

My Quilting Bio Nan Shapiro

I am a native Washingtonian, a barnacle, really. I've stayed here all my life except for a stint at Oberlin College in Ohio. After college I returned to Maryland to work on a masters degree at George Washington U. and to teach in the Montgomery County Public Schools. I moved to Green Acres School in 1977 and continued to work there for forty years until my retirement. I taught many grades and subjects and worked in administration for a while, but my last ten years there were as a music teacher – the best job of all. For much of my time at Green Acres I was involved in an ongoing study of monarch butterflies, raising and tagging them and establishing butterfly gardens with the students.

My husband is a mathematician who has taught at Howard University for many years. My two sisters live nearby, as does my mother who will be 99 years old this summer. We are a close-knit tribe, although two of my three sons are in Texas and Nevada. When I retired I was delighted to be included in the docent training program at the National Gallery of Art. Growing up as a music student, I had missed out on art as a study in school, and I have loved learning about the NGA collection and artists and art history. Tours are temporarily at a standstill, but I have continued to work with a small study group and to give some informal virtual tours, anticipating the time when we can return to the gallery.

I've always liked making things, and I started to sew as a child. My mother was a wonderful seamstress who made many of our clothes and Halloween costumes and taught me to use a sewing machine and patterns. My grandmother taught me knitting, crochet and crewel embroidery. I started quilting with my dear friend and colleague, Ginny Spevak. We decided to start a quilt group of teachers who began drawing names and making blocks for each others' projects. I was completely self-taught at the beginning, hand-piecing and hand-quilt-as-you-go quilting, and making it up as I went along. We began a long tradition of community quilt-making for staff who were leaving the school, getting married, having babies, or coping with illness. We also made quilts for auctions and raffles, and we made quilts and quilted banners with the students. I am still involved in these efforts in retirement. I have learned so much from the other people at school who were more experienced quilters.

I love all sorts of quilts, but I do a lot of machine applique and traditional piecing. My quilt designs often include monarch butterflies. I have never worked from patterns much because I love the creative part of playing around with color and design. I am pushing myself to do more abstract composition and to improve my free-motion quilting. I usually work on wall-hangings or crib-sized quilts, but during the covid shut-down I have made my largest project ever – a queen-sized quilt for my bed.

NeedleChasers has provided a new group of friends and a wonderful source of inspiration. I love seeing everyone's work at Show-and-Tell sessions, and I have learned so much from our presenters and workshop leaders.