



Life in COLOUR

Many years ago, textile artist Diane Gilder's grandmother knitted her husband a pair of socks.

They were black, apart for the big toe on one foot which was bright blue because she had run out of wool.

Those socks have survived and Diane still wears them under her wellies a good 20 years after her grandmother died. She regards them as a very fitting reminder of someone who was dearly loved.

And that's what she wanted to find when she was approached to create a memorial to Louise Johnson – a young teacher at Dronfield's Gorseybrigg Primary School, who died of cancer the day before her 34th birthday.

Diane's work in gloriously vibrant colours has cheered up walls across South Yorkshire, from the three large hangings at Rotherham General Hospital

Textile artist Diane Gilder has just completed her toughest task to date – creating a touching memorial for Dronfield teacher, Louise Johnson.

to the small personal commission to celebrate the birth of a precious daughter. The school wanted the same for Louise.

But finding something which captured the spirit of the lively young teacher was a tremendous challenge. Diane decided her first port of call should be the people who knew Louise best – her pupils: "We had a meeting with the children she had taught and some of the staff she worked with. I told them something about memorials from grandmother's socks to the Taj

Mahal and we decided we should have something in between the two."

Diane asked them for words which described what Louise meant to them and they came up with four pages. Now Diane is working full-time on bringing to life the words they suggested, in seven embroidered panels to hang in the school as a permanent reminder of Louise.

"Louise obviously had a great affect on these children and I hope the hangings will show what she meant to them."

"I never met Louise so relied heavily on the children and the people who knew her, but in many ways that was good because I could be a conduit for their memories."

The squares, roughly 12 inches square, are predominately rainbow-coloured and will be hung in such a way that

they can be appreciated from a wider perspective.

The first has Christmas baubles, hearts and conkers, because Louise loved a song about them. That theme carries on to the second panel which contains musical imagery and the first two notes of the tune.

The third pictures butterflies, sunshine, flowers and the countryside; the fifth has



FEATURE



OVER THE RAINBOW...
The finished piece will serve as a fitting tribute to the popular teacher



snowflakes and the sixth portrays stars on a violet background. The final panel is a necklace with lots of jewels and associated shapes.

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It won't be the first piece of Diane's work to be hung at the school which was built just a few years ago. She was previously asked if she would like to put some of her pieces on display to help brighten up the reception.

So it came about that various hangings including a landscape across Cutthorpe, vibrant lupins and her flamboyant interpretation of the fashion world of Sonia de Launay, have been shown in rotation: "Sometimes they are there for a term, sometimes for a whole school year. It depends if I need them for an exhibition. It works well for both of us; they get something to brighten their walls and I get exposure."

Diane, who lives in Barlow near Chesterfield, studied the history of art, design and film at the old Sheffield Polytechnic for three years and then, at home looking after her family, decided she wanted to try something different. Having signed up for a creative embroidery class held at the middle

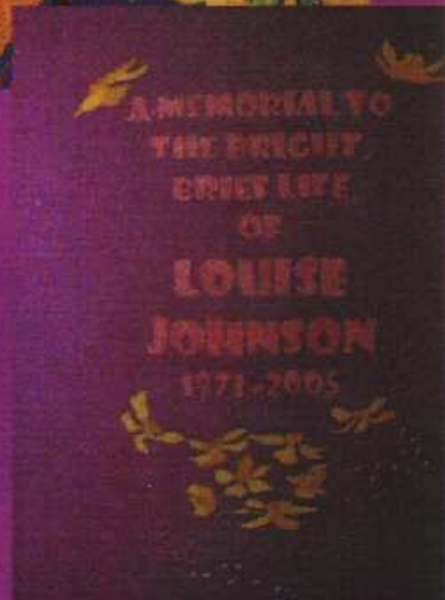


school in Dronfield, she arrived to find it cancelled due to a lack of people.

Instead the tutor invited the few who were interested to study at her house and Diane found herself hooked. She immediately signed on for a City and Guilds course in Chesterfield and still hasn't looked back.

"I have always loved doing colouring in and drawing; creative embroidery creates a wonderful physical end result - it is an absolute joy."

She began working professionally in 1990 and without her portfolio, where she keeps all the sketches and developmental work, she might easily forget some of the beautiful pieces she has created. The commission at Rotherham General Hospital could never be one of them. ▶



"When the dynamic between what people want and how I can give it to them works, it's terrific."