

Travels of a Bead Stringing Device

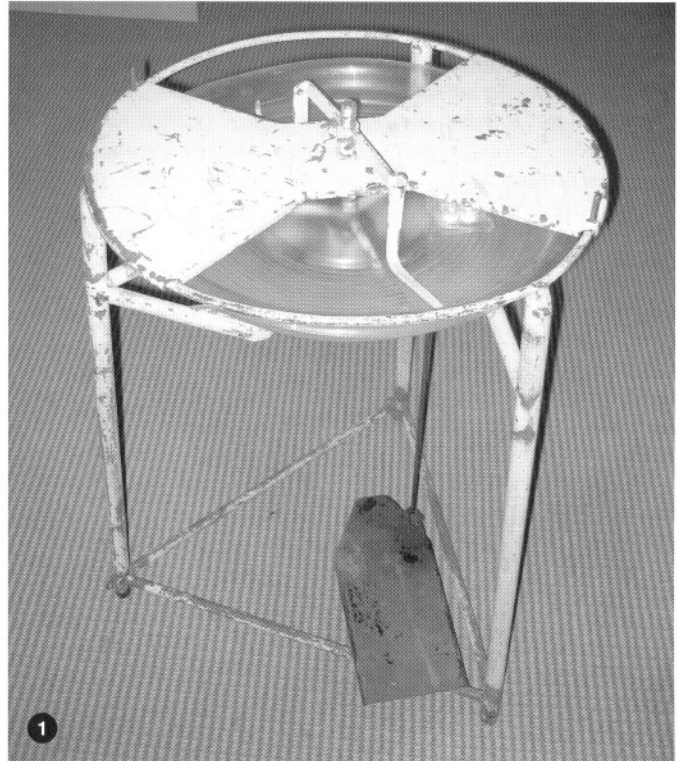
by Diane Fitzgerald

How well I remember the rainy Sunday afternoon in Jablonec, Czech Republic and the long dreary day that loomed ahead.

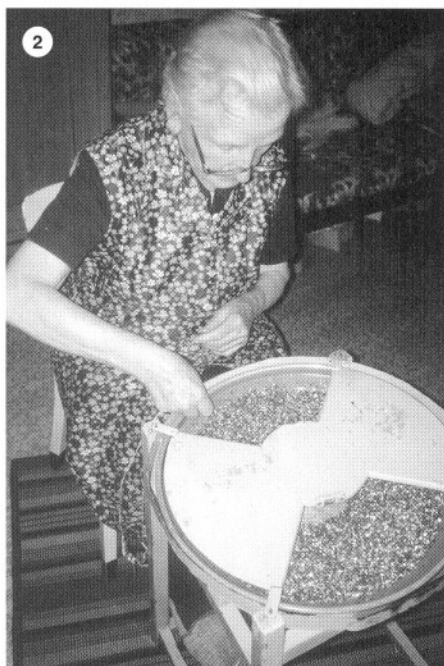
My host, Christa Petraskova, suggested we see if we could find a real beadworker who could tell us about her life and her beadwork. We hopped in the car and went to the small nearby town of Drzkov. After Christa knocked on several doors, we were invited into the home of Vera Huskova, a kindly white-haired neat-as-a-pin woman, perhaps in her eighties, who was willing to her show us her bead stringing machine.

She seated herself before the device and took up her needles – about 12 six-inch needles – which were attached to spools of thread. The device resembled a small metal table with a tray on the top that was about 20-24 inches in diameter and perhaps three inches deep and filled with seed beads. Below it one could see a foot pedal that was used to make the tray spin around much like a potter's wheel. Mrs. Huskova inserted the needles in the beads almost horizontally and as she began to pump the machine, she gave the tray a little push with her hand to get it going in the right direction. As the tray rotated, the beads were driven onto the needles. When the needles were full she passed them along the thread and repeated the process. The strands that were made showed the beads off to best advantage.

One can see older models of stringing machines made of wood in museums there.



Photos: Diane Fitzgerald



About ten years ago, I had the opportunity to purchase an authentic bead stringing machine and brought it back to Minneapolis as baggage on my plane ticket all wrapped in cardboard and tape. It probably dates to about 1930-40. Knowing that some Czech people are afraid that their secrets will be used by others, I referred to the device as a bead stringing 'table' rather than 'machine' as we drove across the border to leave the Czech Republic.

After the machine sat in my shop for several years and I had showed it to everyone in Minnesota who was interested, I decided it needed a new home and put it up for sale on eBay. I sent a notice to everyone on my email list to notify them of this opportunity and it ended up going to a good home. Barry Kahn of Caravan Beads in Portland, Maine was the lucky winner and at a fair price of about \$150. Barry told me recently that the president of the Miyuki Company, a Japanese seed bead manufacturer, had admired it and that he had sent it to him for his collection of bead paraphernalia.

Who knows where this little machine will end up next?



Fig 1. The bead stringing machine bought by Diane Fitzgerald in the Czech Republic

Fig 2. Vera Huskova of Drzkov demonstrating her bead stringing machine which is almost identical to Diane's

Fig 3. Detail of the needles used by Vera Huskova

Fig 4. Another Czech bead stringer using a bead stringing machine set in a wooden table

