

Heirlooms Honoured

by Cindy Scraba

Sometimes a quilt's story must be told. If you've ever discovered certain quilts can take on a life of their own when you're creating them, then you'll understand my purpose for sharing this compelling story here.

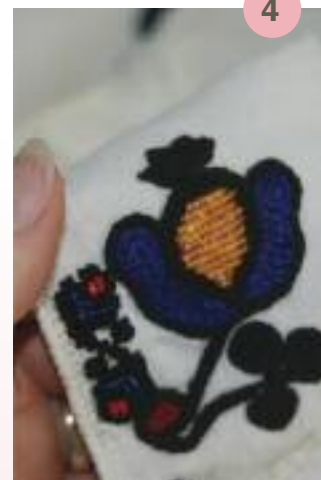
When I was researching my "portrait subject" it came down to logistics and timing. The decision to choose my husband's grandfather was based on having a professional photograph with desirable shadow qualities, which translates through fabric tones—hopefully. Although Grandpa Peter Scraba had passed away the year I met my husband (1973), I had admired him vicariously and decided this was an opportunity to get to know him better...

1 Mary Scraba's Portrait and Needlework Heirlooms

His spouse, Mary Scraba, had previously left behind her own legacy of needlework during the 1960's. Being the only daughter-in-law in their family, I later acquired this small but significant (to me) collection. The photo includes her wedding portrait, embroidered pillow cases, beaded items, and cross stitched pillows within potato sacks, circa 1915 -1965.

2 Original Garment

The featured heirloom of this article and my portrait quilt was this Ukrainian ceremonial embroidered beaded blouse. The idea to cut into this garment adorned with vintage needlework was not taken lightly.



3 Rebirth Process

After months of laborious auditioning and taking dozens of photographs of laid-out border combinations, I painstakingly made the first cuts with the rotary cutter. The challenge was to preserve the satin stitch embroidery and minimize any loss of beadwork. There was to be no second chance here. I cried, cringed and heard cheering simultaneously.

4 Detail of Embroidery & Beading

I believe this vintage style of needlework deserved another opportunity to be admired. After being stored in a trunk for decades it was soiled and unappreciated. Because of this, I gave myself permission to rebirth it.

Over the years Mary's projects evolved along with her capabilities stitching with heavier yarns, instead of fine embroidery threads and beads as used within this earlier item. Sadly, a devastating farm accident left Mary bedridden and eventually her arthritic fingers could no longer perform any needlework.

5 Grandpa Peter Quilt Portrait Completed

Traditionally, I undertake projects with intense color and happy subject matter. This was an exception to that rule. I took on this serious challenge and accepted it as part of my quilting journey to stretch the boundaries of my creativity. It is not possible to impart in this condensed article how emo-

Photos by Cindy Scraba



tional this cathartic experience was. I had many “spiritual visits” and enlightening conversations with both these grandparents during this process. I am grateful for having accepted my destiny to quilt it.

6 Quilt Portrait Detail

As mentioned in my introduction, I chose my subject matter to get to know Grandpa Peter Scraba and began to understand the intense hardships he endured while raising a family in the prairies after immigrating as a young man to Canada in 1913 from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He refused the government’s “free land offer” and insisted on paying his own way.

7 Quilt Label & Certificate of Naturalization
Admittedly, I would not attempt another quilt portrait using only a black and white photograph as the reference. I thought the most difficult challenge would be creating a portrait of someone I hadn’t seen. However, it soon became evident that locating appropriate fabric tones was the crux. And threads in skin tones were extremely difficult to obtain—probably another reason I became a thread dealer after experiences like this one. The good news is wonderful portrait fabric tones and threads are now readily available after many more art quilters have since pioneered this arduous task. [Credit: Marilyn Belford artist/quilt instructor, appliqué class.]

For more photos of this quilt project feel free to visit my website and Cinderella’s Blog.
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