

Remember Me....Stories about MN Quilters by Pat Cox and Martha Eaves



Carla Kilkelly

I grew up sewing. Some of my earliest memories include sitting on the floor under a table while my mother sewed on her old green Elna sewing machine and I sewed buttons onto cloth to keep myself occupied. My aunt did alterations for wealthy women and I was allowed to use the scraps. My grand-mother had a very old Singer sewing machine that I loved to use to make clothes for an antique doll she gave me.

In 1982 (with a one-year old and a three-year old), I took a class from Richfield Community Education on quilting. Jeannie Spears was the instructor, with Helen Kelly coming in for the class on appliqué. I already had quite a stash of fabrics left over from garment sewing, so making a scrap quilt of Ohio Stars for my daughter when she moved from a crib to a big girl bed seemed like an economical way to get a bedspread. Why not make TWO, one

for each of the twin beds? I pieced the two tops, having mastered a ¼ inch seam allowance in the quilting class, and decided to hand quilt them, since I had been praised for my hand quilting in my class with Jeannie. I realized that my daughter would likely graduate from high school before I finished quilting the quilts, so I started machine quilting them, not bothering to rip out the hand quilting still in them. Those quilts are still bouncing around somewhere with my daughter (and she claims they are her favorites of all the quilts she has ever received from me), but they look pretty tattered, although the polyester-blend fabrics still look good!

The White on White quilt pictured is my “What Was I Thinking?” quilt.

I began this quilt after finding the pattern for it at an MQ show, nothing but hand quilting! It was started before my love affair with hand appliqué, and I was attracted to it because of the Celtic knots (which I think I would find interesting even without an Irish last name) and the fact that it would be a portable project. Shortly after beginning this quilt, one of my mother's sisters was diagnosed with breast cancer. She had moved out to the east coast and I had heard she was learning to quilt and was disdainful of anything done by machine, so I didn't think we necessarily had a lot to talk about since the sewing machine was my ally to get quilts done faster. About eight boxes were delivered one day in the mail, some with knitting needles poking out of them, resulting in a few choice comments from the postal carrier! My aunt had a friend come and help her pack up all of her sewing, knitting, and quilting materials and send them to me (minus the completed quilts which she had given to her children). Aunt Reiter knew I was an avid quilter and figured I would appreciate her stash. In one of the boxes were yards and yards of a beautiful white sateen fabric that she intended to use for a whole cloth quilt. (Someday I will perhaps attempt that when portability isn't a requirement!) The fact that I had begun work on a similar kind of project touched me. My mother had many health problems, and as she aged, she spent more and more time in doctors' offices, etc. This quilt project was the 'grab and go' project that always accompanied me on my visits with her to these place. It was perfect, one square of batting, backing, and top, one spool of white thread, a thimble, needle, and scissors. Working on each square, one at a time, kept me sane during some very unhappy times. The project was not completed when she died in 2002, and it took me some years before I could pull it out again, finish the few remaining squares, put on the border, and complete the quilt. It has never been on a bed and will likely remain in my quilt closet since even seeing it often makes me sad. The title, “What Was I Thinking?” refers not only to what my state of mind might have been when I began the daunting project of an intensely quilted quilt, but what was I thinking as I worked on each square.



This quilt has taught me that we all make quilts for different reasons. Some are made in joy, some are made in sorrow, some are made to be used, some are made with no intention of being used, some are made to be given away, some are made to be kept. All of these are valid reasons to make a quilt. If the making of a quilt gives the maker pleasure in some way, then the quilt should be made! When people tell me they would never have the patience to make a quilt, I tell them I don't have the patience to sit still. I like that quilting can be a social or a solitary activity, and I have made many, many friends through quilting. Quilting fulfills my creative needs and results in a beautiful finished product. What more could I ask for?