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Toanui Tawa

English 1010-06

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Explanation

The men roared with laughter as the Nazi soldier slipped crazily down the snow-covered hill. Christiaan Goebel, my great grandfather, seized this distraction as an opportunity and ran for his life from captivity of the Nazis and their hostages. The Nazi soldiers had been gathering Dutchmen for days in Zaandam, Holland. They lined the men along the road after blocking the corner on the road to Amsterdam, and threatened to shoot anybody that passed without stopping. They were waiting for a truck that would take the men to work as slaves in the weapon factory for Germany. After escaping and then hiding, Christiaan returned home in the middle of the night and explained what had transpired to his wife and children—one of which was my Grandma Francisca. The men of Zaandam had been conditioned to a lifestyle of hiding from the Nazis in farm fields and under house floorboards to avoid being kidnapped and placed in work camps or factories. After nearly escaping from the Nazis' grasp, Christiaan contemplated the life-altering decision to leave his family's home in order to give his children better economic opportunities than they would have in tiny Holland. In November of 1951, my grandma, Christiaan and the rest of the family emigrated from Holland. Although they abandoned their home and family business to come to the United States, they carried their cultural traditions overseas. Knitting is a cultural tradition and an important part of their lifestyle that they brought with them. I'm sure that my grandma found relief in her knitting skills when she arrived at Ellis Island, New York, then took a bus directly to Salt Lake City, Utah and began elementary school in a foreign country. From the blog post, "Celebrating Knit in Public Week with 10 Knitting

Facts You Might Not Know”, creator Megan Mitzel claims that knitting prevents illness by decreasing blood pressure and lowering heart rate (par. 4). This may be the secret to my grandmother’s excellent health and well-being. Knitting needles represent my family’s cultural heritage and tradition because knitting is a rite of passage in order to respect your culture, become more sophisticated and gain social acceptance from Dutch family members.

Knitting needles have benefited humanity for millennia because it’s a tool with which people can create clothing and blankets to survive, as my family did when they immigrated. In *Creative Knitting: A New Art Form*, Mary Walker Phillips explains that the earliest evidence of knitting needles has been found in Syria and dates back to 256 A.D. (14). Knitting needles can be made from many substances like bone, tortoise shell, wood, silver, plastic, aluminum, and steel, and can be pointed on only one end to make most anything, pointed on both ends to make socks, or connected together at one end to make hats or other clothing (Phillips, 31). Knitting needles haven’t only been a means of survival and cultural tradition for millennia in one area of the world, but all throughout the world in most countries. Each country has their own preference of knitting needles, stitches, and holding positions. There are two major styles of hand knitting: Continental and English. The Continental style involves holding the yarn in the left-hand while knitting, and the English style involves holding the yarn in the right-hand while knitting (Phillips, 43). Elizabeth Zimmerman, author of *Knitting Without Tears: Basic Techniques and Easy-to-Follow Directions for Garments to Fit All Sizes*, who also is accredited for reintroducing Continental knitting to Northern America, acknowledges that the USA, England, Canada and Switzerland typically practice both the Continental and English styles of knitting (15-16). From my own experience I’ve observed that most knitters from Japan, Germany, and most other European countries solely practice Continental knitting, and The People's Republic of China is a

country that solely practices English knitting. I personally prefer the English style of knitting because my grandmother taught me this style, as she was taught by generations before her. I feel that the Colonial style makes the knit work extremely tight, which creates muscle tension in the fingers and shoulders. Knitting is a stress reliever for me, so to be most comfortable and avoid extra tension I prefer to knit English style.

Ever since I've learned to knit, I've used my skill as an outlet when I have too much homework or a crazy, busy day. My favorite thing to do is to multitask by watching a movie while I knit. I like to find difficult knitting patterns online, and then tailor them to be better pieces. Then I write my own new pattern and create it. I often design Fair Isle patterns. Drawing from, "Enjoy a Fair Isle Tutorial", writer and editor Sarah Johnson describes Fair Isle as multi-color strand knitting that originated from an island off the coast of Scotland where the style was born (par. 1).

My grandma teaches her grandkids to knit when they turn eight years old; an age that she has deemed acceptable to learn this skill. Of all the grandchildren that have been taught to knit, only one of my cousins and myself haven't lost the ability. I always felt that knitting was my grandmother's rite of passage to a higher social circle. My cousins and I know that if grandma teaches you how to knit, and you continue to knit by yourself, she is going to engage with you in conversation more often and give you an expensive knitting-type present on your birthday and Christmas because she's really proud of you. It's important to her to pass the tradition to the younger generation so that we know where our heritage is from, and don't stray too far from it.

I plan to teach my future children how to knit in the way that my grandma taught me, although I'm going to teach them when they ask to learn. I wanted to learn at age five or six, and I know that I was competent enough that I could have grasped the skill. I feel that waiting until a

future age makes knitting feel frustrating and like work for the first few days of learning. I enjoy teaching people how to knit. I've taught my favorite great-aunt on my mom's side of the family how to knit, and I've directed several class courses for neighbors, classmates and friends on this skill. When I teach others to knit, I'm sharing a piece of my family tradition with them.

I still have many cousins, aunts and uncles specifically in Amsterdam and Holland that are living there today. I really want to meet them and see what they're like. I want to see the area where my Great Opa Christiaan escaped from the Nazis, where my grandma grew up in Zaandam, the family's old bakery and store in Amsterdam, and the massive fields of tulips. I want to experience the Krokette, Stroopwafels, and salty licorice that I've grown up eating at the very place where it's from. When I knit, I feel closer to my grandma and all the stories that she's told me about living in the Netherlands. When I use my knitting needles, I am carrying on my family's cultural heritage and staying true to my family's traditions.

Works Cited

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