

MAFA 2019 Fellowship Award: Chris Field-Funk,  
Handweavers of Bucks County, PA

## **Preliminary Report**

First, my heartfelt thanks to the MAFA Grants Board for the opportunity to prepare a Fellowship for the class I enjoyed in June 2019.

I registered for the Bonnie Tarses Workshop, "Three Workshops in One: Color Horoscope, Woven Words, Almost Ikat." I had several reasons for registering for this particular workshop: About four years ago, as a new floor loom weaver, I saw an advertisement for a Georgia O'Keeffe Horoscope Shawl (designed by Bonnie Tarses) and ordered it. At the time, I was just learning how to do simple drafts and this kit and the directions looked like Greek to me, so I put this weaving dream on hold for "one day," which lasted four years.

The "one day" dream began to become reality when Bonnie Tarses offered her Workshop at MAFA 2019. I wanted to learn the theory behind horoscope weaving and how to manipulate various fibers to make different wearable fabrics, blankets, runners, whatever one could imagine. Ikat was another technique that had caught my eye, but I wasn't sure I wanted to go through the tedious tying off, dyeing, and retying it required. Woven Words, another concept I wanted to learn, would help me to weave a wedding blanket for friends as I needed to learn how to weave their names and wedding date into this blanket. So, three dreams in one workshop -- an ambitious endeavor.

## **The Workshop**

The workshop preparation entailed emailing Bonnie with my birth information (date, time, place) so she could complete my horoscope weaving chart, translating the color and draft chart, winding my warp onto the warping board (several days of taking my time, lots of breaks, and working when I was alert), chaining off the 400 thread warp in sections, dressing the loom, and choosing the possible weft colors to bring to the Workshop.

Bonnie asked for 3 yards of warp, this optimistic overachiever made a 7.5+ yard warp. I also brought many color yarns for weft to play with ideas (my car was packed full!). Bonnie planned for students to weave plain weave (tabby); one of my looms still had a leftover 400 thread tie-up from a Denise Kovnat workshop favorite and I thought it fit for a Horoscope Weaving (Horoscope + Falling Stars draft + 400-threads were just what I needed for this workshop). Denise gave permission to use the draft, Bonnie gave permission to weave Falling Stars rather than plain weave, so I tied on to that leftover warp and was ready for the workshop.

During class, Bonnie taught us her version of Woven Words, very different from my perception. I thought people see actual words in the weaving, that was not the case. Bonnie had developed a system to assign a color and number to every letter in a word and then "spell" that word in yarn tints and shades. Based on instructions, we created a "word tartan" weaving, a technique that can also be used in a pre-planned warping.

Almost Ikat taught us how to manipulate variegated/space-dyed yarns to create an Ikat look without planning out a design ahead of time, wrapping the warp, or dyeing it, thereby adding various accents in the horoscope weaving plan to make another one-of-a-kind cloth.

Bonnie added instruction and a sample of how to make a Circle of Life necklace using beads and spacers to represent the signs and houses in an individual horoscope and gem stone beads to stand for the sun, earth's moon, and planets. That's a future project and was not a class exercise.

## **Final Report**

My findings were presented to the Handweavers Guild of Bucks County (HWBC) on Wednesday, September 11, 2019. I included descriptions of my initial acquaintance with the Georgia O'Keeffe Horoscope Weaving of four years ago, showing members it was not a quick / easy warp. I explained how Bonnie showed us how to wind the warp on a warping board to reduce warping time, and also had a few samples of the Almost Ikat warps I had done at home. Some members thought I had dyed the fibers to make Ikat. I had not, but had a method to manipulate the fibers to make what I wanted. I also displayed a set of small cards we used to design our Woven Words, and how we transferred this information to our weaving.

I displayed my personal color wheel and briefly explained how the threads are arranged by the roles the planets play in the weaving draft, shared different samples of horoscope weaving that had been published in Internet news, newspaper articles and *Handwoven* projects, and discussed how using different threads (mercerized or un-mercerized cottons, tencel, bamboo, chenille) could be used / combined to design a personal weaving.

The final part of my presentation was when I unrolled the 7.5+ warp I had woven, and my plans for some of it to become a "Wonderful Huipil a La Bonnie," a mobius cowl, and some towels. I am thrilled I chose this workshop, learning more than I expected, and now have the courage and experience to tackle the Georgia O'Keeffe Horoscope Shawl that has been sitting in my "basement studio" as well as additional Horoscope weavings.

At the end of our Guild meeting, a number of members and I talked about how we could further our study of Horoscope Weaving, Almost Ikat, and Woven Words. With my Guild's help, I prepared a horoscope weaving workshop (held February 12-13, 2020).

Thanks to Bonnie Tarses and her very detailed instruction, I am no longer anxious to tackle Horoscope Weaving, Almost Ikat, or Woven Words. A new educational opportunity is also in my future: during the Workshop, Bonnie announced she is looking for students who are interested in learning her techniques to weave under her "Weaving Spirit" label. I have applied for her program and she is waiting to see additional horoscope weavings before she makes her decision.

### **Changes to the Original Proposal**

My original plan was to hold a one-half to one-day workshop so others could learn the techniques. While preparing for the workshop, it became apparent that a large part of the process happens before we meet: designing the warp and getting it on the loom after we receive our horoscope warping instructions. Bonnie shared with me that she had taught a week-long workshop that included students winding their warps and threading their looms during the workshop but it was not as successful as expected so that is no longer in her workshop offerings.

My new plan is to hold several small meetings with students to provide more in-depth information on the horoscope weaving. The plan is to share what I learned in four meetings:

- 1 - Expanded discussion on Horoscope Weaving and Almost Ikat, including how to order horoscope plans, and answer any questions;
- 2 - Assist students in color and thread choices, demonstrate Bonnie's warp winding and Almost Ikat technique, and answer any questions;
- 3 - Follow up on warping, assist in choosing weaving draft (if not using plain weave), discuss how students can weave words into their cloth, and answer any questions;
- 4 - Show and tell

My goal was to hold these meetings before the end of the year, ideally before December 1. Because my Guild had already scheduled programs through December, that was not possible. However, the Guild was able to rearrange the 2020 programs to schedule a short workshop in February (12-13) for interested weavers, combining it with a day and a half of weaving and other fiber arts to be together to learn and enjoy each other's company. This allowed weavers who are interested in my facilitating their horoscope weaving to prepare their looms and join us. Step 1 above was completed in November, Steps 2 and 3 will happen in January, and Step 4, now group weaving, will happen in February.

The February workshop, just completed, was originally going to have four weavers. However, one weaver broke her arm in January and could not warp her loom and another weaver did not receive her draft until it was too late for her to warp her loom, leaving two active weavers. Although the workshop was smaller than anticipated, both inactive weavers stayed during the workshop to learn additional information I shared, including the Almost Ikat technique and a discussion of Weaving with Words.

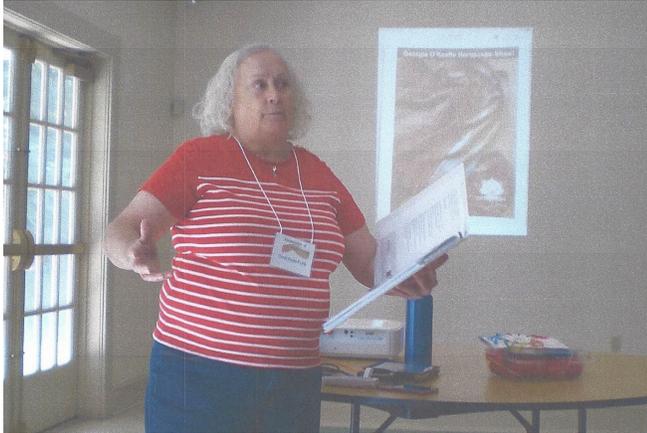
One active weaver completed her project; the other weaver brought other projects to work on when she tired of the horoscope weaving. The workshop ended with a very proud weaver (it was her second weaving project ever) and the other weaver plans to complete her project by our next meeting in March.

Since the MAFA Conference, I have woven two more horoscope shawls and am working on another one. As I learn the techniques, I am adding new features to new weavings and exploring alternative threads and how I can incorporate other designs to make each horoscope shawl unique yet use the same draft (my horoscope). The techniques I have learned show me there are myriad ways to use the same draft and still enjoy variety, keeping me interested in horoscope weaving for many years.





HWBC Guild Presentation



February Workshop

