

Rebecca Gordon, Quiltmaker



## Rebecca Gordon

Quiltmaker Story

Received: San Francisco via email 9/25/2006

My Quilting Story

By Becky Gordon

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

My mother was from West Virginia and my father Ohio. I was born in Bucyrus, Ohio and my younger sister was born in Akron, Ohio. We moved to St. Petersburg, Florida, where my father and uncle and their father, my grandfather, bought a 12-lane bowling alley in 1954. My mother was a homemaker until I went to junior high school, when she started working on an assembly line in an electronics plant, where she worked for 18 years. I went to elementary, junior high, high school and junior college in St. Petersburg and still have friends from that time who live there. From a very young age, I remember doing crafts at school, summer camp, with my mother, grandmother and friends. I made clothes for my dolls sewing by hand and, when I was old enough, I made them on a sewing machine. I'm not sure if I learned on a treadle machine, but I do know that I sewed on one and loved it. I remember making potholders on a loom, weaving lanyards and pine needle trays when I was in elementary school. I graduated from the University of Florida in 1970 and lived in Gainesville, Florida, for 5 years after I graduated. I worked on campus and was a Girl Scout leader with another young woman who was in a wheelchair. I know we did lots of crafts with the girls and had a paper drive to raise money so we could go out to eat and attend the Nutcracker ballet.

2. Describe your work experience.

3. Where have you lived and whether it influenced your life.

4. What other events have influenced the direction of your life.

I started working at a very young age. I mowed our lawn and my grandmother's for spending money. I tried baby sitting, but it wasn't for me. I helped my parents and my half-brother paint our house and my grandmothers and remember feeling "rich" from the money I made. I worked my way through junior college and college as a student assistant on campus and did odd jobs for extra money, like ironing clothes for guys – 10

Rebecca Gordon, Quiltmaker

cents a shirt and twenty-five cents for pants! That was when you could buy gas for twenty-five cents a gallon! I shared a 2-bedroom apartment with air-conditioning for \$60 a month and found it hard to make ends meet at the end of the month!

I moved to California in 1975 with my then boyfriend. We had installed a brand new engine in his VW bus ourselves! Our plan was to drive cross country on the southern route and end up in San Francisco. But, when we got ready to leave New Orleans, where Neal's brother lived, our van had been set on fire and we had to drive another person's car cross country for them in 3 days. So, our plans of seeing the sights never came to fruition. I still want to see the Grand Canyon!

Since I've lived in California I've worked in a wide variety of industries. I've been an administrative assistant/office manager for most of my career, which has allowed me the ability to work anywhere. I worked in a Big Four accounting firm when I first got here and then at a company that sold radio and TV advertising. From there I went to work for Bill Graham, the rock entrepreneur, during the early 80s. That was undoubtedly the most fun place I ever worked! The division I worked for built the sets for all the rock groups who were touring then – the Rolling Stones, the Who, Santana, Billy Joel, Barry Manilow (I know, he's NOT a rock star!) and many, many more. I left there to work at a company that reviewed local restaurants and published a book about them. I got to eat out at some really terrific places then! Then I went to work for a professional motivational speaker, where I ran her business and learned all there is to know about owning your own business. So, I went out on my own and opened my own speaker's bureau, where I was an "agent" and booked them to speak at conventions. My next "life" was owning and running a trophy and engraving shop on Union Square in downtown San Francisco. I owned and operated Awards By The Bay from 1994 to 2004, when I closed its doors and went to work fulltime at a law firm with Pat Garner. During the 10 years I owned my own business I did part time work with a long time friend at several architectural firms. You see, owning your own business is not always the "perfect life"!

While I was working at the law firm, I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer (2002), had surgery and chemotherapy for it and am currently cancer free. That was probably the most influential thing that has and will ever happen to me, as well as the loss of both of my parents. My mother passed away this past September 2005 and it has been difficult adjusting to not talking with her every morning.

5. Describe your earliest memories of quilts and/or quilt making, other sewing or needlework experiences, person or people who influenced your quilting.

Every summer when I was a child, my family would take a driving trip back to Ohio and West Virginia to visit our family. My mother came from a family of 11 children and several of my aunts were quilters. I especially remember staying with my Uncle Farrell and Aunt Mabel and sleeping under the beautiful quilts he designed and she sewed. My mother wasn't a quilter, but she was a crafter and I still have many different things she has made over the years – plastic canvas coasters that say "Mug Rug" on them, "aprons" for my kitchen soap bottles, crewel embroideries and needlepoints

hanging on my walls. I always loved summer arts and crafts at the local community center. I have designed my own needlepoint and bargello patterns and created pillows from them, made countless cross stitch samples, 9 of which I made into a quilt cover, created many plastic canvas Kleenex box covers, lots of sequined and beaded Christmas ornaments as well as quilted table runners, coasters, potholders and quilts.

6. When did you make your first quilt?

I made my first quilt in 1975, when I had first moved to San Francisco. It was made from polyester sheets and fabric squares, with a comforter as the "batting." I tied it with yarn. I gave it to my mother and up until the day she died, it was her favorite quilt I made for her. I took a class in the mid to late 70s (can't remember the dates) with Sonya Lee Barrington out at Fort Mason for a year or two. I made my second quilt there. It was a sampler in reds, blues, greens and white. My mother was the proud recipient of that one too!

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

My favorite quilts are the two I made for my mother. She was so appreciative, which made the whole process very worthwhile. Her encouragement has kept me quilting for the past thirty years. I guess you would say I'm a traditional quilter, whose most typical process is scrap quilts. I love the hundreds of patterns and colors mixed together on the top of a quilt, each one telling a different story or memory.

8. Have you ever used quilt making to help you through a difficult time in your life?

I was not allowed to quilt while I was on chemo, but the thought of being able to come back to it was one of the thoughts I kept in mind as I fought and won my battle. I had two "angels" who took care of me during the process, so when I was finally able to get my hands on needle, scissors and thread again, with the help of my sewing circle, we created a California king-sized quilt to thank my angels for their love and support.

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

I can't even begin to imagine how many quilts I've made over the years, almost all of which I've given away. A couple years ago I made 13 baby quilts to give to friends who had babies that year, not to mention worked on countless community outreach quilts. I also have made quilts for my mother's friends, at her request, helping them through a hard time. I've made quilts for my sister and her husband, when they got married, and I recently made quilts for them from squares of my mother's flannel nightgowns.

10. Do you donate or sell your quilts? Please explain.

I've made at least a hundred quilts for our community outreach program. I also co-founded an organization called "My Brother's Keeper," which made sleeping bags for the homeless from recycled materials. We got together once or twice a month for 10 years and made over a 1000 quilts in that time, and they were distributed on the streets of San Francisco.

I have been hired to make quilts for people too. My sister and her husband have asked me to make a quilt for his son who lives in Nova Scotia, with a beach theme, for those bone-chilling cold winters up there. I've made several baby quilts for friends for their daughters' babies as well.

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

12. Do you select fabric for a particular project or because you like it?

Both.

13. Have you participated in group quilt making activities?

I was in a sewing circle starting in the late 70s and we quilted together as a group for 17 years. We always worked together on one project, and sometimes one quilt would take us an entire year to make! We mostly pieced on sewing machines and always hand quilted our quilts. Each of us ended up with at least 2 or 3 quilts, and I have two of mine. The other was a wedding quilt for my sister and her husband. I am currently in two groups. One group mostly works on our own projects, but occasionally we work together on a quilt – like a going away gift to Alison Patrick, who was a member of the guild and who moved to New York year before last. My second group met each other at one of the Quiltaways about 8 years ago and since then we've been having our own mini-Quiltaways in Monterey and Dillon Beach as well as San Francisco. I get much more done in a group situation, so I love my sewing circles. I've also participate in many, many Quiltathons over the years and love hearing the number of quilts we finish in a day of camaraderie, sewing, eating and fun.

14. Have you taken quilt making classes? If yes, from what teachers; what techniques did you learn about?

My first class was at Fort Mason with Sonya Lee Barrington, where I learned basic quilt making skills; we worked on a sampler project. I attended classes at City College for several years with Patricia Bruvry, where each semester we had a theme quilt we worked on. I was so fortunate to also take one class with Mary Whitehead – what a joy and inspiration!

15. Do you teach quilt making classes? If yes, where do you teach – in a shop, books, etc.?

Rebecca Gordon, Quiltmaker

I've taught some quilting privately to friends. Would love to teach a class, but working fulltime and owning my own businesses for over 15 years hasn't afforded me that luxury!

16. Do you enter your quilts in quilt shows or display them in public – at guilds, museums, galleries, fairs, public buildings?

I've entered my quilts in our guild shows and the Labor Day weekend quilt show. I've been lucky to win a couple ribbons, but that's not why I do it.

17. What specific ribbons, awards, or prizes have your quilts earned?

I've won an honorable mention and a third place.

18. What other public recognition have you received for your quilt making?

19. Have you written articles, patterns or books relating to quilting? Please explain.

20. What advice do you have for future quilters?

Jump in! Don't worry if your points match or if they're cut off! You'll get better, and if you don't, it won't matter. The people who receive your quilts will be so appreciative and feel so loved that they'll never notice an imperfect seam. Get into a group, get into several groups! Each one will have a different dynamic and you'll get so much from sharing the love of quilting with these other people, and they'll get so much from you. Take classes; always be open to new techniques and ways to do things "you've always done this way." You might be surprised how easy something is when you do it another way. Shop at your local quilt shops. The trend of shopping online is killing our small local shops and we need them!