

## Your Quiltmaker Story: Carol Munch



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

I am 53 years old, the mother of three children: the oldest in her first year of college, a son who is a junior in high school and a sixth-grade son. I have lived in San Francisco since 1985, transferring here with my job, then meeting my husband and staying in San Francisco as we raise our family. I am not working now, but volunteering at my children's school (see below). I enjoy running and hiking and try to stay very active. I like to camp and climb mountains, with New Mexico being my touchstone place.

### 2) Describe your work experiences.

I worked for ARA Services for a dozen years, traveling all over the country, installing a computerized food production system, designing cook-chill-cook facilities, then as a regional sales director. I left ARA after my daughter was born, going into multimedia computing for a few years, then, setting up the business side of my husband's public relations company. I was able to retire from all that when my youngest was in preschool, and take on an even bigger

challenge. I manage a project at Claire Lilienthal, our public K-8 school in San Francisco. Each year we work with the teachers to establish a theme, based on their curriculum, then have the children create artwork on cloth around that theme, then sew them into quilts. When the school was small, we made six quilts per year. But we expanded and added middle school as well. This year we will make 22 quilts. We sell these quilts at our annual school auction to raise money for the PTA. Since 1993 we have made 194 quilts and raised almost \$187,000 from the quilt sales for our PTA. We start in September when children return to school. In October when we have the themes and have planned the quilt fronts the children begin their artwork in the classroom. By the winter holidays we try to have quilt pieces in the hands of our parent volunteers who put the fronts together. We then meet on four Saturdays in January and February to assemble the quilts. We traditionally tie the quilts although we have quilted a few of them over the years. We currently have about 680 students at Claire Lilienthal. Together with the teachers and parent volunteers about 1,000 people participate in this project every year. It is a full-time volunteer occupation for me and I have many dedicated volunteers who each year give hours of their time to the project. The community this project creates for our school is heart warming. When we display the quilts in February and March, you can feel the love and joy that they bring to everyone. Last year I was selected as the San Francisco School Volunteer of the Year, a great honor. I was able to hang several of our quilts at the luncheon and share photos of more with the people who attended, bringing a wider audience to the work we are doing. We have also displayed some of the quilts in the SFQG show.

3) Where have you lived and has it influenced your life?

I grew up in a medium sized town in Nebraska, and learned about covered wagons and the pioneers when I was growing up. I remember reading Laura Ingalls Wilder books and there must have been quilts in them (I secretly wanted to be a pioneer), but I didn't have quilts in my early life. I did learn to sew both in 4-H Club and Home-Economics in junior high and I remember my mother sewing our ballet costumes when we were small. I left Nebraska for the Windy City, going to college in Chicago, and then taking my first job

in Philadelphia. There were amazing crafts people in the Philadelphia area. From there I moved to Seattle, then back to Philadelphia, then on to San Francisco. We took a lot of camping vacations growing up, and between them and flying around the country with my work, I have visited all 50 states. I enjoyed living in different parts of the country and seeing the different cultures. Through all these moves and visits around the country, my constant has always been New Mexico. My grandparents bought land in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, near Taos, in 1930 and built log cabins. Every summer of my life I have spent time at those cabins, soaking up the mountain scenery and serenity. New Mexico is an amazing state both for its wonderful clouds and scenery, and also for its bringing together of three cultures: Indian, Hispanic, and Anglo. There is magic in the light and magic in the way the cultures interact. During my college years I worked at Philmont Scout Ranch, the Boy Scouts premier high adventure base in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in northeastern New Mexico. There, I backpacked all summer, teaching scouts how to live in the out-of-doors. My daughter worked at Philmont this past summer, bringing this part of my life to full circle. My best friends are left from those hiking days. So the thread in my life that ties to quilts is one of self-sufficiency, seeing beauty in patterns, and working hard to reach a goal.

4) What other events have influenced the direction of your life?

I think I've described most of them.

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

I started sewing in junior high school, with the first project being a gingham apron with a cross-stitch pattern embroidered onto it. We also learned to make biscuits that year. I graduated to sewing some of my own clothes, with the armhole being the most challenging element. I never thought of myself as being creative. When I mentioned this to my sister she laughed at me and reminded me of all the things I had created growing up. I thought of myself as being good at math and schoolwork and never considered myself an artist.

6) When did you make your first quilt?

I made my first quilt in my 20's when I was living in Philadelphia, on my own for the first time. I saw an article in a magazine in about 1976 about a very simple quilt with two different fabrics and very large pieces making a star pattern in the middle. I had my Singer slant sewing machine that we had bought from a neighbor when I was in high school, and I bought some fabric and made that quilt and a matching pillow. I hung it up behind my desk at my office, and later added outdoor photos from my backpacking trips. When my daughter was born, she gravitated to that quilt. I made quilts similar to that one for both of my sons when they were born.

I was also fortunate when I lived in Philadelphia to be close to one of my aunts who is very creative. She helped me to make a cathedral window quilt which was all sewn, of course, by hand. I was traveling for my job and could take the pieces with me to work on in various hotel rooms in the evening. I also crocheted several afghans during that time period.

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

I am fascinated by the way color moves through quilts. I am so busy during the year designing and sewing all the Claire Lilienthal quilts that by the time I get around to my quilts, I don't make as many as I have ideas for in my head. I have been fascinated by the bargello style quilts, and have made a few of them for friends and family. I have been working my way through "Color From the Heart" by Gai Perry, trying to understand how to use color effectively. I made a quilt for my sister-in-law with calla lilies appliquéd to the top. I also like Seminole style quilts and made one for my brother in law last Christmas. I have not attended any quilt classes, but instead just get an idea from a book or a photo, and figure out a way to do it. I have followed patterns on occasion, but most of my quilts use the pattern as a starting point.

The challenge with the school quilts is putting up to 40 squares on a quilt in an interesting pattern and not having total control of the

colors that the children use to create their squares. When I took over the quilt project we had one design: strips between the squares. After a few years that got boring and our awareness of the world of quilts and our sewing skills were expanding. We started experimenting with changing the pattern of the front of the quilts. I try to incorporate the theme into the design as much as possible. For example, one of the seventh grade classes that studies ancient history had chosen Japanese tie-dyeing as their theme. The staff from the Folk Art Museum at Fort Mason came with a slide show demonstrating intricate Japanese tie-dyed patterns using indigo dye such as tying individual grains of rice into a pattern. For our quilt each student tie-dyed their quilt square with a dark blue dye and to honor the Japanese tradition, I designed the quilt squares of the students into the shape of a kimono, complete with a red sash. My favorites of the school quilts include that Japanese kimono quilt, French Store Fronts in Paris that we created with the French teacher. It featured a large panel in the middle of the Eiffel Tower painted by students and surrounded by shop fronts in Paris inspired by postcards. Another was a quilt we did for an eight-grade class where we made a silhouette of the students' heads using water resist. The kids painted one color on the outside of their silhouette and a light color on the inside, over which they painted themselves planning tennis or juggling or playing football, etc. from our physical education program. Another favorite of mine is a first grade quilt that was flowers pounded onto the fabric. It was soft and luscious. I spend time always looking for interesting ways to put patterns on fabric. Among the techniques we have used are fabric markers, fabric paints, puff paints, fabric crayons, water resist with Dye-na-Flo paint, fabric collage, bleach to discharge color from the fabric, embroidery, tie-dye, marbling fabric, fabric crayons, pounded flowers, and more. I have included small photos of quilts from 2001 forward with themes listed.

8) Have you ever used quiltmaking to help you through a difficult time in your life? No

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

I have managed, designed and/or sewn over 200 quilts, and made another 20 on my own. Most of the quilts have been our school quilts, and so much creative energy goes there that the only time I get to work on the ideas in my head are in the summer. Near the end of the school year it seems we are always making a couple of more quilts for retiring teachers who have helped us over the years and mean a lot to us. These quilts also have some input from the students they have taught. I have given most of my quilts away. I have two in my house, the rest I've given to my children, nieces and nephews, other family members and friends. All of the school quilts are auctioned and sold. Of those, I have purchased four of those through the years.

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

I have never sold a quilt, but the school quilts earned money for the Claire Lilienthal PTA through our school spring Starlight Auction.

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.

I wish I could say my home is decorated with quilts. I have a few scattered around. I have also been the recipient of two hand-sewn and hand-quilted quilts from my wonderful aunt. She helped me piece a cathedral window quilt when I was in my 20's and inspired me to try new crafts and to always keep creating. She always had amazing amounts of energy to get things accomplished.

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

The fabrics I choose are mostly the greens and purples that I like. When I am making a quilt for another person I use colors that complement their style. This also gives me a chance to break out of

my comfort zone in fabric colors. And my quilt stash is filled with the colors I love.

13) Have you participated in group quilt making activities?

Yes, in a big way through the class quilts we make at Claire Lilienthal. In the beginning of the year when we are coming up with class themes and imaging the designs for the quilts we sit around and brainstorm ideas and frequently come up with new ideas that we hadn't thought of before. I also spend my time between school years looking at books to get more ideas of art mediums to put designs on fabric and ways to arrange blocks for the school quilts. The creative energy from the group leads to so many new ideas that I couldn't ever have imagined on my own. Our quilting bees where we assemble the class quilts are very rewarding. We have parents from across the grade levels that participate, comparing stories and seeing our finished results. Then the quilts are hung in the hall of the school. The sense of community this builds and the love I feel from everyone who stops to look at the quilts is hard to put into words.

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

I have not taken any quilt classes. I have a pretty good library of quilt books I refer to them to see how to do a new technique, and I have learned a lot from listening to the speakers at the SFQG meetings. My potential class time is limited by so many family activities right now.

15) Do you teach quilt related classes..? Where do you teach...in a shop...books, etc.

I have never taught a quilt related class, but each year I teach students in many of the classrooms how to create the art for their quilt square and how to use the markers, paints, bleach, cloth, etc. that we use. And I teach new parents how to create designs for the quilts, and new sewers the techniques we need to sew together the quilt tops.

16) 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 have entered some of our class quilts in the Marin Quilt Guild show and the SFQG show once each. In addition, our quilts are hung at the Youth Arts Festival in San Francisco each year and we have received recognition from the Youth Arts Festival in both awards and monetary grants for the Claire Lilienthal. Many years some of our quilts have hung in the San Francisco School District Office.

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

Our Claire Lilienthal quilts have won gold, silver and bronze awards at the San Francisco Youth Arts Festival.

18) What other public recognition, received for your quiltmaking, would you like to share?

I was the San Francisco School Volunteer of the Year for 2006 and was able to display several past class quilts for the award luncheon, and just recently our quilts were hung at the rollout of the San Francisco School Districts Master Art Plan. They even made the Channel 7 news.

<http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/story?section=education&id=4609972>

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

No, but there is a book in all the quilts we've made for Claire Lilienthal I would like to write.

20) Do you have any advice for future quiltmakers?

Your creative talents are just waiting for you. Once you start, there is no limit to where your skills can take you. Happy sewing.