

Melody Doss-Wambeke

Quiltmaker Story

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About yourself, education, work, and family

My varied interests include classic Hollywood movies, Asian and American history, classical and popular music, and textiles. Quilting is my passionate avocation.

My brothers and I attended Garfield Elementary School, Francisco Junior High, and Galileo High School during 1950's and 1960's. I attended City College of SF, UC Berkeley, and SF State for my college education.

I had two jobs in my working life. I worked as a part time waitress to earn money for college. My second job was my 35 year sales position at Britex Fabrics, S.F.

I am the oldest of three children in the Chan family. My father was a farm laborer who worked in flower nurseries in Silicon Valley when it was agricultural farmland. My mother was a full time housewife and a part time seamstress who did piece work sewing for a nearby sewing factory. My parents did not speak English but they worked hard every day. They instilled in us our cultural heritage and a strong study/work ethic.

Where have you lived and has it influenced your life? I have lived my entire life in various SF neighborhoods: North Beach/Chinatown, Inner Richmond, Sunset, Visitacion Valley, and Excelsior Districts. I have traveled abroad and in nearby Western states but San Francisco has always been my home.

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

My earliest memories were watching my mother sewing piece work at our family kitchen for a nearby sewing factory. I learned to sew in my home economics class

with the Singer sewing machines. Quilting was not part of my formative years and no one in particular influenced my quilting style(s).

When did you make your first quilt?

During my second year at Britex, a co-worker announced she was pregnant; so I created a "postage-stamp" baby quilt using Liberty of London Tana Lawns and Swiss Cotton satins. (I was not familiar with quilting cottons at that time.) She later told me her son kept the quilt until he went to college. That Liberty Baby quilt was the first and last quilt I made until the year 2000 when I made my first crazy quilt for a friend.

Describe your favorite quilts ... the type of patterns and designs you use ... any special techniques ... why and for whom the quilt

I love exploring the art of quilt making using my existing fabric stash to create traditional blocks. My quilt pattern inspirations come from quilt shows, books, magazines, and tutorials from PBS and YouTube, as well as famous quilting luminaries such as Alex Anderson and Kaffe Fassett.

I rely on machine piecing and machine quilting, enjoy working and experimenting with quilting cottons, batiks, Japanese indigos, Asian brocades, hand dyes, hand woven Japanese/Guatemalan cottons, velvets, and silks.

I make baby quilts and "just-because" quilts for friends and family. I personalize each with a focus on the recipient's favorite colors and interests. My husband, Charlie, also makes a personalized photo-image label for the back which documents the quilt name, the recipient, our names and city, along with the completion date.

Have you ever used quilt making to help you through a difficult time in your life?

I returned to my job at Britex Fabrics after my late husband, Ted, lost his battle with cancer and was asked to make a quilt for one of my co-workers who had been diagnosed with breast cancer. I made the blocks large enough so every co-worker could sign a message of love and support. The recipient told me the surprise quilt was one of her life savers. Creating this quilt helped me with the grieving of my own loss and began my own healing process.

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

I have created 20-30 quilts for friends and family

Do you donate or sell your quilts? Please explain.

I have donated my time and fabrics towards community projects: Christmas bags, pillows, and Christmas stockings, in addition to accepting commissions.

Is your home decorated with quilts? Do you receive or collect quilts that others have made ... do you share blocks ... exchange fabric ... Please explain.

My home is not decorated with quilts but I have a room with shelves and tables filled with fabrics. I do not receive or collect quilts that others have made because I do not have any wall space to display them. (I barely have room for my design wall). I do not share blocks because I have my own UFOs to complete. I rarely exchange fabrics but occasionally donate them to free tables at meetings or classes.

Do you select fabric for a particular project or because you like it? Have you participated in group quilt making activities?

I select the fabric because it speaks to me via, color, subject matter, or artist inspiration. I participate in Caroline Lieberman's group quilt making activities.

Have you taken quilting classes. if yes, from what teachers ... what techniques did you learn about? Do you teach quilt related classes . ? Where do you teach in a shop ... books, etc.

I have not taken any quilt making classes except for Caroline Lieberman's Stitchery Class. I have amassed a large collection of quilting books and follow experts on YouTube and PBS' TV shows.

Recently I helped classmates at my home to make quilts - from concept to completion. The completed quilts were either family gifts or community fundraisers. Due to my experience, I guide others on "crazy-quilting". That led to my three part demonstration of "quilt-as-you-go" techniques using fabric stashes at Caroline's Friday class.

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

I have received many encouraging and heartwarming compliments about my work. I won a second placed ribbon from the SFQG show for my Fashionista quilt.

Do you have any advice for future quilt makers?

Be PATIENT and be adventurous in learning the joy and art of quilt making. PERSEVERE through the quilting process. (Overlook any non fatal "mistakes" you encounter along the quilting journey.) Be PROUD and wear your biggest smile when you share your creation with others