

## **Living Treasure Em Kolstad**

In October, 94 year old Em Kolstad died leaving a hole in the Billings fiber community. Em, born in Belgium moved to Montana as an infant. The Ellis Island National Historical Archive group chose Em to be one of four Montanans whose voice and recollection of travel through Ellis Island as an immigrant is recorded as a forever exhibit to be listened to by those who visit the Historic Monument

Em learned to spin and tat at her mother's knee and developed into an expert in all forms of knitting, weaving, bobbin lace, and other fiber art. She followed the tradition of her mother who helped support the family during WWI with bobbin lace. An early member of the Billings Weavers Guild, she arranged workshops and gave lessons.

Em spent many years working the Needle Shop in Billings helping innumerable knitters get their sweaters put together! In the 1930's she purchased her first big loom, a 4 harness Weavers Delight from Newcomb Looms. Later her husband built her a table loom. Her love affair with a loom really began with her 45 inch, 8 shaft MacComber. She wove yardage for suits and coats, made drapery material and wove a double weave snowball coverlet to name just a few projects as well as commissioned tapestries. Em taught and became an authority on all methods of weaving, having correspondence with and a mentor in Mary Atwater.

For over 50 years, Em mentored weavers and spinners in Yellowstone County. Most spinners in this area learned to spin from Em or from people she taught. Em traveled to smaller communities to give workshops and support to fledging weavers and spinners. She corresponded with many spinners and weavers from antique wheel collectors to monks in monasteries.

MAWS awarded the Living Treasure Award in 1998. Her legacy includes an openness for trying new ways with fibers. When the results were surprising, that is, other than expected, she advised be happy! When asked how she was able to always accept the situation as it was: tangled warps, gobbled up rolags, all students mistakes that she kept fixing, and not get frustrated. She replied, "Don't sweat the small stuff". Em left a circle of weaving and spinning friends. Undoubtedly Em was right, if we don't get hung up on our small human imperfections, we can excel too, just as she did.