

PROFILE: JULIE DAVIS

The Slocan Valley Threads Guild is over 42 years old, has a vibrant history, and is still growing and thriving. Devoted volunteers whose enthusiasm, hard work, struggle, accomplishment, and foresight over the years have made it the successful organization it is today. The consistent attention over time of all members generated the momentum required for long-term success.

Julie Davis, one of the Guild's founding members, received a Lifetime Membership for her incalculable contribution. Although she prefers to operate from the background, filling in where there is a need, supporting others, and getting the job done, peers wished to recognize her decades of dedication and devotion. Julie's history with the Threads Guild reflects her genuine caring nature, passion for fibre arts, and community involvement.

The story of the Threads Guild goes back to the mid-seventies when Julie, an avid knitter and neighbour JC Bradford, a master weaver, came up with a solution to their problem of sourcing required craft supplies in a remote area. Together they formed a buying club. Word spread and the buying club acted like a magnet, naturally drawing fibre artists in the community facing the same issue. The buying club evolved to regular gathering times to share stories, and friendship while crafting. This is where the seeds of the Threads Guild were sown.

"I met my neighbour JC. She lived two kilometres down the mountain and was the first neighbour I would come across. She was a master weaver, and I a knitter. In those days we had trouble getting supplies. We decided to form a buying club. First it was buying, and then as more like-minded people found each other, we gathered to do crafts together," said Julie who enjoys finding solutions to problems and then taking actions to solve the issues.

"The co-op buying club grew into informal gatherings to make projects together and enjoy each other's company, especially on those long, dark winter nights. That is when the Threads Guild truly began. Later, when JC came up with the idea to buy the old Perry's School House from the RDCK for a dollar in 1981, the Slocan Valley Threads Guild became a formal organization."

Grant writing and fundraising began with the purchase of the building and the first few years were dedicated to upgrades and renovations. Julie played a central role in securing funds and managing projects alongside other long-time members.

Julie, who is humble about her role in forming and shaping the Guild says many grants were accessed to complete upgrades and maintenance. A decade of annual quilt making and designing assisted with costs of operation. The quilt making was fun and brought the membership together in community, she said. The annual quilt raffle ended when the now infamous spring Yard & Yardage Sale gained in popularity and became the primary event.



“Julie and Lynnda Moore working the tearoom in one of the earlier Y&Y” (from the Guild archives)

“Once the spring Yard and Yardage Sale started, it became the community event of the springtime. After a winter of relative hibernation, the event brought all members of the community together, not only members of the Guild. People came out for the opportunity to socialize, enjoy the food and baked goods, as well as the hustle and bustle of shoppers enthusiastically browsing for deals,” said Julie, who has managed and organized the Tea Room and food. Even when life took her away from the valley, she would return to do her part in the Yard and Yardage sale.

“Yard and Yardage is now the annual fundraiser that supports the Guild. It has become a huge event, a huge success,” she said, mentioning that the line builds for at least an hour prior to the event; itself a social affair. Guild members ensure the waiting crowd’s satisfaction by selling coffee and treats to the early birds while completing event setup.

The Guild is a Slovan Valley treasure to many and has held space for the growth and development of fibre artists for almost half a century. “I love the Guild,” Julie exclaimed enthusiastically. “I’ve learned so much over the years. Every meeting, I learn something I didn’t know before. What is amazing is that you learn from everyone.”

Julie is a mentor and teacher herself, according to friend of over 54 years, Pat Morrison who fondly recalls an early memory, before the Guild began.

“My most cherished memory about Julie is when we both had our sons in June in 1970. Julie would sit knitting, and I needed to learn to knit to make hats, mitts and scarves for my children and she took the time to teach me. She shared all she knew with me....and forever after has taught me whatever she knows especially, about Thread related skills. “I was able to raise my children and knit them hats and mitts for the winters. Julie is also an expert sewer, and I learned much from her over the years which enabled me to sew and now I am able to create my own work.”

In the beginning, the guild offered arts and craft classes to the local students at the Winlaw school. “The kids loved it and so did we,”. Over time, a multitude of fibre arts and craft workshops have enriched the knowledge of the community. Fibre arts and crafting workshops are presented throughout the year for the community to learn new skills.

“I want to take all the classes offered, I live in Nelson now, so that is more difficult.”

Julie, also now in her senior years, was inspired by a clip on the internet of a 70-year-old woman learning a new craft. “It reminded me we can always keep



“Indigo class taught by JC Bradford”

learning,” she said. “Sure, you can use the internet, but it is nothing like actually sitting with another person, being taught, and then being supported through the project. I love the sharing and being together with like-minded community. I love getting together to work individually on projects. No politics, just easy and fun.”

Julie who has been part of the executive since the Guild formally organized in 1981, is considered the historian. “I became the ‘guild historian’ I guess because I enjoyed taking pictures of our events. In those days not many people had cameras and at some point, we all decided it would be good to start documenting the things we had done and were doing. That was especially so once we acquired the building. I volunteered to

gather what we had together and make albums as well as continue to gather articles and pictures,” Julie said modestly.

She is an exceptional knitter. Her grandmother in England taught her at a young age and the passion was born. Julie, the youngest of four children was born in Scarborough, Ontario and moved to California at the age of 13 with her family. After college, Julie and her sister decided to move back to Canada with their boyfriends.

The year was 1970 and the times were unstable with the Vietnam war and the draft. Returning to Canada allowed them to escape the draft and set up a sustainable lifestyle in unstable times. They followed friends from California to the Kootenays with the intention of buying land cooperatively and building a home. They purchased 160 acres of raw land a couple of kilometers up a private road in the Slocan Valley and the dream began.

“At one time we had 18 people, including children. Not everyone bought in, but we all worked together to build a beautiful log house and gardens.”

Julie said she was grateful to have previously lived on a commune in the Santa Cruz mountains as it eased the transition to her new off-grid lifestyle, where she would have no hydro power for the first decade.

“My time in California definitely influenced me. That’s where we learned to participate in civil disobedience, live communally, grow organic gardens, build things, and generally survive in the country. Not that we still didn’t have lots to learn,” she said.

“Many relationships did not last beyond the first two years, including mine I moved to Vancouver and came back and forth to Winlaw. I met my second husband in 1974, and we returned to the land to build our own house.”

Her husband, who worked in the film industry was away a lot of the time. She travelled with her husband when she could and worked in the wardrobe department on set where she put her self-taught sewing skills to work.

“The first movie was in Banff, where I first learned about the wardrobe department, which I immediately took an interest in. Because my husband was away a lot and I had two children in school, I wasn’t able to work in the business 100 percent of the time and took jobs when I could.



"Julie and crew working in the wardrobe department in Arkansas on a TV miniseries, The Blue and The Grey in the 1980's"



"It was intense, the hours were grueling, and it was one of the best experiences of my life, she said, adding, "There was only one thing you never wanted to hear on the set where seconds count to the bottom line: 'We are waiting on wardrobe.'"

When she was not travelling, she spent her time raising her two children on her remote mountain homestead, producing custom clothing for friends as a side business and managing all the extra chores off-grid living affords.

"All along I have been making clothes for myself and family, as well as things for the house like curtains, outdoor furniture cushions and covers, etc. I made custom clothing and fleece outerwear for friends and others, knitting as well as sewing. I have always done both, but the knitting is so convenient to take with me and I can watch TV and knit instead of just sitting."

In the late 80's and early 90's Julie went to night school to learn pattern drafting and design at UCLA as well as taking a two-year program at Helen LeFaux Design in Vancouver.

Life changed drastically in 1994 when her 23-year-old son, Eazy, died in a rock-climbing accident. "I mostly stopped sewing, knitting, and crafting for a few years after such a life-altering event. I was treasurer of the Guild at the time and passed the position on. I ended up leaving the valley for Vancouver for 20 years."

When Julie returned to the Kootenays she moved to Nelson. She remains an active member and continues to organize and operate the Yard & Yardage baked goods sale, now with the assistance of her granddaughter, Mila.

“My daughter Lily also took classes we offered to Winlaw Elementary School in the 80’s, so Mila is a third-generation member and may be our youngest. One thing that is great about the Guild is it does include all ages.”



“Julie and her granddaughter Mila working the tearoom two years in a row”

Julie feels positive about the future of fibre arts and the Slovan Valley Threads Guild. “There is a revival of sorts,” she said. “The young people are really loving it! The enthusiasm is great. It is all about the enthusiasm for creating/making things. We are getting older. It is great to be able to pass the information on to the younger generation.”

“My message to members of the community of all ages is this: If you have an interest, jump on board. Don’t be intimidated. We will help you out. The Guild runs smoothly, we’ve worked all the kinks out.”



“Various items Julie has knitted over the years”

