

FROM A JUDGE'S JOURNAL

by Carlene Harwick

Remember the diaries we wrote in when we were blithe young spirits (teenagers)? I don't know about you, but they never were as exciting as I thought they would be. There were so many things to do, places to go, fun to be had that it was hard to sit down and diligently write in it. When I did, it was to document what I had been doing, and I found going back and reading it was boring. So, I eventually gave it up.

A little later on, through a friendship I had made with a gal in another state, I discovered Salada Tea bag tags. They had neat little wisdom sayings on them and so I had my friend send me a bunch whenever her family was done with them. I even took the time to paste them in a book that I still have. I also wrote down any sayings I thought were funny, or inspirational; I thought that when I needed inspiration, it would be there to guide me. If you have ever read Anne Dillard's "Pilgrim at Tinker Creek," you may find it an inspiring book. It is about her thoughts and observances of life as she walked along Tinker's Creek every day. She took a summer sabbatical used the time for introspection and for observing nature and life. (Of course, I have dreams of writing like this some day.) Recently, Oprah suggested that people write down what they are grateful for and list at least 5 things each day. This seemed like a nice experiment and it definitely encourages a focus on the positive...on what you have rather than on what you don't have and on what you have achieved rather than on what you have not.

As I travel to various shows to judge needlework, I have begun to write about each one. The positive and negative parts of the show are written down as well as my feelings about it. It includes what I think may have been done well and what I felt I did not and what I want to do better at the next show.

When I leave to judge a needlework show, I pack my Judge's Journal. The night before the judging, I sit down and read and remind myself where I need improvement -- my behavior, my understanding of the show, the whole nine yards. It is not being too critical to say, I have not yet been "perfect." There are always challenges and there are surprises for which you are never completely prepared. When you have been through a

"certification program" you have your knowledge tucked neatly in your head. You know the basics, are well read on the techniques, and understand color and design reasonably well. Shows may be judged similarly, but no two are exactly alike. The people staging the show will range from experts to novices, and we hope we are ready for anything. There is yet to be a show where I have not learned something. Let me tell you about the ones this past year.

Show #1: This was a consensus type of judging with no number rating. There were many entries and we had time constraints, of course. The show committee explained their expectations to the judges before we began. We worked well together as we reviewed each piece and came to a consensus. There was a situation where the Director of the show asked us why a particular piece did not get a ribbon, as she thought it was a beautiful piece and expertly stitched. It was quiet for a few seconds and then we began commenting on what we saw as the positives and the negatives of the piece. The Director was satisfied and appeared to be comfortable with our explanations. It is amazing (to me) how much knowledge floats to the surface when the pressure is on!

At dinner the first night and prior to the judging, the committee mentioned a situation that occurred several years ago with the judges. There had been a "slight difficulty" in their ability to get along with each other. I reminded myself, "Remember how you behave; what you do will live after you." The two things learned from this show are that study and knowledge will support you when you need it, and, secondly, do not allow your ego to take over - put the art of the needle first.

Show #2: This was a numerical type of judging, but quite a bit different than that used in the certification program from which I came. However, even though numbers were different and categories were different, it was easily translated and understandable. It meant, for me, that I had to think a little harder and remain focused. This was more of an Artist's Art type of show and required serious concentration because the pieces weren't the usual type of pieces you see at other shows. The other judge for this show is well known in the field of needleart. What an honor meeting her and working

with her! And a little scary. I'm not sure what I expected or why I thought she might be excessively serious, but she was a pure delight. We got to the end of the show and had a very difficult decision to make between two pieces for Best of Show. And, she deferred to me!!!! I was very flattered, but slightly nervous that the decision might be up to me. We discussed and chatted and finally came to a decision together. To add a little pressure, we had a judging class that was observing us and who were free to ask us any questions regarding our decisions, after the show and the judging was done.

One of the admonitions in certification was that, "You must be able to back up your decisions." It does feel comforting when you can put your thoughts into words and support your decisions. Several things were learned from this show. This classy, expert judge was a gentle and sharing soul who loves art. No ego was there to interfere with the promise she saw in each entrant's work, and it made her very easy to work with. (I really would like to be more like her when I grow up.) At the end of the day, I was asked to provide a judge's statement; I had not done this for quite awhile. Needless to say, I was not as prepared as I should have been. General comments about the show and the art are best. I allowed myself a personal comment about "what I loved...." a perceptive friend read it, sought me out, and suggested I might want to express myself differently. That is a true friend, isn't it! You can bet I will be better prepared the next time.

And now, **Show #3**. This one had four judges. Two judged counted cross stitch and two judged counted thread techniques. In these categories there were sub-categories and each of these had ribbons to be presented. In the last categories, we were having a hard time making a decision -- too many excellent pieces. The other judge and I were tired, bleary-eyed and a little silly. (Our training had taught us to think before speaking.) We kept coming back to a couple of pieces that happen to have an older man as the motif. We finally decided, "We preferred old men." The two assistants and we two judges chuckled and finished up that last category. At the end of the evening (at the dinner afterwards), my assistant expressed how nice and delightful it was to work together and how much she really enjoyed it and our day together. And, by the way, she was glad we liked "Old men" the piece was hers! I expressed how pleased I was for and how great she was to

work with. (I reminded myself then and am still reminding myself - always "measure your words.")

Every show teaches us something. It is a sign of growth when we understand there is still more to learn and we have not reached perfection. Art doesn't aspire to be "perfect"; it is an expression of the artist's "soul." It is easy to judge on "technique" alone. May we also come to understand the expression of the stitcher's soul.

Carlene Harwick

COLLECTIONS ON LOAN

It has been a real joy working on the Exemplary these past six years and satisfying to watch it grow into the fine exhibit it is today. So I was never 100% I wanted to retire even though retirement was necessary. Fortunately I had Connie Lynn Borserine with her sharp mind, good taste and strong background in embroidery to turn my "baby" over to. I knew she was the person for the job when she adroitly solved a long standing annoyance - I never have been satisfied with the name "Show and Tell" for the sharing section of our exhibit. While not necessary for original work nor for the exhibitors own work - most of our members have wonderful pieces of embroidery; gems that we can all benefit from studying. Embroidery that highlights historical and social context and provides a base for our original work. Embroidery that features important people. Connie Lynn correctly felt that such work required more dignity and respect and came up with the title "Collections on Loan."

As my retirement project I look forward to sharing with you the treasures lent to us by our members.

Susan Dawson

Watch the next issue of NANthology for more on our Collections on Loan!

Special note to Susan: thanks for all the hard work on the Exemplary! Your love for your art and your strength of character that showed as you persevered through your illness has been an inspiration to the editor and to all who know you!