



Joanne Campbell

Quiltmaker's Story

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Interviewer: Jeanie Low, SF Historian

Transcriptionist: Peggy Cleary

Jean: Tell us something about your life.

Joanne: I was born in Lake County near Clear Lake. We were originally Sonoma county people but the family moved to Lake County, where they worked, and I lived there until I was 18 years old.

Both sides of my family are Native American: my dad was born in Sebastopol, and my mom in Jenner. We were not raised in the traditional ways, because they were trying to mainstream us children into the dominant society, but during the Depression father fished and hunted alot to feed the family, and we supplemented that with a large vegetable garden. We ate what was in season, from the garden or that he hunted and fished. He also held a job. My mother never held a job; she was busy raising the family. Mom was an excellent seamstress.

Jean: So it was from your mother that you learned how to sew?

Joanne: I don't remember this, but my older sister tells me that when I was very young my mother let me sit by her as she used her treadle sewing machine and let me sew buttons on a dishcloth. Then she'd cut them off and let me sew them on again. I remember my mother did all kinds of wonderful seamstress work; she even made our wool coats.

Everyone in the community did something called 4H back then, too. Raising animals, gardens, and all kinds of things, and there was sewing. That's where I learned to sew

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even better than my mother taught me. So I studied in that for a number of years. She may have even been one of our teachers at one time.

Jean: So where did you go to school?

Joanne: I attended school, for all 12 years, in Lakeport. Then I attended Santa Rosa Junior College for a couple of years, and then I went to UCSF, where I got my nursing degree and did my work in public health.

Jean: What was your profession?

Joanne: Public health nursing. I worked for the City and County of San Francisco for 32 years as a public health nurse, then at U.C. San Francisco for 4 years. I also spent several months working and studying in London England on a special course on neurological and neurosurgical nursing. I still have friends from that time.

Jean: Do you have early memories of quilts?

Joanne: Mother did quilt, mostly quilts for use, that got worn out. I remember her making an appliqué quilt; I remember how precise she was with a template. One of my sisters became a real avid quilter. I wasn't into quilting until the Guild started. One of the charter members was Lorna Phoenix who I worked with; she was also a public health nurse. I wore a strip-quilted jacket I'd made to work one day and Lorna noticed it and that's how we became friends.

Jean: What did you do with the Guild?

Joanne: In the beginning of the Guild in 1981, we first met at several different places. There were so few members almost everyone held an office. I was a Charter Member, and I was on the 6-person steering committee. The first year, I was vice president and arranged speakers, refreshments, equipment, and so on. Everyone pitched in and helped, just as they do now.

Jean: Who were your quilt teachers?

Joanne: Every quilter that came through that was a speaker and gave a class, I took it. That strip-quilted jacket, was from a class taught by Margaret Puckett, and she even wrote books, which I'd never been exposed to before. Most of these first teachers that we had had books. Yvonne Porcella, Jean Ray Laury, Alex Anderson, Mary Whitehead of course, and Mary Mashuta, Roberta Horton, I can't remember them all. I went to every class I could to learn the technique even if I didn't finish the project.

Jean: Can you talk a little bit about the quilts you brought today?

Joanne: I brought two very small quilts today because the one that is my favorite is in someone else's possession and I couldn't get it back, but it was a Mary Whitehead pattern. One quilt I brought today, It's small, about 8" x 24". It's only the third quilt I hand quilted. It's an Irish Chain, made of 30's fabrics. It's machine pieced but hand quilted. It came about because one time the board members were invited to Marty Boscowitz's house, and he had a wonderful collection of old fashioned fabrics and we sat there all day and made quilts and I used as many as I could. Also I had been married to an Irishman so the Irish chain meant a lot to me.

Joanne: The other one I learned in one of Mary Whitehead's classes. I think this is called color wash. She had us bring all our own fabrics and she had us exchange certain fabrics and she taught us about value, and how to place the colors and how to do the bindings, and it's also hand quilted. These are two of my favorite quilts. The flowered one I call Wakefield Garden because I live on Wakefield Avenue in Daly City, and this hangs on my wall all the time.

Jean: Do you make quilts for yourself or to give away?

Joanne: Some of my quilts are for me, like these two I think I'll probably never give away, but I think mostly I make them for other people. I have three sons, so three of the very first quilts I made were for my sons, out of simple squares in Christmas colors, and then they each had a Christmas quilt. I've made three for my first grandchild, and only a couple for the other five grandchildren (laughs). But I've given them away and I've given them as presents. The larger ones I either make for myself or someone very close in the family. I have made a number of small ones that I've given away for babies.

Jean: Do you gravitate to certain colors or designs? Do you have a fabric stash?

Joanne: I have a very big fabric stash, and I gravitate to a palette of darker colors, blues, purples, pinks, burgundies, and magentas. I usually do not do many pastels. But I do have some in my collection. And I think I favor appliqué more than piecing but I see that these two pieces are both pieced. But I do like appliqué a good deal. I like to hand piece and hand quilt, but nowadays I can only work by hand for a few hours total, because my hands don't work the way they did when I was young. I don't really do my machine quilting; I have my machine quilting done by Laura Lee Fritz.

Jean: Do you donate or sell quilts?

Joanne: I don't sell quilts. Do I donate? A few years ago we had a project of making premie quilts, which was Celia LoPinto's project, I think. I made a lot of those. I've also participated quite a bit in community quilt quilting days. Not recently, but in the past. I did do one special quilt for a grandson's class. They went on a trip to the wetland in the East Bay and they drew pictures. I had them transfer the pictures to cloth with color crayons and I made that quilt for a fundraising auction for the school. That was a big hit, but we had to sort of buy it back because we couldn't let it go!

Jean: Do you make group quilts?

Joanne: I participated in a great many group quilts. One thing that was very popular in the early days was block exchange quilts. Everyone put their name in the box, and if your name was pulled you could have blocks made for you. I participated in that a great many times and I even won a couple of times.

Jean: Did you think that enhanced your techniques, or was it just fun to participate with others?

Joanne: I think both. It was fun to participate with others and see what they are doing, and sometimes you could experiment with a new technique.

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Jean: Do you enter your quilts in shows?

Joanne: I don't really enter my quilts in shows, except for special exhibits, like when we all showed Mary Whitehead quilts. I did make a little Quiltlet, though. It's redwork embroidery. That's another thing that interests me. I've been interested in embroidery all my life, and I've found five friends who also like redwork embroidery, and I think we've been meeting monthly for 5, 6, 7 years?! We did a lot of redwork, also talked, laughed and ate a lot.

Jean: Now talk about your other advocacy work.

Joanne: When I was growing up, very few of my Native American traditions were taught to me because it was not popular to do that because of the discrimination at that time. It wasn't until I was almost to my retirement years that I became active in the California Indian Basketweavers' Association and served on that board, and they've been in existence 21 years. And through that group I met many traditional Native women who still spoke their own language, who still wove baskets, who still carried on with their family traditions, food preparation and collection, and some of them even lived on reservations. Through association with them I became an activist for Indian causes and increasing people's awareness of Native American traditions.

I was not a member of any tribe, but I became aware of a tribe in Sonoma County, to which my father was linked by heritage and genealogy, and I became a member of the Coast Miwok tribe in Sonoma County, we're called the Federated Indians of Great New Rancheria or just "Great New Rancheria" for short. We've lost a lot. No speakers left, hardly any basketry traditions. That was in 2000; I have served on the board of directors and we've been bringing back our language and our basketry. I'm taking language lessons but progress is slow because I'm very busy. Quilting is not part of the tribe's tradition as far as I know.

Jean: What drew you to quilting?

Joanne: I've always liked sewing. I think I liked the creativity, and the color, and the design; compared with other sewing, quilting was an artistic thing. I had always been a science kind of student, so I'd never had a chance to do anything artistic before.

I'm also really interested in genealogy and family history. I work on it with one of my sons. I've made three or four quilts that express this by having family members sign blocks or incorporating something in their life into a block. One time I made a friendship block for someone, and I intended to make another one for myself and I never did and I don't know who that person is, but it was a picture on cloth of my grandfather pulling a boat from the ocean because he was a fisherman. I'd love to have one of those for myself 'cause he was my grandfather. But I've used other things to have people sign things to put on a baby quilt for a new baby.

One of the things our tribe did is a quilt specific to our tribe that hangs in our office. It has shells and things on it, and it includes some patterns like you'd find on baskets, I contributed those, and my sister made the four corners of actual basketry patterns that she made out of cloth. I'm really interested in oral history and I'll probably do more of that.

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Jean: What kind of advice would you give a future quilter?

Joanne: Participate in the Guild as much as you can, in the classes, and in the sewing circles, and in the community outreach, share materials, find a gem on the free table! Keep doing it with whatever time you have, keep your machine set up and ready to use so you can take a few stitches whenever you have a minute.

I have several quilts in progress. I have several tops that are finished. I'm still making them. I think the Guild is a remarkable organization, that after all these years it's still going, people are still stepping up and volunteering, we have a full board, it's marvelous. The QuiltAways are fantastic. I've gone to several QuiltAways and I love being at QuiltAway and relaxing and thinking about nothing but quilting for a few days.

I still try to learn new things in quilting and I still attend Caroline Lieberman's weekly class, and I appreciate the company and seeing what other people are doing.

I was very much motivated to quilt more by one of my sisters, but I have three sisters, unfortunately two live out of state. We're all quilters and we all have fantastic stashes and I always tell them, if we ever move somewhere together we could open a store, all by ourselves! (laughs)

