



Alex Byrne

Quiltmaker

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1) Tell us a little about yourself, education, work, and family.

My name is Alexandra Eve Byrne and I'm British, from Kent in England. I graduated from Kings College London with a degree in Physics in 2000. I currently work as an Office Manager at a tech start-up in SF but have delivered a lot of training and done IT project management in the past. I am married and have a cat.

2) Where have you lived and has it influenced your life?

I never thought about living abroad until my husband was offered a job in Tokyo and we decided to jump at the chance. We left London in October 2013 and spent 14 months living in Japan. This definitely had a big influence on my life as the craft scene there is huge and I had the chance to go to several major shows as well as do a lot of shopping. I also taught sewing, embroidery, knitting and crochet to small groups while I was there. We were back in the UK for two months before the offer to work in SF was confirmed in 2015 and so again I came along as my husband's extra carry on luggage. I quickly started work as an Office Manager and a few months later found out about SFQG and went to my first meeting.

3) Describe your earliest memories of quilts and I or quiltmaking .. other sewing or needlework experiences

My Mum tells me that when I was three I went to see Father Christmas. He asked me what I wanted for Christmas and taking great care not to let my Mum overhear I whispered "a sewing set" which he, naturally passed along to her afterwards. Shortly afterwards she showed me how to knit and I was set in my life of craft. I don't specifically remember my Mum sewing when I was younger but she did make curtains and do repairs on things and she also loved simple hand embroidery using iron-on transfers. I would save up pocket money for sewing magazines and get seventies craft books from the library and try to make what was there, although I never had the right materials. This is where my tendency to 'bodge' things comes from. My edges are rarely straight and my corners rarely align.

4) When did you make your first quilt?

My craft activities trailed off in my late teens as I got distracted with teenage things. I got into knitting while at University and then made basic sewn things like curtains and skirts a few times before starting to think about about patchwork and quilting. It was about 2008 when I went to the Festival of Quilts (the UK's big annual show) and saw a quilt I adored and wanted to make - all polka dots and circles. If I had known how difficult it is to sew curved seams I never would have started. It was paper pieced and tiered and oh boy so many complications. But I made it and I still love it - it's our go-to quilt at home. I finished it in about 2010.

5) Describe your favorite quilts ... the type of patterns and designs you use ... any special techniques ... why and for whom the quilts were made?

My first love and my main love is english paper piecing - EPP. I love hexagons generally and how neatly they tessellate. In fact I love most tessellating patterns but hexagons are definitely the best. But I also love trying different techniques so have made all sorts of styles from improv to applique. I prefer patterned fabric to solids so will never make a 'Modern Quilter' but I greatly admire some of the quilts in that genre.

6) Throughout your quilting experience how many quilts have you made? Do you make quilts for others ... or family ... to celebrate events?

I am always making gifts for friends and family and just handed over a quilt I made to thank a friend for short notice cat sitting for three weeks when my mother-in-law passed away in 2017 and we had to go back to the UK suddenly. I keep a few and recently bought a ladder to display them on rather than having them folded away. I'd love to put them up on the walls and artfully drape them over furniture but in a one-bed apartment it quickly gets messy and there isn't the space for larger quilts to hang. One day I'll get a bigger place!

7) Do you donate or sell your quilts? Please explain.

I've been a keen contributor to the Guild's outreach program since my first meeting so regularly donate tops or finished quilts to Outreach. I just finished a crib size quilt for the "Scrap Vortex" sewalong on Instagram and will be donating that to the 500 Families initiative Adrienne, as Outreach Chair, is supporting. I haven't sold a quilt. I don't like the idea of working to order and risking turning a pleasure into a chore.

8) Is your home decorated with quilts? Do you receive or collect quilts that others have made ... do you share blocks ... exchange fabric ... Please explain.

It is decorated a little bit as described above but I do also have some mini quilts from Instagram swaps up on the walls. I also take part in charm square swaps and a few years ago was in a Bee for the Lucy Boston Patchwork of the Crosses block, which ended up forming a large part of the quilt I exhibited in our 2017 Show called "Red and White Lucy".

9) Do you select fabric for a particular project or because you like it?

I usually buy only because I like it! When I was finishing the Lucy quilt above I needed some red and white fabric I could fussy cut and as I've been cutting pieces for the Pineapple Punch class at the upcoming 2018 QuiltAway I'll need to buy some yardable of backing fabric (although I've cut everything else from stash!). I am consciously trying to sew from stash rather than buying though. I volunteered to cut kits for Preemie Quilts earlier this week for Outreach and we are still using up the fabric stash of a member who passed away many years ago. The idea of dying and leaving behind all that unused fabric seems very sad to me. And after the wildfires came so close to the city I also wonder what I'd lose if there was a natural disaster like an earthquake. Why spend all that money on something you might not use? Better to have a smaller stash but more in the bank. It's taken me almost 40 years to arrive at that conclusion though!

10) Have you participated in group quilt making activities?

Yes, there was the Bee I took part in and I also contributed to our 2019 Opportunity Quilt (I made the centre square!), the Outreach Sewcials, the rainbow hearts for the Florida shooting victims and all sorts of other groups.

11) Have you taken quilt making classes ... if yes, from which teachers ... what techniques did you learn about?

I am terrible at remembering. I've done classes with the Guild on applique for Dear Jane and Sherri Lynn Wood on improv quilts from clothes. I also did a Libs Elliott class at PIQF to make her hexagon quilt although for me that was about learning Y-seams. I've also taken quite a few Craftsy.com classes - the most useful was on sewing curves. But I usually learn through trial and error!

12) Do you teach quilt related classes .. ? Where do you teach .. in a shop ... books, etc.

I have taught in the UK, Japan and SF! Only on a small scale. I am teaching a workshop at SCRAP in May 2018 on quilt-as-you-go to help with their fundraising activities.

13) Do you enter quilts that you have made in quilt shows ... or display them in public - at guilds ... museum ... galleries ...fairs ... public buildings, etc.?

The SFQG Show in 2017 was the first time I had entered a Show and it was thrilling. I won two rosettes! I was absolutely floored and so, so happy.

14) What specific ribbons, awards, or prizes have your quilts earned?

The Red and White Lucy quilt got an 'honorable mention' and my portrait of my husband, which was an art quilt, won 3rd prize in that category. They were both at the 2017 Show.

15) What other public recognition, received for your quilting, would you like to share?

Only 'likes' on Instagram!

16) Have you written articles ... patterns ... or books relating to quilting? Please explain.

Only class handouts and pieces for Quilters Cables. I seem to have written quite a lot for QC now! I did used to blog almost every day but switched to Instagram a few years ago.

17) Do you have any advice for future quiltmakers?

If you're not enjoying it, try something else. I don't mean stop quilting, but there are so many styles! Precision and accuracy are not my thing at all but I still love piecing and designing and quilting. I judge my work by how happy I am with it, not by my technical standards - because I know I am not a technical quilter. I love what I do and hope others will get just as much enjoyment out of it!