



Darlene Hartman

Quiltmaker's Story

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Interviewer: Jean Low, SFQG Historian

Jean: Darlene, tell us something about your life, your education, and so on.

Darlene: I was born in Tacoma Park, MD, and during WWII, in 1942, my family moved to San Francisco. We moved to the Richmond District in San Francisco and I went all through public school in San Francisco. When I graduated in 1956 I went to City College for two years, then finished my education at College of the Pacific in Stockton, California.

After graduation, I worked for the Hales department store, downtown in their executive offices as a receptionist, and I also worked part time at the YMCA in Stonestown, counseling high school girls. In 1961 I was married to my husband Leslie Hartman. In 1963 I had a son, then I had another son, and then I had two daughters. I had four children under 4—for three days, until my older son turned 4.

I love to cook: I learned that from my mother. My mother worked full time, so I had a great opportunity to do a lot of cooking. Mother also taught me to sew but not to quilt. She did piece one trip around the world quilt top, though. I remember when the family went on trips to Iowa mom would shop for fabric for it.

In 1962 we took a trip to Pennsylvania, where my husband was from. His former law partner there, his wife was showing me her beautiful quilts. I asked her a lot about them, and then I remembered that I had my mother's Trip Around the World quilt top, and it hadn't been quilted. In the meantime, my mother had had a stroke and couldn't quilt it.

herself, so I sent this Trip to a Plain woman in Pennsylvania, that quilted it. When I got it back, I was really kind of disappointed, because I thought, "Is that all there is to quilting, these little stitches around the blocks?" And so it kind of got me interested in learning how to quilt. So then I started doing more and more, and reading books; there weren't as many books during that time. (I get a little teary-eyed when I talk about my mother.)

In 1969, six mothers from the kindergarten class at West Portal School where my son was at long last in kindergarten were working on a school bazaar. We met every week and we did all kinds of sewing and stuff to get ready to sell for the Christmas Bazaar. The Bazaar came and went and they sold all these beautiful things, and then we started to feel lonesome because we had met all these women. So six of us decided to meet just with our younger kids, to sew. So we did that, and we formed a group called "Thursday Therapy" with six gals, and this group goes on still today. There are still three of the original people, and the gals have gone back to work and come back to the group, and so we've really enjoyed that.

In 1975, I decided to teach all these girls in our Thursday Therapy class to quilt, because I had been reading all these books, and I thought I was an expert. So I taught them a class, and that sort of started me in teaching quilting.

Jean: Are any of them Guild members?

Darlene: Yes—Several of them were Guild members: Dorothy Shulton, Helen Castelanis was, now I'm not sure, some of them now don't like to go out at night. Esther Henley, Helen Shulton, and a number of them have passed away.

Jean: Did you make quilts for yourselves?

Darlene: No, pretty much we made quilts for our grandchildren. For every gal that had a new grandchild we'd make some kind of a funny quilt for that, and try to keep it a secret. Right now we're making one for Helen Shulton's new grandson that'll be born in May. We're making a clown quilt.

Jean: Have you taken quilting classes?

Darlene: A few early on, Mary Whitehead early on, but mainly at QuiltAway, the teachers we had at QuiltAway.

Jean: Do you give away your quilts?

Darlene: I always make a baby quilt for each baby grandchild, (I have 7 grandchildren) then another one when they are about ten or twelve, with fun themes, like princess and the pea, bug jar, chickens, or tessellating cats, or Halloween and so on. Then I make a graduation one when they are bigger, when they graduate from high school and go on to college. I have one granddaughter who will graduate from Berkeley in May this year, and she has a quilt, and my next granddaughter who is a freshman in college and she has a quilt, and I have a grandson who has three more years in high school, but I've made his top, so I'm going to get that one quilted.

Jean: Do they ever ask, or tell you, what colors?

Darlene: No, I really haven't given them the opportunity to do that. (chuckling)

Jean: What size quilts do you make?

Darlene: I make twin size for when they go to college. The others vary. Sometimes they're wall hangings, usually they're something they can kind of cuddle up with.

Jean: What about this one you made for your son?

Darlene: Oh, I made this for my elder son. My son is in the produce business in Arroyo Grande now, but when he was first married, he and his wife lived in 10 different parts of the state of California. They started out in Oxnard, and then they went to Santa Maria, and then they went over to Firebaugh, they just lived all over. So I made these little houses with the kind of produce they were selling at each house, and each one has the address of the house. At the time—which wouldn't happen now—I couldn't find fabric from avocados, for cauliflower or for broccoli, so I had to print up fabric, and that was kind of a fun project. But nowadays, all that fabric is available.

Here's an interesting quilt. A friend who was in my garden club gave me this in pieces. It's an appliqué quilt kit that was sold at the Emporium around 1940 for \$6.95, including everything except the batting and backing. My friend started it in the 1940s, (she had appliquéd half of one leaf) and she didn't think she'd ever finish it. I did the appliqué. A friend of my mother's saw it one day and said, "Oh, I love to embroider. Why don't you let me do the embroidery on it for you?" So I gave it to her, and ten months later she came back and said, "I don't think I love to embroider after all, it's very difficult." And handed it back to me. I kind of put it away and maybe six months after that, the same woman came back and said, "I've got new glasses! Let me try again!" and this time she did it, and I did the appliqué and hand quilting. It's very special to me.

This is a quilt for my second son Owen, when he went to college, it's an album quilt; it's all different blocks.

Jean: So somewhere along the line you were teaching larger groups of people?

Darlene: Yeah, I'll tell you a little about this. This quilt, the blocks are 3"x3"; everybody's name is written on the muslin and then with a piece of their fabric. I started it with my sewing group when I taught them to quilt in 1976. They all signed their block and some of the fabric they were working on, and then what I've done is through the years is whenever I've been teaching a class, I just have everybody give me a piece of their fabric with their name and the year and so on this one piece, when I counted I have 149 names. I used to teach a couple of classes for lawyers' wives—we had different things you could do, you could take tennis, or you could take bridge, and I did the quilting classes. Then I taught at Yardage Fair in Westlake, and at West Portal Lutheran Church School, to some of the 5th and 6th graders. I always insist that students learn by hand first because it's easier to get it exact.

One thing now I'm doing, at this time when I first started teaching, I had them make a pillow top and I never really saw it finished. Now I have them make what I call their sewing kit. This way they make a quilt. I think it's really important that students learn

how to draft a pattern, for when you see something and think, I like that but I don't want it 12" x 12", I want it 18" x 18", or 6" x 6". I have them draft the pattern, chose colors, figure out how many pieces they need, sew it together, have them use muslin between, or sometimes it might not even have that. Then quilt it all around, and then I teach them how to make a bias binding to put around it. When they're done they have all the skills they need to make a quilt, without having to make a big project. I think it's maybe easier for them to come away with a finished product than to come away maybe with a pillow top and maybe not do anything with it.

Jean: How many adult students do you have in a class?

Darlene: It varies. Probably never more than ten. The list for the class I have now has 16-17 names on it but they don't always come. The problem I find is different levels of skill. Some are advanced, some are beginners, and it's hard to find a project everyone wants to do. But they don't have to do the project. Some of them come just as a social thing, and that's okay too. This is the class I teach at my church. We're doing a pillowcase project now. On the 14th of April we're hoping to make about 64 pillowcases. We've been putting kits together, it's kind of fun, and we're going to have a kind of pillowcase sew-along or something. The pillowcases are going to City Crossroads which is kind of an after school program that our church Christian service supports, and we're going to fill them with goods that they could use, Kleenex and toothpaste and toothbrushes and stuff. Maybe some of the pillowcases won't be filled; maybe they'll be put in other pillowcases for families. The church has been collecting money for that stuff plus money for the fabric to make the pillowcases. So that's our next project for that group.

Jean: Are these Crossroads clients different ethnicities?

Darlene: Yes. They're low income and of different ethnic groups. Pretty much what they are is an after school place where kids can come and get a little help with their homework and maybe do a few crafts and so it's a great service to the families in that area.

Jean: We know you are a button collector. How did that come about, and how many buttons do you have?

Darlene: I have lots of buttons. It started with my in-laws, who were in the antique business, and my mother-in-law, who had a wonderful collection of buttons and buckles. When my mother-in-law passed away, my sister-in-law bought the button collection from the estate and gave me some. Then I started collecting buttons, and going to shows with her and buying buttons. I don't have really expensive buttons, but I really enjoy them. And that's how this very heavy vest came about. There are over 300 buttons on it, all red. Originally I was going to put the red buttons only on particular places on the black and white checks, but my daughter said that wasn't very nice and I'm glad she did. They pop much more with lots and lots. And I made it around the time of the show at the cow palace so the lining fabric is smiling cows! And I won the judges' ribbon for that.

I have a room full of buttons. I keep them by color in jars. I call it my sewing room but my grandkids call it the button room. When they come to stay they say, "Can I sleep in

the button room?" I provided all the buttons that decorated the boxes for the anniversary gifts to the Guild members too.

Jean: Those buttons were really appreciated, too. Do you have any favorite kind of quilt patterns or technique?

Darlene: I always like ones are a little difficult for students to just read the instructions to do, like cathedral windows, or floating bow ties, curved piecing: some of those things I think it's hard to read the instructions and figure out how to do them. And I'm a little more of a traditional; I don't do art quilts.

Jean: Do you decorate your home with quilts?

Darlene: Well, I have quilts on all my beds! I just got back a Mary Whitehead made of green and white scraps quilted by Diane Torres. I'm not real fond of machine quilting, because I like hand quilting, but sometimes it's necessary for time reasons.

Jean: Yes, because you make mostly large quilts.

Darlene: Yes.

Jean: Do you participate in friendship blocks?

Darlene: I haven't brought in packets for a while, or made blocks for anyone for a while. My name's on the list, I should bring some in. The last one I did was for Peggy. But I brought a picture of one to show you. It is called night bloomers. They had done another quilt for me where they did really large blocks, like 14", so this time when my name came up I decided to do something small. It's really special to me because so many of the gals are no longer here.

Jean: How did you get involved in the Guild?

Darlene: A friend in my sewing group found the announcement in one of those throwaway papers about the organizational meetings. I was elected president in 1988 and I served two terms and it was during that time we had the first QuiltAway. Mary Ann Zaremska found the place, Point Bonita, and she called me and said, "I want you to take a look at this place! I think it would be great." So I went over there, and it was a beautiful day, and it was just great, and so we signed up to have QuiltAway there. The first year it was really hot. We didn't wear jackets day or night. But we had a great time. A lot of people complained that it was too much like camping, with those beds and such, but we had a great time.

Jean: How has quilting changed over the years?

Darlene: There are a lot more books. Lots more information out there.

I've never met a quilter I didn't like. I think they're the greatest people and I'm not going to be happy until everybody's quilting!

Jean: Do you have advice for a new quilter?

Darlene: Dig in and start!







