

Meet JOAN COSTELLO | *An interview with Joan in her sun-drenched quilting studio—an airy loft overlooking the glittering waters of Laguna Del Rey in Seaside—about stitching and much more. Only a fraction of our far-ranging conversation fits here, so please take a moment to greet and meet Joan at the next guild meeting.*



Q. When did you make your first quilt? What was its style, and your inspiration?

A. I made a quilt for a friend's baby...it must have been 1975. But my first quilt in this life was 2006. It was one of my son's landscape photos: a big sun, and the mountains of Big Sur. I made it with raw edge fusing, and I free-motion quilted it myself somehow. It was pretty rough, and quite an enterprise for a first quilt. But it was grief work. It was a year and a half after our son died in an accident, his first week of college. My sister and a friend first started me knitting, then quilting. They set me up with a cutter and a ruler and said, 'why don't you quilt?' Almost all of my quilts have been from my son's photos.

Q. What about other creative outlets?

A. I love to cook. I'm a plant-based diet person now, so I've learned some new techniques and that's fun. Most of my other outlets are sports things: stand-up paddling ('we started paddling a couple of years before my husband died, when he couldn't surf anymore), cross-country skiing, bike riding, snow-boarding ('There was a young

guy about three years ago in the lift line behind my husband and me, and he said, "I don't mean any offense by this, but you guys are the greatest old couple on snowboards I've ever seen." I took no offense!'). I also practice tai chi.

Q. Let's talk process. Rank from most to least favorite: planning, piecing, quilting, binding.

A. Quilting is my most favorite: free motion and thread painting. Piecing: meh. Planning is last. Binding has to be third favorite, then. For me, planning is like, 'oh, do I have to?' I tend to jump right in. This one (the work on her machine: an emerging image of an Eagle Dancer) is thread painting with barely a drawing: I just sketched it and jumped in, perhaps foolishly. I have no idea how I'll do the background, no idea how it will turn out. That's how I quilt: I just jump right in.

Q. What's your dream destination?

A. I'm going back to Greece next year: I lived there for a long time. I was a sailor after college. We sailed everywhere: we ran a charter boat in the Seychelles, and in Israel, and then in Greece and Turkey. That was for about three years, in the Seychelles. I cooked for them, we taught [customers] to windsurf. It was beautiful. It sounds so romantic, and in a way it was. But it was a lot of work! Then we managed a private island in Greece to turn it into a resort. It's called Argironisos, or Silver Island. It was a tiny little island, a mile long. We had 30 head of sheep, three thousand olive trees. I lived on the island for four years: no electricity, no people....The granddaughters of the woman I worked for have made it into a yoga retreat. I want to go back to the island, do the yoga thing. And I was thinking...I might make them a quilt before I go.

Q. The most fun I ever had quilting was _____

A. Probably...the most fun was at Asilomar. It was five friends from the mountains, and my sister came out to join us. We all did the same class—independent study—with a wonderful teacher. We laughed the whole time, and drank every evening. It was the year my husband was very sick. I wasn't going to go but his sons, my stepsons, came to stay with him, and he insisted I go. To say that the week was fun feels almost wrong, but it was my first deep breath in a long time. And the boys were so good for him. It ended up being great for everyone.

Just the Facts, Ma'am

Q. When did you join MPQG?

A. Just last year...a year and a couple of months. I was in a guild in the foothills ('Kirkwood, on Highway 88: we bought a cabin up there, and I still get up there sometimes') and also the Pajaro Valley guild when we lived out in the Pajaro Dunes.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. Monterey, right up the hill on Via Cimarron.

Q. Favorite spot on the peninsula?

A. It has to be Frog Pond, just down the street. My husband built much of that park—he was a park ranger here—and there's a memorial to our son there.

Q. What's your day job?

A. I teach seventh grade, math and history. I taught eighth grade for years. My husband had cancer so I retired early, to live. I was glad I wasn't working when he was sick. He passed away two years ago. Some friends called and asked if I would teach for a friend who also had cancer. She passed away, but I'm staying on for another few years. I love it!



<i>This or That?</i>	
<i>Books or movies?</i>	Books. Especially audiobooks these days: I listen when I sew.
<i>Beatles or Rolling Stones?</i>	Beatles.
<i>Paul or John?</i>	Ohhhh....it's gotta be John.
<i>Free motion or walking foot?</i>	Free motion all the way.
<i>Lone sewist or group sewist?</i>	Both. I love group sewing, but don't have a lot of opportunity at present. I have an art quilt group up in the mountains, and I still meet with them when I can. [M]ost friendship groups meet in the day, and at night I'm too tired.
<i>Dogs or cats?</i>	Dogs, of course. Bodie is such a good-natured guy. He's half Australian shepherd and half garbage disposal. He really enjoys life, and he gets me out.



Q. Why do you keep quilting?

A. I have a bunch of reasons. One, there's always another baby, and always more weddings, and at this point it's expected. So, that's a trivial kind of answer. Another is, it makes me feel like I'm doing something. When I retired I discovered that I could spend the whole day very busy, and not a thing to show for it. With quilting, you have a product. And the third reason is, it's still grief work for me. I don't cry, usually, when I quilt. Sewing...is very much like meditation. Unless it's frustrating!

But it's also honoring both of them: my son, my husband. My son's photos, and now the Eagle Dancer. Eagle Dancers are the joiners of heaven, the spirit world, and earth. My husband used that image to stay in touch with our boy.