

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? Founding Members - Sherry Fink



Quilting was on my “bucket list” before there were bucket lists, but I have been sewing since I could manipulate the treadle on my grandmother’s sewing machine. When I moved to Casper in 1978, I discovered that the local newcomers organization had a special interest group for quilters. I started quilting with that group in January 1979, thus begins my quilting story.

The quilters I met there became my community of friends that has been expanding for more than 30 years. Susan Willoughby was the leader of the group, and she decided there was a need for a “quilt shop” in Casper in 1981. “Patchcraft Quilts” was the first quilt shop in Wyoming, and soon Susan saw a need for quilting classes, and I seemed to be the one elected to teach. I soon became her part-time shop manager and full time employee. The first quilting class that I took was from Mary Ellen Hopkins because of my affiliation with the shop. If you took one of my early classes, you were under the influence of Mary Ellen and her unorthodox methods because she took us quickly from the world of hand quilting to the wonderful, exciting, fast world of the rotary cutting, strip piecing and machine quilting.

Quilters from around Wyoming soon started making Patchcraft Quilts one of their have-to shopping stops in Casper. Soon Georgia Mueller opened a shop in Sheridan and Cynthia Sanders did likewise in Gillette. I was invited to teach classes at those shops and also for various quilting groups around the state. I like to think of myself as one of the first traveling quilt teachers in Wyoming.

When Patchcraft Quilts closed, Jean Welch from Jean’s Fabrics in Casper invited me to be a teacher at her shop so we began to convert lingerie makers to quilters. It wasn’t long before quilters in Casper were meeting to learn and to share their love of quilting through the Scrap Baggers Quilt Club. I served as their fearless leader for 15 years until I moved to Basin in 1993 where Cindy Samples and I thought we’d see if there was an interest in quilting in Basin, Greybull and surrounding area. We put a notice in the local papers with a time and place for interested people to meet. We were overwhelmed by the response, and Loose Threads Quilt Club was organized and classes scheduled. Julie Owens was soon part of the group (I had met Julie several years before in Casper) and she decided to open her shop, Big Horn Quilts. The shop soon became the center of quilting activity in the Big Horn Basin and a destination shop for quilters from all over the world. I worked and taught for Julie for 12 years. What an exciting time that was for quilting and quilters in Wyoming.

Meanwhile the quilters in Wyoming were finding each other, quilting groups were being formed and shops being opened. There were also several dedicated quilters in Rock Springs who had a dream that there would be a State Quilting Organization. Bonny Stonemark, Nancy Vase, Jeanne Allen

and Twila Christensen realized the first step was communication and hoped a newsletter would be the way. These four ladies are really the “founding mothers” of WSQG. I was included in one of their early discussions and asked for my support. The first issue of the Wyoming Quilting Newsletter was published October 1, 1992. It was the first step in the journey toward the Wyoming State Quilt Guild and what it has become today.

I am included as one of the founding members of WSQG but was not able to attend most of the organizational meetings because of my teaching schedule but was kept informed of all the decisions and discussions and supported the concept all the way. I served on the Board for nine years as Northwest Regional Director, President Elect, President, Past President and Director at Large. Wilda Vance, Eva Knight and I were very involved in organizing the very first Quilt Wyoming in Casper in 1998. I served as the Chairman, Treasurer, Registrar, and other miscellaneous positions for Quilt Wyoming 2001 in Powell with lots of help from the Paintbrush Piecers Quilt Guild and the Loose Threads Quilt Club. I also served as Registrar for QW 2006 and 2011 in Powell. Actually I had the title but my husband, Ken, did all the computer work and crunched all the numbers for me, and we are already involved in QW 2016.

Along with my participation in WSQG, I have been active in the Black Hills Quilting Retreat for 23 years and have served on their Board of Directors for 20 years.

I couldn’t have done what I have in the quilting community in Wyoming without the help and support of my husband, Ken. I have tried to retire from teaching so I could do more of the quilts that I have wanted to make and to do some designing, but retirement has tended to be as busy as life before retirement. I still do some quilting and will be for a long, long time because Ken told me one time I could buy all the fabric I wanted, but I couldn’t die until I used it all. I have a lot of fabric—need I say more!

WSQG and quilting in Wyoming will always be here. Things may seem to slow down, but history has shown that what has gone around will come around again over and over and over. I ask that all of you keep quilting and encourage your “kids” and grandkids to give it a try because we need young quilters to keep the tradition alive. One of the most memorable comments I ever heard was at a recent quilt show when a first time quilter was showing off her quilt complete with blue ribbon. The question asked by a young friend was: “How did you do that?” The answer was: “With a sewing machine, and I can sew faster than my Grandma!” We’re expecting a quilt from her for our next show!

*Sherry Fink*

*Sherry and her husband have been steady supporters of WSQG and quilting in Wyoming. We appreciate them.*

*I am hoping to report on Eva Knight for the April–May issue. She just returned from a Quilters’ Tour of Japan. **VO***