

Donna Rand

It must have been September of 1986 or 1987 that I saw an item in the San Francisco Sunday Chronicle about a lecture being given at the Main Library on the quilt that had been made commemorating the completion of the Golden Gate Bridge. I attended that lecture, given by Caroline Lieberman, and it was there that I learned there was a San Francisco Quilters Guild. The monthly meeting was coming up the following week and I decided to attend as a guest. The speakers at that meeting were a married couple that collected Hawaiian quilts and it was announced that an upcoming speaker was going to be Georgia Bonesteel. Even though I was not yet a quilter I knew of Georgia Bonesteel from PBS-TV. I quickly "did the math" and figured out that I would want to attend several meetings throughout the year so I might as well become a member.



Growing up in a relatively small town in Pennsylvania I was interested in sewing and crafts from a young age - particularly embroidery. My maternal grandmother lived with us and one of my fondest memories is of my sister, Helen, and I sitting in the kitchen embroidering pillow cases and dresser scarves while Grandma cooked. My mother had been sewing for as long as I can remember. She made many of her own clothes and was also interested in other crafts although there were very few quilts that she made and these were tied, not quilted. I took sewing classes in both middle school and high school as well as what I learned from Mom. Many years later I took a Clothing Construction course at City College of San Francisco.

Quilting has been a humbling experience for me. I thought if I knew how to run a sewing machine I was already at least at the intermediate level as a quilter. WRONG! There was so much I didn't know. A 1/4 inch seam allowance looked really skimpy to me after the standard 5/8 inch used in clothing construction. I didn't know that quilters prefer 100% cotton fabric - or at least fabrics of the same weight. I'd never heard of a "walking foot" and didn't know about burying the knots in the back of the quilts. One of my first quilts was a log cabin design using Georgia Bonesteel's quilt-as-you-go method. The log cabin strips are made up of anything from denim to heavy cotton sailcloth to cotton/polyester blends to traditional 100% cottons. The knots at the beginning and end of each row of stitching is clearly visible on the back of the quilt.

When I joined the guild, they were planning for the first Quiltaway. It sounded like great fun and I immediately got in way over my head again by taking workshops like Sonia Lee Barrington's "Geometry for Quilters" about creating design elements of unusual geometric shapes, etc. I was having enough trouble piecing the traditional stars and triangles!

Then I decided to take some classes. I took Beginning Quilting (patchwork piecing) and Hand Quilting and Applique classes from Caroline Lieberman at San Francisco Fabrics on Polk Street (no longer in business) as well as workshops with the guild. Over the years I have been very lucky to be a student of many well know quilters - Miriam Nathan Roberts, Eleanor Peace Bailey and Mary Mashuta among others. In 1992 I went to Asilomar where I spent most of the time in an Open Studio conducted by Bernice McCoy Stone. She was so knowledgeable about every phase of quilting that she could advise any student on any problem. One of my favorite teachers was DeDe McElroy. She taught Tahitian Applique and Hand Quilting at one of our Quiltaways at Point Bonita. I enjoyed both of those classes but especially her method of hand quilting which I am still using. I really like the hand work of quilting, applique and embroidery.

Over the years I have started many more quilts than I have completed. I have completed about a dozen quilts, mostly small ones or wall hangings. I haven't given any of them away to family members yet although I have made other quilted items as gifts - table runners, place mats, etc. One of my goals is to make a quilt for each of my family members and if I ever finish all the projects I've started, I would have enough quilts to do so.

My early quilts were very traditional in pattern and "calico-ey" in fabric choices. I still prefer traditional patterns - stars of all kinds, Flying Geese, etc. but I am making better choices in fabric and color. I can even see my own style starting to emerge. I seem to be drawn to graphic designs. For our 2001 quilt show Food Challenge, I used photo transfers of restaurant menus which I framed with various food print fabrics. For our 2003 show I used photo transfers of pictures of a trip to France the previous year on a vest made of fabric from Provence. For our 2005 show I made a tee shirt quilt using the fronts of tee shirts from the San Francisco Zoo and the SPCA. I won a third place ribbon in the Small Innovative Machine Quilted category for the tee shirt quilt.

Getting from "Point A" to where I am now has been an exciting journey. I am basically a shy person and I feel the camaraderie of the guild has really brought me out of my shell. I served as Membership Chair for two years and have worked on the Publicity Committee for several of our quilt shows. In 2005, Joe Cunningham and I were interviewed by Channel 5 (KPIX) prior to the quilt show. Currently I serve as co-chair of the Saturday Sewcials.



