

Jeanie Low, Quiltmaker. January 24, 2006

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San Francisco, CA
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1) Tell us a little about yourself, education, work, and family-I'm a baby boomer born in San Francisco, and my parents were immigrants from China. We spoke Chinese at home. I have three brothers and an older sister. On weekends, we did chores such as laundry, swept the stairs, washed and waxed the kitchen floor and helped with meal preparations. Dad was a carpenter, and Ma worked in the sewing factory next door. After "American" school, I attended Chinese school and learned another dialect. Often, I wrote English notations next to a new Chinese word that had the same sound. I prepared my homework for both schools in the evenings. Sometimes, it was arithmetic and book reports for American school. Then, I might practice my brush calligraphy and memorize a page to recite for Chinese school. After awhile, I developed a schedule to juggle my bicultural world. In the mid-1960's, I earned a degree in Library Technology from the City College of San Francisco. After working four years, I returned to college to earn a B.A. in Chinese Studies from San Francisco State University.

2) Describe your work experiences-My first full time job was in the Library at the University of California Medical Center, San Francisco. I enjoyed working with the public and learned to be less shy. I worked at the fast paced Circulation Desk and supervised several employees. I also worked twenty-five years in property management. The work involved a variety of skills from communications, accounting, to being knowledgeable in landlord-tenant laws. In 1994, I wrote a manual called, "China Connection: Finding Ancestral Roots for Chinese In America" using my bilingual and research skills. I have also presented workshops on the subject for several genealogical and Asian American Studies conferences.

3) Where have you lived and has it influenced your life-In the 1950's, I lived in a working class neighborhood in North Beach. The neighborhood was rich in diverse experiences and individuals. In the evenings, the Beatniks across the street recited their poetry and snapped their fingers. A few doors down, I saw flamenco dancing when they opened their doors for air. I also saw my first outdoor art show and listened to jazz at the Upper Grant Avenue Street Fair just down the street.

4) What other events have influenced the direction of your life-The women's movement opened my eyes to the possibilities ahead.

5) Describe your earliest memories of quilts and /or quiltmaking... other sewing or needlework experiences... person or people who influenced your quilting-About 1990, I saw my first quilts at the De Young Museum. The quilts on exhibit were from the Esprit Collection. I was in awe with the tiny and uniform stitches in the handquilting. It was wonderful to see ordinary fabrics being used to create art pieces. I always enjoy seeing the variety of designs and techniques used when I attend quilt shows. Years ago, I made my own clothing and some for my two children. However, when clothing outlets came on the scene, I wasn't making clothing anymore and quilting appealed to me.

6) When did you make your first quilt-I finished my first quilt in October 1991, when I was in Caroline Lieberman's quilt class. It was a wallhanging with a star in the middle. I hand pieced and handquilted it.

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7) Describe your favorite quilts...the type of patterns and designs you use...any special techniques...why and who the quilts were made for-I like scrappy, applique, hand quilted, crazy quilts, wearable clothing, and art quilts. I especially love seeing hand quilted quilts and quilts with a story. I like making applique quilts because of the natural shapes and it's relaxing. Sometimes, I make rough sketches and then I design as I go. I use a light weight iron-on fusible tricot to stabilize silk and brocades and to minimize the unravelling factor. Brocades are especially difficult to work with as they are stiff. However, brocades give quilts an extra elegance. Dupioni silk also have a dramatic effect when used in quilts. They have textural surfaces and under certain light conditions, give a quilt a wonderful glow.

I keep most of my quilts as they will eventually be given to my children. Several of my quilts tell personal stories. "America Bound" is made with brocades with a Log Cabin pattern. It is embellished with symbolic jade pieces and handquilted to symbolize my family's journey in becoming Americans. The Guan Yin jade symbolize my Chinese roots. The three jade coins symbolize the expense to immigrate to America for my parents and my sister. The five jade butterflies stand for each of my siblings flying forward into the future - the different directions reflect the journeys we've taken. The jade pieces on the bottom row are auspicious (good luck) symbols as depicted by the goldfish, basket and the frog.

"Four Generations of Family Resemblances" is made of brocades and silk with the Chinese Coin pattern. It is embellished with symbolic jade pieces of faith and plenty, photo transfers, appliqued and handquilted. It is a visual record of my maternal family history. The quilt front utilizing Asian fabrics represent my Chinese identity and the quilt back and quilting techniques represent my American identity.

"Diamonds in the Rough" is made with brocades with a Baby Block pattern. Those brocades represent my memories of the 1950's when it was fashionable for Chinese women to wear body hugging brocade dresses, called "chiang saam." I discovered how difficult it is to handquilt with a metallic foil thread. It was hard to see and it would curl when I needed to double knot the end. If the thread was longer than eight inches, it will break off at the needle eye...

"The World of Sunbonnet Sue:An Autobiography" is a friendship quilt based on my life in the character of Sunbonnet Sue. The applique scenes were made by quilting friends with a whimsical look at my life. Each block gave me an insight to how each quilter went about to produce the activities associated with Sunbonnet Sue. I treasure their work, thoughtfulness and wonderful images.

8) Have you ever used quiltmaking to help you through a difficult time in your life? Quilting has been a creative way to work through a few difficult periods in my life.

9) Throughout your quilting experience how many quilts have you made? Do you make quilts for others...or family...to celebrate events? I think I've made over thirty quilts of various sizes. I made friendship quilts for two of my very close friends.

10) Do you donate or sell your quilts? Please explain-I've been donating small quilts and handpainted silk scarves with calligraphy to the Angel Island Immigration Station for their fundraisers. I've also made three quilt tops for the clients at the Asian Women's Shelter. I've also donated handpainted silk scarves for SFQG's auctions.

11) Is your home decorated with quilts? I like hanging my quilts on the walls. They are like old friends, and they bring back fond memories.

12) Do you select fabric for a particular project or because you like it? I buy fabric because I "must" have it. Sometimes, I buy for a specific project and sometimes, fabric is given to me. I have some Liberty of London cottons that are waiting "their" turn. The brocades I use are scraps and sample cuts that were given to me.

13) Have you participated in group quilt making activities? I've participated in several community outreach quilts and opportunity quilts for SFQG.

14) Do you teach quilt related classes..? Where do you teach...in a shop...books, etc.-I haven't taught quilt classes, but I have taught fabric crafts. I taught several workshops to make origami kimonos, cranes, fabric envelopes, and hearts at Black Cat Quilts.

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15) Do you enter quilts that you have made in quilt shows...or display them in public - at guilds...museum...galleries...fairs...public buildings, etc.? I've entered a few quilts for the Marin, San Francisco Quilters' Guild, and Pacific International Quilt Festival (PIQF) Shows. It's especially nice to have a quilt be juried into the New Quilts from Northern California exhibit at PIQF.

16) What specific ribbons, awards, or prizes have your quilts earned? I've been fortunate to receive some ribbons, but I think there are many great quilters who don't receive ribbons. I've attached a few photos of my quilts

17) What guild jobs have you done-I was SFQG's librarian for 5 years. Then, I co-chaired the 2001 quilt show. Later, I worked on the publicity committee and on special exhibits for the 2003 and 2005 SFQG shows. I've been the guild's historian since about 2001. My continuing project is to collect the quiltmaker story from each member of my guild, San Francisco Quilters' Guild. I think it's important to compile as the stories give another dimension to why and how quilters like to create with fabric and abit about them as an individual. I don't mind the time I spend volunteering for this guild because I like the camaraderie and the good work that we do together. I've also been on the Advisory Board for the California Heritage Quilt Project since 1996. It's mission is to preserve quilt history and the quilt stories of California quilters. I've organized two local CHQP oral history projects.



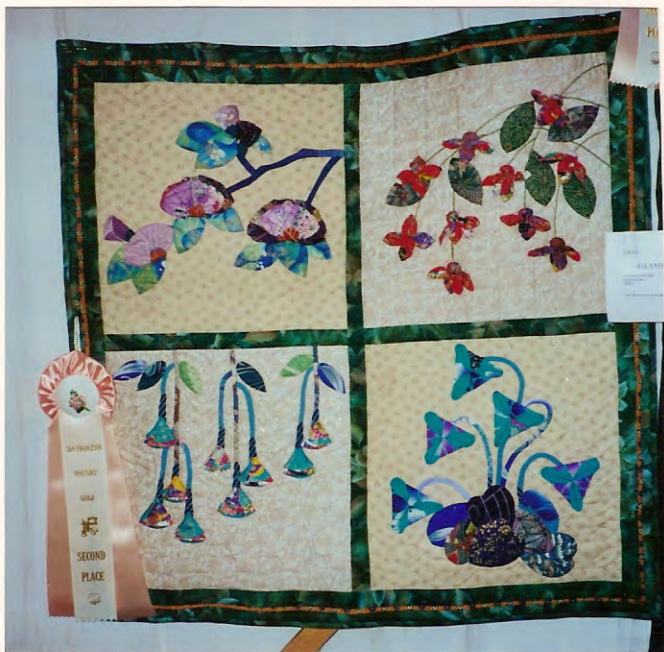
"America Bound:New Beginnings"



"Kimonos in Grace"

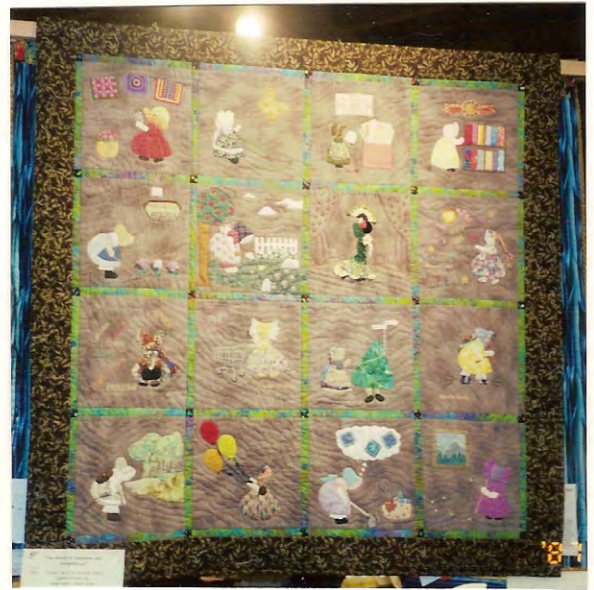


"Four Generations of Family Resemblances"



"Glimpses of Nature"

"Diamonds in the Rough"



"The World of Sunbonnet Sue:
An Autobiography"



"Summer Treasures"