

By Melanie Martens

Rejection. We've all experienced it, or know a fellow knitter who has: the grandchild who wore those felted slippers she asked for once, and never again; the husband who left that masterpiece Aran sweater in the closet for the moths to feast upon; the "friend" who gave a handmade layette to Goodwill "because it didn't match my nursery colors."



One Christmas as I was teaching myself two-handed Fair Isle while fashioning a beautiful yoke sweater in the process, a relative's comment floored me. "For you? Isn't that a little selfish?"

Selfish? To spend countless hours creating a wearable work of art, and then to want to wear it myself? Suddenly, I did feel a bit selfish, I admit. I almost lied and said it was for Aunt Peggy . . . but then I might have had to actually give it to her, and there was absolutely no way that was going to happen -- not a mohair's chance in hell. And so I ask: why are we knitters so sheepish about making things for ourselves?

It might be the fault of our hyper-productive grandmothers, who are always knitting, crocheting, sewing, and raising the bar for all of us. Mine at least is the craft equivalent of a polymath. She can darn my grandfather's socks, cross-stitch a picture of my cat, and knit up a pair of booties for her newest great-grandchild, all while watching an episode of *Murder She Wrote*. Or perhaps it's the Martha Stewarts of the world who are to blame for the myth of handmade simplicity. This brand of lifestyle marketing is especially strong during the holidays. "You too can make all your gifts from scratch! Just follow these fourteen hundred easy steps." Easy to say in August, but come December, with countless unfinished projects on the needles and our fingers permanently webbed together by the glue gun, we finally throw our hands up in defeat.

When will we learn? Never, that's when. Because, honestly, we should take part of the blame. Out of love, generosity, and maybe just a little bit of ego, we all perpetuate this myth that crafting is a selfless activity. Time to listen to some tough advice. . .

Dear knitters, beware that tiny swell of pride when someone praises your handiwork. Beware its mutation: over-commitment. Soon, you've agreed to make a blanket for every new baby in your neighborhood. You promise sweaters without noticing how long your project queue has become. Personally, I should have learned my lesson the year I found myself stuffing my father's Christmas stocking with one finished mitten, one ball of yarn, and bunch of feeble excuses. He got the second mitten for his birthday – in May. And I recall a friend's innocent observation: "You're always knitting so how come all your sweaters come from The Gap?" That's a good question.

Which is why I am speaking up at this, the gift-i-est time of the year. Let's all temper our enthusiasm, and dare I say it, our generosity. Let's bestow our creations only on the truly deserving. More importantly, let's take some time to knit for ourselves. We are all entitled to create something with our own happiness in mind.

So this December 25, cast on for that little cashmere cardigan you've been dreaming about. And the next time a friend announces she's pregnant, buy her some booties, then start that afghan you've always wanted in just the right colors to match your new couch. You say it's someone's birthday? Good grief, isn't it always someone's birthday, someone else's birthday? Mark your own. Knit YOURSELF something, for goodness' sake! You deserve it.