

Aneeta Patel

Needles at the ready!

WRITTEN BY SHARON THOMAS

From billboards to books, teaching classes to touring India on a bike, Aneeta Patel's knitting life is never, ever dull.

When you hear about Aneeta Patel's strange knitting activities, you have to wonder how she gets involved in them in the first place. "What normally happens," Aneeta says, "is that the phone rings, I answer it and say yes to whatever's being asked. It's only when I put the phone down that I think, 'How am I going to do that?'"

It's that attitude ("I definitely get it from my parents," says Aneeta. "They always say yes to everything,") that's seen this knitter, designer and tutor write a book, teach classes, launch a website, ride 242 miles across India and knit a billboard...

Knitvertising

Aneeta's a member of the Islington WI and, in her capacity as a professional knitter, became

involved with a joint project between Sky TV and the Women's Institute to find a member to become the face of the WI – a W-I-con – on the Sky Learning channel. To launch the search they wanted a knitted advertising billboard, and Aneeta became leader of the project. Eighty kilometres of yarn and 250 hours later, she and her small team of knitters had created the first-ever piece of 'knitvertising'.

"The finished thing was bigger than my living room," recalls Aneeta. "One lady did the logo for me and another knitted one of the side panels but most of it did fall on me. I was knitting for 10-12 hours a day to get it finished and was hobbling around by the end. Again, the phone rang, I said 'yes' and then thought, 'Oh my God, it's a knitted billboard!'"

Aneeta will freely admit that she's never really planned her

route through a career in knitting. Taught by an aunt at the age of five – "She was right-handed so I learned to knit right-handed even though I'm left-handed," says Aneeta – knitting stayed with her, on and off, for a good few years. "I was even knitting when I was a grumpy teenager," she laughs.

It was in 2002/2003, though, that the bug really bit. Going along to Cast Off events inspired Aneeta to volunteer with the Working Well Trust, a charity that teaches knitting to Bangladeshi women with long-term mental health problems. "They meet, learn new skills and confidence, and even if they can't speak English they can read a knitting pattern, which is pretty cool," says Aneeta.

What was also pretty cool was that Aneeta discovered a love of teaching that has inspired her ever since, and never left her. She started teaching classes at Loop in Islington, North London, and hasn't really stopped since.



"Shall I tell you a secret?" she says. "I should be paying my students! My enthusiasm goes wild at knitting classes. When I get a total beginner who thinks they're going to be rubbish and, within seven minutes, I've got them casting on... I'm totally in awe of teaching. It's such an honour to have something other people want. I think the ability to pass on knowledge is the greatest achievement in my life."

Knitting emergencies

Aneeta's now taken that ability two steps further, with her

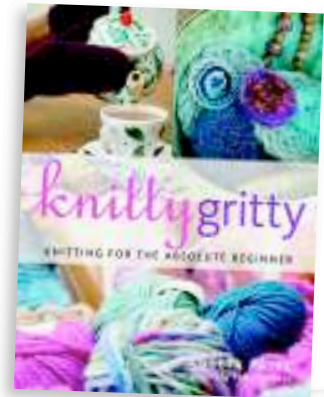
Knitting SOS website and her first book, *Knitty Gritty*. Aneeta calls her website 'the real fourth emergency service'. "I started it a couple of years ago," she explains. "It was a natural progression of the classes. I didn't want new knitters to get stuck and give up when a bit of advice could keep them going so I launched Knitting SOS as a free service to help out. Life's



Aneeta rode her bike around Rajasthan for a women's charity.



SAVE £2 ON KNITTY GRITTY
 Aneeta's never failed to teach anyone to knit, so if you're a beginner or are helping novice knitters, *Knitty Gritty* is a fantastic book to have. Publishers A&C Black are offering *Simply Knitting* readers the chance to buy *Knitty Gritty* for £12.99 (£2 off), with free p&p within the UK. Simply call 01256 302699 and quote GLR 1MO. This offer ends 31 January 2009.



not about money, is it? Otherwise I'd have been an accountant!" *Knitty Gritty* again came out of a phone call. Says Aneeta: "It rang, I answered it and suddenly I'm writing a book based on my classes. It was really important that it worked at the right level so I had it tried and tested by my beginner students. I'd send them patterns I'd designed and they'd send them back covered in red pen! When you've been knitting as

long as I have it's easy to assume too much, so it was great to get that feedback. "I got lots of people involved, including very reluctant knitters – my parents! – to make sure all the instructions worked. Also," Aneeta continues, "when you look at more traditional knitting books, you only ever get a picture of the finished piece. For one thing, a beginner's not going to be able to achieve that level of finishing and, for another, halfway through knitting something it's easy to panic and think it looks nothing like the finished thing so I wanted lots of pictures of the different stages. I'm really pleased with the end result and I hope everyone else is too."

Women charity. "It was ten months of insane, traumatic training for ten days of 'look, I can fly!'" she explains. "I love riding my bike around London but cycling 50-60 miles every weekend, as well as trips to the gym, wasn't easy. The ride itself was amazing and, of course I took some knitting with me. It was a bit too cold and dark when we were camping but when we were on the long coach rides in between stages it was perfect."

No more cycling then, but what else? "I think," says Aneeta, "the best thing I can do in the future is keep answering the phone. As long as it keeps ringing, I'll be happy!"



Back in London, Aneeta's written a book.

Book to bike
 So what of the future? One thing Aneeta has no plans to repeat is her epic 242-mile bike ride around Rajasthan, India's largest state, for the Women for



PHOTOGRAPHS: AC BLACK; PETER SCHIAZZA

To find out more...
 Visit Aneeta's website, Knitting SOS, at www.knittingsos.co.uk to find details of classes, free knitting patterns and more. If you need some help or advice you can also call Aneeta on her hotline which is 07940 850458 or email aneeta@knittingsos.co.uk