

The story behind Barbara Blanchard's winning quilt, "Flowers for Diane".....

Not long after I began to quilt, we were visiting my sister-in-law in Atlanta (she was married to Doc's late brother). Her name is Diane. She told me that her mother had started a quilt for her in the 1930's, made out of scraps of fabric left over from dresses, etc. Her mother, Esther Newell Radebaugh, stopped work on the quilt during the war and never went back to it. She died in 1971 and Diane had saved the parts that her mother had finished in an old box ever since. Diane asked me if I could do something with what her mother had started, and out of an abundance of enthusiasm and a shortage of common sense, I volunteered.

The box contained about 80 "flowers" for a grandmother's flower garden quilt, along with scraps of fabric, a few cut-out hexagons, and a metal template for cutting more hexagons. No directions, but what could be more obvious? A few surviving notes identified the fabric common to each flower as a P&B fabric. I subsequently found that P&B still makes this fabric, although I was fortunate not to need any more.

I made a number of additional flowers from the scraps in the box, then went to assemble them into a quilt that would hopefully be 88" x 110". Along the way I found that Diane's mother had not been anal about the 1/4" allowance, and therefore the existing flowers ranged from unusably small to somewhat generous. I salvaged most of them, sewed them together, made a few more, and eventually had a quilt top that appeared to be about the right size. Except for one problem. I sort of got the feeling that the shape was more of a parallelogram than a rectangle, although I couldn't tell for sure without a large flat surface. I finally took the top over to the Patch and spread it out on a couple of tables in the back. Lo and behold, it was indeed a parallelogram. It seems that what was required was one additional row of hexagons around each flower. A set of directions would have suggested this, but I had had no idea. I actually have a picture of the top at this point!

I then proceeded to take the whole thing apart, and it went back in the box for several years. I got Diane to identify a green fabric which she would like for the additional hexagons, but other than that, progress ground to a halt.

Diane eventually came for a visit and inquired as to the status of her quilt. She even offered to take the whole thing back if that was what I wanted. I told her that if she was ever going to have her quilt, she had better leave it with me because I couldn't imagine that anyone else would be willing to take on the project. Suitably embarrassed by this situation, I then resumed work on the top, about five or six years ago.

After I got all the blocks assembled, and actually got the top very close to 88" x110", I had to make a decision about quilting it. At this point, I really wanted to get it done, but I also had so much time and effort in it that I didn't want to ruin it with lousy or half-hearted quilting. I made the decision to quilt it as I thought it should be done, although this would take an eternity. In fact, it took about 32 months.

As the end gradually crawled into sight, I gave thought to putting the quilt in a show. I asked a couple of national speakers who do some judging, and they understood my interest in having the quilt seen, even if it had some noticeable problems, such as occasional stains on the flowers (probably from before the fabric was cut into hexagons) and this kind of thing. I checked with Diane and got her permission to enter the quilt in NJ and Lancaster. It was accepted at both, and in each case, Diane's mother is listed by name as one of the quilters. It will be judged in the group category in Lancaster.

I had no idea that it had won a ribbon until I saw it in the show today. My feet have barely touched the ground. I am thrilled!

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