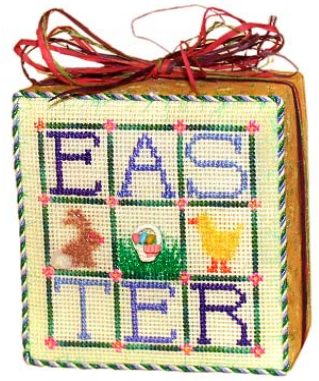


The Secret Needle Night Story

You know... it might be kind of fun to explain the Secret Needle Night process to all of you. It seems they 'just appear' in your mailbox every month... but a lot of ladies spend a lot of time on them even before they ever come to being!!!



Linda Stolz -- aka Erica Michaels Designs -- does most of our designs. She used to work a few days each week at The Silver Needle before she moved to Tennessee. She'd watch me agonize over designs each month... and one day suggested that she take one of the upcoming themes and see what she could come up with. (We plan our year's themes ahead... Jan will be Valentines, June will be Patriotic, September will be Halloween, etc.) She brought back a wonderful bundle of Indian Corn... well, with that... the rest is history! I am NOT a designer... and she is! I've left these up to her -- the professional!!!



So Linda sends us designs. We yeah or nay them... just like that! Very brutal sometimes... but we've worked together for so many years, that this isn't a stumbling block!

Next, the approved design goes to Angie and Diana, who choose fabric and threads... dishing over all the cool things we have in the shop, and sample rings of threads I have on hand. Angie, bless her heart, sometimes stitches a design 3 or 4 times... because she brings it back into the shop after stitching it over the weekend... and we tear it all apart... not the right colors -- too bright, too dull, bad fabric, crummy shapes, not good thread coverage, icky design -- we need a new one! (And poor Linda puts up with us!) Or... we LOVE it! Just change this and that... or, once in a blue moon, it's absolutely perfect the first time around!

Now, a few weeks later, after Angie, Diana and I are pleased with the results... of course most of the shop gals have seen the stitched variations by now, and made several positive and negative comments... I announce the rule that nobody is allowed to say "Oh, I never really liked that one anyhow," because we've dinked with this for over a month and we're bonded with it! They had their big chance to give us input! It's time for me to price this thing out... and see if we can afford our own good taste! (Sometimes embellishments win out... and we use less expensive threads -- sometimes, terribly expensive threads, and teeny embellishments!)

Next... I order all the threads, fabrics and embellishments. Angie has kept track of all her lengths of thread used. I always give you more! Always a challenge in math... the Medici wool comes packaged differently in skeins rather than than hanks, for instance... so my thread counts change after I order, depending on availability! Threads come and go, beads are in and on back-order, clay is handmade... everybody needs time to fill the orders... so we do worry about all that a little! (Actually, sometimes I do A LOT!) Fabric is back-ordered, dye-lots come in just looking awful... sometimes something doesn't come till the day before we assemble the kits or, once, NOT in time AT ALL!!! Ok...so there's just a little stress involved!



Materials arrive. I have to keep track of what comes and what is on backorder... so we can stay on top of delivery times. If we're a month or two ahead of schedule... I have to keep the materials separated for each month... and know if everything is here for a particular bundle of thread, so it can go to Mona's boys, for assembly. Thread bundles are 'farmed' out to Mona's college-aged sons, whose spending habits can always exceed SNN earnings!!! They measure and cut all those lengths to my 'recipe specifications.'



I have ordered just enough thread for the month's kit -- unless I was mathematically challenged that month! NOT a happy moment when we discover my mistakes!!! Mary L and Jill usually take the fabric home to cut it... no time in the shop on work days! (They use scissors, because rotary cutters aren't accurate enough to cut your pieces following the thread lines! They cut each of those pieces by hand -- individually!) I personally love doing the embellishment packs... but need help with those too, sometimes.

Ok... kits are in production! Meanwhile, you're calling and e-mailing every day to update your credit card numbers and expiration dates, give us new addresses, adding to the auto programs you want shipped, or starting the program. It's my job to input you correctly into the system. Sometimes the system isn't too kind to me... and we all have to have a little patience! In the meantime, Angie and Diana are busy choosing threads and stitching the next projects... we're offering changes and suggestions... asking for new designs... waiting

for thread samples to arrive... just everything!

Mona steps in for the finishing! How do we want the model done? Do we want a finishing kit? (You really liked the candy box one!) She has to get the model done in time for Mary -- our faithful webmaster -- to photograph the finished model, organize the instructions that include the chart, thread key, the color photo page, the recipe, and my words about that month's kit. Mary prints all of that on our cool color printer... in time for me to take to the shop for the kit assembly that following Saturday. Mona starts her finishing kits...



It's time to assemble the SNN kits! We bring in a full crew on the Saturday before SNN... and we assemble all of them in one day... process your credit cards, pack the kits in the envelopes, tape them shut, address label them, and apply postage! Whew! The Saturday goal is to have your kits ready to go so when Monday rolls around... they're waiting till Wednesday -- Secret Needle Night -- to send! (Sometimes we need that 2-day cushion!!!) The "specials"... the overseas stitchers, or the gals who are buying more than one kit are handled separately that Monday or Tuesday... so everybody gets their kits shipped out on time Wednesday! The mail lady is wonderful... she remembers and brings us extra postal tubs the week before. The mail men who fill in for her groan, and come back later for it... I guess it's just too much for them!!!



Mary's final job is to post the SNN image on our website sometime early that Wednesday morning. (I will confess the first time we FORGOT SNN!!! We were standing in line at the post office mailing shop orders, when Deanna called and said that people were calling because they couldn't find the new SNN on the site! Holy Cow, how awful!!! I still laugh about it!)

It's ALWAYS a lot of fun for us... and we love your comments and e-mails when you finally get them! By that time, we've been working on your project for at least 3 months... and we feel like we've given birth! It's OK if they stack up in your stitching stash, because they're happy there... but it's even better when you send pics of finished designs, or just tell us what fun you've had stitching them.

I hope my little 'story' has been fun for you to read about... it was fun to write about our special, wonderful, Secret Needle Night!

Happy Secret Needle Night Stitching!

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