

Sheila Griffiths: “It is always fun!”

By Moe Lyons, March 2022

It was 1957. Sheila and George Griffiths were recently married and living in northern Ontario, where George was working in a gold mine. “It was damn cold!” says Sheila. “I was sick and tired of the long winters and of being so damn cold.” They began to dream of a different life, looking in papers such as The Free Press Weekly to see what might be out there. They read a letter to the paper about being in the Kootenays and going on a trip to Renata to buy peaches. Peaches. So Renata it was. “We found it and we loved it and the land was pretty cheap.” They decided to pack up and move with her brother and her parents. Her brother had a convertible sports car, she and her husband a leaky Nash Metropolitan. They stuffed all their belongings into the vehicles and set out to create a whole new life.

Of course WAC Bennett and the provincial government had other plans. In 1967 the Griffiths were bought out and had to give up their home because it was going to be flooded for the High Arrow Dam. They decided to head for the Slocan Valley, and found a relatively inexpensive house on the corner of land that would become the site of the Vallican Whole Community Centre, the house that would later house Pigweed Press for a time, and then become Marcia Braundy's home for many years. George dug the hole from which The Vallican Whole took its name (but that is a whole other story.....)

For several years they hopscotched about the Valley, George building houses wherever they went: Pedro Creek, back to Vallican for a two years, then Perry's Siding. They went back to Ontario briefly until they finished building in Appledale, and finally, in 1981, settled for good in a home they built just off Fern Road.

Throughout all this, Sheila made many friends, and found herself particularly drawn to spinners and weavers. While she had some experience working with fibre and fabrics, this opened up a whole new world for her. “I discovered there was a way to be creative and inventive with fabric instead of just following patterns.” Thus began a lifelong fascination and involvement with fibre arts. She found this approach so much more interesting, loved that there was more thinking to do.

Sheila, February 2022

Photo credit Nancie Switzer



She became friends with Judy Bradford, who suggested they gather with others every once in a while to work on projects together. Together about half a dozen women invented The Threads Guild. Except for Judy and Maggie (Teth) Bruyere (Haddow), the founders are still alive and well and continue to be involved.

Her youngest son died in 1986 and George two years later. Economic survival was always a struggle. Sheila needed to do something to make a living, so she took the little money she had and started Sheila's Shop, first at the north end of the Duck Stop, and later in one of the motel units next door. She initially thought of it as kind of a junk shop, and while she continued to sell second-hand goods, it developed into a bit of a showcase for creative work, including cards, crafts and earrings. Sheila became an accomplished beadworker, and many of the burgeoning counterculture, including myself, sported her elegant earrings. In 1995 she turned 60 and sold the shop. "It never made much money," she said, "Although we could live on it. I sort of enjoyed it, but it was a lot of work."

The Threads Guild continued to be a big part of her life. "People showed me how to do a lot of craft things," she said, "and I taught others, too. It was interesting. I can't say I had any real specialty ~ anything with pretty colours in it is my favourite thing!" She says she chose fibre arts because "They don't spill and they don't dry out if you leave the lid off."

"I have made a lot of quilts, probably more than 100, and I worked together with others on a few as well. I remember some spectacular quilts! Once I made a double wedding ring quilt that was so big I couldn't finish it on the frame so I gave it to the Threads Guild and someone else had to finish it. Mostly I machine-quilt. I've sold quite a few, and given many away. They have gone to the East Coast, California and even Germany. I make them tough, they are intended to be used as an actual bedcover and to be laundered.

Sheila was always very active in the Guild's group activities, and in 1982 she designed the quilt which was the first of many beautiful raffle quilts.

"I also knit a lot ~ hats, socks, etc. I sold them at craft fairs for many years."

Sheila in 2006 working on the "Flowing Threads" raffle quilt at the Threads Guild

*Photo credit:
Threads Guild Archives*



“I love the Yard and Yardage sales, and have contributed lots of stuff to them over the years, and then come home with all kinds of things.” She says she has tons of fabric squirrelled away that she will be making available to the Guild for the next Yard and Yardage sale or sales, so keep your eyes peeled.

“The thing about the Threads Guild,” she says, “Is it is always fun! Getting to look at other people's work inspires me. And there is always something different. I took a rug hooking workshop, and one workshop I found really fascinating showed us how to draw shapes, etc. which was particularly useful for quilting.” Occasionally there would be a major organizational effort and people got together and dyed all kinds of stuff and taught each other their various techniques.

When asked if she found she had moved more into teaching than learning, Sheila says, “Oh no, I am still as nosy as a ferret! If someone is doing something I don't know how to do, I want to learn how to do it! Most of us are like that.”

Nowadays the social aspect is less, whereas previously there were monthly meetings. Sheila says she didn't miss many of those. People brought along anything small enough to carry and did show and tell. “I got to look at all kinds of beautiful things people were making.” Nowadays, as well, Sheila isn't as mobile, since she quit driving, and has had a hip replacement.

Sharing at monthly Guild meetings:



2018, with coil baskets she made



Sheila and daughter Nancie in 2020

Photo credits Sharon Block

She lives with her daughter, Nancie and they continue to be creative together. They share a 20' x 20' studio. A multi-media artist like her mother, Nancie feels blessed. “Mom's house was always the kind of place if you needed something you'd probably find it. It was always a very inspiring house to live in.” Nancie has branched out into sculpture, collage, painting and assemblage.

At the 2015 AGM, Sheila was awarded a lifetime membership in the Threads Guild, at that time only the third person to receive this honour. Looking back over the years, Sheila says, “It was huge! People came from all over, and everyone was so friendly. Being part of the Threads Guild made my life much more happy and satisfying ~ being around other people who enjoy making stuff. It has been a very bright spot in my life, all those years.”



Photo credit Nancie Switzer, 2022