

## MY QUILTMaking STORY

By Dorte Brandenhoff, Quiltmaker.12/2013



My name is Dorte Brandenhoff. I am Danish, born in November 1946 in Copenhagen Denmark, where I have lived most of my life. I am a certified and registered midwife which in Denmark is the main medical person during pregnancy and delivery. No babies are born in Denmark without the help and support of a midwife, be it at home, in private clinics or at hospitals. Even at cesareans the midwife is there for the baby. I stopped counting how many babies I have helped long before I retired in 1992. But it is close to 2500 babies I have welcomed into the world.

My husband, also Danish, is a cardiothoracic surgeon, and we have 2 sons both born in Denmark in 1972 and 1979. The oldest has lived in San Francisco since 1992 and has been a dancer with SF Ballet for 13 years. The youngest lives in Denmark with his wife and 2 daughters.

We had been coming to USA on a regular basis over 30 years visiting friends and family. and moved to Cleveland, Ohio in 2000, so my husband could get his American license at the Cleveland Clinic and in 2004 we sold our home – through 26 years – in Copenhagen and moved permanently to San Francisco. Quite a step this late in life, but only to have new exciting experiences.

In 1952 for my sixth birthday, my Godmother gave me a small pillow and quilt for my doll. Both in a “Grandmother’s Flower Garden “ pattern. Right away I knew that when I became a mother I would make a quilt like it for my baby. In the summer of 1972, expecting our first child, at a time when only a handful of people in Denmark knew about quilting. Patchwork was mainly used to make potholders, I began my quilt. A small one, meant to be a cover for the pram. Paperpiecing hexagons using fabrics left over from other sewing projects. Back then I had sewn most of my clothes as well as placemats, pillows, curtains etc. I was never good at throwing even the smallest scrap away. A good friend was a wholesales dealer in fabric who added lots of samples to my collection.

Well, the baby outgrew the pram before I finished the quilt and in the next few years he continued to grow faster than the quilt. I decided to make it into a bedspread. Not only did I run out of the background fabric. The colour was no longer in fashion and to be honest, my son had definitely outgrown the colors. Whenever my work as a midwife were quiet, I would sew hexagons into flowers. I bet I have flowers for numerous quilts. And all the time I carried a green fabric square in my purse in case I should come across that special green colour for the background . It took almost 10 years! Finally I could finish my quilt, I thought. HA!

By then our romantic “ first-in-love” bed had been upgraded to a “ comfortable “ King size. And I had not bought quite enough of that special green fabric. Fortunately quilting had become fashionable in Denmark and fabrics bountiful, so it only took another 5 years or so, before my green was available.

The background is green as you may have gathered - very green and in 3 slightly different dyes. In addition, all the flowers are made of scraps from the boys clothes, bedlinens etc. The quilt is done entirely by hand with 2662 hexagons and approximately 30 stitches on each side. I started out not knowing anything except what I could see with my doll’s quilt. Every step was learned the hard way. Even choosing the batting, I was thinking thick and soft. English not being my first language, I believe I called it a bedcover instead of – spread, so the nice lady in the quiltshop in Ohio recommended a thick woolbatting. Another lesson learned. I hand quilted, sitting on our bed under the quilt in very little clothes.

I must admit I have not yet discovered the pleasure of the actual quilting and have just recently had my first lesson. I had to finish this quilt before our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008 and I did. It is a true learning – by – doing – project, and as I have also learned that all quilts have a name. Should I name my quilt “ Sew what – I am still learning “ or “ Learning Path in Bloom?”



I saw my first quilting magazine when visiting the States in 1976 and managed to have a subscription sent to Denmark. Over the years, I have subscribed to over 10 different magazines and I absolutely love to read about quilts. I realized I never invented anything, merely spent time

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reinventing what others had already done. I prefer the older magazines maybe because my favorites are the old-fashioned traditional patterns made of what you had.

I am however addicted to fabrics and find it hard to pass any opportunity to buy. But only once have I bought fabric for a specific project. In fact, it was for a kingsize bedspread for my son who never had his babyquilt. Over the years I have made several smaller quilts for other special babies and children.

While in Cleveland I joined my first quilt Guild and really enjoyed meeting and learning from many different quilters.

In February 2003, on a visit to San Francisco, I visited the SFQG exhibition and applied for membership even though I lived in Denmark. It wasn't until fall of 2004, when we moved to San Francisco, did I become an active member of the Guild. I first joined the ByLaws committee working on updating the Guild ByLaws and then served 2 years as Parliamentarian. The following year I served as Chair for the biennial quilt show (2011) together with Linda Breitbarth.

Apart from enjoying the meetings, programs and activities, I also joined a small sewing circle. We have now grown to 14 members and call ourselves "The Wednesday Whimsicals." We meet every 2 weeks in each others' homes and also have a monthly workshop, renting the studio at Quiltworks.

My favorite part of the process is playing with fabrics and drawing design ideas based on traditional patterns and made to suit the person who is receiving the quilt. I have many more ideas than I will ever be able to make. Though I no longer stick to hand sewing but have come to enjoy machine piecing and some simple machine quilting. I have taken my first baby steps in quilting on a longarm that has speeded up the process to finish quilts both for gifts and community outreach.

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In 2009 I won my first ribbon at the Guild's quilt show. Two more ribbon have been added since.

Dorte Brandenhoff, December 2013.