

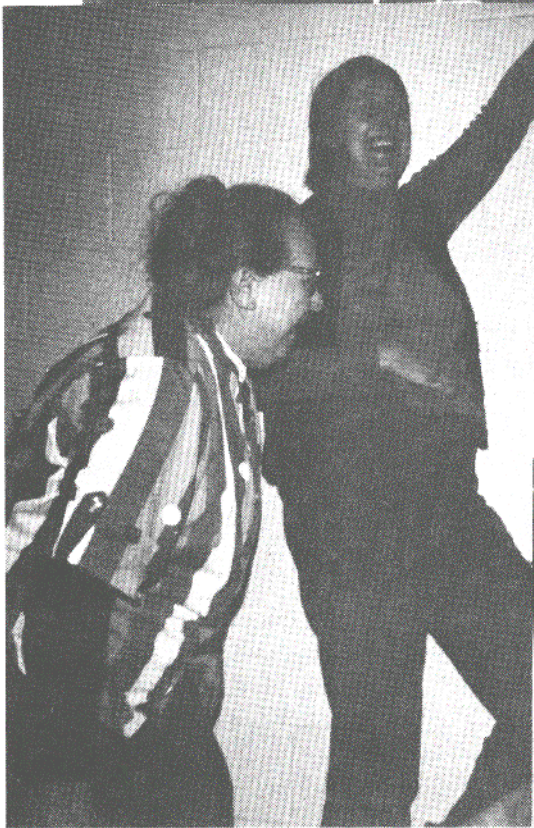
QUILTERS' JOURNAL

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NO. 22



LUCILLE HATTIE HILTY



Photos courtesy Lucille Hilty

1) with fellow judge Jean Ray Laury at the FESTIVAL OF QUILTS '83. 2) As she appeared in QUILTS IN WOMEN'S LIVES. 3) Diane Hersch holds a quilt while Miss Hilty gets a closer look. 4) With Deborah Kakalia at PATCH IN TIME #4 sewing sleeves on quilts. 5) Dishing up her famous souffle.



LUCILLE HATTIE HILTY

by Joyce Gross

Lucille Hilty, better known to many of us as "Lucy", has had a lasting influence on the quilting scene. From the time polyester batts and little quilting were the fashion of the day, Lucy Hilty has continued to preach her own gospel of quilting. She fervently believes that the beauty of a quilt is in direct proportion to the amount of fine quilting on it. She preaches that philosophy to all who will listen. Gradually she and her fellow preachers of the fine quilting doctrine are being heard and fine quilting and lots of it are again becoming fashionable.

Hazel Carter recently appointed Miss Hilty to the Selection Committee of the Quilter's Hall of Fame.

Miss Hilty is well known for her part as the first quiltmaker to be introduced in the film, "Quilts in Women's Lives" by Pat Ferrero.

This article is from an interview between the author and Miss Hilty which was taped at Point Bonita in the Golden Gate National Seashore where she was taking a quilt workshop on February 9, 1983

"Lucy Hilty is the warmest, most giving person in the whole world."

Janet Shore

Lucille Hattie Hilty was born Oct 8, 1917 in Pandora, Ohio in a little house across the street from the Mennonite church which her parents attended.

Pandora, a Swiss Mennonite farming community, is composed of many intermeshed relationships which produced a multitude of first, second, third and even some double second cousins. Christian Hilty, Lucy's father, was somewhere in the middle of a family of ten children and her mother, Hattie Geiger, was the oldest of eight children. Great-grandfathers on both sides of the family had come from Switzerland and a swiss dialect was spoken at home. It wasn't until the family moved from Pandora to Dover in 1922 that English became Lucy's first language.

The Hilty family lived in a number of small towns (Pandora, Dover, Blufton) as Mr Hilty tried in numerous ways to make a living for the family. He was a school teacher, carpenter and a superintendent of grounds for a Mennonite College. At the college, the family lived on the grounds until the children left home.

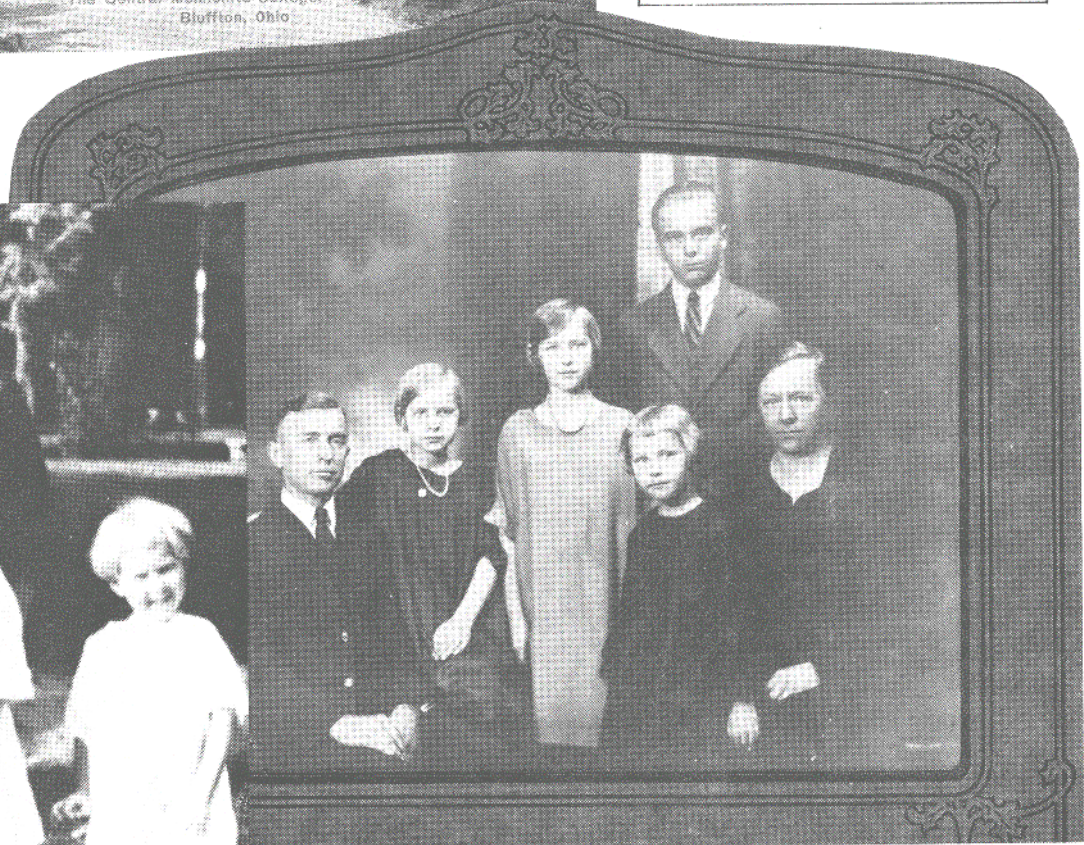
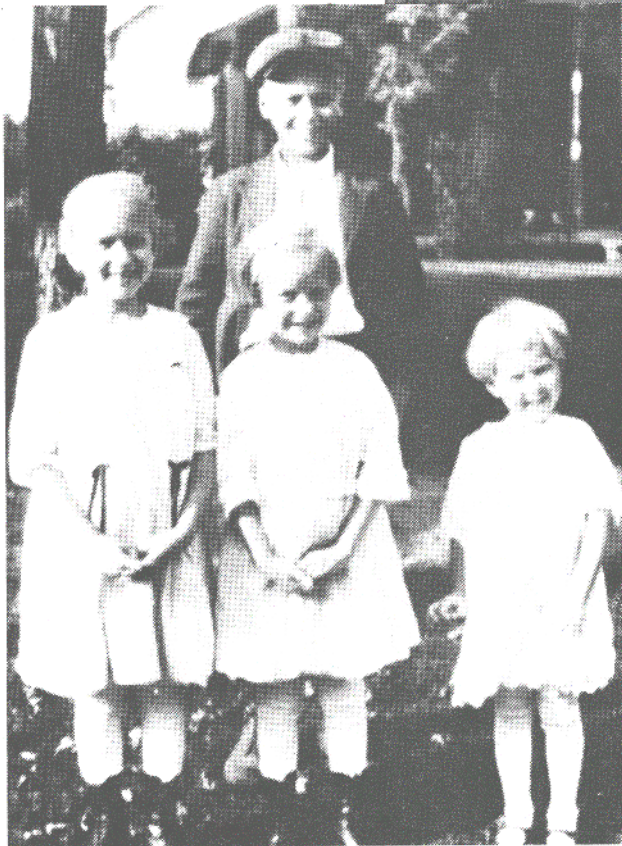
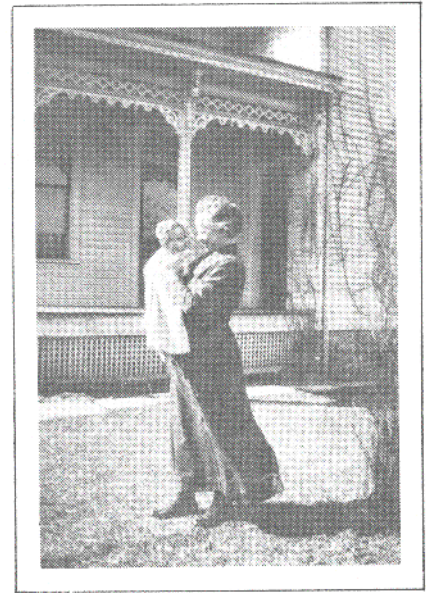
GROWING UP

Miss Hilty recalls, "I'm the youngest of four children. I'm the 'baby'. It was good but it was also a great embarrassment to always be called 'the baby'. I guess I resented some of it because I felt I was growing up and didn't want to be treated like a 'baby' anymore. In a way, being the youngest keeps one from growing up independent. There was always someone around to help me and to tell me what to do, so I really didn't have any decision making to do until I left home. I was very dependent upon my sister."

Being a Mennonite child entails a lot of game playing, but also a lot of expectations for being part of the family and helping with the chores. Large families were common in farming communities because they were needed to help out on the farms.

Mennonites are good to their children. In terms of rearing, they give them responsibilities, they are sensitive to them; they believe in education, teaching children skills and how to get along with each other. There are many joyful and satisfying things about being a Mennonite child.

There was no problem with doing well in school. I was a good student and loved to read. In fact I still do.



Upper left) Central Mennonite College, Bluffton, Ohio. Upper right) Hattie Geiger Hilty with daughter Lucille. Lower left) The four Hilty children: Harold, Agnes, Alma & "Baby" Lucille. Lower right) Family portrait ca 1920

LEARNING TO SEW

All the time I was growing up, my mother sewed a lot. She had all the home arts down pat... sewing, cooking, gardening and what not. I learned to sew because I needed clothes and I liked making clothes. My sisters and I learned to sew mostly with our mother. After that we started reading the patterns, studying them and figuring out how to do it. I learned to sew in the depression years by going upstairs in the attic and going through all the boxes of old clothes (like old skirts) ripping them apart and remaking them. I hardly ever had anything that was made commercially.

LUCY & MUSIC

When I was in high school and college I wanted to be a musician... a singer. I loved opera and classical music. I sang in glee clubs, small ensembles, and had the whole run of vocal music. I sang solos in competitions and won prizes.

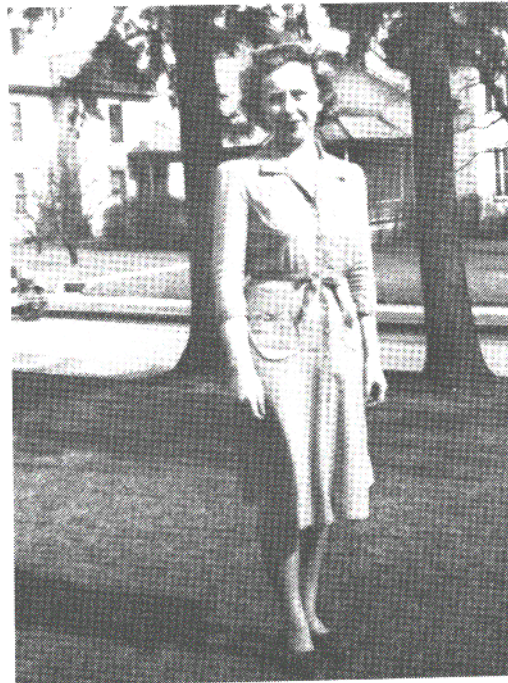
I grew up in the depression and went to college on a shoestring. I majored in music, living at home because the college was only a few short blocks away. At one point my sister and I who were the same size, shared a wardrobe. After two years I was really tired of not having any money in my pockets and I was really tired of not being able to study voice the way I wanted. I decided to take a job in a drug store.

I began to study with a good voice teacher and enjoyed the lessons very much. However, now I had the opportunity to concentrate on music, I realized I was too much of a jack-of-all-trades to concentrate that much on one thing. It would mean excluding many things that I really wasn't interested in giving up.

THE WANDERLUST

After three years in the drug store I got the wanderlust. It was just before WWII and we were getting reports from all over the world. I realized that there was a big, wide world out there and I wanted to see it all.

I remember one day I was looking at an atlas in the drug store and I found I could open to any page and find places where I would like to go. I thought to myself, "I had better find something that will let me travel. I need a job that I could take anywhere in the world." Teaching seemed to fit the description so I decided to go back to school and get into education. I never wanted to just visit a foreign country. I wanted to go and work there so I could really take in the whole country.



TEACHING

In 1940 I went to Bowling Green State Univ for about a year. By that time they were drafting men into the army, which caused a shortage of teachers. When they dropped the requirement that teachers needed a degree to teach, I went into teaching and taught a first grade my very first year. The second year (the year the War started) I taught in Vanluis. I remember making out ration books in the basement of that school building. I really didn't like teaching in that school very much and had nightmares about the teaching. I wished I were back at the drug store where I didn't have as much responsibility.

I stuck it out and the next year I taught in Sylvania, right outside of Toledo, Ohio. I liked it a little bit better. After that jobs were wide open in the teaching field so I went to Van Wert near Fort Wayne and I liked it even better.

THE RED CROSS

In March I quit teaching to join the Red Cross to 'see the world'. First I was sent to Washington DC for three weeks of training as a hospital aide (not in a nursing capacity but as a Red Cross worker that provided recreation and social services to the men in the service). I ended up in Cleveland.

Being in a military environment was a different experience for me. Mennonites are pacifists and I had a lot of conflict with that. The only way I could have any



peace of mind was to figure that though I was working with the military people I wasn't doing a job in the army. In retrospect, I guess I had conflict about being in the Red Cross, which seemed such a humanitarian thing on the outside and on the inside was full of politics.

I really liked the contact with the men, especially those back from Europe. I was in hospital recreation, setting up and showing movies, playing card games and performing little services for the men. After about a year and a half in Cleveland I went to the hospital in Fort Knox and was there when the war ended.

WORLD WAR II

I was in the generation where all of the able bodied young men were away. Those at home were those who had been hurt and couldn't go back into the service or those who had been rejected. All of the businesses were run basically by either women or older/younger men. Women got out of the regular women's role to try something else. For a lot of women it was a liberating thing. It was fairly easy to be classified a conscientious objector if one came from a historically pacifist church such as the Mennonites, but even the Mennonite men who qualified for a c.o. status went into what they called "alternate service", e.g., hospital work.

During WWII, everyone was involved in an all-out effort. It was a time of great patriotism. At home people were saving drippings, cans & newspapers, the magazines were full of "how to recycle" and recipes with no sugar. For the Mennonites, the recycling and using things was nothing new. It was our way of life. Mennonites had ration books, coupons and shortages just like everyone else. Now it is a hard to remember how the war permeated everything we did. When I joined the Red Cross, I got extra coupons to buy shoes to wear with my uniform. What a wonderful thing those extra coupons were! I bought I Miller shoes because I wanted them to last.

cont on pg 12

OPEN LETTER TO QUILTERS' JOURNAL READERS

Joyce Whittier is President of the QUILTERS GUILD OF GREATER KANSAS CITY and a quilt teacher.

"Preserving our quilt heritage is very important to me and I am disturbed when I hear of antique quilts being destroyed or mutilated. For some time I have been thinking of ways to preserve the quilts and give access to them by the quilt loving public.

My suggestions follow and I would appreciate hearing from anyone with suggestions or criticisms (either positive or negative)

The Nature Conservancy was formed by environmentalists when government agencies found themselves without adequate funds to purchase valuable land. A Board of Directors determines whether the land is desirable and upon their recommendation, the Conservancy purchases and deeds it over to an appropriate agency. Funds for the purchases

come from the tax-deductible annual dues of the organization members.

I believe a Quilt Conservancy could function in much the same way. When a valuable quilt (from a historical or design standpoint) becomes available for purchase the Quilt Conservancy could purchase it and present it to an appropriate collection which would then be responsible for its conservation and/or restoration.

This would accomplish two things: (1) it would allow us to prevent the destruction of quilts by people like Ralph Lauren, who have the money to purchase the quilts but not the interest in preserving them. (2) It would make the quilts available to large numbers of people for study and/or enjoyment.

Comments may be sent to Mrs Whittier c/o QUILTERS' JOURNAL, Box 270, Mill Valley, CA 94942.

LUCY HILTY - cont from pg 5

THE WAR IS OVER

We had several false alarms, but when the end actually came it was a heart stopping thing. I remember just crying with relief. I had a boy friend who was in the army and I was a lot closer to it than some people. It is hard to explain the enormous kind of relief that comes when one feels the danger is over for someone you care about. I remember the casualty lists that appeared in the newspaper day in and day out. We would stand there every day to see if there was someone we knew on the list. I lost some relatives and a number of friends. That was common for everyone in those days.

I was in Fort Knox when the atom bomb was dropped. I remember the feeling of disbelief and horror! It was such a funny mixture of feelings... There was all of this joy that the war was over and that people who were in Europe weren't going to have to go to the Pacific Theatre to fight the Japanese, and at the same time there was the horror of the Atom Bomb!

The war was over in August of 1945. After Christmas I decided that the need to be in the Red Cross was also over and I went home to look for a job. I found one almost immediately and returned to the base to give two weeks notice.

I was used to living on an army base with lots of freedom so when I started back to teaching, I was absolutely miserable with the confinement of a classroom.

I took my class, which was a first and second grade combined, over in the middle of the year. They hadn't been well trained and I had a terrible time with them. I was not sure I even wanted to stay in teaching. At the end of the year I just quit my job and told the superintendent that I would like a job if I could have a regular first grade or kindergarten. Understand I had never even been in a kindergarten, but I just thought I would like it. It happened that this was one of the few schools in Ohio which had a kindergarten. Unfortunately, there was no opening.

A friend from the Red Cross who had returned to her job as store manager for a Montgomery Ward in Schenectady, NY offered me a job as her assistant. I took it but it didn't take long to realize that I really didn't want to do that kind of work for a company like Montgomery Ward.

MISS HILTY GETS A KINDERGARTEN CLASS

About that time my former superintendent wrote to tell me they had an opening for a kindergarten teacher and would I be inter-

ested. I jumped at it and plunged into something I didn't know anything about.

The war babies were coming to kindergarten so I had a class of about 40 with one assistant. I soon realized I had found my place with the 5 year olds. I liked the nurturing things that went with young children . I wanted and needed to stay with that age group.

CALIFORNIA

Towards the end of that year, I received an offer of a third grade job in Santa Cruz Calif. The superintendent had heard about me through a Red Cross friend. It was still a teachers' market so I said rather snippily, "If you have a kindergarten I would be happy to come to Santa Cruz ." A few weeks later he offered me a kindergarten position and I accepted it.

I loved Santa Cruz! It was the most beautiful town I had ever seen. There were mountains, the ocean, beautiful flowers and the mild climate. I fell in love with the native Californians and their real Western hospitality. If one comes from some other part of the country, it is difficult to understand the openness and experimental quality about the California people. I never wanted to live anywhere else after I had been out here awhile.

I went back to Ohio to go to school the next two summers and finally got my BS in 1949. My allergies had given me laryngitis all the time I was in Santa Cruz so the next school year I took a position in Bakersfield . As soon as I realized that I was now qualified to teach overseas, I filled out the applications forms with the armed services dependents schools overseas and was accepted.

JAPAN

It had been my goal all along to live in a foreign country so when I was sent to Japan in 1950 I was happy.

We were sent to Gamagori, a resort hotel along the sea not far from Nagoya. We spent about a week there before we were sent to our schools. I woke up the first morning to strange smells and strange voices in a strange language. I was so excited! I thought, "Well, I finally made it!" We even experienced a typhoon while we were there.

I taught first grade which was all right because it was more important for me to go overseas than to teach my kindergarten. I really had a good time. I fell madly in love, just utterly and completely madly in love. Then I went home for the summer.



Miss Hilty and her kindergarten class, Bakersfield, 1949-50

I had ordered a car to take back to Japan through a Bakersfield salesman, to be picked up in South Bend, Ind and ended up with Ohio license plates.

DRIVING ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Two weeks before I was to drive across the country, I got my driver's license. I had planned to take someone with me but no one had the time, the money or the inclination to drive across the country with me.

I got to Seattle in the middle of rush hour and our hotel was near the PR station in the heart of the business district. Of course there was no parking nearby. I didn't know what to do. I started to pull in at the hotel but a policeman came towards me. I hurriedly pulled away and drove out of town where I parked until it was 6 pm and I could go back. I was too tired to cope with the car so I left it in front of the hotel, told them at the desk to park it in the garage, and didn't take it out again until it was time to drive to the port.

JAPAN - THE SECOND YEAR

When I got to Japan everyone was driving on the left hand side of the road but fortunately my habits were not well established for the right side so it all worked out very well.

American base life overseas can be very insulated ... like the British when they were in India. There was some contact with the Japanese people but one didn't really have much time for fraternization. Teachers were on an officer's status on the base so we had use of the officers' club.

Actually by the time one worked all day there wasn't much time left. It seems like a missed opportunity now. There were Japanese that we became friendly with, but in terms of really knowing Japanese families ...no.

I did a lot of sightseeing. On weekends I did the local points of interest and on longer vacations I'd go further. It was interesting to see the Japanese teachers with their whole class out on a holiday. Even overnight trips. I'm not sure how they did it except that the Japanese people didn't allow troublemakers in their schools. They don't bother with them. The children were under great pressure to conform so they don't have the discipline problems American classes would have.

When I left Japan I had a big collection of 35 mm slides I had taken - all kinds of wonderful photos about how people lived, the costumes and clothing they wore, etc.

BACK TO THE STATES

When I knew I was coming back to the states, I wrote to my former landlady and asked her if she knew of any apartments for rent in her neighborhood. She replied that I could have my old apartment if I wanted it.

I was supposed to have my old teaching assignment but during the summer Tehachapi and Bakersfield had a big earthquake and all of the old schools were wrecked so everyone was on double sessions. It was just awful! We had three kindergarten classes in one big classroom which amounted to having 100 five year olds in one big room.

cont on pg 18

HILTY - cont from pg 13

At the end of the year I said to myself, "I hope never to come back. I hope I never see this place again." never

GREAT BRITAIN

That fall I went back to teaching American children for the air force. This time I went to Great Britain. It was true they had won the war, but it seemed to me that there was a spirit of depression over the country which was unlike the sense of rebuilding that was prevalent in Japan. It was a gloomy year for me.

I suppose part of it was the climate. One is far enough north so that if you are there in the winter one can experience all the darkness and dampness of a British winter.

We didn't make friends with the British but I loved the chance to go out on the weekends and absorbing the culture on a day-to-day basis instead of going on a trip and just traveling through the country.

For instance, it was important to me to see the things that were available in the stores because they represented a different way of living.

A WINTER AT HOME

While I was in England I decided it was time to do some work on a master's degree so I applied for admission to the teacher's college at Columbia Univ and was admitted. I found a job teaching for the year in a kindergarten in Long Island and I really loved that year. I loved teachers' college. It was one of those free and liberating kinds of education and I just really went with it. I thought it was the greatest thing!

My father had died by this time and my mother was living alone. I went home for Christmas and on my way back to New York my car went off the road. I ended up in the hospital in Ohio with a leg that was badly broken and a shattered ankle joint. After spending a month in the hospital I went home to spend the rest of the year recuperating. I thought every few weeks that I would be going back to school but I didn't go back to New York until summer.

It was while I spent the winter with my mother that I suggested we put a quilt in the frame and work on it together. It was nice because though I had learned to quilt at home, I hadn't done very much quilting there for a very long time. It brought in relatives and my mother's friends and we did a lot of quilting.

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

Towards the end of my last year at Columbia, the Berkeley School District interviewed for teachers. I made a contact so when I got my Degree, I headed for California. They placed me in a kindergarten and I stayed there until I retired in 1978.

QUILTS IN WOMEN'S LIVES

"Quilts in Women's Lives" was what I call a "happening" Soon after Mary Strickler's Quilt Shop opened in San Rafael, I went over with a friend. We were hunting for a quilt to take to Great Britain on a summer class tour when we read in the paper about the shop. Of course as soon as we got there, we found we all shared a great many things so Mary Strickler's became one of our favorite places. I didn't know Pat Ferrero but at one point Julie Silber (one of the owners) told me Ms Ferrero was making a film and there was a possibility she would want to use me in it.

Ms Ferrero did call me and told me she had a lot of film footage about the Mennonites in Reedly in particular, but she didn't have much on the individual quilters. She asked me if she could come in and interview me. I agreed so she came over and we talked for awhile as she taped the conversation. Then she came back and said she would like to use me in the film.

She got some more background for the film and then one day she came with her crew -her camera man, her sound man, and a couple of other people and they spent the day filming.

Ms Ferrero was serving as director of the film. She sat there with a clip board full of notes and questions and asked me to talk about several of the topics. I thought it would be an interesting experience even if nothing came of it. However, it changed my life.

I feel lucky to have been one of those quilters because things have happened to me since that film I never expected to happen to me. I can go all over the country now and people say to me, "Oh you're Lucy Hilty?" or "Don't I know you?" and they have an instant frame of reference. It may be accurate but undoubtedly some of it isn't.

It is a little frightening and disturbing to think you'll go on for years as you were at that particular point in your life. I mean, a person changes but when you film someone, the film part stays the same so no matter what I do from now on, I am that quilter in the show and I sort of stop there. I don't believe life is like that. In a sense it is unreal.

I think of it as being Pat Ferrero's film because she had something she wanted to say about quilts and quiltmakers. When Linda Reuther, Julie Silber and she curated the quilt show at the San Francisco Institute of Art in 1976 she was surprised at the emotional response she received from the women during the "sharing periods". She wanted to do a film about how deeply women cared about their quilts and their connection with the people who were dear to them. And that the quilts meant something to the women in terms of self expression. I think there was a kind of freedom for women to express themselves through their quilts in times when they didn't feel that freedom in other aspects of their lives.

In a sense, you lose some of your privacy although it hasn't been like the movie stars. I can not go to quilting meetings anymore without somebody knowing me. That's ok and I don't really object to it but if I wanted to slip in somewhere and be unobtrusive, it would be a lot harder to do.

I told Pat Ferrero, "It has been a lovely experience and I'm really indebted to you. I don't know whether you expected the response to the film it has received but it has changed my life. When most people retire from a job they sort of become a non-person in the sense of assuming responsibilities and being noticed. That hasn't happened to me at all because of that film"

RETIREMENT

When I retired in 1978, I thought "oh what will I do?" because all my friends were still teaching. The East Bay Heritage Quilters formed a few months later and when I joined, all at once I felt I had a whole circle of friends. Quilting groups or rather the quilters within the quilting groups are very supportive of one another. I treasure all of the organizations that I belong to that are related to quilting.

The world of quilting gave me something else. It gave me the opportunity to take my skills in teaching and start to use them in the quilting world. I did a little quilt teaching back in the early '70s but it wasn't until I retired that I really took it up. There were a lot of very good teachers teaching applique and accurate patchwork, while quilting was an area that was neglected. I guess it has become my specialty. Now I teach in quilt shops, for guilds and at symposia. All that has opened up new vistas for me.

A WONDERFUL TIME TO BE IN QUILTING

It is easy for quiltmakers today to be exposed to fine quilts and quiltmakers from all over the country through exhibits and shows, publications, TV programs, symposia, classes and workshops. The ferment of quilting ideas is almost overwhelming. I think it is a wonderful time to be in quilting!



GILBERT STUART BIRTHPLACE

A postcard from the birthplace of Gilbert Stuart in Saunterstown, R I, shows a bed and quilt. "The quilt was made by Rozella Vose and given to GSB about 50 yrs ago. It was quite old then" according to Isabelle Pettigrew, curator of the Nat'l Monument.

Ms Pettigrew asks for help in identifying the patterns and/or age of the quilt.