



Winning the Award for New Weavers 2022

Lorraine Steel, Whangarei



My mother and grandmother introduced me to a variety of hand crafts when I was very young. In primary school, when I was involved in a project on the Elizabethan era, I saw a picture of a spinning wheel and thought that one day I'd like to do that. Many years later I was given an Ashford Traditional wheel and some fleece. Over the years friends gave me fleeces and I learned to sort, wash, card, dye, spin and ply.

During New Zealand's first COVID-19 lockdown I crocheted my way through my stash, saving some special fibres. I also felt it was time to find a new hobby. I wanted one that I could enjoy indoors, day or night and take with me when I went to stay with family.

Choosing a lovely, white, soft Turkish cotton and a bamboo/acrylic in variegated thickness and colours, I boldly asked two of the weavers in our club if they would weave me a scarf. I had never been involved in weaving, having grown up not knowing any weavers. I knew virtually nothing about weaving. Two days later Evelyn Clover and Diane Bamber introduced me to a four-shaft table loom and began teaching me a new language and new skills. I was guided through the steps of setts, winding a warp, dressing a loom, reading a draft, beating, picks, tabby and twill weaves. I went home later that day with the loom, books, notes, enthusiasm and my newfound hobby – weaving.

With continual lockdowns and restrictions the pandemic curbed travel and workshops, but I found the members of the Whangarei Spinners and Weavers, and Whangarei's 'Weaving with Others' groups filled any lack during these times. Their assistance, advice and generosity in helping me is appreciated and very humbling. I received many issues of *Handwoven* magazine, a warping board, books and cones of fibre to experiment with. Laurel Wheeler has loaned me her inkle loom, which has been used to produce shoelaces, bag straps, helping hands and a dog lead for my grandchildren's labradoodle, complete with his name woven into it.

Diane offered to teach me more and we had long discussions about the types of weaving, and looms. I finally decided on an Ashford 16-shaft table loom. For club days I have a rigid heddle loom as it is light and easier to transport. I enjoy using it to weave wool and have made two throws using double width weaving.

As I explored this new craft, I realised how much there is to learn and wondered where should I start. I made tea towels to practice beating and getting the selvages straight. Every time I weave I learn new skills and tips. Seeing Diane's beautiful work in Tencel fibre, I purchased some and began to weave with it, making two pieces I am proud of. Club members began suggesting that I enter the Award for New Weavers 2022. I was very hesitant for a long time, but it was in the back of my mind that if I could learn enough to make some nice items maybe I would enter. My family encouraged me and so I went ahead.

My first entry is a wrap in cream and light green Tencel. I liked the pattern, and it was my first weave using this fibre. It feels soft and has a lovely sheen. I want to keep this for myself.

The second entry is a scarf made with possum/Merino warp and Merino weft. It has very subtle colours, and is light and soft.

My third entry is my 'Infinity' top using ecru and shale Tencel. This was a very enjoyable weave from start to finish, which I felt showed in the finished garment.

Fourth is a tote bag. Bags are an item I am interested in pursuing and are very much a work in progress. I received much helpful advice from the selectors.

Lastly a gamp¹. I had seen this word and had to seek advice as to its meaning. Jenny Robertson explained and with her help, using Carol Strickler's *A Weaver's Book of 8-Shaft Patterns*², I made a small one – a sample cloth with 60 different patterns in the one weave. Some are structural patterns and others show colour and weave effects. For me, the benefit is I can see the patterns in reality and choose what I want to use, knowing how it is going to look. It was a good learning experience and one to improve on.

Creating the portfolio was an immense challenge for me. I have learned the importance and benefit of keeping detailed notes in a clear and tidy order on each project, commenting on the article and making notes for future reference. The selectors' comments are very constructive and helpful, as is their advice going forward. When I look at what I have achieved in the past 18 months, I am excited to see in what direction weaving will take me over the next 18 months. I learned many years ago to plan my work and work my plan, and I can apply this to weaving. I am drawn to Tencel and making more garments using this lovely fibre. The selectors have recommended some websites to join to further my learning.

My sincere thanks and appreciation to Creative Fibre, and to the selectors for honouring me with this award. I find weaving to be creative, peaceful and therapeutic. Now addicted, weaving is my happy place.

¹ 'A weaving gamp is a two-dimensional array of woven patterns.' 'An Introduction to Weaving Gamps', by Penny Lacroix. <https://www.gist yarn.com/blogs/how-to-weave/an-introduction-to-weaving-gamps>

² Strickler, Carol. *A Weaver's Book of 8-Shaft Patterns*. Loveland, Colo: Interweave Press, 1991

