

discover your *creative* gene

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WHEN THE CREATIVITY GENE WAS BEING PASSED OUT, the family into which I was born failed to get the memo. Despite this, I have doggedly pursued the arts and think of myself as a creative person.

In elementary school I built card houses and carved doggies out of Ivory soap. I made yarn dolls and Kleenex carnations. But I really soared when cutting snowflakes. I would fashion those little paper squares that passed for toilet paper into a wintry wonderland as I draped the snowflakes around the stall for the next person to enjoy.

At age 10 I persuaded my parents to buy a piano, and I persevered with lessons until I was just competent. I took ballet lessons for many years and almost excelled. Then I broke my foot while walking. End of dream to be a ballerina.

In high school I tried my hand at acting. I loved

being on stage, so in college I majored in theater. But within a few years I was seized with stomach-churning stage fright. End of desire to star on stage and screen.

After college I worked for many years as a television news writer. No creativity there.

Later in life I attended law school. No creativity there, for sure.

Even though my professional life lacked it, creativity was the buoy to which I anchored my personal life during times of stress. I first learned the craft of crocheting as a young woman barely scraping by in San Francisco. I hated the city, my job, and my life. I needed to feel productive, and turning inexpensive yarn into a warm blanket by using just a small hook seemed to be a real survival skill.

That year I made my first afghan. Then I moved to Los Angeles, returned to college, and made



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another afghan to match my weird apartment with apple-green shag carpeting. It was comforting in a new world where I had just begun to meet people.

My life soon filled with friends, jobs, and adventures. I settled comfortably into that strange apartment. My brightly colored afghan became my blanket, offering security and warmth.

I did not feel the need to crochet again for many years because my world was familiar and manageable. I married a wonderful man, we bought our first house, and a year later we had a baby. Life was sweet.

But as my daughter was finishing kindergarten, life got complicated. My husband lost his job, and within days I learned my mother had terminal lung cancer. I needed an outlet for coping with my losses. Crocheting beckoned.

To show my mother how much I cared, I made her a blanket in her favorite colors, navy and white. I was surprised by the satisfaction I derived from creating with just a simple hook and yarn something that made those I loved feel warm and comforted. I was making new family heirlooms.

Crocheting became something I looked forward to in the evenings. I lingered while selecting the colors. I relished the ritual of winding the yarn into balls. As I

rhythmically created row upon row, I put aside my thoughts and just felt soothed. Unconsciously, I had imbued the yarn and hook with a sense of security.

When a cousin was about to get married, I quickly gathered yarn in her trademark purple and lavender for a personal afghan. My in-laws got one in black, white, and red. My daughter's room was blue and white, as were both of her afghans. My best friend got one for her family room. I crocheted blankets for my den, my bedroom, and my office.

In a few years, life sorted itself out and my need to crochet receded.

I recently picked up the hook and yarn again to make a pink-and-brown afghan for my daughter, now college-bound. As I crochet the squares, I become aware of her life apart from me. I know she needs to find her own adventures, but I also know she will need to feel protected. This blanket will be there for her to stay warm and feel my love every time she wraps it around her shoulders.



Joan Trossman Bien, a freelance journalist originally from Illinois, spent many years writing TV news in Los Angeles. She recently earned a law degree and owns a small antiques business. She lives in Moorpark, California, with her husband of 20 years. Her daughter attends college in northern California.

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