

The Heart and Core of the Threads Guild By Lesley Mayfield, March 2022

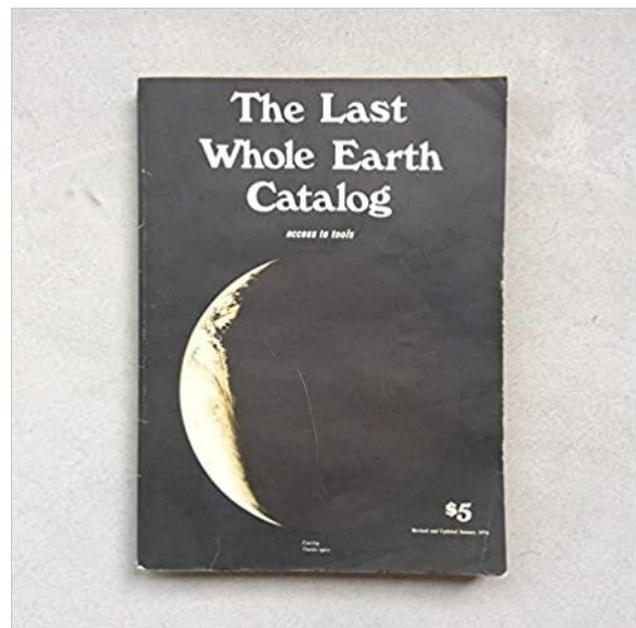
Picture yourself in 1976, as a young woman in your Slocan Valley home. The toddlers are asleep, and all the necessary chores done. You have some craft materials and a wonderful idea, but that magazine picture is short on practical details! You need some solid “how to” information, but “where, oh where to get it”?

Circa 2022: just “Google” that! But in the 1970s, home computers were just a futuristic idea. Even making a phone call might not be an option, if your homestead was far from the existing power line. But the age-old technique of “just asking around” has worked since time immemorial, and so the next day, out you went to do just that.

Networking in person is a little slower (compared to the internet), but the Valley’s fibre-friendly people did find each other. A small group in search of connection and resources began meeting monthly in each other’s homes. They discovered that amongst themselves, they **were** a resource. Some had solid sewing skills, while others had ventured into macrame, batik, or could knit up a storm. They could learn from each other. The chance to socialize was also welcome, as homestead life with all its chores could be more than a little isolating. One household had a projector, and films from the NFB made a special evening indeed. Sourcing supplies was also better collectively, as orders for yarn and specialized tools could be placed in bulk. At the time, Woolworths in Nelson (at Stanley and Baker) carried some yardage on the second floor, and at some time there was a fabric store on Baker, but supplies for weaving and other crafts were generally obtained by mail. Special shopping occasions arose when travellers returned from distant parts. Along with the slides, stories and potluck, there would be a chance to buy fabric from Mexico, Guatemala, Thailand, and other exotic places.

That decade, a veritable renaissance of craft was sweeping North America, in sync with the whole back-to-the-land ethos of “doing it yourself.” A glance through “The Last Whole Earth Catalog”, a sort of bible of the time for alternative living, gives a sense of a whole social movement. It has listings for instructional books and sources for tools – here’s a sample of topics: basic engineering, yoga, wild plants, windmills and pumps, portable showers, mathematics, bushcraft, camper life, welding, birthing and dying, wine making, horse tack, first aid, boat building, children’s games, low-tech construction, and motorcycle maintenance. There’s more, and the fibre crafts are well-represented.

The point is that developing the skills to tackle life’s basic necessities on your own terms, from food to outhouse, was core to making that lifestyle change. Individual reasons for exchanging some form of urban life for chickens, goats, and a handmade house were as varied as the individuals themselves, but common to most was a desire to get off consumerism’s materialistic treadmill. And making things yourself from the basic raw materials could, and still does, provide a measure of



independence from the vagaries of the uncontrollable world at large. People wanted to know how to make things, from chicken coops to pot holders. And once you had all those sheep, there was potentially lovely wool, if you could just get past all that raw fleece....

The opportunity to take custody of the disused Perry's Schoolhouse in 1981 necessitated formalizing the ad hoc fibre group as the Slocan Valley Threads Guild Society. Thanks to Jane Murphy and her typewriter, the application was submitted with appropriate dignity! With the building as a venue, possibilities for activities expanded, but the focus on learning, teaching and sharing remained. More formal classes were organized, with instructors brought in from farther afield, as well as the resident expertise. People fondly recall going to the Guild to learn pine needle basketry, painting on silk, tapestry weaving, pattern drafting, felting, tailoring, dyeing, quilting and more.



*Early Days Weaving Class: Christine Matthews, Gail Buckner, Judy Laret, unidentified member.
Photo credit Threads Guild archives*

The classes were important, but so were the less formal projects. So many members were becoming new parents, and even before Society status the women had been cooperating on making a quilt for each new arrival. Each person contributed a square, and a lot was learned in the process about pulling together a unified design from very disparate parts! But friendships, as well as quilts were made – a very real metaphor for piecing together a community.

Indeed, the Guild has always held up the fibre arts and crafts as a focus for people coming together, ignoring the often fractious divisions that rock our valley from time to time. Politics have no place here. Over the years, the whole community has been welcomed for occasions such as the Sheep-to-Shawl challenge, many shows, markets, and Open Houses, and in the past two decades, the famous (almost annual) Yard & Yardage Fundraiser. So much more can be achieved when we focus on our shared joys instead of our disagreements.



2003 silk painting workshop: Jane Murphy, Brenda Elder, Jill Kimmel, Lesley Mayfield, Lois Lawrence, Sharon Block. Photo credit Threads Guild archives

When asked why they joined, or continue to be involved in the Guild, members say they appreciate the warm welcome, the chance to meet new people, and the validation of having their interests taken seriously. Sharing is great motivation to reach ever higher standards of work, especially when encouraged to teach others what you know. Participation and connection help to keep one “in the community”, a great antidote to potential isolation.

*Lois Lawrence, Lynnda Moore, Sharon Block, 2005
Photo credit
Threads Guild Archives*



The Guild also offers more tangible assets, having built up over time a collection of specialty tools, such as cutting mats, carders, dye pots, a swift, a niddy-noddy, and a loom. These are available for use during classes, member days, and studio rentals. There is also now a quite extensive craft library of books and magazines, both new and classic, which members can borrow. The Library is curated and managed by a volunteer Librarian, with an annual budget allowed by the board.

Care of the building has required a great deal of fundraising over time. Many raffle quilts have been made – every one original, and an exploration of diverse techniques. There are now some highly skilled quilters among us, and also many who simply wanted to give it a try.



*Members Susan Appleby, Phyllis Del Puppo, and Laura Tiberti with the 2014 raffle quilt
Photo credit Gail Elder*

The fibre arts offer so many outlets for creativity – here is just a sampling of the Member Days and workshops that our Guild and building have hosted:

- basketry of all kinds
- acid dyeing for wool
- papermaking
- spinning
- principles of design
- dyeing with indigo
- nuno felting
- machine quilting
- two-at-a-time socks

- hat-making with cattails
- procion dyeing for cellulose
- use of natural dyes
- wreath making
- fabric collage
- stitched shibori resist
- needle felting
- piecing techniques
- knitting in the round

Exploring Design – Geometry and Nature's Patterns (Adult)

Threads Guild

In this series of 4 workshops, students will travel on an explorative adventure into the process of design. Taking up the tools of the geometer and inspiration from nature around us, we will learn to create meaningful designs for use in textile and fibre art projects. Within the universal principles of geometry and nature's patterns is a rich world of symbolism, transformation and beauty. We can invite this inspiration into our art and design for home and adornment. In these classes, students will develop designs through activities in geometry, drawing, printmaking and painting on paper with discussion and guidance in how to transfer these designs into fiber art projects.

Saturdays, 1-4 pm
 Oct 19, Oct 26, Nov 2 and Nov 9
 \$55 + \$20 for materials (\$20 pd at Thread's Guild) #26638

Facilitator: Morgen Bardati

17
Adult

Example of a class offered through Recreation Commission 8, facilitated by member Morgen Bardati

The Guild was formed out of people's desire to make beautiful and useful things, to challenge themselves with new skills, and to share all of this with others. Those core values bring diverse craft practitioners together, and make an excellent base for our future adventures.



40th Anniversary display at the Nelson Public Library, Photo credit Jeremy Addington