

## "Something Truly Useful"

...Hints and suggestions from Medrith J. Glover for her knitters to contemplate while at sea on the Inside Passage Cruise to Alaska on the "Norwegian Pearl"...**September 13-20, 2009**.....and other times.

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### **OK – Where is it?**

After your "marked st" becomes part of the fabric below the needles, reposition the marker so that it grabs BOTH halves of that st... It is much easier to identify a whole "heart-shaped" stitch and then to track its st-column up through the fabric.

### **You CAN Get There From Here!**

That wonderful waste-chain cast-on can be used to span anything. (You can also use traditional eensy-weensy-spider invisible casting-on, but I think this one is friendlier.) Make a nice sloppy chain with a large crochet hook and smooth yarn. Study the chain to find the little heart-shaped parts and the little back-bump behind each one. Knit into these back-bumps as if they were sts on a needle... The beauty of this is that when the chain is later removed, you have lovely stitch-loops going the other way and you can knit DOWN from them... You don't have to make all the decisions at once and you can knit FROM anywhere TO anywhere!... And...think about it... You could do all the borders LAST! (There is also a version of this where the waste chain back-bump loops are trapped on a knitting needle during their formation, so they're ready to be knitted into with the real yarn *immediately*. Just keep in mind that even though these loops are on the needle, they do not constitute a row of anything. This is also why, to avoid confusion, you must use a yarn for the waste-chain that does not occur in your project.) ...The waste-chain can also be used to create an extension at the edge of something... like at an underarm... and the second side of the sleeve can be knitted up from the resulting loops... no seam and no bulk. Cool.

### **...Corollary...Grafting the Beginning to the End of Something**

Did you know... that if you start with invisible cast-on and then turn that beginning up to meet the end of your work, you can graft the two ends together perfectly?... absolutely perfectly... it's magic... and very good to know. We've used this for lace borders knitted onto shawls. No one wants a *dumb* seam in their lace border.

### **Working In Ends**

Most knitting directions tell you to work in ends, but they hardly ever tell you HOW. Here's Medrith's favorite "HOW" ... (I'd much rather relax and be careful about this process and *never* have to deal with these ends again, than have to try to work in any short bits again later after they've popped out, which they most certainly will do.)

... Don't tie a knot. Instead, leave 3" to 4" ends when joining in a new strand... and tie a little bow on the wrong side of fabric. Later on, when you're well beyond it and the fabric is stable around these ends (and only if you're *sure* you're not going to want to change your mind and back up), make the two yarn ends pass each other in a half stitch of the underneath side of the fabric, where they would have been one if they were a single continuous strand. The fabric should look complete on the right side. *Now*, you're ready to actually work these ends in.

If the yarn is plied, split the plies in half... if a 3-ply, split into 2 and 1. If the yarn is a "single", don't try to split it... to even try would probably destroy its structural integrity.

On regular Stockinette, using a sharp (chenille) ndl, *pierce* the "intersections" of the row strands on the purl side, just skimming along on the surface, and staying in a strict vertical line. The worked-in strand will lie directly behind a "half-stitch" column on the knit side and shouldn't slip into the horizontal "ladder" area. Skim along this way for maybe an inch or a little more, and then skim back in the other direction, very nearby, for maybe an inch. Split yarns should be worked in aimed in opposite directions. This way they'll pull against each other. Trim off any excess tufts at an angle so they'll be tapered. When

the fabric is stretched, there will be no distortion and those ends will be virtually invisible.

For garter stitch, I usually skim along the edges of ridges, so that the ends nestle into the valleys between ridges.

### **The Heartbreak of Sloppy Edges...**

Do you find that when you work back and forth on a flat piece of knitting that the edges tend to be irregular and a little unkempt-looking? Remedy...

I discovered many years ago that if I worked very close to the points for the last 6 to 8 stitches of each row, extra yarn does not have a chance to creep into the stitches of the previous row and make them loosey-goosey.

### **More "Edgy" Thoughts**

I can't believe how many patterns are still being written with decreases smack-dab on the edge of the fabric. You can choose to do this differently if you'd like the rest of the construction to go more smoothly... Make sure all dec's are performed *one stitch in* from any edge. This way it will be much easier to do seaming or knitting up stitches for a border, collar, etc.

### **Spacing Increases**

Circular spacing is easy... Divide the total stitches by the number of increases. What you get is the number of sts between the inc's that aren't there yet... Any leftover sts must be evenly dispersed, one at a time, among the little groups of sts. For any of these computations (increases, decreases, buttonholes...) calculators are no good. You need to do long division with a pencil, because you need to know what the remainder is! Spacing on a straight piece of knitting usually requires that the inc's be "framed" by some plain sts at each end... Divide the total sts by the desired number of inc's PLUS 1... (disperse leftovers as before).

## **Spacing Decreases**

Circular spacing is easy. Divide the total sts by the number of dec's... What you get is the number of sts in each group of sts that will INCLUDE a dec... (example: A group of 7 sts might best be thought of as K5, K2tog... and any leftover sts would have to be evenly dispersed accordingly.) Spacing on a straight piece of knitting usually requires that the dec's be "framed" by some plain sts... and here it will be helpful to make little marks on a page to help you think through the best placement . ... Divide the total number of dec's PLUS 1... If symmetry is important to you, you'll then have to rearrange the extra sts on the ends... possibly including any leftover sts... so that the actual end dec's are the same distance from the edges of the fabric. I *always* have to make little marks on a page to be sure I've done it right... and proof is very comforting.

Just keep in mind that when figuring increases, the changes *are not* part of the existing stitch count, but occur between them... and when figuring decreases, the changes *are* part *of* each group... i.e. – a group of 15 will really be, say, K13, K2tog... or SSK, K13.

## **Flat Can Be Flattering**

Do cable patterns undulate in and out a little too much on your undulating figure? As you can see, I like the word "undulate"... but I don't much like the view it's describing here. Replace the usual reverse Stockinette found in between columns of cables with garter stitch and the fabric will be flatter overall and be more flattering as it drapes over you. The only "undulating" remaining will be the pretty results of the cabling itself. Cables are great, by the way... lots of drama for very little effort. Don't be afraid of them.

## **Fixing the Hole at the Sock Heel Gusset**

I'm referring to that gapolis that can happen on socks that have standard heel flap construction. When you've completed the heel flap, turned the pretty little crescent of fabric at the very bottom of the heel (I love that part... looks and feels like sculpture), and are ready to begin knitting up sts along the first edge of that flap, do that. Then, as you begin to work across the waiting instep sts, trace the strand of the first of these instep sts to its right and find where its

neighbor became part of the flap. Insert the tip of the left-hand ndl into that adjacent loop, from back to front, and K2tog ... the loop to the right will twist and tuck right under the first instep st and close that looseness right up. Work across the remaining instep sts, except for the last one... slip it as if to K, then insert the right-hand ndl into the matching strand of the neighboring st that became part of the flap, inserting ndl from back to front, insert left ndl into the fronts of both loops from left to right, as you would to set up for a normal SSK, and draw the wool through with the right-hand ndl, from that position. You'll notice that in neither of these maneuvers has there been an actual decrease. You've simply neatened things up where the fabric is stressed. If you pay attention to the stresses when you're connecting angles and planes of fabric like this, you'll find there are often very logical small tweakings you can do to weduce the stwess.... extwemely desiwable.

### **Painless Unraveling**

If you have access to an umbrella swift and a ball winder, you can turn the usually disheartening act of unraveling a misjudged piece of circular knitting into rewarding playtime. Just plop the unfortunate cylinder of knitting onto the swift and whiz it off and onto the ball winder... shortens the agony and makes it all seem like a positive move. Then, if the yarn has been in the fabric long enough to become set in its kinky ways, reel it from the ball back onto the swift, making a "reeled skein"... Tie it in about 4 places with scrap yarn and give it a gentle bath in warm water to help it relax. Whirl the rinse water out of it in the spin cycle (only) of your washer and drape it over something to dry. It'll look fresh and inviting again. Knitting with kinked yarn is a bad idea anyway; the kinks will interfere with your achieving a smooth and even tension.

### **Yuck! Fractions!**

If you don't like using fractions (or decimals) of stitches per inch in computations, you might like this alternative. It's almost silly, but, well, so are we sometimes... Multiply the desired chest measurement times the number of WHOLE stitches you get to 3" or 4" or 5" (or whatever it takes to get a WHOLE number of stitches at a WHOLE inch mark... you simply ignore any inch marks that occur in the middle of a stitch) and then DIVIDE your ridiculous total by

that inch measurement from your gauge swatch. You'll have only one possibly weird decimal figure at the very end to round up or down to make your pattern repeat work... and cast on.

### **Short-Row Placement When Staggering Wrap Locations**

Anytime you're thinking of doing a series of short rows all at once, if possible, make them happen so that the wraps will all occur at the same level the fabric changes to another fabric (stockinette to ribbing, etc). Example - If you wish to create a crescent of fabric in the yoke of a sweater just before the neck border, cause the wraps to be done with the farthest one forward (close to the chin) first... and work subsequent wraps gradually back toward the shoulder on each side. This way the eye will be confused and the wraps will be nearly invisible. Conversely, if you need to add short rows at the tummy-front of a top-down sweater (for your favorite huggable tummy), do the ones closest to the imaginary side-seams first and gradually work back and forth placing wraps in order toward the front... and they will again be more hidden by the change in fabric when the bottom border commences. In the above examples, if the direction of the knitting is reversed, the order of the placement of the wraps will be reversed also. Think about it and draw yourself a picture, if you need to. It will become evident what the plan needs to be.

### **...and in addition to Tummy Crescents...**

If the need exists for extra fabric up and down – tummy crescents or bust darts – there will likely be a need for a little more fabric sideways as well. Ample bust-lines, tummies, very curved and rounded backs all demand a little attention. The imaginary side seam lines can be shifted forward or backward slightly and the resulting stress reduction can be quite helpful. Also... a lot can be gained from including little wedges of extra fabric at the shoulders so that they flare a bit to join the neck... and avoiding disrupting the main fabric of the body... I call them "bust darts under the ears"...

### **Fine-Tune Your Fabric**

This is so simple... As you work along, whenever you notice a stitch which is too large or too small in relation to the adjacent fabric, redistribute the yarn along

the row. Don't wait until the garment is done... Let this periodic evaluation become a habit as you knit. My guess is that the increased awareness will also contribute to a fine-tuning of your own personal tension.

### **Stranded Colorwork (Fair Isle) "Awareness"**

When you find you need to "wobble in" the carry because it must travel behind "too many" stitches, be sure to stagger the wobble locations so that they don't occur in the same place. The stitch columns tend to separate and lift up, showing the carried color, if wobbles occur for even 2 consecutive rows.

For a similar reason, don't wobble around a single stitch... Make the carried yarn travel around 2 or more stitches... up to 5 stitches at a time on fingering through worsted scale.

...And *don't change hands!* Keep the background color and the pattern color in the same hands throughout.

...And, if you can determine which hand knits looser, use that hand for the pattern color, using your firmer hand for the background.

### **Eliminating Bind-offs!**

Often in garden variety written instructions, we find things like "Bind off all neck stitches"... only to find that we are later instructed to knit up stitches there for a border. Ugh! Almost anytime you're going to be working up from there in knitting again, it's advantageous to work from live stitches instead of a bound-off edge. The same goes for most shoulders. I'd much rather do a 3-needle bind-off to join shoulders than sew a seam there. You can trust yourself and make decisions like this whenever you believe you have a better idea! Elizabeth would be proud.

### **Cable Cast-on Refinement (my thanks to Nancy Robinson)**

The knitted-on cast-on usually called "Cabled", where you knit the yarn through *between* the two end stitches, will give you a crappy-looking slaunchways slope to that very last stitch... unless... you bring the yarn from back to front between the needle tips *before* you place the final loop on the left-hand needle. That

simple move corrects the entire look of the thing and causes you to smile in a very smug manner indeed.

### **How Fitting!**

The best use I've found for those versatile circular needle kits is the creation of a loooong needle for fitting purposes. I spread the stitches out on the accommodating multi-cabled assembly for a reassuring try-on, and then just knit them right off and back onto my favorite (usually an Addi) needle again... Much faster than slipping the stitches onto a string and then transferring them back to the needle again. Of course, if your needle kit IS your favorite needle, you'd just add cables for the try-on and then remove them, replacing the needle tips. And DO try on your garment often. Every time you have any question at all – give it a try-on!

### **"Tootsie-Won't-Show" Heather**

This is the most desirable color to knit your sweaters of if you have a dog or cat that sheds constantly. I have to admit that this hint is still in its theoretical stage at my house as I am still searching for the ideal yarn to camouflage the inevitable and ubiquitous proof of my close association with my beloved pets... they truly are a part of me. (This is a logical offshoot of the similar search for carpeting that is the exact same color as the dirt outside your house.)

### **Knitters' Safety**

When you're working with a set of 4 double-pointed ndls, leave that 4<sup>th</sup> ndl *in* your work, when you put it away, and the whole assembly will quite naturally fold flat. You aren't likely to lose a ndl this way and you won't have a porcupine lying in wait in your knitting bag. (To accomplish this, I usually just work halfway across a needle and make the whole thing collapse there.)

### **Seed Stitch in the Round**

If you do it on an ODD number of stitches, you won't be able to tell where one round ends and the next begins! (I laughed out loud when I tripped over that one.) Similarly, you might want to do an "every-other" speckled color pattern on an ODD number of stitches if doing it in the round.

## **“Lay of the Land” Borders**

Innumerable times a knitter has come to me for help with a knitting pattern directing that a specific number of sts is to be knitted up on a vertical edge of fabric. I usually suggest that they ignore the finite number. Instead, I suggest that they knit a swatch of the proposed border and find out what *its* gauge is... then compare it with the *row* gauge of the main fabric to find out what the relationship is. A rate of knit-up will become evident... 5 sts to 6 rows... or 6 sts to 8 rows... and so forth. Whatever the relationship demands should be just fine. Rates are reliable. Trust yourself... and trust the fabric.

## **Medrith’s “Improved Eyelet Buttonhole”**

I’ve always liked the simplicity of the eyelet buttonhole - “YO, K2tog” - and the ease of working out the numbers for placement, but it has always felt a little unfinished to me...

The following subtle tweaks neaten it right up...

Medrith’s Neatsy-Poo Eyelet Buttonhole – in a garter stitch border:

Right Side Row – K1 through back loop (tbl), YO, K2tog tbl.

Wrong Side Row – K1 tbl, K1 (the YO), K1 tbl.

## **Don’t Make Decisions at Night!**

This conclusion has definitely been arrived at from personal experience! When it’s decision-time and you’re tired, put it off until morning when you can look at the whole project with fresh eyeballs. You’ll be amazed how easily the solution becomes apparent. And when backing up (i.e. – ripping out) seems to be the obvious best choice, wait until morning to do that too... It will greet you as a positive development and even as a desirable opportunity; whereas, at night, when you’re tired, it would likely be regarded as yet another discouraging, disgusting, unfair, revolting development. See what I mean?

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The following are hints I put forth for the Spring issue of KNITTER'S Magazine in 1989 (issue #14 - p.30, 31), when they included my version of Elizabeth Zimmermann's Adult Surprise Jacket. These thoughts have not been in print anywhere since then:

### "Medrith's Musings"...

**Large Ladies Luck Out!** While knitting Elizabeth Zimmermann's Adult Surprise Jacket, a happy circumstance results from our dimension requirements. Because more rows are required to give us the girth we need, more rows are automatically being added to the length at the same time. This means that by the time the Surprise Jacket is the proper dimension around, you may find you won't need to add the 'extension' around the bottom that the 'little people' need. Those beautiful corners continue to the end. (The 'experience' I'm speaking from is a fuchsia one that measures 52" around and comfortably drapes over 48" hips.)

**Sneaky Short-row Solution!** Ordinarily, when you do short rows in garter stitch, the resulting extra ridge is visible, right? Even though you've ignored the wrap (*not* knitted it as you would on St st) and made the end of the ridge as tidy as possible, it does show. There *is* one more thing you can do! You can place the wrap smack-dab next to or just 1 st away from the 'corner' st on the back of the sleeve and your eye is so distracted by the turning of the corner that it doesn't see there's an extra ridge on one side. It works! It works! Having the extra rows extend all across the back and that far into each sleeve doesn't hurt a bit, and the location of the turns is automatically shifted by the changing location of the corner itself. Most or all of the short rows you'll need can be added during the 'sleeve part' before you get to the underarms and nobody'll ever know!

Also, you may find, as I did, that if you like the layered look, there's no need to add the sleeve extension. The cast on edge ends up at a pretty  $\frac{3}{4}$  sleeve level all by itself.

**Cotton "Surprises"** need to have a little extra fabric added overall to allow for shrinkage later. Doesn't it say somewhere that a shrinkage loss of about 10% is expectable?... My own beloved cotton one even included some cotton yarns that have to be at least 25 years old... doubled or tripled old crochet thread, because the color was right!

**One more hint** for those easily confused – if you find it a little difficult to identify that corner st during the decreasing rows, so that you can keep it constant, try this: RS Row – K to within 1 st of corner st, sl2tog knitwise, k1, p2sso. WS Row – K to corner st, sl corner st purlwise, wyif, knit on.

There's never been a more baffling and compelling and fascinating and maddening and successful and satisfying garment to knit than the Surprise! Elizabeth, you've launched many an unsuspecting knitter into a whole new outlook with this one. Perhaps it deserves a subtitle... 'The Turning Point'.

~ Medrith J. Glover

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