

Saskatchewan Stitches Conference 2016

A letter to Friends...those I know and love, and those I have yet to meet...

*It is time to pour yourself a warm beverage, as I reflect on the 2016 Stitches conference – coffee is my preference! Last year my time at the Stitches Conference was much different but still a very enriching experience. Meet Linda Pringle, also known as Mrs. P. a dear friend from the Yukon whom I had encouraged to join me, and she did. She flew into Regina and we enjoyed a pleasant drive to the St. Peter's Abbey together. Linda and I were outpost nurses together in the Yukon and for a number of years we lived in the same community. The road trip flew by with lively conversation both trying to catch up on the year before and the anticipated conference ahead. I had a clear schedule when I initially booked and planned for the Stitches Conference last year, however soon after a long awaited surgery booking became available and I found myself double booked to have shoulder surgery. So my first trip to the Abbey last year was unfortunately cut short. My surgery was a success and after rising from my anesthetic fog I was able to return to the Abbey to continue my recovery and have some time to be nurtured. Like all good nurses, Mrs. P took very good care of me, as did many others at the conference. It was a slow recovery, but made ever so pleasant with like-minded creative souls at the conference. I was not a history buff but an additional bonus of being in the Abbey, were my coffee conversations with Father Demetrius, followed by his Abbey tours and listening to his engaging stories. My first year at the conference, two years ago, I would say I was there more for mind and soul. Last year that expanded to include the full deal – mind, **body**, and soul. I realized that this event does fulfill each aspect – mind, body and soul. I fully commit to eat, pray, love and embrace this event annually.*

I was excited when this year's class schedule became available. The planning, the anticipation are all part of the process I enjoy. Sign up, get out the Rubbermaid tubs and start collecting the tools and items on the class list. I feel like a kid getting ready for school in the fall.

As I reflect on another year, the Stitches Conference having come and gone, ever so quickly. This year I was grateful for the two able arms I had, and having my good friend, Mrs. P. back with me. She's getting the full experience too - quotes from her were: "I needed this", and "this event is spiritual" and I can't help but fully agree!

As you drive up the pristine property of St. Peter's Abbey, something changes within you. This continues as you enter, and meet the Stitches Conference leadership team who exude such sincere warmth towards everyone. From the minute you arrive, you just know and feel you are in a wonderful place. There is no doubt, or regret that you made a great decision to register and attend. Being seasoned attendees, this year we had the opportunity to welcome newbies and assist the directionally challenged to find the dining hall. It felt good to be helpful! A culture strong in socializing and sharing is present and you feel it grow stronger day after day and more evident with the increasing volume in the dining hall as the week goes on!

Linda and I prefer to stay at the Abbey. It really makes life convenient and simple, almost like an all-inclusive resort. Room, meals, entertainment, laundry, and education all within the convenience of one embracingly beautiful location. This year, the week started off a little quieter but as the weekend approached the population grew and the place was soon abuzz with conversation and enthusiasm from participants about their classes and projects. The classes were /are high quality and very learner friendly and supportive. There was / is something for everyone's interest and skill level. It is the out of classroom activities that drew my eyes and warmed my heart the most this year. There is no one left out and even the most reclusive and socially isolated person has the opportunity bask in the comfortable wrap of great conversation, support, and encouragement found everywhere and anytime, including at 6:00 AM standing around the kitchen counter, knitting and enjoying the freshly brewed coffee together!

Peggy who always has her hands busy with knitting actually thinks I could turn a heel on a sock! She is a real optimist but she made me feel that I could! I love watching the

quiet introverted person find something within themselves, and soon proudly present at show and tell in the evenings or share the story of their project and their learning. It's most impressive when they bring last year's projects completed! Something I envy and will strive for in the future. By day 4 already many attendees have come and gone and those of us who settled in for the week love the luxury of no imminent home, work or family responsibility. All we have to do is, just "be". Faces relaxed, shoulder tension released and each day our steps have more bounce and energy. The rush and urgency of our daily lives are placed on the back burner. Burdens or struggles that we bring with us are put to rest for the time being. This past year there has been many losses. Loss of spouses, loved animal companions, health and jobs. Sharing our lived experience and the challenges that come with it aren't shied away from but welcomed, and sharing helps everyone both work through their challenges but also become enriched by the experience. While we are there to learn new skills and produce beautiful crafts – none speaks to truly authentic fellowship as much as what these conversations provide.

God Bless the Kevin's and Ron's of the "Stitches World", but so much of this conference is "woman" time! Women who take this special time away from their daily lives, homes, families and responsibilities return home with a renewed outlook. When I attended the first year I was working too much and going in many directions. When I returned home that year my husband said "you are back in every way". It was actually my husband who introduced me to the importance of my attending the conference for me and as an added bonus – for our relationship. I come home "rebooted" for whatever life has to offer and challenge me with.

This year we were all *gob smacked* by a beautiful young shining 13 year old star who no doubt will be a textile leader in the near future. She had talent and passion for everything textile and willing to take on any activity and experience offered to her. She brought such pride to all of us and even people like me who aren't mothers wanted to nurture her and help her along her creative journey. She was magically everywhere and she left not only with a bulging swag bag but also a journal of recorded memories

and newly acquired knowledge. She made us all think back to when we started our creative interest in handicrafts – that eventually would lead us to here to the conference. I'm excited to think what creative life journey will be in store for this young woman.

Last year we started our own little "sweat shop". One evening during the conference we gather to sew little dresses for the "Dress a Girl Around the World" project. A lovely event that brings us together for a cause that has heart and love sewn together and in every stitch in every dress. We welcomed the opportunity again this year. Sharon's leadership excelled once again, as a couple of us (Mrs. P and myself) were stuck on visualizing how the pattern ended up into such a cute end product. Apparently some of the sewing machines can do 2000 stitches a minute and they were a humming with production. We created many dresses with pride and pleasure and I can only picture the wee recipients twirling in them.

Another revelation to me this year– I love gambling! I rarely even buy a lottery ticket and stay clear of Bingo events and casinos. But this year I learned that I really, really do like gambling when the "pot" is for fabric and rolling the dice was for 50+ fat quarters. I don't think I will ever need to call Gamblers Anonymous but I would gamble fat quarters every night if the dice were out!

My classes this year were all about wool...felting and rug hooking. I am more drawn to the classes where a little imperfection can be overlooked, and just perhaps that imperfection may even be viewed as creative and a good thing! I love the tactile textural feel of the wool in my hands. I think I might have committed to finish my rug-hooking project for next year's conference. I am not sure if I said that out loud for anyone to hear but I have a few months to procrastinate and still complete it!

Next year there is a "challenge". As an adult I have never competed or entered anything. My only experience is when I was in elementary school where it was compulsory to make things for the fall fair. In reflecting on those fairs I did get a first prize ribbon for a fake fur creation! Fortunately fake fur is not part of the challenge but

a beautiful piece of linen cotton fabric. The challenge has knocked some cobwebs out of the right side of my brain as I find myself keeping notes on possible projects. I usually abstain from such activities but not this time....I am "challenged and I'm in"! But what excites me and I look forward to seeing are all the other entries that will be there.

The many hands that reach out to make up the Stitches Conference go far beyond palms and fingers. It includes the gestures of support, encouragement, understanding and a willingness to share in conversation and the caring that holds our hearts together throughout the conference and waves us back year after year.

I liken my life to a recipe, and the Saskatchewan Stitches Conferences has become a Premium Ingredient of my life.

Lori Tulloch July, 2016