
NEIGHBOURS OF

EXHIBITION PARK

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Sylvia Plester-Silk: Helping People See Differently



Sylvia Plester-Silk: Helping People See Differently

By Heather Grummett

Photography by Erin Charbonneau



When it comes to downtime, Sylvia Plester-Silk and her husband Mark love getting away to enjoy the outdoors at the cottage - a cottage that they built themselves. With a passion for renovating, they purchased a treed lot near Lion's Head in 2006, and proceeded to clear it enough to start building by 2008.

The couple purchased a 1968 trailer, which they fixed up and parked in a near-by trailer park. They spent holidays and weekends working on the cottage during the day, then returned to the trailer park for a hot shower and a relaxing dinner at the campfire.

They did all the work except for the septic system, concrete work, drilling the well, and drywall finishing; plus they hired roofers only because it was getting late in the year and they were running out of time. By the fall of 2009, the cottage was finished enough that they could technically live in it and give up the trailer. A true labour of love, the couple put on the last piece of trim two years ago.

Having graduated from Ryerson as a Social Worker, Sylvia worked in various trauma, mental health and addiction focused careers, as well as working as a parole officer, before making a change.

"I love helping people see things differently," said Sylvia. "We spend so much time stuck in how we think or do things - making a change seems to open new possibilities and shifts how people both live and work. There's that moment where it registers that they can live differently."

It's that passion for helping others that led her to open her own business, On Purpose Consulting, in 2010. With a focus on non-profit organizations, she provides executive coaching to improve team dynamics and help shift behaviours.

"I needed to be passionate about what I was doing," she added. "I like to always be growing and experiencing self-development. I've worked in a lot of toxic environments. We are all different in how we see and interrupt things. When leaders learn to delegate properly, and learn how to have those difficult conversations to deal with conflict, things can shift within an organization."

"When I meet people out in the community I get such positive feedback as to the outcome from changes within an organization – whether they start to raise more money, clients are getting better service, employees are happier or the organization is functioning better. Suddenly, I even see people smiling and walking differently."

Sylvia volunteers as the President of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers Southwestern Ontario Chapter. She speaks professionally on team dynamics, accountability and conflict, at conferences, leadership days, and training seminars. She has donated her time to speak at local organizations including PIN's

Executive Director Peer Group, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Guelph Rotary Club.

Sylvia and her loveable Black Lab-cross enjoy spending time on walking trails near Exhibition Park. At nine years old, Josee loves adventures and is always doing crazy things – so much so that her antics inspired Sylvia to write a book.

Published in 2013, *Unleashing Team Potential: Lessons for Leaders from my Canine Friends* relates those everyday stories to important leadership lessons - like the time Josee interrupted a football practice during a trip to Exhibition Park. She took quite an interest in the small orange pylons lining the field and after grabbing one in her mouth, she showed off her skills by running through the other pylons. Enjoying the attention from the team, she ignored Sylvia's calls. The coach was not impressed with the interruption – which inspired Sylvia's advice that as a leader sometimes you just need to have a sense of humour.

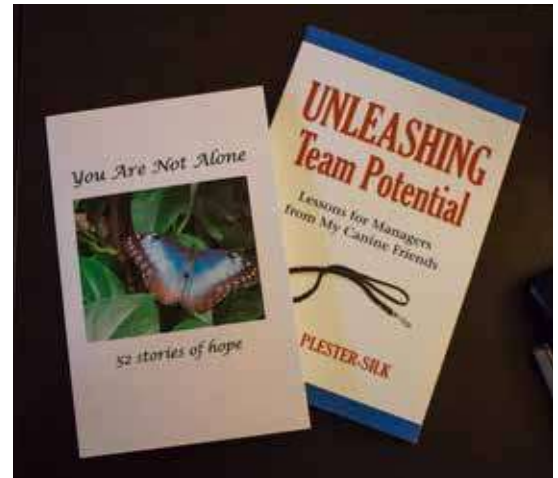
More recently, she contributed a chapter on forgiveness to an anthology published and edited by Guelph resident Lisa Browning. With book proceeds to Hospice Guelph Wellington, the project included true, personal, inspiring, and healing stories that were a touching way to fundraise for the palliative care facility.

"When we forgive, we let go of the pain and set ourselves free. It happens when we decide that we no longer want the other person to 'rent space for free in our heads' and choose to let go of the hurt."

Her passionate spirit has taken her to various locations around the world; this fall she'll participate in a five-day, four-night hike to Machu Picchu. But there's a comfort in returning to the Exhibition Park neighbourhood, to her century home, where she can enjoy the closeness of the community and her creative side, that is reflected in her sewing, knitting, and painting.

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