

Touch is one of the five senses to make us happy on this planet called Earth. (However, scientists have named two more: Movement and Body Position.) The five senses list has grown to become the Seven Senses list.

To touch or not to touch, however, is our question.

“Don’t touch,” screeches the grandmother as she runs toward the two-year-old grandson. “Hot, it’s hot. The stove will burn your fingers.” “Hot,” says the little guy. He doesn’t know what “Hot” feels like nor does he really care. Touching a hot surface is something he is going to do more than once in his lifetime. Grandma, however, does not want it to happen on her watch.

When we touch our surroundings, as human nature taunts us to do daily, we receive information through our now seven senses. We want to touch: to feel the “hot” flames, or more importantly, to sigh at the feel of the texture of the fabric we are going to purchase. Then to smell and to taste the fibers we cut, wash and dry, as we form the fruits of our labor into a quilt. Touching the cool colors, we see that they are perfect for the design. We feel the warmth the fuzzy batting, the softness of the backing. We let our fingers do the walking as we quilt. It is always touching to feel the texture of textiles. We are thrilled to be able to play with our fabric.

That is why we, as quilters, may find quilt shows stifling. We are asked to touch with our eyes. We are asked to use white cotton gloves just at the time we are compelled to “touch” the artwork hanging in front of us. These quilts on display in a show are pleading with us to caress them, to fondle them and to breathe in their essence. How can we not touch them with our bare fingers? Fingers want to fill our personal swirls with fibers. Whether or not our fingers are scarred with memories of touching Hot Stoves they are filled with a hunger to touch.

I reached out to touch a sky-blue flower in the quilt hanging at my eye level. “Don’t touch that quilt,” came a female voice from on high and to my right. I cringed as if I was caught with my hand in the cookie jar just before dinner. “Find a glove and use it,” said the voice now complete with a face. “Read the rules.” Time stopped. Breathing slowed. All eyes nearby saw me cringe.

Hearing her voice made me blush. I knew better. I just forgot. “Oh, sorry,” I murmured.

The Quilt Show was in a different city long ago. I was sorry that I forgot to “see with my eyes, sorry that I had made a bad impression. I hoped that I would not forget again.

Cotton sateen, wool fibers, and the thread quilting stood at attention. There was a need for them to be touched. They were dressed up and were ready to be touched, to be admired.

Sensing their needs, I tip toed to the reception desk, grabbed a white cotton glove and returned to the same quilt. I touched the sky-blue flower and cooed as I felt a slight response.

It was touching.

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