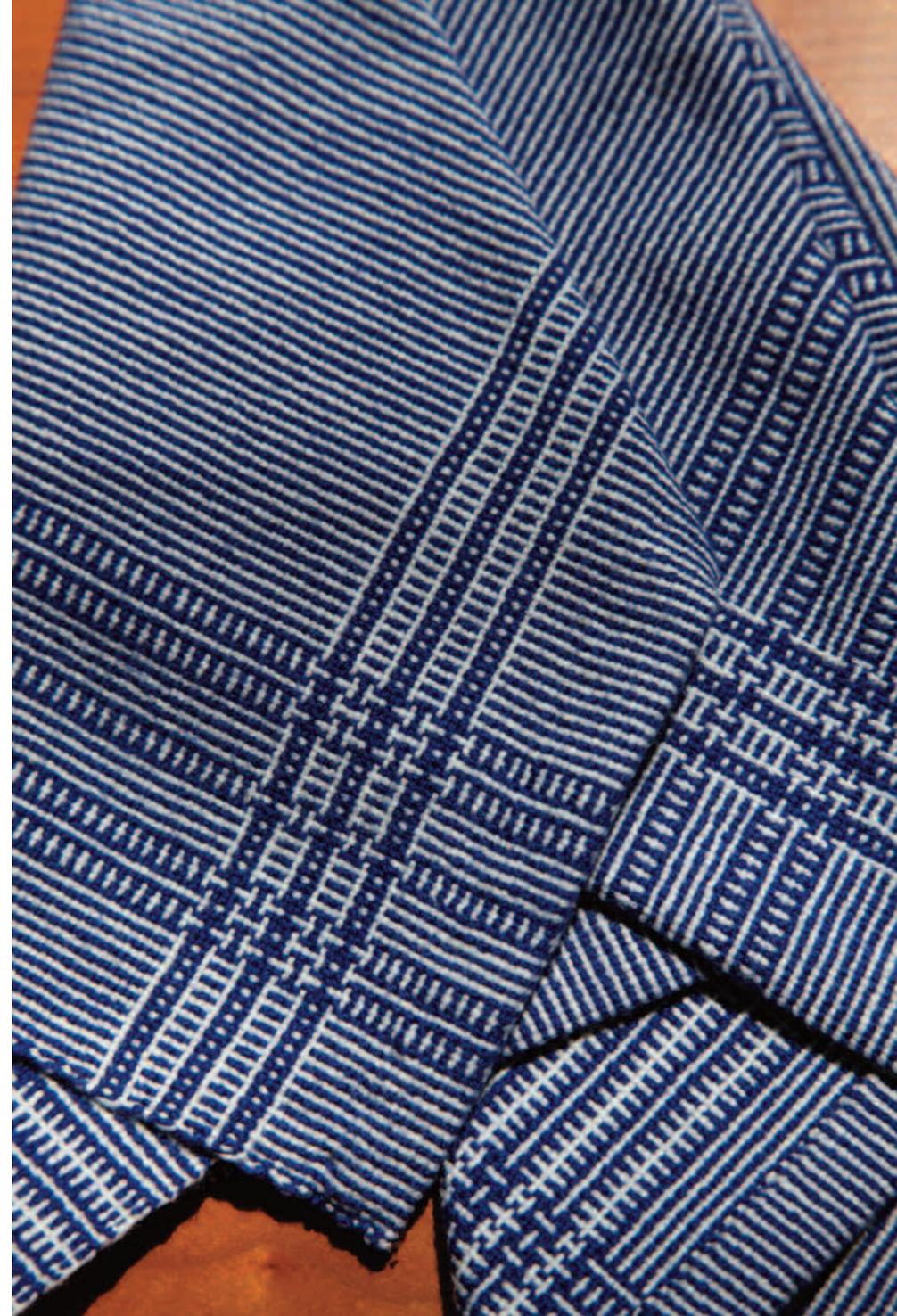
You've mentioned a number of differences that using your Whimsy & Tea napkin makes in your daily life. Is there anything you want to add about why these differences are important?

It's important to me to be who I am regardless of circumstance and what other people say or what the trends are. I value things of beauty. I like art and I like craft. I like to have things that are not cookie cutter. The items in your home, the kind of house you buy, the way that you dress and groom yourself are a way to live these values for myself. It's also an invitation for others to consider: How do you reflect the things that are beautiful and important to you in your own life and in your own physical space?

It's so lovely listening to your incredibly intentional morning and making ways to take good care of yourself.

I know I didn't always do it. It's reflexive now.

It started in my childhood – taking care of myself and the people around me as well as valuing things that are important to me and making these values known. I was able to do that for myself most regularly starting in my 20's, especially at the tail



end of college and then from there on out.

Even when I was in college, I started collecting things that I liked. I didn't have the \$20 to spend on the bowl but I still spent the \$20 on the bowl. I continued doing that here and there during graduate school and it really took root during that period of my life.

Why do you think it's so hard for people to buy special things for themselves?

I think you have to get past the point of feeling it's an indulgence. And that maybe you haven't earned it. We tend to be more willing to spend money on other people.

When I've made purchases where I wasn't necessarily intending to go buy something for myself, it has been things where I look at it and I can say, "I really adore this and you know what, I would do this for somebody else. Why would I not give the same kindness and generosity to myself?"



Deirdre Danahar is a coach and consultant who helps people with complex, busy lives master the art of doing their best work without the guilt, strain and emptiness of compromising for their careers. She lives in Jackson, MS.

www.inmotioncc.com

Ideas & Suggestions

for bringing more beauty into your everyday life

- ❧ Create a breakfast ritual for yourself.
- ❧ Pick one thing you love that you use everyday. Consider designating it for your exclusive use.
- ❧ When you are having a crazy day, find one thing in your life that is beautiful and spend five minutes with it. Hold it. Listen to it. Breathe in its fragrance. Soak in its beauty and let your mind be soothed.
- ❧ The next time you're shopping, consider what Deirdre learned from her mother: "It is better to buy something that's a little more expensive if it's better made because in the long run you'll enjoy it more. It will last you longer."
- ❧ When you see something and think "This would make a great gift," ask yourself if you can extend that kindness and generosity to yourself.

“They bring me a
soul-enriching feeling”

Cindy

One day when I was making a deposit at the bank, the teller, Cindy, asked me about my business name, “Whimsy & Tea.” We started talking about kitchen towels, so on my next visit to the bank, I brought some with me. She purchased one towel, then a second one, and then asked me to weave a third that would pull the colors of the first two towels together.

After her purchases, I continued to see Cindy regularly at the bank, and we’d chat about her towels. She told me that she’d created a display with the towels on an antique ladder.

I weave kitchen towels with the desire that people dry their hands and dishes with them. I asked Cindy if I could interview her because I was curious about her use of towels as art in her home and I wanted to know more.

Our conversations have helped me understand that having my towels on display as art is indeed using them. And, by the end of our interview, Cindy began to think about getting a towel to use to dry her hands!

In the interview I learned that she has placed the towels and other special objects throughout her house as “soul-tinglers” – objects with special, personal meaning that make her soul tingle when she walks by them.



What inspired you to buy a towel in the first place?

The name of your company was intriguing to me. Then one day you actually remembered to bring some towels in to show me and they were just beautiful. I have this antique ladder in my kitchen and when I saw the towels, I thought the ladder would be a perfect place to hang these towels. I bought one for my sister-in-law too because we both like the same things.

How do you use your towels?

Not the way the weaver intended! I use them as art pieces really. I use them to bring me happiness every day when I look at them. They're colorful and add beauty to my home. They're made so beautifully and perfectly.

What difference does having these towels make in your everyday life?

I don't know that they make a difference in how I *live*, but they make a difference in how I *feel*. They bring me joy. I like to have things around my house that I look at and think, "I know where that came from. I like the person I got that from." They bring me happiness when I look at them because they're something special. I didn't buy them mass-manufactured from China.

We talk about other special objects Cindy has in her home and I comment, "It seems like they are all in a way art pieces for you."

They are art pieces. They're not things that I pull out of the drawer and use; they are things that I admire. They bring me a soul-enriching feeling every time I look at them.

What difference does this soul-enriching feeling make in your life?

I feel full. Like I have a full life versus I'm yearning for something. What I like about these objects is they make my soul tingly and happy. It's not something I always think about, but I can feel it when I walk by. I feel the energy. It revives my soul and makes my soul happy and full.



“Life is getting shorter. So why not dry my hands on something beautiful & useful versus something that’s got a hole in it and you’ve had forever?”

I think soul tingling is a beautiful description.

It actually is a physical feeling and it’s in my core where it tingles. I call that my soul. I tingle when I walk by these things. It’s like they are sending energy to me and I feel the tingle. And your towels are one of them. I can’t plan that; I can’t buy something and say, “That’s going to be my soul tingler.” It happens after it’s been there.

I’ve placed these soul tingle throughout the house so I get these tingles as I walk through the house. Some people have a sanctuary; mine are not just in one area. I want these things spaced out because I want to feel tingly in every part of the house.

What’s important about this tingling?

It feels good. It makes me happy. It makes me smile and creates a feeling of gratitude.

I think gratitude is an underused emotion. This tingling feeling reminds me of gratitude because when you are grateful for things, you can kind of get a soul tingle. I think more people should be grateful for many more things.

It sounds like gratitude and soul tingling are connected for you.

Yes. When I bought the first towel, it was very special but it wasn’t until I got all three of them together that I got the soul tingle. The first one was lonely and needed some friends to send the energy.

All of the objects I have that I’ve kind of put on pedestals to enrich my life or my soul – they weren’t planned. That’s just the way they became.

It sounds like a number of these special objects were gifts.

When I think about it, a lot of these special objects were gifts. I think the gift element makes it that much more special. I feel a connection to the person who gave it to me or where I got it from. Now I bought your towels, but they were, in a way, a gift. They were a gift to me. From me.

Part of the reason I asked to interview you is because you use your Whimsy & Tea towels as art. I personally love drying my hands on them so much, and you are helping me expand my ideas of what it means to use a towel.

You know what, I may have to buy another one and dry my hands on it. Because the thing is, we are all getting older. Life is getting shorter. So why not dry my hands on something beautiful and useful versus something that’s got a hole in it and you’ve had forever? I always intended to use them as art pieces once I saw them, but you have made me realize I should probably buy one for my hands. I think I deserve it.

Tell me more about this deserving.

I am learning lessons from my mother. She is 88 and has kind of self-sacrificed her whole life. She will put off purchasing something because it's not the right time.

When is the right time? I want to have what I can and enjoy everything I do have now. Everything in my house gets used for my intended purpose.

I'm at this point where I don't want to put things off. I see with my mom that time is counting down. I only purchase things for now. I like beauty. I like nice things. I'm not extravagant by any means. The very simple things are what's important to me: a glass that fits in your hand really well to drink out of on a daily basis or a pillow that fits behind your back just right. And having a nice towel to dry my hands on which I do probably 20 times when I'm cooking dinner. I should have a nice towel to do that.

What kind of towels do you use in your kitchen?

I have some old beat up Williams Sonoma towels that don't match a thing, but that's what I use. I've had them for years. I wash them and bleach them and they just don't wear out.

If you love your Williams Sonoma towels, you're all set.

I love them for the practicality, but I won't think of them the same as drying my hands on one of your towels. It wasn't until this conversation, until you said, "I love drying my hands on it," that I even considered using one of your towels to dry my hands on.



Cindy Duffy had a long and successful career as a hotel, restaurant, vineyard owner with her husband John before working at the bank where she and I met. After Cindy and John sold their businesses, they built a home in the hills of Sonoma County, CA. The process of designing and building a home helped Cindy discover what is important in the scheme of her life and what fills her soul.

Ideas & Suggestions

for bringing more beauty into your everyday life

- ❧ Experiment with creating small groupings of special items. Does it change their energy, how they affect you, when you bring them together?
- ❧ Choose special objects with particular meaning that make you feel happy when you see them. Create mini-sanctuaries by placing them intentionally throughout the house.
- ❧ Is there something you've been putting off purchasing or doing because the time isn't right? As Cindy said, "When is the right time?" Consider allowing yourself to buy or do it now.
- ❧ Take a look at the things you use everyday – a drinking glass, a kitchen knife. Are they beautiful? Do they feel just right? If they aren't, can you tweak them so that they are beautiful and just right?
- ❧ Add color somewhere in your home. Maybe a splash of bright color to make you smile when you walk in the kitchen or a soothing color in the bedroom. Colors have different qualities and people respond to them differently. What color makes your soul tingle? Where could you use more of that color?



“It reminded me
of my humanity.”

Caryn

I met Caryn at the Lake Oswego Festival for the Arts in Lake Oswego, OR a couple years ago. Her aunt Linda is a friend of mine. Linda encouraged Caryn to come to the festival and to choose a towel that would be a gift from her.

I know from conversations with customers at craft shows that a number of my handwoven towels are purchased as gifts – for weddings, birthdays, Christmas, thank-you’s and more. However, I don’t usually have an opportunity to meet the people who receive those gifts. It was a treat to watch Caryn select her Whimsy & Tea towel and then to interview her after she’d been using it for a while.



As I spoke with Caryn I learned that she was given so much more than a towel. Coming to the craft fair – where she was reminded of her humanity and was inspired to rekindle her creativity – was an important part of the gift. As she uses the towel, she appreciates its beauty while being reminded of the love she feels for her aunt and uncle, which in turn helps her feel connected to love in this world.

You received your towel as a gift. What was it like to receive this gift?

At the end of this particular school year, I was so completely tired and exhausted, physically and emotionally. It was all I could do to keep being my absolute professional best and show up for my students with a lot of energy and love. So to have my aunt tell me about an artist she knows and wants to share with me was in itself a gift right then.

Heading out to an arts festival and looking at someone else's work is a beautiful experience. It was lovely to go on out and take time to select a handwoven, functional piece of art ... even though I was exhausted. It may sound silly but it reminded me of my humanity – going out and meeting an artist who is creating. It encouraged me to slow down and be present and to appreciate things.

It also got me thinking, "Oh, right, Caryn, you had hobbies once and you have artistic things that you like to do. What are they? You could pursue those and take care of yourself." It's very challenging to have time and energy to pursue hobbies (or other parts of who I am, outside of my professional life) during the school year. This visit was inspiring for me.

How do you use your towel?

At first my husband and I just wanted to have the towel folded and displayed. We just wanted to admire it, because it is really beautiful. We stared at it; placed it in various lighting in our apartment. We took a photograph of our cat near it to send it to my aunt as a thank-you. And we also used it on the first day.

Mostly, now, I dry my hands with it and every single time I do, I appreciate it. It is one of the truly beautiful things in our kitchen. We love it and we love the story behind it – that it's from my aunt and my uncle whom I love very dearly.

Does drying your hands on this towel make a difference in your everyday life?

Absolutely, yes. For one, I try to avoid buying things that are disposable – like paper towels or plastic bags – so I'm always eager to find alternatives that truly work and that I will really use. Functionally, I love drying my hands on something that feels good, and soft, and strong, something that I'm never going to throw away or put in the compost or landfill. I love interacting in such an "everyday" way with something so beautiful.

The towel also changes my life because every single time I use it, I think of beauty. The sheer experience of looking at it and drying my hands on it, and noticing that it's beautiful, reminds me to notice what else around me is beautiful. The birch tree outside our apartment window, for example. It's beautiful.

How does stopping and noticing beautiful things improve the quality of your life?

It's a reminder to be present. Touching the towel can serve as a silent meditation to be present. For me – somebody who has spent a lot of her life struggling with anxiety and not being very present – noticing, breathing, asking myself what is actually occurring right now in the moment, makes a huge difference in my quality of life.

Is it new for you to use something beautiful in an everyday way?

Story is so important. When I look around this kitchen, the things that strike me are definitely connected with people or stories. Your towel, for example. Blue and yellow have been my favorite colors throughout my life. Knowing that I met the person who made it is incredibly special. It's a reminder of my aunt, and it's a reminder that I am connected to love in this world.

Touching the towel can serve as a silent meditation to be present.



As human beings, we have put so many protections and barriers up around ourselves. But what I've noticed about learners and have learned from reading brain research is that we make meaning when we connect with other people. Making connections is one of the most significant things in comprehension and learning how to be a reader. Making meaning is about connection. So it doesn't surprise me that the towel is part of life having meaning.

Is there anything you want to add?

The towel is opening up a question, consciously and subconsciously, in my mind. Because it is a reminder of beauty and connection, I get to ask myself, "What are other ways that I can be inspired by this? How can I either make beautiful things or be more resourceful and creative during the school year? How can I make certain to have more beauty in my life?"

I knit, I paint, I draw, I play music, and I used to write music. The towel reminds me that there are things I can do to bring beauty into my life and that I can be creative and resourceful, and build upon the inspiration I get from this lovely, handwoven towel.

That's lovely. It is my hope that people will bring more beautiful things into their lives. (Caryn laughs.) Seriously.

I laugh with joy and inspiration. I so agree. I absolutely agree wholeheartedly. I am thrilled by the prospect of more beauty in everyday lives and more and more people voicing it. It makes me happy.



Caryn Cushman has been teaching and learning with 4th and 5th graders in the public schools in Portland, OR. She is shifting gears as she and her husband Jay prepare for the arrival of their first child in June 2015. Caryn's next professional steps will likely include one or more of her great passions: wine, writing, and a smattering of other artistic pursuits.

Ideas & Suggestions

for bringing more beauty into your everyday life

- Designate something in your home as a reminder to be present. When you see it or use it, take three deep breaths or do some other practice that grounds you and brings you into the present.
- Take yourself out on an artist date, preferably alone. The purpose of this date is to slow down and do something that inspires you, nurtures your creativity, nourishes your spirit, reminds you of your humanity. It might be visiting a flower show or greenhouse, doodling with art supplies or taking a long walk in the woods. Or perhaps your artist self wants to eat lunch at new restaurant.
- Replace something in your home that is disposable (e.g. plastic bags, paper towels, paper napkins) with something environmentally friendly that you will use and love.
- Do you have a hobby that you've neglected? Can you make time for it? What small steps can you take to bring it back into your life?
- Look around you, your room, your home, your yard and name what you see that you consider beautiful.

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Did a particular comment or reflection in an interview resonate with you?

Which ideas for adding beauty to your everyday life inspired you?

How you bring beauty into your everyday life? What difference does that beauty make?



Marilyn Webster

The first time I said to someone, "I make cloth," something resonated deep inside me. Making cloth is something so basic and yet so profound. Cloth is such an integral part of our lives, from waking to sleeping, from birth to death, that we don't always notice it, let alone think about how it was made. I marvel that I get to take hundreds of threads and turn them into functional cloth.

When I learned to weave in 2005, I felt I was coming home. Weaving, and in particular weaving kitchen towels, combines many things that I have loved since I was young – working with my hands, cooking and baking, and a fascination with numbers and patterns.

I weave kitchen towels, napkins and table runners to add beauty and sacredness to the ordinary tasks of daily life. I started selling my handwoven textiles at farmers' markets in 2007 and gradually entered juried craft fairs and exhibits.

I am constantly looking at color – wildflowers on an afternoon walk with my yellow lab, a friend's necklace, shells collected at the beach. These noticings find their way into my towels and other textiles.

I invite you to [visit my online store](#) and soak in the beauty of those towels, napkins and table runners. Perhaps one of these handwoven textiles will support you in bringing more beauty – as well as connection, gratitude and soul-tingling – into your life.

If you prefer to shop in person, please [look at my calendar](#) to see where I'll be or [contact me](#) to visit my studio.

Whimsy & Tea (www.whimsyandtea.com)

marilyn@whimsyandtea.com

(413) 369-4713

