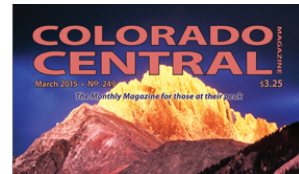


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/ Eppie Archuleta of Capulin: Weaving a Life

Eppie Archuleta of Capulin: Weaving a Life

📅 February 1, 2001 / 👤 Staff (<http://cozine.com/author/mark/>) / ≡ 2001 February (<http://cozine.com/category/2001-february/>)

Article by Marcia Darnell

Local Artists – February 2001 – Colorado Central Magazine

WEAVING requires hundreds of different threads and decades of work and creativity. Eppie Archuleta has 78 years of living on her personal loom, a tapestry of work and family, success and failure, children and teaching, building and growing.

And pain.

Eppie's husband of 60 years, Frank, died last January, just five months after the death of her mother. The black clothes of mourning she wears are not an affectation.

"I always dressed in bright colors, but not any more," she says. "I will be in black for a long time."

She has invited a granddaughter and three babies to live with her to help her recover from her losses.

"The kids were my medicine," she says. "I've always had kids around. The first thing is my kids, then my weaving."

Her weaving has taken a back seat to grief recently. She hasn't worked in months — a significant change of lifestyle for someone who has made a life at the loom.

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[Photo by Marcia Darnell]

Eppie has been weaving “since I reached a loom,” when she was about 10 years old. Her parents were weavers, and the children helped them by making bobbins and doing other chores.

“We were always working when we were small, because my mom and dad were weavers and they were always at the loom. There were nine of us.”

The family made piecework for a company, and Eppie sold the clothing she wove for years. She grew up in Española, N.M., and moved to the San Luis Valley in 1951 with her husband, who worked in the fields. The couple worked, farmed, and had 10 children — eight of whom survived into adulthood. She now has 36 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.

“Since the kids were very small I had them around me,” she remembers. “I like to keep them busy — I don’t like to have kids on the street.”

She continued her creative pursuits through this hectic time.

“I always weave at night, I always have, even now,” she says.

In addition to making rugs and wall hangings, Eppie has passed her craft on to young people. She has taught weaving since the ’70s, privately and in vocational schools. She wanted to teach at the college level, but was not allowed to for many years, for lack of a degree. Recently, though, she has taught at Adams State College.

Nearly a decade ago she moved to tiny Capulin, in Conejos County, building a small house adjacent to a wool mill. The home where she lives now is crowded with babies, furniture, dogs, family photographs, two playful kittens, clothing and fabric, and three looms of varying sizes — a full house for a full life.



[Photo by Marcia Darnell]

THE MILL HOLDS the machinery for processing the wool Eppie uses in her



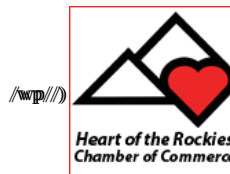
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art. A workroom stores finished yarn in a rainbow of colors, as well as the largest of Eppie's looms, which was built for her by a grandson. Some of her best work hangs on the walls.

The soft, handmade wool is dyed naturally before Eppie works with it.

Its feel is noticeably softer than the stiff commercial material in mass-produced pieces. The results are both traditional and innovative, with bright colors and symmetrical designs.

Eppie's work garnered a lot of press in the '70s, and her reputation grew with each article about her, culminating in a National Geographic profile in 1991. She was invited to President Bill Clinton's first inauguration in 1993.

"I've been five times in Washington," she says.

A collage of photographs shows Eppie weaving at the inauguration, and posing with the offspring who traveled with her.

"We had four generations in Washington," she says.

Her work hangs in museums from coast to coast, including Taos, Denver, California, and Washington, D.C. She has had a traveling exhibit in New York for four years.



[Photo by Marcia Darnell]

She sells her work directly, however, preferring not to sell through brokers. She enjoys dealing directly with the people who admire her work, and tries to create to suit them. Many of her works are sold to tourists and visitors to the Valley, but she also does business by mail.

"I sold one once to a couple in San Jose, California," she says. "I never met them, they just saw some article and wrote to me and sent me pictures of what they wanted, where they wanted to put the piece. I made it and mailed it."

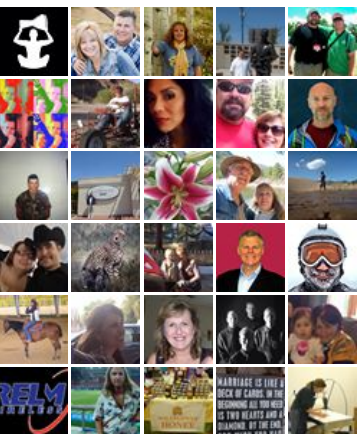
She custom designs most of the work she sells to customers, asking them for ideas, sizes and designs.

"Anything they want!"



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Her creations aren't limited to decorative pieces, either. She's currently working on a T-shirt for a relative. It's black, with a rendering of a grizzly bear against a full moon.

"I can do anything," she says.

THAT KIND OF CONFIDENCE is what will get Eppie through her present pain. Her spirit is reviving and her looms await. She talks about rearranging her house and getting back to work.

"It took a long time but I'm ready to work again," she says.

And she should have years of creativity ahead, if her family is any indication. Her mother died at 102 "and she was still at the loom," Eppie says. "She wove till the last day."

A large photograph hangs in the mill, depicting Eppie's mother working with wool. The photo is a blow-up of a frame from a PBS special about crafts that featured Eppie's family.



[Photo by Marcia Darnell]

Eppie's own children and grandchildren are also part of the tradition.

Her grandsons run the wool business and build looms, and her granddaughters weave and sell their creations too. Soon the craft will be passed on to the fifth generation.

And the tapestry will grow.

Contact Eppie Archuleta at 8325 Hwy. 15, La Jara, CO 81140, or at (719) 274-5019.

Marcia Darnell lives and writes in the San Luis Valley.

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