

My Quilting Bio

Karen Cyr

I grew up in Iowa. Quilts were part of everyday life. My parents had a grandmother's flower garden on their bed—made by my Grandmother. She made a traditional basket quilt for my 10th birthday. I painted my bedroom walls to match the green of the borders. My grandmother gave my mother and her sister "state of the art" Kenmore sewing machines around 1960. Neither one of them ever sewed on them; "the sewing gene skipped generations" my Mom always said. I used that machine until I received a performance bonus in the 1990's and purchased a Bernina 1230 from G Street. I made clothes in college at Iowa State University—many of the women in my dorm did the same. I did not make my first quilt until 1976 when my nephew was born. It was a pattern from Better Homes & Gardens, pastel ginghams with appliqued hearts. My first learning opportunity about the need for stabilizers under machine applique. I was living in Chapel Hill, NC by that time, having moved there to attend UNC for graduate work where I met my husband, Bruce Cyr. I later switched careers, graduating from Duke Law School in 1977. We moved to Washington, D.C. for employment after graduation. I joined the Nuclear Regulatory Commission where I spent my entire career as an attorney. I worked in various positions, serving for the last 15 years of my career as the General Counsel for the agency.

Quilting and other crafts were always my pastime and antidote to work. Soon after moving to Washington I took a hand quilting class from Esther DeLashmutt, another Iowan, to learn the fundamentals of quilting. I also took machine quilting classes from Lois Smith. Both based their teaching on a sampler quilt, neither of which I ever finished. I made many baby quilts, retirement quilts and holiday gifts for family and colleagues at the office over the years. Most of what I made I gave away. I enjoyed keeping connected to quilting over the years through such activities as the Continental Quilting Congress' organized by Hazel Carter, Jinny Beyer's Hilton Head Island seminars, classes with Elly Sienkiewicz for Baltimore Album blocks (which I am still working on), classes at G Street and Community Quilts. I was happy to find and join Friendship Star quilting guild because it was the only evening guild at the time. I was part of the group that established PM Patchwork in the early 80's for an evening quilting guild. We had our first (and I believe only) quilt show as a joint show with NeedleChasers in 1988. I made the pilgrimage to Houston for the International Quilt Show in the 1990s with my empty suitcase in tow because, in pre-internet days and before the growth of quilt shops in the early 2000s, that was THE place to find every kind of fabric imaginable. (Some of my purchases were used much later in the Asian Sampler quilt pictured). The best quilt show I ever saw, however, was one I attended after I retired—*Infinite Variety, the Red and White Quilts of Joanna Rose*.

After retirement, I joined two daytime quilt guilds and have enjoyed taking workshops and classes through those groups. I never made a bed-size quilt until this past year when, in desperation for something to keep occupied, I made an online GE design project. I had started one after I retired because I felt a little guilty not having a quilt on my bed, but then I won the Opportunity Quilt "Dragons Tails" from the NeedleChasers raffle in 2014 and never looked back at that project. At the moment, I'm enjoying working with more improvisational piecing and making small wall quilts that reflect my now more consuming retirement passion—birding.