

# HOLLY



## Misa Hay meets the remarkable June Hemmons Hiatt, author of *The Principles of Knitting*

If you are a knitter you will probably know about this comprehensive and in-depth resource of knitting techniques. The book has been described as a 'masterpiece' or even a 'bible' of knitting. For over three decades, knitters have turned to it when looking for information about anything and everything to do with knitting. It not only contains the accumulated wisdom of generations of knitters, but entirely new techniques and applications that June developed.

I had the great pleasure of meeting June, who visited Shetland with her family for a few days this past spring.

We spent several hours chatting about her book, her newly designed knitting belt, and all things woolly. June and her family loved Shetland and their only regret was that they had such a short time here. I was truly inspired by June's story, and although my knitting skills are still very basic, I invested in a copy of the book and also one of her knitting belts, beautifully crafted by her son, Jesse. Here's the story of how June wrote her remarkable book.

**IN 1982** after finishing a degree in history at the University of California

in Berkeley, June considered going on for a PhD or applying to law school. However, her husband had a demanding career and they had an eight-year-old son who needed a parent at home, so June looked for an alternative that would not demand so much of her time.

She says her mother taught her to knit when she was four or five and it had been a constant in her life well into adulthood. So the idea of knitting while she pondered her future had great appeal. However, she had not picked up yarn and needles in years and needed to refresh her skills. Looking through a few technique books, June found them unsatisfactory and contradictory so slowly the idea of writing her own knitting book began taking shape ...

A year later she had an outline, an introduction, and two

# KNIT!



chapters, but she realised the book she had in mind was going to take more time than she had planned. Before going on, she decided to see if anyone was interested, and was fortunate to place it with a major publisher. She had no idea that it would become such a big book and that it would take her eight years to write it.

June says: "I was soon working on the book full time because, in addition to writing, illustrations were needed – over 900 of them. I knitted endless swatches and photographed them, and had three artists do drawings and charts. They didn't know how to knit and I didn't know how to draw, so communication was a challenge."

The book finally went to the printers late in 1989 and appeared in stores in early 1990, but initially the book did not sell very well, which was a great disappointment. So after a time she turned her attention to a major renovation of her 1907 California home, and unexpectedly found herself acting as both architect and project manager. When the book went out of print in 1997, June confesses

she was so busy it barely registered. After the dust finally settled two years later and the house was more or less habitable,

June was amazed to discover her book was selling for \$400-600 a copy, or more! Unfortunately, it could not be reprinted, and she realized that in order to bring it back into print, she would need to do an entirely new edition. So the work started again and after twelve more years of rewriting and producing new graphics, the second edition finally reappeared.

While doing research on knitting methods for the first edition of *The Principles of Knitting*, June learned that one of the oldest of them employed a device of some kind to support the right needle, freeing the hand to act as a shuttle. Her research took her to Scotland in 1984, where she found a small yarn shop in Edinburgh, and learned how to use a Shetland knitting belt, which was virtually unknown in the U.S at that time. June said it immediately became her favorite way to knit and she wore her belt the entire time she worked on the book

As June told me, she thought it was "a great shame" that more knitters didn't know how to knit this way. So after she finished work on the second edition of the book, she decided to see if there was something she could do to reintroduce this remarkable method to the larger knitting community. Unfortunately, knitting belts have not been readily available outside Shetland so she worked with her multi-talented son Jesse to develop a new interpretation of

the traditional one. The result is the beautifully hand crafted knitting belt now available on her website.

I really like using my belt: not just for its aesthetic appeal but also because it is contoured to fit your nody, which makes it very comfortable to wear.



To find out more about June Hemmons Hiatt's work, her book, and her knitting belts, visit [principlesofknitting.com](http://principlesofknitting.com)