

Quiltmaker Story: Mariko Duenwald  
San Francisco, June 16, 2011  
Interviewed by Jean Low  
Transcribed by Peggy Cleary



*JL: I see you've been a member of SFQG since Oct. 1997.  
Tell us something about your background and family.*

MD: I came over here [from Japan to the US] in 1983. I have two children, 24 and 21, and my husband. I used to work, at Sumitomo Bank, for two years, until I got pregnant. After that, I quit, and I've been a housewife until now.

*JL: Was there anyone in the family who sewed?*

MD: My mother sewed our kids' clothes and drapes and things for the house. She was pretty good, I think.

*JL: How did you get interested in quilting? When did you see your first quilt?*

MD: I found a rather unique fabric store in Tokyo when I was young, more than 30 years ago, and there was a quilt on display. I didn't know what a quilt was, but I fell in love, so I started to find out what quilts were. It was an American antique quilt.

*JL: How did you learn to quilt?*

MD: From books.

*JL: How long have you been quilting?*

MD: 20 years.

*JL: Did you take any classes?*

MD: No.

*JL: Ah, self-taught!*

MD: Yes.

*JL: I notice you enter a lot of shows, and you have been getting a lot of ribbons for your work. What kind of quilt do you like to make?*

MD: I don't know. Sometimes I'm just inspired to put colors together. My quilts are American traditional, just changing the color. I don't know how to explain it.

*JL: Where do you get your inspiration?*

MD: Sometimes in a book, sometimes in a dream. (Laughs.)

*JL: Where do you get your fabrics?*

MD: JoAnn's. Some of my friends send me from Japan. Or, used to be, House of Fabrics was there, I really liked that store, but it is not there any more. I haven't bought fabric for a long time, because I have a lot. I like those old fabrics.

*JL: Now, for those hexagon quilts, did you work with a cardboard template or a plastic template?*

MD: I use both. I make them myself.

*JL: Do you have a name for this quilt?*

MD: This one? This is Mrs. Nelson's Back Yard.

*JL: Mrs. Nelson's Back Yard?*

MD: Yes. Mrs. Nelson used to own our house where we live right now. When we first came, her back yard was so pretty, full of flowers, that's why. It's not so pretty any more. (laughs.)

*JL: What kind of quilting did you do on this?*

MD: This is hand pieced and hand quilted, it took about six months. It won Best of Class at Marin Quilt Show, I don't remember the year.

*JL: The other quilt you brought is redwork. Tell me about it.*

MD: Kate Greenaway illustrations are the inspiration. I enlarged her illustrations at the copy store and transferred them to the fabric.

*JL: How long did this one take?*

MD: I think this one took five or six months.

*JL: When do you do your quilting?*

MD: At night, whenever I sit on the couch.

*JL: Talk about the ribbons you've won.*

MD: One is Pacific International Quilt Festival Best Hand Workmanship, 2007.

*JL: What kind of design was it?*

MD: Like an Americana calendar, appliqué, piecework and embroidery.

*JL: Do you display quilts in your home?*

MD: Yes.

*JL: What kind of quilts do you like to display?*

MD: I like to display whatever makes the person in the room feel comfortable. The quilt and the room must go together, so the quilt doesn't stand out so much. I think there is a quilt in every room. Before I joined the guild, I made bedspreads for the kids and ourselves.

I remember taking the kids when they were very small to Golden Gate Park and seeing the Quilt Show in the Hall of Flowers. They didn't want to go in, but we did anyway, and I joined right away.

*JL: What do you like about the Guild?*

MD: I can get information and share information and meet people who like to quilt. Before that I didn't have any friends who quilted, and I couldn't talk to my kids about it.

*JL: What jobs have you done for the Guild?*

MD: I've never done anything!

*JL: I thought you'd done things for the shows.*

MD: Yes, just for the shows.

*JL: Do you ever make quilts for other people, or sell your quilts?*

MD: I've never sold, but I've donated.

*JL: What kind of quilts do you donate?*

MD: Baby, and some others, to the Guild.

*JL: Oh, Community Outreach through the Guild.*

MD: Yes, that's it.

*JL: What kind of quilt technique do you like to do best in the quilting? Machine, hand?*

MD: I like hand quilting. With machine quilting, you really have to concentrate. But hand quilting, you can sit on the couch and watch TV, so I like that. Quilting is the best part of making a quilt, for me.

*JL: When you quilt, do you have a stitching pattern in mind? Like this one with the diamonds quilted in it?*

MD: I don't know. Usually I try to think about a way to do it so I don't have to change the frame or change the needle.

*JL: Do you use a marking method?*

MD: I usually use a disappearing pen, or do something where I don't need to mark at all.

*JL: What kind of pen do you use?*

MD: It's a blue, mark-b-gone, that you can buy in a fabric store. Check first, if it goes away when you put water on it.

*JL: Do you make quilts to win ribbons, or just for enjoyment?*

MD: I think I make the quilt first, and then I put it in the show to see what people think. If I can win a ribbon, I'm very happy, but then I forget about it soon.

*JL: Would you say that you have won a lot of blue ribbons?*

MD: Well, yes, there are some.

*JL: Where do you keep them?*

MD: In a box under the bed. (laughs.)

*JL: Does your family appreciate your quilting?*

MD: (Laughing) I don't think so. In the beginning, when I entered my quilt in SFQG in 2001 I got an honorable mention, I was very happy about it. It was my first time. My family was excited about it too. But since then, they don't care. Especially my husband doesn't care. But it's good. If he cared about it, I don't know....

My kids when they go to college they always take a quilt I made with them, they appreciate them.

*JL: What kind of quilts do you make for them?*

MD: Squares, something simple.

*JL: What kind of pictures, I mean what kind of fabric do you use for them?*

MD: Cotton, I made the boy, a log cabin in dark colors, black and gray on the dark half, yellow and pink on the light half, he likes it. For my daughter, I made a scrap quilt of 2" squares all over.

*JL: For yourself?*

MD: I made 2, both Kaffe Fassett designs. One is postage in the middle, and a border like log cabin, in bright colors. The other is a diamond gradation with floral prints.

*JL: You are from Japan. What is it about American fabric that attracts you?*

MD: They remind me of the very first American quilt I saw.

*JL: What are you working on now?*

MD: A hexagon quilt again, 1" hexagons, I've finished the middle and now I'm working on the border. The background is cotton sateen with red flowers, and the border is pastel colors with little flowers.

*JL: Would you say you make quilts for yourself or someone else?*

MD: I usually make them for myself, and then if someone else is having a baby or something, I'll look at it and say, "Maybe this quilt is good for that."

*JL: So you do give your quilts to your friends.*

MD: Yes, if there is the opportunity for that. And they really like it. So I don't make it for the occasion, but when an occasion comes, if I have a quilt that is appropriate I'll give it as a gift.

*JL: Do you have any advice for future quilters?*

I don't know, because I do hand quilting, so if they can find the joy of hand quilting, that will be a joy of your life. It's more like therapy and relaxation for me. For me it's very nice.

*JL: Do you have anything else you want to say about quilting?*

MD: Quilting is part of my life. I will do it till the end of my life. I feel like that.

