



Knitting Yarns: Writers on Knitting

Ann Hood (Editor)

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“The impressive collection of writers here have contributed essays that celebrate knitting and knitters. They share their knitting triumphs and disasters as well as their life triumphs and disasters. . . . These essays will break your heart. They will have you laughing out loud.”—Ann Hood, from the introduction

Why does knitting occupy a place in the hearts of so many writers? What’s so magical and transformative about yarn and needles? How does knitting help us get through life-changing events and inspire joy? In *Knitting Yarns*, twenty-seven writers tell stories about how knitting healed, challenged, or helped them to grow. Barbara Kingsolver describes sheering a sheep for yarn. Elizabeth Berg writes about her frustration at failing to knit. Ann Patchett traces her life through her knitting, writing about the scarf that knits together the women she’s loved and lost. Knitting a Christmas gift for his blind aunt helped Andre Dubus III knit an understanding with his girlfriend. Kaylie Jones finds the woman who used knitting to help raise her in France and heals old wounds. Sue Grafton writes about her passion for knitting. Also included are five original knitting patterns created by Helen Bingham.

Poignant, funny, and moving, *Knitting Yarns* is sure to delight knitting enthusiasts and lovers of literature alike.

Knitting Yarns: Writers on Knitting Details

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From Reader Review Knitting Yarns: Writers on Knitting for online ebook

Gaja says

I was admittedly a little nervous when this book showed up in the mail (I won it through a Goodreads giveaway) and I found out that I'd somehow managed to miss the fact that it was a memoir instead of fiction like I had thought. Memoirs are one of those things that can either be really great, or be collection of 'I guess you had to be there' stories that are probably really great to people in the know (not being a knitter, I'm not in the know at ALL) but aren't that interesting to people who don't know what's going on. Thankfully this book worked out to be the former rather than the later, and I enjoyed it overall. Some of the stories were really sweet, some were sad, some were fun, and there only worked out to be one that I really, really didn't like. I kinda had to force myself to get through that one.

Like most of the other reviewers here, this book made me want to get out the needles (I may not know how to knit, but I seem to have dozens of knitting needles around here) and see what I could do. I do like a book that inspires creativity.

Anastacia says

Anyone who has read more than one of my reviews before knows I'm a crafter and more specifically a knitter and crocheter, and anyone who follows my blog knows I try to review a wide variety of crafting books, so naturally I jumped at the chance.

There's a few similar books out there, a collection of short stories with the common theme of knitting in all the stories. The difference is this collection includes more famous people, like Barbara Kingsolver, Sue Grafton, and Anne Shayne (of Mason Dixon fame). Like any short story collection, some are better than others - my least favorite was about a guy who kept talking about how he didn't knit but yet his story somehow involves knitting anyway. He just kept talking about how he didn't knit, like he was insulting the craft and those who love it. But that's the great thing about short story collections, you spend a few minutes reading a story you don't like, you move on to the next one that you do like.

There's also a few patterns included in the book, which in books like this I always figure they include solely as a way of selling more books (you know, people who enjoy reading will read this book, and people who just want patterns will buy this book, so you get twice as many sales). You have no idea what the patterns look like because you have to go online to see photos - I hope that this is maybe just something in my e-ARC and not in the final book. They are all very basic designs, like fingerless gloves, cabled head wrap, ruffled slipper socks, coffee cozies, etc., and most designed by Helen Bingham.

I received a copy of this book for free through <http://edelweiss.abovethetreeline.com/>

Barbara says

I expected that in this book which features "writers" writing about knitting, that most or all would be writers who KNIT. That may have been the original concept but in fact the majority of the writers are failed knitters. That is disappointing for someone who is a knitter AND a reader. Also, I expected the writers to be names I knew, but in fact many were unknown to me, and a couple brand new, just published writers.

One common narrative that I disliked was a constant reference to knitting grandmothers who knit things that most of the children and grandchildren didn't appreciate. There were some references to loving memories of these women but too many of the other references fit the stereotypes of knitting that most knitters constantly hear and try to counter with examples of gorgeous knitting. The stories of failed knitters were abundant and at time tedious, despite the talent of the authors.

Despite these criticisms, there were a number of gems in the collection. Anita Shreve and Barbara Kingsolver are each skilled and ardent knitters. Kingsolver applied her fantastic narrative skills to her selection "Where to Begin". Anita Shreve tells the story of finishing UFOs during a visit with her daughter that I loved. A writer I didn't know before, Taylor Polites, authored one of my favorites in the collection "Clothes Make the Dog". His dog, Clovis, a chihuahua (tiny of course) love, love, loves knitted items that Taylor knits for him/her. I also enjoyed Taylor's account of living year round in Provincetown, a "gay haven" which changes dramatically post-season. Local knitters gather during the winter and include some year round gay residents, Portuguese grandmothers, punks, church ladies, and just about anyone who knits.

I bumped this up from 3 to 4 stars because I did enjoy it despite some disappointment. The writing was high quality and what knitter and reader can resist a good knitting story.

notgettingenough says

This isn't a book, it's a piece of crochet, haphazardly put together from random squares of indifferent colour combinations.

We may take a moral from it: no number of highly qualified birds does a swallow make.

This book has prize-winning and NYT best selling authors coming out of its what's it. But in the end it is that creature to be avoided at all costs, the one to which, ironically, knitting never descends: the crocheted blanket squares. The one everybody's grandmother made and 99% of the time they are a hodgepodge of the consequences of 'waste not, want not' with no concern whatsoever for the general notion of aesthetics or any particular person's sensibilities. Uggggh.

I cringed every time I read one of these writers talk about how amazingly impossible it is to knit and how they took twenty years, or isolation with their grandmother or some other extreme measure to learn - that's those who succeeded. Quite a few of them took up astro physics or open heart surgery instead because you know. Knitting is SO HARD.

It's not that I don't want to sympathise. I can look back to my first knitting day, my complete frustration because I couldn't figure out for myself how to do purl, this being just pre-internet - that is, there is no longer any excuse. But Simon showed me how and Simon hadn't even knitted before, he'd simply watched women

knit 50 years earlier when he was a young boy and remembered. With all due respect to Simon, this means knitting is NOT THAT HARD.

Like most things in life, becoming a wonderfully accomplished practitioner is hard, but becoming competent is SO NOT HARD.

I couldn't do it. I couldn't sympathise with women talking about how it took them hours and hours and years and generations to learn how to wind a bit of string over a stick. It's a time for embarrassment, not sympathy.

I wanted to sympathise with the writer who ended up giving somebody something that was complete shit, suddenly in the zen of the notion that it's THE THOUGHT THAT COUNTS. But I can't. If that's the thought: I've given you something perfect and you give me in return something shit, I get the thought and it isn't pretty. It's insulting. My friends reading this please take note. I never want to get a lousy meal in return for a good one, a lousy scarf in return for a beautiful one, a crap book in return for a magnificent work of art. Please give me nothing. I will take the message that you care. Not as much as if you'd given me something lovely, but more than if you'd given me something crappy. IMPORTANT NOTE: anybody reading this who is under the age of six is excluded from the above principle.

Rest here:

<https://alittleteaalittlechat.wordpress.com>

Arianna says

shelfnotes.com

Dear Reader,

I can say this with absolute certainty: this book would be a wonderful gift for a knitter in your life. How can I say this? Because it was gifted to me by my own sister (thanks, Bethany)! It's funny, because I am not one to read knitting novels. Occasionally I will pick one up, but although the craft is a passion of mine, it's not something that is enhanced by reading books about knitting groups. Mostly because those tend to be "chick lit" - novels more about the lives of the women in the group than the knitting itself (and chock FULL of awful knitting puns! - and I do love me a good clever pun, normally). And honestly, it makes sense: how much CAN you really write just about the craft of knitting? It'd be boring. You have to write about the lives, or there really is no novel.

However, this one (perhaps because it wasn't a novel, but a series of essays) was totally different. It DID make me laugh, and cry, and for sure it inspired me to knit more! I would be listening to the book while walking the dog, and get all eager to arrive back home so I could pick up my needles again. The stories in here are real stories about people who knit, people who wish they could knit, people who simply love being around knitters. They are stories about people who are experts and people who will always find bliss in knitting the most basic of garter stitch scarves, over and over again. It's not a book that judges your knitteriness. It is simply a book that celebrates the joys and the emotional power of knitting. I know, I know, how can it be emotional? But the things these people craft with their hands - to make for their loved ones, to make to offer comfort to those who have suffered loss - have truly brought peace to their chaos, in many cases.

I loved the story about the mother and daughter who attempted to tackle all of those notorious knitters' banes: the unfinished projects. The ones that you were so gung-ho about beginning, but which got put aside for one thing or another and then languished in your knitting pile for ages - sometimes *years*. Every knitter has these. Just like every knitter has some sort of yarn stash. They're both something that we almost all have attempted to conquer at one time or another - only to recognize the absurdity of it all. Perhaps there really was a reason you abandoned that piece, be it consciously or not. It's one of the things we just have to accept.

There were some great writers featured in this book, too - it was definitely a book specifically of writers on knitting, and you have to keep that in mind. There are plenty of wonderful other stories that could be told, I am sure. These are just the stories that Ann Hood solicited from professional writers. So you get pieces from Barbara Kingsolver, Sue Grafton, Andre Dubus III, Elizabeth Berg, Ann Patchett. All about various aspects of knitting. Not all of the authors even ARE knitters. And I kind of loved that! They still found something very important to write about the craft.

My favorite thing about the book, though, might have been how two entirely different stories both had to do with two very unique concepts: one, parents who would not let their children sit still in front of the TV (hence they picked up knitting, among other things) and two, the concept of a non-knitter woman who MUST sit next to a knitter for the soothing benefits (I believe the repetitive ticking sound). Both are things I'd never heard of (although the former is something I kind of prescribe to, myself). Overall, this book is a treasure for those who want to be inspired both in the knitting craft and in life. (Normally I don't go for that kitschy stuff, either, but this worked one me!)

Yours,
Arianna

Jana says

I lost my best fur buddy on 6/11/15. I found that I could not work and I could not read. I didn't want to see anyone or talk to anyone. I didn't want to watch anything on TV.

But I could knit. And I could listen to this audiobook. Which is what I did for 2 days.

Knitting is therapeutic. A "prescription" to lower blood pressure in one story. And in the first essay by Ann Hood, it is what helps her with her grief over the death of her daughter.

These essays on knitting were just what I needed this week. Some of the narration is by Ann herself. And her son narrates the male stories (both are excellent). Andre Dubus III has an essay in here as well as Barbara Kingsolver, and many others. The story about a man who knits for his 4 lb Chihuahua was very fun. My 60 lb yellow lab stars in several of my knitting photos, wearing many a scarf and shawl.

If you're a knitter, you'll get it. If not, you'll want to become one after you listen.

Marie says

When I decided to review this book, I initially planned on doing a quick one-liner on each of the authors... since this is a collection of stories by different authors. After finishing the book, I decided to go a different way with my review.

I find that when I'm looking at reviews, I tend to read the short and/or bulleted reviews just to get the gist of what I'm getting myself into. I wanted to make, what I feel, is an important few points about the book... and not get those points lost in a long, drawn out review of each and every thought that went through my mind while reading it.

My most important point that I'd like to get across, is more of a feeling. Do you know that feeling when you read a great book and the story starts off interesting and the ending leaves you satisfied and glad that you read the book? This book is like that. The best part is that, since it is a collection of short works, this feeling occurs over and over and over. It's like reading a bunch of very satisfying books all in one book.

Second, I just love the editor's style. Her own writing is great and the arrangement of the stories is fantastic.

I liked some stories better than others, but they were all interesting and very satisfying.

Lastly, I don't knit! I never have and never planned to. I sew, I cook, I play percussion.... but I don't knit. That didn't stop me from truly enjoying this book. I recently flew from Boston to Florida on a business trip. I read this entire book on the flights up and back.

I would highly recommend this book. It's satisfying on multiple levels and the characters stay with you after they've gone.

Maddly Peculiar says

A collection of stories all centered around the timeless art of knitting. Some stories certainly spoke louder than others but all of them had something meaningful to say: knitting is the art of turning straw into gold. I personally love knitting, crafting a ball of yarn into a hat or a scarf or a rare pair of socks. It's all so therapeutic and encouraging to know that I can create something good with my two little hands.

Elizabeth says

I rarely give a book 4 stars, but I enjoyed this collection of essays that much - except for the one by Barbara Kingsolver. I quit reading her books years ago because her proselytizing annoys me. In her essay in this book, it is her turgid, dense, and unnecessarily obtuse language that annoys me.

Essays I particularly enjoyed:

Ann Hood's "ten things i learned from knitting," particularly the section on knitting groups (pp. 110-111). I too find great pleasure and support in knitting groups.

Suzanne Strempek Shea's "crafty critters" - she talks about getting lost in the process of knitting. Makes me think of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience* and how refreshing it is to get absorbed in something and lose self-consciousness.

Jane Smiley's "why bother" made me laugh out loud (I love when that happens).

Teri-K says

In many ways this is a delightful book for knitters. There are lots of "How I learned to knit from my dear grandmother or my tense Mother" pieces, but also a few interesting "Why I don't knit but love to watch others who do". Add in several "Why I believe feminists can knit" and one "Why I, a gay man, knit for my Chihuahua" and you get a sense of the range.

But I have to call out the introduction to one piece. ""A husband and wife form a couple; it takes the addition of children to create a family." SERIOUSLY? When was this book published? 1920? 1820? I love being a Mom & Grandma. But I know wonderful folks who can't/don't have children and can't/don't adopt. Who says they aren't a family anyway? Imagine how painful this would be for someone struggling with infertility or the death of their only child or something. They're reading a perfectly good book about knitting and then they get this thrown at them. How dare the editor state that they can't be a family!!!!!!

When I read this I wanted to throw the book across the backyard. I'm disgusted that this could be published in 2014 and not be used as irony. Shame on them. I was so offended I considered not finishing the book but instead I skipped that article, put the book aside for about a week, and then restarted.

Beth Fuller says

I loved this book! Each essay is but a few pages - just long enough to get to know a writer, short enough to read during a 15 minute break at work. I loved that this book about knitters - and non-knitters - was not by the 'usual suspects'; instead these were familiar, and unfamiliar writers, there were successful knitters, there were unsuccessful knitters, and I loved each one. We could be friends, I thought more than once, we could share patterns and tips and embarrassing amounts of yarn stash; I know how you feel about your grandmother's knitting, I've felt that way too. I too have been loved by a knitter, and I too have run out of people to knit for!

There are several patterns included - pictures are easy to find on Ravelry - I look forward to knitting those up as soon as I finish this row.....

Mollie *scoutrmom* says

This I find to have been by far the best of the anthologies on knitting writing that I have read, and I've read most of them.

The other books of essays were from people who are either amateurs, or make their living at knitting. Basically knitters writing about their knitting lives.

This one is from people who make their living at writing. Writers writing about their knitting lives.

My favorite entry was Taylor M. Polites story about knitting for his chihuahua. I can almost see the little critter prancing in his outfits, the description was so well written.

My only quibble, and this is very minor, is that for the knitting patterns that are interspersed among the essays, there are no images. You are left to type in a web address to see what the garment should look like.

Enjoy! I hope your public library has this, I got mine at Half Price Books on a whim and I'm so glad I did, as I'll be passing it around.

Isaiah Vianese says

This likable and diverse collection of essays explores the many practical, therapeutic, and symbolic functions of knitting in people's lives. Knitting also works as a reflection of the individual writers' personalities--a comfort for the neurotic, a fixation for the perfectionist. The essays are fairly consistent in quality, making the book a pleasing read--especially for those interested in handcrafts. As a knitter, I found it comforting.

LuAnn says

This book makes me want to pick up my knitting needles and start some project. It's a collage of authors, many of whom you've probably heard of, discussing how knitting affected their lives -- some in small ways, others in rather substantial ways. It's heartwarming and touching to hear these people talk about learning to knit at their grandmother's knee, watching a cherished aunt weave special items, turning to their stash of yarn to banish depression and hurt and more. I truly enjoyed it.

Bev says

Knitting Yarns is a collection of essays from a diverse group of authors (some I knew; some I didn't) about knitting. That's the one unifying element between the essays: some read like short stories, although autobiographical; some are almost instructional, such as "how to teach a child to knit". A few reflect on the spiritual aspects of knitting and how that compares to writing and/or life. Those essays, in particular, remind me of Debbie Macomber's Knit Together.

The only thing I wish there had been more of? Crochet and other fiber arts. Overall, though, an enjoyable and inspiring read. Even if you are primarily a crocheter.

Note: I received a copy of this book from Firstreads.
