

Sue Danielson

Quiltmaker's Story



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Interviewed by Jean Low, San Francisco Quilt Guild Historian

Jean: Tell me something about where you grew up, your schooling.

Sue: I grew up in Chico, California, until I went to University of California Berkeley.

I got married in 1953. We have 3 children.

Jean: Anyone in the family who sewed?

Sue: Grandmother did quilting and made a lot of clothing. In those days you had to make your own clothes. My grandmother used to visit us and they used to put up a big quilting table on wheels and they would quilt at it. It's in the Sacramento valley outside of Orland. I don't know what ever happened to her quilts.

I've only quilted about 13 years. I started about 2000. Before that I was busy with a store and several other businesses and family. When I had a store, I bought quilts from Maren Larsen. The store was called Lazy Susan. I was there for 16 years. We did a lot of everything, but that piqued my interest in quilting. I bought a lot of quilting books and sold them. I read them and thought I'd make quilts when I retired, and that's what I did. The name came from a lazy Susan:

you know, you can put anything on a lazy Susan and spin it around. We were both named Suzanne, so that's what we called it. We sold all kinds of things. We had jewelry, cards, toys, all kinds of paper goods, dishes, all kinds of things.

Jean: You were on the merchants' association, and did board work?

Sue: Yes, I was on the merchants' association, and I was president of the small business commission of San Francisco for 8 years.

Jean: Did you work with a lot of mayors?

Sue: Dianne Feinstein appointed me, and I was appointed president with Art Agnos. I did that for a while along with Lazy Susan, but that was kind of an extra-curricular activity (ha-ha). I've always been interested in politics.

Jean: When Did you close down Lazy Susan?

Sue: 1988. So it's been a long time. And then I had an apron company. And then I had a handbag company.

Jean: Oh, Okay. You were always busy. What made you decide to get into quilting when you retired?

Sue: Mainly because I like fabric and I like texture. I really like fabric. I like color. I think it's a really good social thing. I have a group that gets together every Friday.

Jean: How large is your fabric stash?

Sue: Don't ask. (laughs).

Jean: What type of quilts do you like? What are you drawn to?

Sue: I'm drawn to mostly colorful things. I know a lot of people like light things, but I guess you can tell, I'm more of the bright. I'm kind of going to more contemporary, easy patterns now, because I have such a stash and I want to get rid of it. You know, big, and simple.

Jean: These quilts, are you making them for people or for yourself?

Sue: Both. I'm donating some, and then I'm making for friends. There's lots of babies.

Jean: So where are you donating your quilts?

Sue: Usually to the Quilt Guild, and I've donated some to the Chinese Auxiliary and I've donated to Ronald McDonald House a couple of times. I have a friend who works there. Well, we do it at the Guild.

Jean: long have you been with the Guild?

Sue: Since 2000.

Jean: And you've been volunteering with the Guild. Which jobs did you do?

Sue: Treasurer, and Hospitality, and Vendors for the Show.

Jean: What do you think of the future of our quilt shows? Is there something we need to do?

Sue: I like the way they are now, but I think we need a space, of course. That's what we're looking for now, is a space. I like the way it's set up, pretty much, and I do like having the sale. I think a lot of people like to buy things and it gives us money for the Guild.

Jean: How important is publicity for Quilt Shows?

Sue: Oh, I think it's most important. I think if you don't have publicity you don't get anyone there. I don't know how you get it though.

Jean: You yourself have done publicity for organizations, though, right? So, you have experience there.

Sue: I've had some, yeah. It's very hard to break into television. Now with the social networks, that's where we really need to be. We need to ask our friends to use their email. That's the best thing in the world, to get your friends to come. Say, you know, we're having a quilt show, and use their email list.

Jean: getting back to your Friday sewing group, tell me a little about that. What do you do there?

Sue: (laughs) We sew and gossip and eat.

Jean: How many members?

Sue: 7 or 8, or sometimes 9.

Jean: Are you working on projects together or on your own?

Sue: Everybody's working on their own. We may do a project together this year. Do you have a group?

Jean: UFO.

Sue: How many are in your group?

Jean: Sometimes 5-7.

Sue: It just depends on who's traveling, you know. But I think the thing about our group is, it's people who I never would have met before. Never Ever. We have a cross section. It's really nice.

Jean: Do you decorate your house with quilts?

Sue: Yes, I have some, but my husband is a painter, so we have more of his paintings than my quilts.

Jean: Have you taken any quilt workshops?

Sue: Oh yeah, I've taken a lot of quilt workshops.

Jean: Who have you taken them with?

Sue: Oh, Freddy Moran, Paula Newman, Ruth McDowell, Pat Dickers, and Judy Woodfill, and Tish Cheung, I've taken a lot from our group. I like to do that.

Jean: What do you think about the Saturday Sewcials? Have you taken a lot of those?

Sue: I like them. I haven't taken a lot, but I've taken 4 or 5.

Jean: When you're working on a project, do you buy the fabric and then plan the project or is it the other way around?

Sue: It depends.

Jean: Is there a color range you gravitate to?

Sue: I just don't like greyed looks. And I don't buy fat quarters anymore. I buy 1 or 2 yards, except for backs. I buy backs on sale or put things together to make it more interesting.

Jean: And do you have a system of washing things when you buy them, or do you do it when you are starting a project?

Sue: I really don't prewash anymore. I did a whole quilt without prewashing anything, and I washed it and nothing happened. Because most fabrics are colorfast if you get Moda and some of the better fabrics. I'm more careful with JoAnn or Beverly fabrics, and I always prewash Batiks.

Jean: Do you do large bed quilts, art quilts, wearables?

Sue: I don't do any wearables. Most of mine are large. But I have done a lot of lap quilts. And a lot of baby quilts. But I do more crib quilts than I do layette size, because they grow out of them so fast.

Jean: Do you enter quilts shows?

Sue: Yes, I enter Petaluma and our Guild.

Jean: What do you get out of it?

Sue: It's nice for other people to enjoy our work and see other people's things. And I think you have to participate in things to get anything out of it. That's what my father always said.

Jean: Getting back to your grandmother.

Sue: She visited once in a while. She lived on a ranch. She made all her own quilts when she was younger, but I didn't get to see any of them.

Jean: Where did you get your sewing skills?

Sue: From my mother and grandmother. I took a lot of art classes in high school and college, so I learned to sew in high school and sewed a lot of clothes.

Jean: What kind of art classes did you take?

Sue: All kinds of basic art classes.

Jean: Where do you find inspiration for your quilts?

Sue: Everywhere, I think. Mostly books. I have a hard time deciding what colors to use, what to put together. And I was doing foundation piecing but I don't like foundation piecing so I'm not doing that anymore.

Jean: Sometimes that's what we do, we have unfinished projects and we leave them and come back to them later.

Sue: If you could see my unfinished projects, you'd die. I go from one thing to the next to the next. But in fact, I'm finishing some things up now.

Jean: Do you do hand quilting, machine quilting, send it out?

Sue: I send it out. I have done machine quilting and some hand quilting, but lately I've been sending it out. I really like doing the patchwork. That's my thing. On the small projects, I do my own. Baby quilts and stuff, I do my own.

Jean: So how many days a week would you say that you spend on quilting?

Sue: I don't have that much time. It seems like I cook and clean a lot. Probably only a day or two, you know, just hours in between. Whenever I have a chance or in the evening. I don't have a lot of time. How much do you spend?

Jean: As much as I want.

Sue: This last week I did get one done. I spent lots more time on it, I probably spent a couple of days doing it to get it finished.

Jean: Do you ever stop to cook when you're working on a quilt?

Sue: Don't even ask. I set down three meals a day and I always cook.

Jean: Here's the big one, now. Have you ever used quilt making to help you through a difficult time in your life?

Sue: No, I've never had difficult times, I've been lucky.

Jean: Do you have anything else to add to your quilt history?

Sue: No, I think that's about it.

Jean: Do you have advice for future quilters?

Sue: I think it's jumping in and starting a project. I think you can hesitate and read all kinds of books and stuff, but you really need to jump in and try.

Always challenge yourself for a little bit more, do a little bit harder project.

Quilters should take as many classes as they can. I think classes are really what is good. I'm going to go up and see Laura Fritz. She's going to do a class on her vest. I'm going to learn about how to do one of her vests. You remember her vests, at the quilt show? She's had quilts and jackets and stuff that she did with her felt. Almost like a reverse applique method.

Also, belonging to a quilt guild. I think our guild is really neat.

Jean: What do you like about the quilt guild?

Sue: I think the socialization, and I love to see all the show and tell, because it gives you inspiration. And all the speakers. I love our speakers. I think they're great. It's great having them.

Thank you, Sue!