

“That Damn Rug” Comes Home

By Stephanie Ashworth-Krauss

Several years ago I received a call from a hooked rug dealer who I’ve know for quite some time. We chatted briefly and then he mentioned that he had just purchased a rug that I might know something about. He began to describe it, then paused, cleared his throat and said, “Well, I think it’s called *That Damn Rug*.” Ah, yes...

As most of my rug hooking friends know, my mother, Anne Ashworth, was a prolific rug hooker and a very fine hooking teacher. Her sense of design and color were well developed and her dyeing was legendary. She also occasionally did some commission work and no job seemed too big. I know of at least two 9 x 12 foot rugs she hooked on commission, and she was in the process of hooking a 14 x 18 rug for my brother when she passed away in 2001. She loved a challenge and heaven help the person who said, “...it can’t be done”. So in 1991, when Mom received a call from a rug dealer in New Jersey with a proposal for a ‘large project’, she naturally said yes. The project was almost her undoing!

The rug dealer was working with an interior decorator who wanted a hall runner for an apartment on Park Ave in New York. The decorator was looking for a new hooked rug to complete the early American motif for the entryway to the apartment, and the rug had to be five feet wide and twenty-three feet long. The tricky part was that he needed the rug within 6 months! Mom accepted the challenge and work began. Mom spent over a month struggling with the decorator about the design and color-plan, and the hooking finally started about 2 months after the contract was signed. With the help of her best friend and several local hooking groups, she completed the project on time. I was one of the hookers involved with this project and I remember the process well... and the extreme case of shingles Mom developed afterward due to the stress. This was such a monumental project that Mom decided to write an article for *Rug Hooking* magazine. (See *Rug Hooking*, June/July/August, 1992)

So when my caller said, “that damn rug”, I knew exactly which rug he meant. I’d done quite a bit of rug repair for this dealer and he was actually calling me to discuss the possibilities of cutting the rug to make it into an area rug. His customer liked the design, but wanted something more like a square than a runner. We talked about cutting several parts, then sewing them together in a different shape, and re-fitting the design in this way would have worked, but he decided the cost was prohibitive. I was relieved when he came to this conclusion because I really didn’t want to alter something that Mom had worked so hard to create. My caller still needed to sell the rug, but who could possibly use a rug of this size and shape? My Dad and I discussed buying the rug back for our family, but it just didn’t make sense. Neither of us had a space for it, and with two kids still in college, I couldn’t afford it. We let the idea drop and hoped that the rug would eventually find a good home.

During the following two years, my life changed significantly. My new partner and I decided to buy a house together where we could live and have my rug hooking shop. We

each sold a house and in that time one of my daughters graduated from college. We remodeled the garage of our new house to accommodate my shop, and since it had been a two-car garage, front to back, the shape of the shop is long and somewhat narrow. Hmm... On a whim, I called my rug dealer and asked if he still had 'that damn rug'. Well yes, he did. I took a few days to think about it, called my Dad to see if he'd help and then called the dealer back. I told him that it was time for '*That Damn Rug*' to come home.