

Tzouhalem Spinners & Weavers Guild ***50th Anniversary!***

In eighteen hundred and forty-three, a flock of sheep came o'er the sea...

Fast forward to a winter afternoon in 1973, when a handful of friends – weavers, spinners, and knitters, all wild about wool – met up and named themselves the Tzouhalem Spinners & Weavers Guild. They put out a call for members, formed a society, and crafted a mission statement:

To encourage and promote spinning, weaving, and associated fibre arts
as a medium of self-expression, fulfillment, and satisfaction.

To encourage closer fraternal relationship with people having these interests
in the Duncan and surrounding areas.

The encouragement portion of the Guild's mandate is a favourite among members – who *doesn't* like to chat about their interests? It's gratifying to be part of the plunge that people take into the world of fleece and fibre. Experienced fibre people help new members to take their first steps in learning to weave, spin, or knit, and they'll help with tricky projects. Michele Pace, a guild member for 17 years, says "that no matter what your level, the Guild is happy to share info and assist with learning. No experience necessary, and no judgement." The Guild's public demonstrations at local fairs and events have encouraged many to discover their own passion for the fibre arts.

I'd never had call to think about spinning or weaving until I saw a group of Guild members in action at the Cowichan Exhibition. One woman was "carding" fleece, fluffy puffs of wool flying around like dandelion seed. A second woman rhythmically treadled a spinning wheel, and I watched as she drew the yarn, smoothed it back, and repeated this action over and over as the freshly spun yarn wound onto a bobbin. The third woman was "throwing" a shuttle back and forth on a table loom, intricate patterns forming amid bursts of autumn colour. She asked if I'd like to try. *Really?* I pushed the wooden shuttle and it slid like butter across the taut warp threads, drawing the yarn along. I wanted to spend the rest of the day there, turning wool into fabric, but a line was forming – oops, others wanted a turn, too.

The Tzouhalem Spinners and Weavers Guild has been a community presence since its inception fifty years ago with annual events, displays, and twice-monthly meetings, and continues to encourage the growth of fibre arts of all kinds.

Here's what we've done so far in 2023:

Distaff Day (January):

- * A historical celebration of women's work in textiles. An annual Van Isle spin-in!

Islands Agriculture Show (February):

- * Demos of spinning and weaving

Imagine That! store window / Farmers' Market (May):

- * Display of Guild members' beautifully crafted items, with the felted fish a crowd favourite – big plump salmon hanging in the window; spinning demo

Arts on the Avenue in Ladysmith (August):

- * Hands-on spinning and weaving demos, and oodles of info about the Guild

Cobble Hill Fair (August):

- * Spinning, weaving, knitting, and felting demos (kids love the hands-on)

And these events are still to come:

Cowichan Exhibition (Sept. 15, 16 & 17):

- * Spinning and weaving demos; impressive entries for judging and display

Weavers and More Show and Sale (Oct. 19, 20 & 21, Cowichan Community Centre):

- * High-end woven and knitted items, toques-to-rugs-to tea towels; perfect for gifts

Fleece and Fibre Fair (Oct. 21, The Hub, Cowichan Station):

- * Yarn paraphernalia, yarn stash, goods, and equipment for sale (arrive early, it goes fast!)

The Guild has participated in other events over the years. For example, Bamberton Historical Days where we spun yarn in the orchard; Dream Spin retreat in Lake Cowichan; the Sheep to Shawl competition where guilds compete to weave a shawl starting from sheering the sheep; the Association of Northwest Guilds conference that highlights fibre arts exhibitions; education; networking; and fun! The Guild has also supported youth by providing 4H leaders with equipment and fibre plus training sessions for spinning and braiding.

There's a strong interest in fleece and fibre on the Island and Gulf Islands, and likely has been since those first sheep arrived. The Guild is a networking hub for sheep farmers and fibre people, processing mills, and fleece sellers. We offer workshops on nearly everything to do with

fibre arts and wool, including dyeing, Shetland knitting, tapestry weaving, and the list goes on. We also have an extensive library and equipment collection available for loan to members.

Members organize and run study groups too, bringing in presenters from an array of weaving and knitting cultures, all in the name of fun and education. Alison Irwin, a 45-year member of the Guild, shared that she “can’t imagine *not* belonging to the Guild. I remember telling my sons when they were young that being in the Guild was like taking a college class. There’s always something new to learn!”

Help us celebrate the Guilds’ 50th anniversary by catching a demo – bring a friend and check us out! Want to drop in on a meeting as a guest? See some Show and Tell? For further info go to: www.tzouhalempinnersweaversguild.com