

The Importance of Making Things by Hand

- 1.** *A deeper connection to the things that keep us alive and well.* The human-made world is mostly beyond our comprehension. Our daily survival depends on seemingly magical gizmos that provide our food, water, clothing, comfort, transportation, education, well-being, and amusement. But you can make your world a little less confounding by sewing your own clothes, raising chickens, growing vegetables, teaching your children, and doing other activities that put you in touch with the processes of life. In addition, the things you make reflect your personality and have a special meaning. You share a connection with them every time you use them, and you appreciate them in a different way than you do store-bought things. This is why gifts of hand-made preserves, blankets, and furniture are so cherished. You are sharing a part of yourself with the recipient of your gift; they will value the time and effort you put into making something for them with your own hands far more than what it would have took to pick up a gift card at the mall.
- 2.** *An appreciation for the things you have and the systems that make it possible.* The flip side to enjoying the things you make yourself is discovering how challenging and time-consuming it can be to make them. It takes me hours to whittle one cooking spoon, and while it's enjoyable, I can't imagine making all of our family's cooking implements this way. Now, I pay more attention to the things I buy, and I appreciate them more than before. Because I've become an active participant in the human-made world, I'm more observant of it. I care more about how things are made, paying close attention to each object for lessons in craftsmanship I can apply to my own projects.
- 3.** *An opportunity to use your hands and your brain.* Human beings evolved opposable thumbs for a reason. The sense of reward you get from making something with your hands can't be earned any other way. It's obvious that people learn faster from "hands-on" experience than they do watching someone else do something. (No wonder kids ask, "Can I try?" when they see their parents using a tool or appliance.) And when people engage in DIY activities like knitting, their heart rate and blood pressure go down. We are tool-using animals and our bodies feel better when we've got tools in our hands.