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## Quilts that Teach

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*Some people are born with a silver spoon in their mouths;  
I was born with a needle and thread in my hand.*  
- J. M.

Needlework came naturally to me as if it is something I brought with me to this life from a time before. I have created with fabric, needle and thread since before I could write. One of my first memories is of walking outside our house, grumbling, "I'm going to break off my teeth." I was so frustrated; this was the most horrible thing I could think of to express that frustration. This stemmed from having an idea in mind of a sewing project that I wanted to create but I had a three year old's limited fine motor abilities. I knew what I wanted but my body was not there yet!

My finely developed tactile sense developed from the lanolin-feel of freshly sheared wool. The quilts of my childhood had sheep's wool as batting. Growing up on a Zamora, California, ranch amongst my father's herd of 2000 sheep, I *helped*, even in my preschool years, during shearing time by jumping on the wool in wool sacks to compress it. I was so little that looking up from where I stood within the sack of wool, I could see a circle above me, the top of the sack and, within that circle, the sky. To me was what Heaven must be like.

In my adult professional life as a Pediatric Physical Therapist, no longer having to take notes as I had done as a student, I used meeting and conference times to embroider. During the two years of my first job, I created *The Lady and The Unicorn*, a circular piece that is 36 inches in diameter. The piece is entirely done in individual embroidery stitches.

Nearly as soon as I finished it, I was traveling in England. Getting off a bus in Oxford, my backpack laden husband and I were stopped by a woman who stated, "Go to the Asmolean,." The following day, we visited the Asmolean Museum and happened upon the woman, an employee. We greeted her and she asked, "What would you like to see?" I was at a loss but my husband piped up with, "Etchings!" She led us to a back room of the museum where a lone man sat in a room lined with glass cases

**Figure 1. Lady and Unicorn**



floor to ceiling. He asked, "Which etchings would you like to see?" Again my husband responded, "DaVinci." The man opened the lid of a thin box and lifted out a few matted etchings. He left us to contemplate an original DaVinci etching. It was of a unicorn.

Synchronicity has always been an important player in the intuitive abilities and something I incorporate into my professional life and in the making of my quilts. Quilts are a meditative experience for me. I cannot force a quilt into existence. I have to wait for the time that is right within my inner self. Quilts are never *work*; they take on a life of their own and lead me through the process.

Many times, in interviews, writers will comment that they did not write the book; they were just a conduit through which their characters spoke. My quilts are often done in that manner. I do not plan out my quilts ahead of time; they just seem to come together of their own as I am inspired by yet another fabric or design concept as I go along. I sometimes start a quilt and get stuck part way through. I have to put it away in my attic and wait for the muse to return. This sometimes occurs when I realize who that quilt is being created for; at which point, I find it very easy to finish because it just flows.

As a medical intuitive, I teach others to pay attention to that which occurs in our mental picture of a patient. This may include information that we saw but did not *notice* or did not document at the time. The intuitive piece is that information that is stored somewhere in the back of our minds and we have to be patient about waiting for the information to surface. The more quiet and patient we can be about retrieving that information, the more quickly and readily we are able to recognize it and use the information in our work with patients.

In the context of quilts, design ideas often come from a shape or picture I saw out of the corner of my eye. I may not even notice it at the time, but when I next look at the quilt, the visual picture in the context of where I saw it comes into my mind's eye. Interestingly, these mental pictures may be of something I've seen that day or they may be of scene from many years ago.

**Figure 2. Letting Go**



I work as a pediatric physical therapist but I have made quilts forever; they flow from within. For many years, I carried with me the energies of patients of mine who had died. Over time it became an increasing burden. I had to purge the energies. To do so I made a quilt and actively infused it with thoughts of each child. One of the fabrics was a black taffeta which reminded me of clothing worn by women in mourning during Victorian times. I incorporated butterflies to represent the transition from this life to the next. When the quilt was completed, I was free.

Sometimes a quilt seems to start itself. I do not know who or what the quilt is for. One of those had a surface of cold silver and blue with icicles and snowflakes. In the middle was a large silver broken heart. The edges of the crack in the heart are tied together with ribbons. Undoing the ribbons and opening the heart reveals a cup of sunshine underneath. The sense I had was that despite seemingly impossible adversity in our lives, there is hope, warmth and promise.

**Figure 3. AIDS quilt**



While making the quilt, AIDS kept popping into my head. I never mentioned those thoughts to anyone. I showed the quilt at a Portland, Maine, art gallery and, after the show, I was asked if I would be willing to donate it to a fundraiser for the local AIDS hospice.

“Scatter My Life” (Figure 4) was well into being made before I realized it was creating itself for a friend of our son. She was a Brown University student struggling to live the college experience despite cystic fibrosis. Our son gave the quilt to Laura when she was going in for lung transplants. She died shortly before graduation and her parents returned the quilt to Elyne. He passed it on to a man he’d befriended who was non-verbal, autistic and severely mentally challenged. Showing Elyne how much he loved the quilt, he held it to his body in an embrace.

My childhood nights were filled with the sounds of the barn owls who nested in the attic above my bedroom. I loved listening to the mother admonishing the babies and to the little ones taking flight. When I need to travel out of body, moving free of the physical body in a parallel world known as the astral plane, I often am accompanied by my spirit guide, a barn owl. I use out of body travel to visit places that I cannot physically reach because of time and distance limitations. The barn owl is there as a companion for these travels.

**Figure 4. Scatter my Life**



**Figure 5. Spirit Guide**

As a professional member of The Monroe Institute (an educational and research organization dedicated to the exploration of human consciousness), I was a participant in an active email group. We decided that we would all meet as our astral selves at the Monroe Institute's deck at midnight Pacific Time (3AM my time) on a given date. I was fearful that I'd sleep through it. However, I awakened promptly at 3, called my Spirit Guide and immediately felt that I hit a corner of something hard and cold. I could see a dog and a male deer. Then I was back in bed and asleep. The next day, emails abounded from the group. Brian Dailey, MD, reported that he had brought the 5+ foot tall quartz crystal onto the deck: that's what I had run into! Suzanne Morris said she couldn't make it but sent her dog. Russ and Jill Russell, from Scotland, brought along their stag. Someone else reported an owl that was unusual because it made a hissing sound rather than hooting. To celebrate my spirit guide, I created a quilt in her honor (Figure 5).



My quilt designs come from my heart and from somewhere beyond my *self*. The quilts are never planned out ahead of time. I simply pick up a piece of fabric, then another and another until the pieces become a whole.

An article in *The Portland (Maine) Phoenix*, January 5 2001, stated, "Mast's quilts also have a touch-inviting quality that contrasts with their ethereal appearance." It is my gift to the world.

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