

Toni Ogden feels lucky. She grew up in Philadelphia, with easy access to vibrant culture. “It was all around; from the Academy of Music, art galleries, and museums — all of the ideas and the people that came with that were available to everyone, including a person from a lower middle-class economic background.”

“I have always been interested in clothes. I admired nice clothes and used to hang out at the local fabric store, where I could get my hands into fabric and patterns. I used to read Vogue magazine, international clothing magazines, and Korean clothing and patternmaking magazines — I was fascinated by the different ways of putting clothes together. My grandmother sewed clothes. She was not particularly a role model, not helpful. She was always sewing. She made dolls for fund-raisers and festivals, and I wanted to help, but she was never satisfied with anything I made. At least I learned I could make my own clothes.”

# Toni Ogden

As she developed her interests and skills, Toni moved from making clothes to quilts to creating her own fabric, all the while harboring a passion for music that brought her to WV as she pursued her love of folk and mountain music. “I used to listen to WXPB in Philadelphia and made my first foray into WV to find musicians to play with and learn from like the Hammons family, and Dwight Diller of Pocahontas County. I have played several instruments including banjo, but fiddle is my preference.” She studied for several years at the Swannanoa Gathering under top Irish fiddlers Colin Farrell and Caitlin Warbelow.

***“I want to always be open to new possibilities. As long as you are improving, as long as what you are doing is feeding you, you keep going.”***

Luthier John Preston in Lewisburg loaned her one of his handmade fiddles. "John is well known for his kindness and generosity to string musicians. Playing a "real" fiddle boosted my confidence and skills." Toni plays in two local old-time jams in the area and practices every day with her banjo-playing husband, Harold.

***You can't let mistakes paralyze you or keep you stuck in the same place doing the same thing over and over.***

Toni is always learning and pushing the boundaries of her knowledge. She shied away from formal schooling except for workshops, which she embraced to further her broad interests in music, writing, and weaving. "I want to always

be open to new possibilities. As long as you are improving, as long as what you are doing is feeding you, you keep going.” About making mistakes, Toni says, “It is the only way forward; you make ‘em, and on you go. I am not afraid to try new things. You can’t let mistakes paralyze you or keep you stuck in the same place doing the same thing over and over. Embrace the happy accident.” “If I had had more self-confidence, I believe I could have turned my weaving into a sustainable business, but I did take a traditional job because I felt a responsibility to my family and children. A lot of time went into the job instead of developing my own business.”

Toni describes herself first and foremost as a weaver and rug weaving remains a primary passion. For years bed time reading was a few pages of Peter Collingwood's Techniques of Rug Weaving, a bible for the incredibly varied art and

craft of weaving wool rugs. In 1994, as president of the Fiber Arts Network, she pushed to establish the Weaving Studio at Carnegie Hall and taught weaving classes there. She teaches weaving and spinning in the schools through Carnegie Classrooms in her workshop, Spinning Threads, Weaving Cultures. “I love seeing the kids light up when they are learning.”



Cochineal dyed and natural colored woven wool blankets made by Toni Ogden, repurposed into a coat by Thomas Ruggiero.

Toni sells her work by word of mouth, and at regular shows in Lewisburg, such as events at The Fiber Studio at Lee St. Studios, the Weaving Studio at Carnegie Hall, and Tamarack. Whether playing an instrument, or playing with colors, textures, and patterns on a loom, Toni's strong inner voice is always ready to sing out.



## ***Handmade Coat, a Collaboration with Thomas Ruggiero***

***The journey of this coat spans decades and began on the farm where Toni found the fleeces. “ I think I read about this farm in the Market Bulletin. They had bags and bags of beautiful fleeces. I sent them off to a mill to be washed and spun, and asked them to imitate a handspun look.***

***I dyed the wool for this coat with cochineal. The darker fuchsia is the cochineal, the lighter pink is the afterwash from the dye, and the browns and grays are the natural wool color from the sheep. I took all this yarn with me to a weaving workshop with Tom Knisely, one of the most well-respected weaving instructors in North America. It was the year Timothy McVeigh blew up the Oklahoma City Federal Building.***

***I made three blankets, which we used as blankets until I brought them to Thomas Ruggiero in 2025. I totally trusted his instincts, skills, and style choices. He’s a magician; I knew he would create something of value.”***

