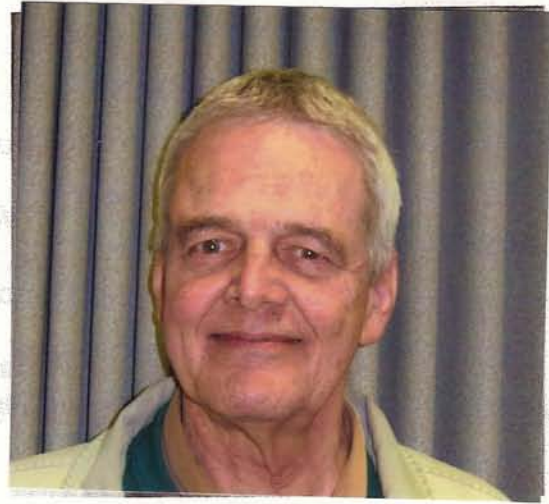


John Maxwell - My Quiltmaker Story
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I made my first quilt in 1996, a log cabin style fashioned from fabric scraps leftover after several years of garment sewing. I have slept under this quilt most nights the past twelve years. Another early quilt was a fabrication from leftovers, this time blue denim jeans I had been saving since I first began sewing when I retired in 1992 from a career in computer programming with the phone company. That year I bought a Bernina sewing machine and enrolled in basic and later in more advanced sewing classes at The Sewing Workshop on Balboa street near 20th avenue. I saved all the leftovers from all the classes and from all the projects I pursued outside the classes. When I made the denim quilt I edited my way through these leftovers, combining colors and patterns that were pleasing to my eye and which, I thought, enhanced the wonderful overall blue denim color from the jeans scraps. I invented what I thought was an original block for that quilt but when I showed the quilt at the SF Quilt Guild Sew and Tell one summer evening in 2001, the year I joined, someone told me the block was called Kentucky rail. Whatever its name, this quilt has place of honor on the bed in my guest room. The embroidered patch I put on the back of the quilt says that I made it in 1999.

The log cabin and the denim quilt are the only ones I have kept for my own use. All the other quilts I have made have been given away to family and friends or to community outreach at the guild. About ten years ago I had a collection of hand-woven fabric purchased by my brother-in-law in Guatemala when he went there on a fishing trip. I made throw pillows for him and my sister from this fabric. I offered to mail them the leftovers to their home near Kansas City but they insisted I keep the remnants so I turned these into a quilt for them. The quilt also incorporated small rectangles of fabric I cut from my old worn out taupe corduroy and black jean trousers. Though the somewhat coarsely hand-woven Guatemalan fabrics are outside the boundaries of what are usually considered appropriate quilt-making fabrics (tightly woven cottons), their brilliant colors and obvious hand-made look appeal to me as they have to others who have seen this quilt. I machine quilted it in a lengthwise channel pattern at about one and a half inch intervals and this strengthened the piece for day to day use as a bed cover.

A couple of years later I made a quilt for my other sister. It was an experiment in machine reverse applique. Again I used whatever leftover fabric scraps I thought would work together, but for this quilt, and for the first time in my quilt-making experience, I purchased new fabric which I used as the background for the reverse applique. I showed the quilt to the Dorcas Quilters one Wednesday in the spring of 2001 before I mailed it to the small town in southeast Kansas where my sister lived and where I grew up. Anna Chan saw the quilt that day at the Dorcas group and at her invitation I joined the SF Quilt Guild the next

month. A year and a half after receiving the quilt, and without my knowing about it, my sister entered the quilt in a local quilt show where it won the prize for audience favorite. I think it is my favorite too, just edging out the one in Guatemalan fabrics for my other sister.

In the fall of 2001, partly as therapy following the events at the World Trade Center and elsewhere on September 11, I made a quilt for each of three friends who lived in or near Kansas City. One of these quilts was made entirely from scraps in my fabric stash and the other two were made mostly from purchased fabric.

I made a quilt for a cousin of mine the following year. Her husband is a presiding judge in one of the counties in Kansas just west of Wichita. She displayed the quilt by hanging it on the wall and, according to her, the quilt dominated some of the dinner conversation one evening that year when their guest was the chief justice of the Kansas Supreme Court. Was that my five minutes of fame?

In the first year that I joined the SF Quilt Guild I always made the block of the month and within six or eight months I won the prize. The result was a blue/white quilt in the churn dash pattern which now graces the guest room in the house of a longtime friend of mine who lives on the Maryland shore east of Washington. She claims to have decorated the entire room around this quilt.

I have only made bed quilts. I have never made a wall hanging, a table runner or any other fabric object that is almost but not really a bed quilt.

I have noticed that my garment sewing has dropped off the last several years. This has reduced the size of the pile of fabric leftovers which in turn has resulted in my making fewer quilts. My conclusion is that I seem to get enjoyment in using cloth a second time in making a quilt, rather than purchasing all new fabric for the purpose. Maybe in years to come as the twenty or so shirts I made for myself begin to wear out and I make new ones to replace these I will again find myself with a stash that demands to be made into quilts.

In recent years I have found myself turning to hand quilting rather than all machine work. Three years ago I got wind of a hand quilting class at the Dorcas Quilters group. I asked to be included, I took the class, I practised on my own projects for six months. Then, when my hand quilting stitches finally passed muster, I joined the other Dorcas members working on the frame, hand quilting vintage quilt tops. This hand quilting experience, every Wednesday at St. John's Presbyterian Church, is a major highlight in my life today. It has given me a profound sense of community and friendship. I also seem to derive new pleasures in working slowly and steadily on an object towards its final and beautiful conclusion. That, for me, is the essence of quilt making.