

## It Still Lives Season 4, Episode 2 Part 2 Transcript

Kami Ahrens: Hello and welcome everybody, you're listening to It Still Lives, the Foxfire podcast, where we take you on a journey through Southern Appalachian history one story at a time. I'm your host, Kami Ahrens, and this week—as promised—we are listening to some historic audio clips straight from our archive on the practice of weaving in Southern Appalachia. So there were quite a few weavers here in the mountains at the time that the students were going out and interviewing people, especially in the 1970s. So today we're going to feature clips from Marinda Brown, who was extremely well known for her weaving, as well as Edith Darnell, Lula Norton, and Granny Lyndall Toothman, who's a little bit of an anomaly, and I'll talk about her in a minute. But Marinda Brown especially was a member of the Betty's Creek Weavers, which was a group of recognized weavers here in the Betty Creek Community, which is part of Rabun County—it's near Dillard, Georgia. So it's a very small, close-knit community and Marinda actually learned to weave as an adult from her mother-in-law, so she didn't weave as a child, as would have traditionally have been done probably in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

But at the time that Marinda learned to weave, it coincided with this larger movement known as the Arts and Crafts Movement. So, national attention turning towards some of our folk skills, especially those here in Appalachia. But weaving was always really important in the mountains, and certainly in many rural communities where goods wouldn't have been readily accessible. So people had to clothe themselves, and to do that they had to harvest their own wool or flax and process it into yarn and thread their looms, and from that, make their clothing. And this was a process that the entire family would have been involved in. so we know that little kids around age 4 would probably start helping to card the wool, which is where you brush out the fibers. Around age 6, they'd probably start spinning, again, both boys and girls. And then usually around age 10, girls would start weaving and the boys would go out and start doing heavy labor with their fathers. But there are accounts of men knitting and assisting their wives in these crafts as well.

As manufactured goods became more readily available in these areas, weaving and other handicrafts started to decline. But again, in the first half of the twentieth century, we start to see the crafts revival, or the Arts and Crafts Movement, really turn its attention back to these hand crafts. And actually, during the Great Depression, the WPA started schools where people in rural areas could come and learn some of these crafts. And that's actually how Granny Toothman—Lyndall Toothman—learned how to weave. She went to one of these WPA schools that had looms and she started weaving there and kind of carried the craft with her throughout her life. So Marinda, Edith, Lula, and Granny Toothman are all just singular examples of different ways that many women in the mountains utilized and practiced the craft of weaving. So I hope this gives you a little bit more information to complement our earlier episode this month and if you want to learn more about these crafts, you can seek them out in the Foxfire books. And if you head to our website, we'll make sure to link all of that.

So first up, we have Marinda Brown, again who I said was from the Betty's Creek area, talking about weaving.

Marinda Brown (MB): I think I bought my loom around '56. Between '56 and '59 anyway. And I have really woven since I bought mine. But I hadn't done too much previously; I had you know just gotten interested by degrees.

Foxfire (FF): Who taught you to weave? Your mother?

MB: Well, I guess I just picked it up. No, I guess Harry's mother (*Marinda's husband*), Mother Brown, I guess she showed me how, you know. And I helped her thread up the loom. She did some work, she made some coverlets for all of her children. I think she did about six coverlets for her children and I can't recall just when she did that work, but it was after we married, I'm pretty sure. But, and I went with her down to Mrs. Zack Dillard's, that's Barnard Dillard's parents, she had a warping frame—you know what I'm talking about, what I warp mine one—and it covered, oh it was a great big thing! It covered—she kept it outside, and it went just about all the way across the house. And I just don't remember to save my life how we managed to do that, but I think Mother Brown put on about 100 yards of warp. And I helped her carry that thread back and forth, it seemed like we walked miles and miles getting it on. But you know, that's the way that older people back then, very long time back, warped their thread, on those great big warping frames that they kept outside.

FF: And they'd put on 100 yards? Gosh.

MB: And it was fine thread too. But it was strong—they sized their thread somehow, I don't know, I think she bought her thread ready to use, you know, it was sized and everything. It was fine thread, yet it was a lot stronger than the thread we get today. And it has made me wonder in working with the fine threads that I do, how they every managed to get it on. That is the hardest part of it. But I do remember helping her thread up the loom, sometime after she made these coverlets, she brought her loom here and it put it on our porch. We had a porch that went all the way around the house. And she let me set the loom up on the porch, and then she did some weaving on the porch, but I don't remember exactly what she did and then she let me keep the loom, and weave rugs. And I made quite a few rugs, take just worn clothing, I worked up the strings myself. And I guess that is where I got my start. Now that was, let's see, that must've been in the '40s. No, it was before then. That was in the '30s. I think she died in '39. So it was before then. And the loom, she gave us the loom. But she had parts of that loom borrowed from people all over the community. And when she died, we returned those parts; there wasn't anything left much. We took the loom down, set it down, and of course it just, for a long, long time I didn't do anything but rugs, because it was coarse thread—heavier thread—and it didn't break as bad as the fine thread. And it took me quite a long time to learn how to thread it up, you know, and change my different pattern drafts. And then finally, they had a book over at the craft shop that I borrowed. And it's one that I finally bought myself, one like it, you know. And from that, I just have learned to do a lot of different patterns.

But for a long time, I just practiced. I didn't make anything, you know, that I thought was worth selling. But I did sell as many things, you know, just odds and ends. And that kind of gave me encouragement, caused me to branch out and do just a little more and a little more. Had the desire, I know—if you see a piece of music, you want to sit down and try it out, see what it's like. Well, I'm that way with my weaving. If I see a pattern draft, you know, I want to sit down and try it out.

FF: Have you ever done it when, say, like you were mad or something? And to let your anger out, you weave?

MB: Yeah, well I don't know whether you'd say when I was mad or not, but when I was disturbed. Now last week, I didn't feel too good and I was tired, but I was doing something that I wanted to get done. And I kept right at it when I didn't really feel like it, you know, and my mind wouldn't stay on it. and I'd have to go back and take out. I'd put in some that didn't do right and I'd have to go back and take out. And then I noticed, your feelings have something to do with it, in the way you beat, make your beater. Sometimes you give it a harder jerk than you do other times and it makes your weaving a little close together and it shows, it shows on you. It'll tell on you all the way through.

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KA: Here is Edith Darnell talking about her experience weaving.

Edith Darnell (ED): You'll just have to ask me and I'll tell you what I know.

FF: I knew how long you'd been weaving and how you started learning, started at the Hambidge Foundation? Well could you tell me, was it hard when you started at the art foundation? You know, you told me they didn't have somebody to weave.

ED: On a double loom, I had to take one side with another girl, that was my first weave. Well I'd done pretty well.

FF: What did you weave over there?

ED: Well, we just wove wool things, cloth. But I wasn't interested in that, I was interested in pattern weaving.

FF: Well, then you got your loom here at home?

ED: Yeah. But I went over to Ms. Norton's over in North Carolina and learned how to make the dogwood flower, weave them. Then I got my loom and put mine on.

FF: What kinds of things did you like weaving the most?

ED: Well, I'd rather weave bedspreads and things. I'm [more likely] to pick out a pattern.

FF: Have you tried a lot of patterns?

ED: Yeah, well I've had seven to get burned up.

FF: Oh gosh.

ED: And I've got too many, I've sold three I guess.

FF: What was your favorite pattern?

ED: Well, cat paw.

FF: The cat paw? I've never seen that one before. Well what did you find was the most difficult thing about weaving? Was there anything that was hard about it?

ED: No.

FF: Did you ever—one lady told us that she would be, you know, your feelings sort of come into your weaving. She said that one day she was kind of angry and she was throwing the beater harder because she was angry, have you ever done that?

ED: No, I just love to weave.

FF: But do you kind of weave if you're upset about something? Do you ever weave to get it out?

ED: Yeah, you just sit and be happy weaving. I don't know if everybody can, but I can. Or quiltin'. Anything like that, I'm just as well as I can be.

FF: What did you find was the most rewarding thing to you about weaving? Did it make you feel good just to make something or was it just the feeling?

ED: When the pattern comes out. When that pattern comes out right, you feel good.

FF: Is that the only job that you've ever had? Weaving?

ED: Yeah, I've never worked—well I worked for her just a little and wove, but never worked away from home.

FF: Mrs. Hambidge? Did you like working there?

ED: I like the work, but I didn't like working the wool thread all the time and no cotton. But the warp here, I've got cotton warp.

FF: I went out there and we went through some of the buildings and I talked to Ms. Beasley, Dean Beasley, and they just weave a straight pattern, don't they?

ED: Uh-huh

FF: Has weaving gotten easier since you started? Do you feel like you're more confident and stuff?

ED: Yeah, and getting the loom threaded too.

FF: Do it yourself?

ED: For every pattern.

FF: Gosh. Do you consider that about the hardest thing?

ED: Threading the loom and putting the warp on, getting that done.

FF: Do you dislike doing that?

ED: No, I don't mind to do it, it just takes a little longer, you know, and I like to put my warps on myself. I'll put about 50 yards on by myself, comb it and all.

FF: Did your mother weave then, when you were a girl?

ED: Well she didn't weave any while we was home, but she wove before she ever married.

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KA: And now we'll take a listen to Lula Norton.

FF: This is Aline Richards and Barbara Lynn and we're going to interview Mrs. Lula Norton on spinning flax, 9-12-74.

FF: What other things did you do in your spare time?

LN: Oh at that time, I was having this weaving industry. You know, I taught a lot of women to weave. Well, I've done some kind of handwork all my life.

FF: Where did you have a group weaving?

LN: During the Depression, back in late '30s.

FF: Well where, up in here somewhere?

LN: Oh, right here.

FF: Right here? I didn't realize that.

LN: Yes, I had a little shop down near [...] and this shop at one time. After I decided to retire, I [did it out of my home].

FF: This feels like raw wool doesn't it?

LN: You can have all those.

FF: We were just going to make pictures of this.

LN: Now the loom that I started weaving on belonged to some people by the name of Heden. At that time, they were called Hede, way back close to 50 years ago, that I had saw an old handwoven coverlet and I thought it was very pretty and I wanted to learn to make it. And so I started out in search of materials and a loom to weave it on. And I found this old loom, up in an old abandoned house. And so I bought it from the daughter of the grandmother—I mean the granddaughter of the grandmother that used it, Mrs. Heden. And then I got the wool, carded it, and spun the thread and got the box, and did the whole thing. And I found an elderly woman in the community that had woven coverlets, in fact, she was the one that wove the coverlet that I thought was so pretty. And she said she would help me. So when I got things together, she died, between the time I was getting my loom set up and everything ready. But I got to work at it. And I had some things she had given me, drafts, and told me a little bit about them. So I took that and threaded my loom and I worked at that two weeks before I got the knack of treading. But I got it done. And made several. And I made the material for suits and so on. But during World War II, at the beginning of World War II, wool got scarce and I couldn't get it, so all, well all my life, I'd done something with wool: knitted or crocheted. I made sweaters and the first money I earned in my life, I was about eight years old, I knit a pair of socks, men's socks. My mother had spun the wool of course. And sold 'em for twenty-five cents.

FF: That was good then, wasn't it?

LN: I guess I was about as happy as you are now with twenty-five dollars.

FF: Well alright now, when you made suits and stuff, before the second World War, did you spin your wool?

LN: Yes, I carded and spun my wool.

FF: Did you buy it locally?

LN: I done a lot before the war, but it was during the beginning of the war when the wool got scarce that I turned to linen and cotton. And begin to weave linen sets and towels and things. And then it got, I got kind of a market built up for it and one of the neighbors got interested in helping me. I taught her to weave and then they begin to come in along and along, you know, and earn a little extra money. So I finally ended up by teaching 24 and furnishing them work through the Depression.

FF: Who did you sell to?

LN: Well, after I got started on that, or even before, I joined the Southern Highlanders Handicraft Guild and I was a member of that for about twenty-five years. Through them—they had several stores, you know, shops. I did quite a bit through them and then people were hearing about the shops, as far as Martha's Vineyard and places like that. There was the Churchill weavers over in Kentucky. They had a shop in the Palmer House in Chicago. So they found out about my linens and I shipped them a lot of linens. And well, I kept it up until the women started to go off after the Depression and things began to open up. I guess it was, well I kept on with it for, there was two women that stayed with me for a long, long time. In fact, Mrs. Buchanan—you have her story—she's still going on with it. She worked for me for 27 years.

FF: My goodness.

LN: And then when I decided to retire from weaving, she kept on. Well, now of course, I carried all the financial responsibilities of projects and paying the friends if they dropped their weaving in. Sometimes I had to throw it in the waste basket, but I made out.

FF: Well that's what I was going to ask you, did you pay each person after they made a piece or did you pay them by the hour or how did you do it?

LN: I paid 'em by the piece.

FF: Well did you have 24 looms?

LN: Yes, I did. More than that. I had, we made some and we bought several. And I don't know just how many, I had more than that because I kept two or three at the shop so that weavers who wove at the shop could go from one to the other one, with something different on it. Maybe one of them would be weaving towels and another one runners and another one, we had a baby blanket we wove. We wove baby blankets and sets and like—but now, I've turned all that over to my weaver and she's going on with it and her daughter, Hilda Buchanan, I taught her how to weave too. And she's helping her a lot in that.

FF: So now the weaving is still going on?

LN: The weaving is still going on and some of my designs are still being used.

FF: Those were your original designs that you made out the drafts for?

LN: Yes, I made all my designs. I never took up anybody else's design.

FF: So you didn't have like the whig rose pattern or the drunkard's trail.

LN: I had an adaption of the whig rose pattern. And I made up several patterns from the old coverlets. But it was just—I picked it all out myself.

FF: Right.

LN: I never did use the honeysuckle like so many of the weavers did. But I made up my own pattern.

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KA: And finally we have an interview from the 1980s with Granny Toothman, who stopped in at the Foxfire classroom to tell them about her adventures in weaving, spinning, and other crafts, and traveling across the United States. So I hope you enjoy her interview.

FF: It's March 26, 1985, Foxfire class. Richard, Kevin, and Clark interviewing Granny Toothman.

Granny Toothman (GT): The best thing to do is start at the beginning. Because we're at Foxfire where log cabins are the big thing, I'd like to start at the beginning. I was born in May the first, 1910, in a little log cabin in the hills of West Virginia. And the cabin, I can remember it very vividly, we moved from that cabin to another one when I was seven years old. But it was one room with a loft. A room and a half in the loft. It had the old fireplace and the rope beds and the whole works. And then when I was seven years old, we moved to a double cabin on a farm. In fact, the first one was in the village. At that time, in 1910, there was about ten log cabins in this little village. And then we moved about two miles out in the country to about 150 acres—one-horse farm. I'd done all the things that they done in log cabins. I helped make soap, I helped dye cloth, I helped make hominy and make lye from the wood ashes and all that kind of stuff that you've read about. But then we didn't, at that time, we weren't doing any weaving or spinning or anything like that in the family.

I started, I took a weaving a class in the Depression. They had these little schools for, so that people could make a little income to help their families along. In 1935, I went to a school of weaving that was sponsored by the federal government, to help the rural people. I took to the weaving, I was from a family of craftsmen. And then I went to work for the federal reformatory. It was a prison, a federal prison for federal inmates. And I went as a correctional officer. And I hadn't been there but a very short time, the warden come out and had some handwoven things in her hand and said, "Look what they're doing at the El Reno, Oklahoma." And I said, "Well I can do that." And she said, "You can? You'll have a weaving school in the morning." They happened to have a couple of looms there at the institution and the next day, I had two girls and two looms. And from that, I stayed there 13 years and taught weaving.

And then I came back to West Virginia and taught weaving for the board of education—adult vocational education. And that is where I learned to spin. We had done a lot of weaving and I'm pretty good at automatic weaving. I've done enough of it that my method—I have fast weavers. They finally got kind of bored with too much weaving, so one of them said, "Let's learn something else." And I had a spinning wheel, and I said, "How many's got spinning wheels?" And three or four of them did have. So I went to a mountain woman, and all you can be taught to spin is the fundamentals of how to hold your material, how to take care of it, how to adjust your spinning wheel, and then, you've got to learn it by trial and error.

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KA: Well thank you so much for joining us this month. I hope you've enjoyed this look at weaving, both in the past and present here in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. If you haven't already, definitely head to our website and take a listen to our interview with Allie Dudley, who is the resident artist at the John C. Campbell Folk School. That was a really great interview, and Allie is doing a lot of work to preserve and practice historic weaving patterns. If you want to learn more about anything that you heard in today's episode, head to our website. That's [www.foxfire.org](http://www.foxfire.org). If you scroll to the bottom, you'll see a series of blog post snippets, and the one on the very left should be the most recent podcast. You'll be able to click on that and find links to anything related to the topics discussed in this podcast episode.

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