

# HOW PATCHWORK QUILTING CHANGES WOMEN'S LIVES

*Dena Crain,  
selling  
patchwork  
quilts at the  
Jamhuri  
Christmas  
Craft Fair,  
Nairobi,  
Kenya, in  
1994*



**By Dena Dale Crain**

**In Partial Fulfillment of Quilt Judge Certification From the  
South African National Quilt Guild**

**Nairobi, Kenya April 20, 2011**

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents a general survey of the many ways in which women's lives are changed by participation in patchwork quilting as craft, art, business and passion. Quilters on the QuiltArt e-list and readers of the author's blog "Dena Crain: Artist/Teacher in Kenya" were asked to tell their stories about the ways in which their lives had been affected by patchwork quilting. Case studies began coming in, and they form the backbone of this report. Fleshing out that substantial skeleton, the paper provides readers with a wider perspective on the importance of, and probably some of the reasons for, the current enthusiasm amongst women for patchwork quilting in all its various forms. Respondents came from many different experiential backgrounds, and each story stood unique in its understanding of the significance of quilting in each person's life. Amateur and professional teachers, students, artists, handicrafters, and business people responded, giving the paper a breadth of vantage points from which to view the original question.

From these reports, the structure of the paper took form without deliberate predetermination from the author. Several aspects of quilting were mentioned by the respondents that the author had overlooked. When arranged in a logical order, the various sections of the paper flowed together remarkably well, permitting us to see the larger answer from the physical benefits and problems through to the application of the power of women quilters in the political arena.

It is hoped that each reader will find herself (or himself) within the scope of this paper and be able to place herself into a larger context. Reading stories similar to one's own always helps to dispel notions of isolation and loneliness, and these stories go straight to the heart of each specific topic. Read, then, and see patchwork quilting as a special activity in an often chaotic world, an activity that creates and builds women in a positive way, even as they create and build textile concoctions that delight the eye and satisfy the soul.

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By Dena Dale Crain

Historically, patchwork and quilting have been a part of many women's lives. From the humble beginnings of patchwork as a means of rendering old clothing's continued use to the joyfulness of the harlequin's costume, from rough haphazard patching of worn areas to geometric traditional block designs, back to improvisational roots and onward to fine art, patchwork has for centuries kept older textiles in service even as it permitted and encouraged artistic expression and colorful new creations. Quilting has been used to strengthen, to insulate, to protect and to beautify fabrics all around the world from the time of the Egyptian and Chinese dynasties through medieval Europe to the steppes of Russia and the plains of Kansas. Today, these two needlework handicrafts have risen to dizzying heights of popularity, finding adherents and practitioners in every level of human society and all around the globe.

There must be some reason why the reworking of textiles has given patchwork quilting such a boost in recent times. This paper poses a thesis: that this newfound popularity has little to do with recycling and is more about a direct link between quilting and increased awareness of women's rights and issues; that through patchwork quilting many women have been able to rise to higher levels of artistic creativity, business acumen and general poise and self-confidence, than ever before. That they have been able to do this from a base that has traditionally rested in the domestic setting is much to women's credit. Today's patchwork quilter travels the world, buying and selling, teaching and learning, exhibiting her work and judging her peers in a way that has never been done before. This paper seeks to learn why

this phenomena has occurred, and what have been the driving factors behind its success.

What we can learn from this study can inform us about what the future may hold for patchwork quilting and its leaders and followers. By understanding the forces at work in the modern movement, we should better predict its future directions, priorities and outcomes. By evaluating a context of anticipated possibilities through reported case studies, we can see where the largest strides can be made to keep patchwork quilting moving forward, discover where can be found those who stand to benefit most from involvement in patchwork quilting, and address the needs of those who will gain the most from it.

To help answer the question about how patchwork quilting changes women's lives, individual stories were solicited by post on the author's blog, Dena Crain.com, and posting on QuiltArt.com: An Internet Mail List for Contemporary Quilters. Followers of the author's blog may be previous students, but most are likely to be quilters although this cannot be confirmed from blog stats.

The QuiltArt e-list is the most popular mode of communication amongst patchwork quilters who are, or who would like to become, focused more on the artistic side of patchwork quilting than on the handicrafting side. Its description states that it is "the Internet's largest mailing list for contemporary art quilters, established in 1995 as a means for those interested in innovative, contemporary art quilting to share, learn and grow." Not only was QuiltArt deemed a convenient resource to poll, but those quilters were considered to be on the forefront of patchwork quilting. Their responses would be demonstrative of lives which have perhaps experienced the greatest kinds and amounts of change, possibly because those quilters are among the most creative and open-minded toward accepting the changes quilting can bring to them, this in contrast to the stereotypical patchwork quilter as somebody's grandmother keeping idle hands occupied in a life that is

slowing down.

As the stories came in, each quilter gave her undirected statement in prose form; no question and answer survey was attempted. Through the examination of the reported life stories, certain remarks were found to exemplify the kinds of changes that had been anticipated, but others opened new directions of thought. Most poignant were those reports submitted by quilters who have suffered disabilities or who must adjust to continuous pain in their lives and for whom quilting has given both relief from suffering and added meaning to life. Surprising, although it should not necessarily have been so, were reports about quilting women and politics.

Each story was searched carefully for relevant comments that would flesh out and document observed changes in women's lives. Rather than posing a thesis and then seeking to determine its veracity, the method for this study began with an assumption and then sought examples to verify and confirm that assumption. The goal was to help all better understand the impact of what has often been perceived as a woman's domestic hobby as we see increasing numbers of women moving forward with their hobby as art, business, administration, medicine and governance.

## **What is the evidence that patchwork quilting affects women's lives?**

A study, "Quilting in America 2010" (QIA)<sup>1</sup> presented by *Quilters Newsletter*, a Creative Crafts Group publication, in cooperation with International Quilt Market

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I

& Festival, divisions of Quilts, Inc., reports statistics on patchwork quilting in American in 2010. The statistics reveal some surprising facts which are used to prove the claim that patchwork quilting is changing women's lives in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

According to these statistics, there are more than 21 million patchwork quilters in the United States of America. This figure is lower than the 27 million quilters reported in 2006. Major economic losses suffered in 2008 and subsequent years have taken their toll on patchwork quilting. Some quilters would not have had discretionary money for quilting. Some may have been forced out of the job market with accompanying loss of income. Others, because spousal employment may have fallen, may have been forced into taking employment themselves and lost both time and income for quilting. Nevertheless, the quilting industry in the U.S. alone is estimated at USD \$ 3.58 billion.

The QIA demographic analysis shows the average patchwork quilter to be an affluent 62-year-old female who is well educated; almost three-quarters of them have attended college. Less than half of these quilters prefer traditional patchwork; this justifies the argument that QuiltArt is an acceptable resource for polling quilters for this study.

The average American patchwork quilter has a room in her home that is devoted to her sewing and quilting activities, and that room is full of more than USD \$ 8,500 of quilting tools and supplies, plus more than USD \$ 3,500 in fabrics. She buys nearly 100 yards of fabrics each year, fabrics to be stored and used over time.

Dr. Marybeth Stalp, author of Quilting: The Fabric of Everyday Life (Dress, Body, Culture), interviewed for an article titled "Quilting and Midlife Renewal" in

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics from other countries have not yet been published, so the following discussion applies only to the United States of America.

the Canadian publication *Aging Horizons Bulletin*, speaks to popular notions of space allocation in the home:

Most homes are not set up for individual leisure space. Some homes have been built to include a workshop that is more likely to be used by men than women. There are shared family spaces like the family room or the TV room, where family members gather to relax and visit, or watch TV and play video games, or whatever; but few homes are designed to give women their own personal space.

Carving out a place in the home where she can work on patchwork quilting represents one of the first changes we see as our quintessential woman takes up quilting. She takes a class or workshop, or a friend teaches her a few basics, and she immediately sees the need for her own space, a place for sewing, sharing, and finding herself through patchwork quilting. Setting aside such a space, even if it is only a corner of the kitchen or bedroom, is an act of defiance against the old order, alerting the entire household that the woman is taking herself seriously, but it is only one of many such steps she will take as quilting transforms her life.

She will fill that space with the equipment, tools and materials she needs to make patchwork quilts. She will purchase slowly at first, but the buying quickly becomes an obsession. Watch quilters at any quilt festival as they jostle for position in crowds surrounding a popular booth, the money fairly flying out of their hands as they buy all the latest quilting gadgets, patterns, books, fabrics, notions, sewing machines, electric power steam irons and more. Every product is appealing, each designed to make patchwork quilting easier and more fun to do and to produce superior results. As statistics quoted above show, the money flows!

Along with carving out space and filling it with all that patchwork quilting has



to offer, our quilter will re-prioritize her time. Time spent with a quilting mentor, friend or teacher is high priority; classes, lectures and workshops, guild activities, charitable works and many other activities associated with patchwork quilting as business will take their toll on a quilter's time. There will be time spent working on a computer, interacting with other quilters through email and e-lists, designing and planning quilts and printing quilt patterns, shopping online, possibly blogging or managing a website for a small quilting business, or simply to enjoy looking at what other quilters are making. Our quilter spends more than 5 hours a month reading patchwork quilt magazines!<sup>3</sup>

These time demands prevent many women from taking up quilting until a point in their lives when such time becomes available. With children leaving home, jobs or careers winding down and sending women into retirement, additional time and discretionary income make a perfect combination to enable women to enter patchwork quilting as a hobby later in their lives. As we shall see below, many of these women, because they are bright and well-educated, perhaps accustomed to working in other disciplines, find themselves becoming business women again, launching themselves into new careers as patchwork quilters, artists, retailers, teachers and judges.

With space and time, equipment and materials and a rudimentary education in patchwork quilting, our woman begins to do that which she set out to do--make patchwork quilts. From works in progress, the quilts are completed to make bedcovers, wall hangings, wearables and accessories. These, too, require more space for storage if they are not either used in the household, given away or sold to others. The house fills with her favorite quilts, hung on walls, blanketing beds, draped over chairs, placed on the table for beauty and function.

As work is completed, compliments are earned and our quilter basks in the

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<sup>3</sup> QIA, *ibid.*



glow of appreciation for her efforts granted by spouses, children, neighbors and friends. Occasionally, she produces something she considers unworthy of approbation, but for the most part her efforts at whatever level of skill she has attained are lauded by family and friends. Her self-confidence increases. She tackles ever more challenging projects in the future and succeeds with those as well. She is blossoming as a quilter, and growing as a woman, as a person who is deserving of recognition, high praise and appreciation.<sup>4</sup>

Sadly, too many of us do not receive this kind of support from our loved ones. Spouses can be cruel and insensitive to the budding creativity of their quilting partners, either through ignorance or malice. When this happens, the quilter knows she can always turn to other quilters for support. The network of patchwork quilters is strong; we reach out and touch one another's hearts in many ways. Patchwork quilting can give a woman encouragement, praise and support when she cannot find those elsewhere in her life.



*Retail sales of fabrics, notions and patchwork quilting equipment*

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<sup>4</sup> I recall my personal experience at this stage: Standing at the entry to my first, and solo, exhibition, my husband took a long, slow look around the gallery and emitted a soft grunt, "Hunh!" I knew I had done well! This modest praise did what it should do: it encouraged me to do more quilting.

Many women are involved in the business side of patchwork quilting. They find gainful employment as wholesalers and retailers of patchwork quilting machinery, products and materials. A list of possible occupations would include:

- \* Sewing machine, long-arm quilting machine and electrical appliance (irons, lamps) sales and training at wholesale or retail level
- \* Wholesale or retail sales of fabrics, books, patterns, notions, tools, aids, batting and fusing materials
- \* Book authors, photographers, designers, editors and publishers
- \* Festival organizers
- \* Quilt teachers and lecturers
- \* Quilt judges
- \* Professional quilt artists
- \* Gallery and museum curators
- \* Surface designers (dyers, printers and manipulators of cloth)



*Teaching in Johannesburg, South Africa 2009*

These are only some of the occupations open to patchwork quilters if they want or need to make money from their quilting, and many women combine more than one activity in their efforts to make quilting pay. Christine Brown, editor of *American Quilter* magazine, for example, is also a certified quilt judge. Many quilt teachers have written one or more books, and some, like Angela Madden and Ann Johnston, are self-published.

Studio Art Quilt Associates, an international body of studio art quilters, has a vetted membership category for Professional Artist Members. Many of these women maintain websites or blogs, or both, to sell their quilts, patterns, books, even fabrics. They make extra money on their websites or blogs by selling advertising space through such programs as Google's AdSense or Quilt Blog Ads.

### **What kinds of changes in life do women experience as a result of participation in patchwork quilting?**

When the call for stories of life changes went out for this paper, predominant among initial responses were reports of how patchwork quilting had helped make life more bearable for those who were suffering from physical pain.

One quilter, who prefers to remain anonymous, told of how she ruptured scar tissue on her sciatic nerves and spinal cord, leaving her in terrible pain. Equally painful medical tests produced a diagnosis of a debilitating condition symptomized by chronic pain, numbness and tingling, and difficulty sitting. She was told by her doctor to give up full time employment and "potter."

Not mentally prepared for retirement at age 50, she became seriously depressed. Talked into making her daughter's wedding dress, she found in

needlework some relief from the pain, perhaps something other than pain to occupy her mind. She has since become an avid hand-appliqué quilter. The rhythms of stitching combined with color to give her peace and satisfaction, and afforded her graceful acceptance of her situation.

Osteoarthritis set into this quilter's hands, so eventually hand stitching became painful for her as well, but she soon discovered the world of quilting on computers. She began sewing more by machine, following instructions from World Wide Web resources, taking workshops, studying tutorials and tip pages, and generally improving her knowledge and technical skills. When pain was at its worst, she sought solace from her computer where she enjoyed reading magazines and blogs and perusing the many photographs of the quilts of others whose work she admired.

Now age 73, this quilter loves free motion quilting and thread work. She makes art quilts and has held a successful solo exhibition. She continues to quilt for family, friends and charities and has made several hundred quilts in her lifetime. Even when she is able only to sew one piece of fabric to another by machine, she is satisfied that quilting has made all the difference in her life, "To say that quilting has saved my sanity is no more than the truth."

Suzanne Mouton Riggio's situation was more serious. Spinal surgery left her paraplegic in 2005. Early attempts to quilt proved unduly frustrating, a situation that improved when her son fitted the foot pedal control of her machine onto the inside of the machine cabinet and attached to it a knee pad. She quickly learned how to use her knee so she could sew by machine with minimal discomfort, and got on with the business of quilting. Now, her major concern is that storage spaces in her work area are too high for her to reach.

Suzanne is an art quilter enjoying her 21<sup>st</sup> year in the field. She has earned hundreds of award ribbons and some prize money as well. Clearly, through

quilting Suzanne has overcome her limitations, mental and emotional as well as physical. She sells her quilts and accepts commissions. Her quilts have been exhibited all over the world and published in several books and magazines. After a long career in music, Suzanne says of quilting, “It is the occupation of my later years and fills me with joy as I look forward to making new works of art.”

As a child, LeeAnna Paylor grew up “making things.” Assisted by her grandmother, as have so many of us by ours, she tried patchwork quilting at about age 8 and never looked back. Passing through a long phase of making clothing, LeeAnna returned to quilting many years later. She says:

*Love of textiles, love of thread, love of texture the quilting stitch gives, love of colors and interplay of color and pattern calm and excite me at the same time. That's my oxymoron. I am in a deal of pain from injuries but when I am in the middle of a project, it seems to send endorphins to dull it. I forget to eat, don't hear husband coming home, lose track of time when in a particularly engaging creation.*

LeeAnna's physical distress is the result of spinal damage leaving her with three vertebrae that rotate and pinch nerves. She has suffered this condition for the last eight years, medicines and therapy proving of little use. Sitting is quite painful and she must continually keep shifting her position, but she has not let that stand in her way. With a quilting background that includes major national and international exhibitions, winning ribbons, lecturing and teaching, she now looks forward to rebuilding her career this year. She reports that she has “gained a new identity.” These comments sum up her situation now:

Quilting has brought me a creative outlet, friends, a sense of connection, increased teaching skills, joy, stimulation, competition, calm and excitement. I look at the world in terms of how I'd interpret it in fabrics. I visit fabric stores on vacations. I travel specifically to see other quilts. I interview artists at craft shows, and compare their art to my process so I have a connection to other creative people. It has become my life. My house is messy, I seldom cook, I don't iron shirts. Luckily we dance and go for lots of walks or I'd get out of balance!

Physical pain is not the only form of suffering from which patchwork quilting can give relief. Many have turned to quilting during times of severe emotional distress. The following report is typical of those who are suffering:

Quilting has become my friend and hero in difficult times. When I am feeling lonely and want to talk but have no one to talk to, I sew. I have always been a sewer and made my first quilt at 18, but I didn't embrace quilting until much later. I barely survived a difficult time in my marriage and suffered a bitter divorce from a social group that I was an integral part of, when I picked up quilting with a vengeance and saved my sanity. I lost all my friends and was at a crossroad of redefining myself.

I found that quilting was a place so filled with peace. It was the kind of peace I needed so badly. Quilting felt like being in prayer and meditation constantly. I relaxed with it and eventually found myself moving from perfunctorily making blocks to creating art. I don't remember exactly when I made the switch. One day I realized I wasn't just quilting to



*be free of the pain I was feeling. The pain was gone and I was free to make a statement with my work.*

These remarkable comments come to us from Aisha Lumumba, owner of OBA Quilts. Her poignant revelations touch many of us in the heart, as we understand full well how important any artistic endeavor can be in the path to emotional salvation. Judging by the look of her website, she has risen far above the difficulties she mentions here to become a successful businessperson as a patchwork quilter.

Linda (surname withheld) was hurt twice over. Forced to resign from her job over an inappropriate relationship, she was deeply wounded and left in emotionally fragile condition. She began quilting, took some workshops, paid more attention to her “roots” and felt closely connected with her quilting forebears. She remembered with fondness many hours spent working with her grandmother on a treadle sewing machine, an image familiar to many of us. With the help of therapy and quilting as art therapy, Linda has restored her self-confidence and quality of life.

Patty Mendys sought emotional help over relationship issues from a therapist who just happened to quilt. The therapist introduced patchwork quilting to Patty, and encouraged her, through creativity, to let go of pain and fear. With focus on process rather than result, Patty ended a soured relationship and moved forward with her quilting to find a new life.

From Judy Bowers comes this report:

*I am disabled, able to do very few relaxing activities due to my limitations. I was very depressed, and was just trying to make it through life; I had a very low self esteem. As soon as I began quilting, I couldn't believe my changes. In the beginning, I only used dark fabrics. When people asked why,*



I told them that color "hurt." People started noticing my quilts and making favorable comments. My self-esteem improved and I was no longer depressed because I had so many quilts I wanted to make. I am intelligent and was bored. Quilting gives techniques that I can learn and I will never run out of things to learn and to teach. I was able to teach other beginners to quilt (until my voice began giving out), and now I teach via articles I am writing, and my blog. I also work (for free books) for a publishing company, writing reviews on their products and developing new uses for their new products. And now, I USE BRIGHT COLORS!

Jake Finch, a young spouse struggling with fertility issues, turned to sewing, first clothing, then quilts, to fill empty hours. She says, "Whatever your style, taste or need, there is a quilt out there that can be made to address it. I love contemporary quilts, but can certainly appreciate traditional and reproduction quilts." Self-taught, as are many patchwork quilters, Jake's timing was propitious; quilting was becoming about something other than blankets, even as Jake's interests in it were maturing.

As her fertility issues remained unresolved, Jake returned to school for a degree in journalism. That career morphed after the birth of her daughter, from her tenth pregnancy, into one that included teaching, writing and publishing books and editing magazines about quilting. Today, she says:

If anyone had told me 20 years ago that I would make a living from both writing and quilting, I would have laughed at them. I've learned over these years is that the comfort and warmth gleaned from quilts doesn't have to come from

snuggling under them. I have been more comforted from the process of creating quilts and exploring what a quilt is than from any other source over these years. Quilts didn't remove my pain and struggle to become a mother, but they did offer another pathway for my desire to birth a child.

Remarkably, Jake's daughter, now age 10, and her friends are learning to quilt! The foregoing case studies have shown how patchwork quilting helps women overcome physical pain and emotionally troublesome times. However, before we leave the topic of women's health, we must look at the reverse side of the coin, the pain caused by quilting.

Dr. Susan Delaney Mech, in her book R<sub>x</sub> for Quilters, has addressed this subject in depth. Offering countermeasures for back and neck pain, repetitive stress injuries like carpal tunnel syndrome, sore fingers and eyestrain, she offers exercises, changes in positions and methods of working, balms and healing ointments in her holistic approach to women's health during and as a result of patchwork quilting and at various times in a quilter's life. She addresses the organization, structure and function of the sewing and work areas, lighting, tools and aids that can lighten tasks, and the importance of break times. Her book is "must-read" for those quilters who suffer muscle spasms, poor vision, sore hands and fingers, and problems resulting from obesity and lack of exercise.

The second area in which we see change in women's lives as they increasingly participate in patchwork quilting and its auxiliary activities is a rise in education levels. From the first attempts at patchwork quilting, undertaken following instructions provided by a book or magazine, or perhaps with assistance from a more experienced friend or teacher, a quilter begins improving her education. If you are a quilter, you will never grow old because there is something new to learn

every day!

Quilters first focus on increasing their technical skills: learning how to work with patterns, how to cut and sew their quilt tops, moving on to layering and quilting, and ending with binding and other finishing techniques. This is practical education that can only be mastered with demonstration, practice and experience. Visiting exhibitions, seeing with what methods and how other quilters have solved similar problems helps expand a quilter's horizons, broadening her perspectives on problem-solving and teaching her how to think.

A typical scenario was presented by a report another of the respondents on how she took up quilting and gained her skills, quoted here at some length to reinforce the point:

In February 2001 a friend, an avid quilter, brought me some quilt books and patterns. My friend suggested I should take a beginning quilt class at a local quilt shop to learn the basics.

In May of that year, I bought Basic Guide to Rotary Cut Quilts by Marianne Fons & Liz Porter. I decided to complete the patchwork lesson blocks which could be made into a wall hanging.

In June I took a class in Machine Quilting. We used spray to hold the quilt layers together, practiced using a walking foot, used decorative stitches as well as straight stitches and lowered the feed dogs and with a big foot embroidery foot practice free motion quilting, learned to practice on scraps first and to use gloves to move the quilt.

About a week later I taught myself the Seams Sew Fun Sampler which includes these blocks: Farmers Daughter, Trees, Star, House, Jack-in-the-Box, Weathervane, Mosaic, Sailboat and Wheels.

Then I purchased an appliqué wall hanging pattern by Pat Sloan, "Ma-Ma's Garden." Although we were moving soon, another friend took me to a Quilters Guild meeting. Their speaker talked about using creativity. I was inspired and thought when we move I must find a quilt guild to join. In 2003, I joined a quilters' guild after we moved. Belonging to the guild helped to improve my skills. In 2005, our guild cosponsored the state quilt symposium with two other guilds. I chaired the committee of volunteers.

After getting a new laptop, I took classes from Ed2go on Word, Powerpoint, and Excel and enjoyed them, so decided to try Quilt University. I also need to take more classes on Photoshop Elements and Corel Draw to learn how to use them.

Many people and groups have influenced my quilting. I don't think one person or group has made more of an impact but each together with the others has helped me grow as a quilter.

This respondent's report is typical of the experience of many quilters as they move from humble beginnings and struggles with sewing and quilting into working with creativity (composition, color, value and the elements of design), mastering use of the computer, and working with quilt guilds. Each experience represents a serious effort at acquiring new knowledge and skills.

Increasingly, degree programs are being developed and implemented to help satisfy the demand for more education for patchwork quilters. These include university programs in textiles and fibre arts, the best of which is probably now found at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, with its International Quilt Study Center. This institution offers a master's degree in Textile History/Quilt Studies. A serious, three-year creativity and methods program is offered through the City &

Guilds program in the UK. Students can enroll for home study courses, shipping work assignments in for grading, and can complete the program with a Diploma in Design and Craft: Patchwork Quilting.

For now, however, most education of patchwork quilters is still taking place informally at local and regional guilds, during their meetings and festivals, through workshops taught by itinerant quilting and design teachers. It comes from experienced quilting friends, mothers, aunts and grandmothers, or it comes from trained, well-qualified and highly experienced professional teachers. For all informal education in patchwork quilting, costs are relatively low, there are no exams or grades, and there are no prizes or awards for work well done. The emphases are on learning and having fun doing it!

Education without formal accreditation and ending in knowledge but no certificate is readily available through this system or through the Internet. Quilt University and Joggles as well as some lesser known online businesses are offering patchwork quilting workshops online. Quilters especially enjoy the flexibility and convenience of online study in the privacy of their own homes.

Through all the foregoing educational vehicles, quilters are steadily “raising the bar.” Between better education and improved technology, quilts being made today are of remarkable quality in design as well as construction. Regardless of the methods of education a quilter can access, the benefits are obvious. From quilter Judy Momenzadeh come these remarks:

*Quilting has completely changed my life in ways I never dreamed of when I started. I went from traditional to art quilting along my path which has lead to the self discovery that I am an artist and have some talent! I never would have known this otherwise. From this knowledge, I have gained self*

*confidence and a sense of purpose. It has also been very rewarding since I am able to teach and share what I have learned.*

Hand-in-hand with education comes social interaction. Patchwork quilters, in a timeless tradition of sisterhood, fellowship and sharing, teach each other and make friends in every aspect of patchwork quilting. Whether it is a few friends who gather for a couple of hours of hand quilting once a week in one another's homes, or at an international quilt festival, groups of passionate quilters readily turn to one another for help and support, friendship and fun, sharing and caring about each other. This aspect of patchwork quilting brings us full circle as it contributes in a meaningful way to the health of patchwork quilters.

On their own, patchwork quilters occupy their time with planning, piecing and quilting, all solo sewing activities of one kind or another. Put a group of quilters together and a new kind of social energy is created. Sharing not only finished pieces but also patterns, ideas, techniques and materials, a group of quilters quickly sets about the business of helping one another to finish projects that are already in progress as well as inspiring ideas for new creations. For some quilters, accolades given during "show-and-tell" sessions may be the only positive response they receive in life. Not all families are supportive of the quilter's efforts, and approval from one's knowledgeable and experienced peers always carries a bit more weight than loved ones' well meaning but perhaps uninformed opinions.

Within the network of quilting acquaintances and friendships, women gain self-confidence and poise. They learn to trust their artistic judgement, and to push forward to new levels of competency in their art and in their organizations. They join quilt guilds, eventually run for office, accept the responsibilities and deliver the

service to their guilds--all of which helps each quilter grow and mature as a social force.

At the local level, interaction occurs most frequently through participation in quilt guilds. Groups of quilters who live within relatively short distances from one another, and who can conveniently meet at least once a month, quilt guilds work to educate, inform and promote patchwork quilters. As a guild member, one is expected to share one's efforts through "show-and-tell" sessions, receive additional technical support and training through organized workshops as well as informal guidance and comments from other members, join into exhibitions organized by the guild, and generally have fun with patchwork quilting friends and acquaintances. Guilds function as primary support groups for women, even when the issues are of a more personal nature. Lifelong friendships form, and the emphasis is always on sharing and giving.

This report from Canadian Sharron Schoenfeld explains the benefits of guild membership from the quilter's perspective:

*It is wonderful to be in the company of women who share the same passions as I do; we share a common language. I have found friends that I would never have met had it not been for our shared love of fabric. We have come together formally at retreats and workshops, as well as informally to share what we know and delve into the myriad of creative techniques and notions.*

*Involvement with my guild has provided encouragement and helped develop the confidence I needed to exhibit my work outside of our group. I have exhibited at various invitational shows, CQA Quilt Calgary 2010 being one of them. The feedback provided by peers at these shows as well as the various workshops I have attended has been valuable and encouraging.*



I still have a "day job" (thankfully it's part-time), which I enjoy but look forward to the day when I am able to spend as much time as I want in my studio developing my craft further.

Guild membership can prove highly useful and extremely valuable in the development of budding quilters and artists. Rhoda Taylor, a retired university biology professor who took up patchwork quilting, speaks of her guild experience:

In early 2007 a friend introduced me to the Fiber Arts Guild of Pittsburgh (which sponsors FiberArts International) and that really changed my life. The guild has critique sessions before its evening meetings.

The Guild members are such a diverse group of artists and are so approving and helpful. Nothing negative is ever said, but constructive criticisms and helpful suggestions are given. I've learned so much from them.

Membership in the Guild changed my life. I have taken a number of workshops through the Guild and at the Society for Contemporary Craft that I learned about through the FA Guild. I started to enter local art shows and have gotten into about 30 juried exhibitions, mostly around the Pittsburgh area. I had work accepted for the SAQA Points of View exhibit and my piece was shown in several places in the US and in France. I have also been juried into the Associated Artists of Pittsburgh (the foremost art group in Pittsburgh) and the Pittsburgh Society of Artists. I have won several prizes in art shows for my work. I currently have a solo show in the gallery of a beautiful unitarian universalist congregation in Frederick, Maryland, and soon will set up another solo show in another UU church in Adelphi, Maryland. The Frederick

show was very well received and I sold several pieces. Here I am at age 75 being a prize winning artist and enjoying it so very much. I am still in awe of the achievements made in a period of less than 10 years from my first quilting class.

Involvement in patchwork quilting often leads to volunteerism. Participation in guild activities, exhibitions and competitions, and charitable works can lay a foundation in working with others, a foundation that can lead some quilters into other endeavors. Communications, charitable work, community outreach, administration, and management are legitimate business of patchwork quilt guilds, and volunteers are always needed. Skills gained through efforts expended pay off in surprising ways, equipping guild volunteers to move forward in their personal develop.

Sharron and Rhoda speak of properties common to all quilt guilds. Shy, reticent new guild members find confidence-giving support that eventually encourages them to come forward on the creative side as artists and teachers, and on the administrative side as volunteers and officers, assuming and executing duties that take them “out of their comfort zone” and into new areas in which they must learn and apply new skills.

Jasvinder Phull, Immediate Past Chairman of the Kenya Quilt Guild, spoke at length in her closing report about the learning experiences she had while holding that post. Early on, she worried about whether she could manage a computer to do Guild work. She took a workshop on computing, then had her son provide follow-up coaching. In no time at all, she was managing email, surfing, even word processing. Expressing her gratitude for those experiences, Jasvinder encouraged others to follow in her footsteps. New officers were elected, and the process continues.

From such experiences and feelings of well-being, self-satisfaction and self-confidence, quilters enter the world of professional patchwork quilting, a world in which they can gain not only wisdom and maturity, but where they can also earn money! From the realm of volunteerism and quilt guild participation, we turn now to those women who have found new professional careers as a result of their patchwork quilting. There are far too many opportunities for paid employment to be listed here in detail, but the major areas include work as professional quilt artists; wholesalers and retailers of equipment, supplies, materials and notions; publishers, photographers, journalists, editors and writers; special events and tour organizers; quilt judges and appraisers; quilt historians, conservators and curators; and amateur and professional quilt teachers. Throughout the formal sector of patchwork quilting, there is a great deal of overlap, as we shall soon see.

Quilters who have extraordinary artistic talents and determination move rapidly from traditional to innovative to art quilting. Once they begin selling their work, they are labeled professional quilt artists. They make accept commissions, make quilts, exhibit them, and sell them. If their work wins prizes or awards, selling prices rise. Many of these artists become amateur photographers out of a need for inexpensive photography. Some write about what they do and how they do it for books, magazines or blogs. If they have developed special methods or techniques to produce certain results, they may soon find themselves teaching others what they have learned.

Such has been the case for well-known quilt artist Dijanne Cevaall. Netherlands born, Dijanne has lived in Australia for many years. During 1990, she traveled in Africa and made her first quilt along the way. Trained as a lawyer, she found it impossible to find suitable employment in her field back at home in Australia, so turned to patchwork quilting instead. With small children of her own, Dijanne's intention was to produce and sell cot quilts. She began teaching other

quilters, then started exhibiting quilts made during her time in Africa. She swapped quilts for professional photographs of her work and a wood-burning stove. She used the photos for a magazine article about her work in the Australian publication *Textile Fiber Forum Magazine*, and that promoted her art in the world of textile and fibre arts. Taking up surface design, exhibiting in England, France, the Netherlands and the US, becoming involved with an internet group of art quilters which included Lisa Call, Joanie san Chirico, Linda Colsh and Mary Beth Bellah, among others, Dijanne's creative nature flourished in direct proportion to her reputation as an up-and-coming quilt artist.

In the meantime, Dijanne wrote a book about patchwork quilts based on Tahitian *tifaifai* which also capitalized on her dyeing methods. This kind of activity (she has written and is writing other works), plus making quilts and selling them, along with curating exhibitions, continues to enhance Dijanne's appeal as a textile artist. However, she says:

The reality of earning a living in Australia is tough doing this kind of thing. We are a big country with a small population. Teaching jobs are too few. As a nation, we are more interested in sports than the arts. Arts funding seems to go to organizations and rarely to artists, and people do not buy enough quilts to make up the difference. I survive on what I make, teach and write about, but I live on an extreme budget and yearn for the day when I might earn a decent living.

Dijanne's candid remarks reveal the downside of being a patchwork quilt artist. Like all artists, earning a living as a quilt artist is hard, very hard, and very discouraging to all but the most passionate of quilters, or to those who quickly

learn to work efficiently and to maximize all possibilities for reducing their personal workloads.

Pauline Burbidge is one such professional. By streamlining her design methods and working with a long-arm machine, she was able to produce a designer collection of production quilts. Today, she quilts successfully full-time, runs a company called QuiltLine making one-of-a-kind soft furnishings (bedcover quilts) and small art pieces. Her bedcover quilts sell for as much £10,000, and her smaller art works go for between £150-500. Pauline accepts no commissions, preferring the freedom of working to her own standards rather than to those of someone else.

The quilter who comes immediately to mind when thinking about retailers of quilt products, patterns, notions and supplies is Marti Michell. A dynamic bundle of energy supports this consummate salesperson. Marti promotes her products with great enthusiasm and amazing success through lectures and demonstrations, trunk shows and in classrooms. Her Perfect Patchwork Templates are rotary cutting aids designed to permit quilters to sew without having to trim away any excess seam allowances (nubbing). Simple in concept but brilliant in execution, Marti's products are most successfully marketed, as are those of Clotilde.

Clotilde began amassing products in the garage of her Florida home at a time when online shopping was becoming a reality. Amongst the first to recognize the possibilities, she eliminated overheads by warehousing her merchandise in her home and selling over the Internet. So successful was she that her company has continued despite her demise a couple of years ago, and it continues to be a major supplier for quilters as well as dressmakers and other textile workers.

Visit any large quilt festival or symposium and find there literally thousands of vendors of everything from fabrics to notions to trims, books, machines, irons, and--of course--even quilts!

Those who make art, and those who teach others how to make art, are

followed closely by the publishing industry. Demand for patchwork quilt “how to” books has perhaps never been higher than throughout the last 20 years. Magazines like *Quilting Arts*, *Quilters’ Newsletter* and *American Quilter* have flourished, and as the Internet has grown in importance and convenience, these publications are “going digital.”

Publications about patchwork quilting require a complete retinue of employees to produce. Photographers, editors, journalists, printers, web masters and more make a living from such work. Authors, it seems, do not fare quite so well directly from sales of their writings, but earn much-needed recognition when found in print. Building a reputation as a quilt artist or teacher is every bit as important as making the art or teaching the classes. Jake Finch, quoted earlier, gave this report about her early experiences:

As a journalist, I was obviously comfortable with crafting written information. As a quilter, I'd gotten a new sewing machine, one that could accomplish my quilt visions and my skills grew. I started teaching at my local shop and designing my own projects and quilts. Eventually I came up with a new technique for making quilted book covers. Putting together several samples and a strong proposal, my first book was purchased by CGT Publishing immediately. From there, I wrote a second book for them and then started editing books for them as a freelance developmental editor. I also secured a freelance position as a field editor for *American Quilter* magazine and began writing articles for *Quilter's Home* magazine. Somewhere along the line, my quilting merged with my writing and today I earn the bulk of my income from the quilt industry, serving as coeditor of *Quilter's Home* magazine and occasionally writing and designing for other purposes, all within the quilt business.

Doreen Speckman was the first quilter to make a successful business out of quilt tourism. Extremely popular for her sense of humor, ability to teach, and strength of leadership as a tour guide, she enjoyed several years of globe-trotting with quilters until her unfortunate and premature demise in 2000.

Odette Tolksdorf has for many years worked closely with Nancy Crow to organize theme-based quilting tours of South Africa. With or without workshops, visits to museums, craft cooperatives and small businesses included, these tours give participants an opportunity to experience firsthand the arts and crafts of South Africa which include textiles, basketry, beading, painting and much more.

Jim West, of Sew Many Places, also organizes quilting and textile tours around the world, and his competitors are many. As tourists become increasingly theme-conscious, seeking to travel and sightsee with others who appreciate the same interests as they do, this is a burgeoning field. Tour operators are eager to capitalize on this niche market, even if they have no direct experience of patchwork quilting. They can always recruit a patchwork quilt celebrity to accompany a tour group, giving it much needed authenticity through a recognized name in patchwork quilting.

Several self-appointed bodies have established certification programs for patchwork quilt judges and appraisers. The Canadian Quilters Guild and the National Quilt Association in the United States are two of these, and the South African National Quilt Guild has a similar program, as does The Quilters Guild of the British Isles.

Each of these programs requires completion of specific requirements to ensure an ever-increasing standard of excellence, and works closely with candidates to help them gain diversity of experience and breadth of knowledge in each of their respective fields. Candidates generally pay a fee to enroll, and may have to travel to participate in judging experiences before they complete the requirements.



Once certified, however, these judges and appraisers are free to operate within the open market, setting fees and conditions as they see fit and in keeping with competition. From amateur to high-priced professional, all levels of judging and appraising are currently available to quilters and quilt event organizers. It is anticipated that as demand increases and standards rise, the money to be made in each of these fields will rise accordingly. Certification helps to ensure credibility, integrity and shared standards of performance, and is thus appealing to those who wish to work and earn money in the fields of judging and appraising.

Quilt historians are employed by museums and universities to help with the massive task of recording quilt history, curating exhibitions, indexing and maintaining permanent databases including photographs of quilts, and teaching textile and quilt history to younger generations who, it is hoped, will carry on the traditions.

Quilt conservators are needed to help preserve today's as well as yesterday's quilts. Marsha MacDowell of Michigan State University is an important figure in this area. Curator of Folk Arts at the Michigan State University Museum and a Professor in the Department of Art and Art History, her primary responsibility is in the Museum Studies Program. She works with The Alliance for American Quilts helping to index quilts not only from the United States, but from all over the world. Marsha also coedits H-Quilts, "a moderated internet discussion forum whose purpose is to provide an exchange of information for individuals around the world engaged in quilting research and documentation."

Amateur and professional patchwork and related textile teachers are plentiful outside of the formal education sector. From local experts who are willing to share their knowledge for free to top-name professional teachers who can easily be booked up to three years in advance, all levels of instruction are also present in the marketplace.

No credentialing program currently exists for these teachers; they earn their credibility through direct experience and increased demand for their workshops at festivals and other guild events. Opportunities for teaching patchwork quilting and related subjects online are also much on the increase and this is a field that is set to expand exponentially.

Fine art galleries are now looking to textile and fiber arts to augment offerings from painters, sculptors and photographers. Possessed of two-dimensional imagery enhanced by three-dimensional texture and often purely sculptural effects, patchwork quilts offer much needed relief and variety to gallery offerings. Perceived by many to be a new form of art work, exhibitions of patchwork art quilts attract a new market as well as intriguing established customers for galleries and other art shops. These businesses require knowledgeable salespersons to explain and market the work, as well as trained curators to recognize and appreciate differences in quality and style.

Some of the employment positions mentioned herein will provide a living wage; others will not. It is therefore not unusual to find a quilt artist who also writes and teaches, as described above in the section. A quilt historian employed by a university may have to “moonlight” as a patchwork teacher at a nearby community college to make ends meet. A conservator may make quilts of her own that are for sale, and so on. Many quilters must wear more than one hat to earn a living wage.

Nevertheless, the patchwork quilt industry in total seems still to be expanding and redefining itself every day. The effect of that is that the best and most experienced people in each aspect will rise to the top, and those who cannot contribute so much will fall by the wayside. Competition will be for our industry the great leveler that it is in other businesses, and we might well anticipate an increasingly refined group of genuine experts at the high end.

For the great majority of patchwork quilters, the social benefits of quilting far outweigh any other considerations. The myriad opportunities to meet others of like mind, to spend many fun-filled and happy hours crafting their art, to share knowledge and ideas, to laugh, eat, travel and tour together--these are the most highly prized benefits of patchwork quilting.

Patchwork quilting serves as an entrée into any community anywhere around the world. If you know how to quilt, you can find other quilters and know that you are assured of an instant set of new friends. Especially because patchwork quilting is one of the visual arts, even language differences can be overcome quickly and will prove no barrier to making new acquaintances and friends. If a quilter cannot find other quilters, she can always teach a few beginners and start her own quilt guild!

Many “ex-pat” wives have reported the ease of locating and connecting with groups of quilters upon arrival in new circumstances. Those whose husbands are relocated for business, diplomacy/government or military posts, and missionaries who move into new countries, cultures and societies can soon establish their interests in patchwork quilting, and until they do, the quilting itself fills otherwise long lonely hours with creative work to keep idle hands busy.

Whether a quilter relocates around the world or around the corner, she is part of a sisterhood of like-minded needleworkers, and she can easily tap into those resources for support, help and encouragement, in life as well as in quilting.

Sue Spargo is one such wife. Grown up and educated in South Africa, Sue’s husband’s employment took the couple first to the UK, and then to the United States. Homesick for South Africa, Sue expressed her love of her homeland in her folk artwork in such a delightful manner that she soon made new friends and eventually established herself as a business force in the patchwork quilt market.

German Klothilde Wohlsperger now lives in Italy. Her story is typical of

those of other dislocated wives, in no matter which capacity they serve:

My husband is in the German military, so we have to move almost every three years. I took [quilt] classes at Community College to learn the basics. This experience was also helpful for to practice my English. After two years sewing and working on quilts we moved back to Germany. After a while I felt lonely and started thinking whether I should meet other women, maybe to teach them the first steps to do patchwork. After showing some of my works and my program idea I was allowed to hold a class at the community college (called Volkshochschule [literally "people's high school"]). I could see some friendships getting started and this made me very happy. Also it was very helpful for me to find and meet people living in the same place as I did. It was successful for meeting other women and gaining new friends. Patchwork helped me to get involved in the new community and I was also proud that my self-esteem grew.

After two years we had to move again. This time, after all the moving work was done, I started as soon as possible to get the same possibility to teach, because I wanted to meet other women and get involved in the new community fast, and it worked again. I found out that all of the women had something to get away from and were glad to think about something else to find their inside peace. Patchwork helped them with this, no matter if it is the time to get over an illness, problems in the family, having no job or searching for relaxation from a stressful life ...

So I was thinking about what patchwork means for me. Do I have a problem that made me start patchwork, too? The main "problem" in my life is that I had to move very often and so I was searching for something next to my family, something to stabilize me. That is what patchwork is doing

for me. I am never bored. Also, it helps me to get in touch with other women easier and faster, we have the same interests and topics to talk about. It makes me happy to see that my family likes what I am doing and I am proud to have my husband's support. It makes me happy to see that through my teaching other women find their peace and they become more happy. Patchwork keeps me looking forward in yet another foreign country, Italy.

Sometimes, a quilter's life changes without physical relocation as, for example, when she retires. Leaving a full time job for a new, more domestic life in a household that is empty of children can leave a woman feeling at loose ends, lost and lonely. Not so for patchwork quilters. Rhoda Taylor had this to say:

I took up quilting after retiring from teaching and after my children had grown and left home. My artwork has provided me with an important new life. I have no "empty nest" problems. I suspect that I would have become very bored and lonesome without a job, children, and the activities associated with both. With my quilting life is very full, in fact I wish I had more time to do my artwork. There is often not enough time in the day to do the things I want to do and it seems as though my life is full of deadlines as it was when I taught. My artwork is who I am, what I am, and the focus of my life today. Although my family is very important, because of the circumstances they are not daily as important as my art is. I am so thankful that I have found something to make my life so meaningful. And my family is proud of my artistic achievements.

Associations formed at the local and even regional level have expanded in recent years to include those made at the national and international levels through the plethora of quilt exhibition, competition and workshop festivals now held all over the world. Another facility, the World Wide Web, is home to patchwork quilters through various e-lists, e-groups, websites and the latest trends in blogging. Making the transition from retirement to active patchwork quilting, Sherry Boram speaks of the QuiltArt e-list:

Being a part of QuiltArt.com since 2001, an online international art quilt community of around 3,000, I have had constant connection to like-minded quilters who educate, stimulate and encourage me daily through the Internet. This was critical to my development as a quilter, because we were only at home four months of the year, and participation in a traditional quilt group was impossible. My online link to fiber creativity was always right there with me, 24/7!

I have taken advantage of many challenges generated by the artists of QuiltArt, and each project has stimulated my soul and given me ways to develop as an artist. I have expressed some of my deepest feelings through fabric, color, and stitch. My world has grown beyond my wildest expectations, particularly at the age when many of my peers are "powering down" their imaginations with activities like golf, bridge, television, shopping and dining.

As a result of my love for making art quilts, I see the world in a new light. I recognize beauty where I never noticed it before, I feel passion for the causes that promote unity and justice in the world, and I feel a sense of artistic and personal fulfillment that nothing else has ever given me.

Thanks to the communications opened up to housebound, working or otherwise socially isolated women granted them by computers and the Internet, quilters have more “voice” today than ever before. They can be heard communicating around the globe. They have become a powerful force in shaping the patchwork quilting industry as it exists today and they will define the shape of it in the future because of these connections.

All the foregoing discussion brings us to a culminating point where women channel their efforts and powers: the realm of international politics. Women now use the self-confidence, maturity and wisdom they have gained by working with their peers in a common interest arena to effect change on the global level. They use their patchwork quilting as a means of garnering attention and focusing it on commonly shared ideals: beliefs in life, human kindness, sensitivity to others, good health, a healthy environment and global peace.

Prominent quilters possess much-needed visibility to enable them to work effectively for change. Ami Simms has worked tirelessly to raise awareness and funds for research on Alzheimer’s, as has Virginia A. Spiegel for the American Cancer Society. Quilters have long used their work as a voice for social change through imagery and content; now they take their quilts and that voice to Facebook, Twitter and other social networks, calling out demands for reform louder than ever!

Karen J. Warren, writing on the subject of ecofeminism, “women's potential for bringing about an ecological revolution,” alludes to the metaphor of making a patchwork quilt as a model for peace:

*My goal here is as much suggestive as argumentative: using the metaphor of theorists as quilters and theory-building as quilting (see Warren 1990), I suggest what at*



least some patches of an ecofeminist peace quilt must look like, what threads might be used to sew the different patches together, and why a multilayered or multitiered theory rather than a universal, univocal theory of violence is necessary to any ecofeminist peace politics. I do this without specifying what the actual design of any particular ecofeminist peace quilt does or must look like.

Warren goes on to write at length of her interpretation of the metaphor, but her words lead us to conclusion in a model which goes from theoretical to practical. She continues:

Quilts (or patches) tell unique, individualized stories about the quilters and the circumstances of their lives; they are candidate patches for a larger, global mosaic, an ecofeminist quilt-in-the-making in much the way that the AIDS memorial quilt is a patchwork of 10,500 panels of individual quilts which record and commemorate lives lost to AIDS. Like the AIDS Names Quilt, an ecofeminist peace politics quilt collectively represents and records the stories of people of different ages, ethnicities, affectional orientations, race and gender identities, and class backgrounds committed to nonviolence, or . . . appropriate resourcefulness. As feminist quilts, the ecofeminist peace quilts I envision have no jointly necessary and sufficient conditions which define them. Nonetheless, they are feminist quilts.

The world has seen several quilts of the kind Warren describes, not metaphorical in nature, but rather realized tangible evidence of the power of women (and men) to express their shared beliefs as they lobby for political attention

and timely response. The AIDS Memorial Quilt mentioned above is only one such example. Another such initiative was formed by the Millennium Quilts, made by women all over the world to celebrate the year 2000 A.D., the second millennium, with wishes of peace, health and well-being for all. The sheer *love* invested in these quilts, paid generously by their makers through long hours of design, planning and execution of the work, is a powerful force not to be disabused.

Yet another significant work was the International Women's Day<sup>5</sup> (March 8) Global Opportunity Quilt. This is not a real quilt, but a fund raising project organized by nonprofit organization Opportunity International. Each participant who contributes a set fee receives a token plus the belief that her contribution will be used to help a less fortunate mother begin some small business that will provide for her and her children, enabling her to "feed and educate her children, gain access to better healthcare and housing, and save money for life's emergencies."

These examples of women coming together, sharing beliefs, feelings and commitments, are but a few of the many proofs that women take their patchwork quilting very seriously and are well-prepared to use it as a driving force for positive change on a troubled planet. Through patchwork quilting, we first heal ourselves; then we reach out to heal the world!

## **What Do Women Receive in Return for Their Efforts in Patchwork Quilting?**

To summarize, we have seen how less than healthy women find peace, solace and relief from pain, both physical and emotional, through patchwork quilting. For

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<sup>5</sup> "International Women's Day, March 8, is a global day celebrating the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future."

some, patchwork quilting has given completely new meaning to their lives. For many, quilting has at least opened an avenue of creativity through which they can express themselves and find their limitations or disabilities negligible or irrelevant.

Also, we have considered the risks of damage to health that quilting can cause through repetitive stress injury and poor ergonomics in the design of furniture and equipment. These problems, for the most part, can be overcome by modifying behavior and demanding well-designed tools and equipment, and most women can get on with their quilting with little or no discomfort or inconvenience.

Women gain much in education. They learn the sewing methods and techniques necessary for their craft. They learn a great deal about color, value and texture as expressed through textiles, and about repeat patterns and composition, the elements of design, and relevant qualities of fine art. This education is self-reinforcing, with women teaching other women, younger or older, what they know about the tools and materials, basic creativity and self-expression through patchwork quilting. It is to be hoped that as patchwork quilting becomes increasingly popular and the work of highly skilled artisans experiences increased demand, more and better formal systems of education will be established and promoted. For now, education amongst patchwork quilters continues as it has throughout many generations and in many places throughout the world, informally and often through the generosity of those who have sharing with those who have not.

Taking education one step further, we see that many women are able better to provide for their own welfare through patchwork quilting. They move from organizing neighborhood quilt groups to staging international quilt festivals, from working as shop clerks to become manufacturing and wholesale marketing moguls, from learning a few skills to teaching many, helping to preserve and foster patchwork quilting as a tradition that has empowered women across space and

time. Incomes are earned, standards of living are raised, and entire families benefit from women's talents and skills expressed through patchwork quilting.

As these events take place, each woman experiences growth in maturity, poise, self-confidence and the ability to handle difficult situations well. With ever more professional level demands on her time and expertise, a patchwork quilter will rise to each occasion, learning and moving forward in life as in her handicraft or art. From participation in guild activities to accepting responsibility as an officer, from selling quilting supplies for someone else to opening a quilt shop of her own, from organizing Saturday afternoon neighborhood quilt shows to filling an international conference center with quilt art masterpieces, women from every kind of lifestyle enjoy the freedom to take on new challenges and then rise to meet them successfully.

Along the way, these women become modern-day movers and shakers, reaching out to the larger global community with abilities and insights that can, and will, help to shape our world in years to come. From the humble beginnings of reaching out to a friend or neighbor with a suggestion for a better way to sew on a binding or how to get points to intersect perfectly, patchwork quilters move forward to take on ever increasing responsibilities for planning and decision making, and come to control a larger share of the market economy, an economy that can be bent and redirected towards a more equitable distribution of goods and services for all.



## A Post Script

Not surprisingly, the initial question “How has quilting changed your life?” elicited responses not only from women, but from their husbands. The reactions of husbands to their wives’ quilting activities and their effect on the women’s lives revealed a more holistic synergy between the handicraft and all persons affected by it.

Dr. Marybeth Stalp, “Quilting and Midlife,” *Aging Horizons Bulletin*, hints at the possibility of conflict within the home over a woman’s involvement in patchwork quilting:

I was surprised to find a leisure activity like quilting causes tension in the home. While it’s true, some continue to view quilting stereotypically as something old ladies do, quilting can enhance and change women’s lives. The new activity challenged long-established routines and family dynamics. For example, the women would joke about spending more time on quilting and less time on housework and cooking. I like to think that quilting can challenge and enrich the family and that it can help women to become more comfortable with their creative selves.

A woman’s need for space in the home for her work area and for storage of her materials, equipment and tools can cause overcrowding in the household. If she asserts her needs as opposed to those of her family for relaxation, dining or sleeping space, she can easily cause conflicts to arise.

Not only space, but the woman’s time may become a source of irritation to her family. Her failure to accomplish those domestic tasks which the family

ordinarily might have expected from her can become problematic. A hungry spouse and children who arrive home to find no dinner cooking on the stove are quite capable of making the woman's life miserable, so some kind of balance and mutual understanding must be established. Bernard Storme spoke of his life with Belgian quilter Marie-Claire St. Maux by explaining that her commitment to perfection required so much time he had "much peace and many quiet hours" to spend alone. Some men would appreciate that, but there would undoubtedly be others who would not.

Jake Finch shared the following remarks about her husband's positive attitude:

*In all, I can't imagine what my life would be if not for quilting. And what's the best thought to hold is that my husband can't imagine it either. At first critical of my overflowing stash and UFOs [unfinished objects], he now enjoys my quilt life almost as much as I do and when my machine is left unattended for a spell because of other commitments, he's the first one to point out that I need to be sewing.*

Clearly, if a woman takes up patchwork quilting, she needs to feel her way along carefully, making sure that she draws her family into her enjoyment of quilting. She may have to move slowly, be circumspect about buying equipment and materials and be ever sensitive to the ways in which her quilting may threaten family stability and mutual support. Given enough time to see the quality of her work, how friends and acquaintances praise the quilter, and an opportunity to feel that they are contributing to her success, however small it may be, a quilter's immediate family can become the principal supporters for her efforts. When this happens, everyone in the family becomes a winner!

It is not unusual, also, for a spouse to become involved in the quilter's business. Carol Miller, "Dean" of Quilt University, relies heavily on her husband Roger to look after registrations and finance in her successful online quilt workshop business. Vikki Pignatelli's husband, who recovered from a bout with cancer in 1993, travels with her and sees to her accommodations and the set-ups for her lectures and demonstrations. Many quilt product retailers are husband/wife combos who work together successfully to promote their common goals and shared interests in quilting. Glenda Kirkiridis' husband travels and works with her with Amafu Hand Dyed Fabric, helping to set up booth displays and sell her hand-dyed fabrics. These are but three such examples of complete spousal cooperation in a quilting business; there must be hundreds more!

The roles of husbands in relation to their wives' efforts in the field of patchwork quilting probably reflect the wives' interests as well as any specific training or skills the husband can bring to bear on their wives' hobby or business. Says Rhoda Taylor of her husband:

*My husband says my quilting has changed his life too and that I should tell you that. I don't have a studio as such. My husband has to live with my stash and work in progress in most rooms of the house. He also has to put up with being asked his opinion on various works in progress and to help me name pieces. He is proud of me and the success I have achieved, but doesn't like to say so; I wish he would!*

From Sharron Schoenfeld comes this most enlightening comparison:

*The poor man, he thinks he is so hard done by. He has a peculiar method of rating my quilts. He insists on keeping a*



tally of missed meals in relation to each quilt produced. For example, the quilt I had in Quilt Calgary he rates as "450 missed meals" and so on. My daughter has a better take on the whole thing. She noted that as a quilter I cut a lot of fabric up into little pieces, and then sew it all back together again. However she has not stopped there, she has correctly pegged her father as a bit odd in his choice of hobby as well. He is restoring a 1950 pick up truck, in order to do that, he has collected roughly 8 old trucks, taken them all apart and is now putting the parts back together to make one new truck. Hmmm, we quilters aren't so odd after all!

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