

This morning. I wanted to talk about quilts. And I make quilts and I love quilts. I love thinking about quilts. I love holding quilts. I love things that are made out of old quilts. I love teaching people and showing other people how to quilt. I love watching people figure out sort of the ins and outs of piecing things together and unfolding and rearranging and so I'm really interested in, you know, the history of quilts in a place that I live. And again, if you've listened to my usual show on Sundays, it's called Friendship Village because that is the name of a book written by a woman named Zona Gale and the book was written in 1908 and Zona was born and lived in Portage, Wisconsin, which is a small town that my dad was born in and didn't grow up in but like grew up going there and spending time there. So I'm always thinking about the the idea of small towns, villages, hamlets. How do we view our history, especially in a town that's less organized, if you will, you know? That's unincorporated, that doesn't have a mayor or, you know, more traditional systems maybe of history-keeping archiving, etc. So I'm interested in how my own quilt practice will change and transform and exist as a newcomer to New Mexico and I'm interested in the textile history of this place, both the indigenous history - histories - that are erased in terms of textile construction and and art-making as well as, you know, who came here to make this town what it is today, and how does quilting or a textile, archival practice fit into that? So I wanted to read a little bit from a book that's really special to me that I've had for a long time called The: Quilters, Women and Domestic Art: An Oral History by Patricia Cooper and Norma Bradley Buford and this book is about quilters in West Texas and New Mexico. And so I would like to share some so in the introduction they say: this book is about a group of women who make quilts in Texas and New Mexico. They are our ancestors. We sought them out because we were interested in their art. We bought quilt from them, sold quilt for them and in the process became so impressed with their wisdom and strength as individuals that we wanted to record what we could of their lives. Through them we came to know our grandmothers and mothers and finally to know ourselves through long conversations, visits, shared work, we got a sense of our history we had not before experienced.

The book is meant to be a record of the art and lives of women who speak directly to you. We made tapes, took extensive notes, and photographed the women and their environment in an attempt to establish resonance, depths that neither words nor photos have separately by means of this varied research. We hoped to convey that because the predominant insight for us - that the quilts represent an

all-inclusive portrait of these women, the quilts are an artistic expression of their selves and their whole experience.

They go on to say, let's see, here we go. In addition to thinking about the quilts as a record of family and community history and as a repository of American design and textiles, we began to understand the quilts as art coming directly out of the home, out of family interactions. The quilt was made for a member of the immediate family: for a close friend or a dreamed of mate in this context. The home was Studio, Arts School and Gallery.

We knew from our own experience that the technique of stitchery was passed on by exacting instruction. So also was education and color and design and the art was controlled and handed down by women, usually mother grandmother or out the best elements of teaching were often combined over the construction of a quilt early and often loving instruction tradition discipline planning in completing a task. Moral reinforcement. Quilting was a virtue. The pioneer home must have been a particularly challenging place for inventive design under the pressure of necessity. And scarce materials, as we continue to study the quilts and then we became more and more interested in talking to quilters about the experience of creating quilts. Other questions kept coming to mind: were the women aware that they were professionals? Artists? Did they know that they were stitching together the history of the country, making the Great American tapestry?

It became vital for us to talk with these women. We wanted them to tell us all about it. We wanted to get a close look at their lives.

So for me, you know, reading this and as a quilter myself, I am so interested in the story collection and hearing the stories of quilters and why they quilt and what and the experience of like what lived experience lives in a quilt and I learned to quilt in 2012, 2013, from Eliza Fernand who's an amazing quilter and artist and also a collector of of stories. She had a really amazing project, Quilt Stories, where she traveled around the country in this sort of quilted tent that she made and and collected stories from people who made quilts or had relationships with quilts and similar to what these authors present to us in the beginning of the book is: is this this understand like through hearing about quilts and learning about quilts we get to know ourselves and that's part of what's so powerful to me and my dad - his mom, Marlys, she died when my dad was 22. So I

didn't exist until my dad was 30, so we didn't have a chance to meet each other on the Earthly plane, but after - and I didn't really even know that much about her quilting practice until I learned to quilt myself and my dad and his sister, my Aunt Linda, were - they were like, "oh, well, we have all these quilts that your grandmother made, that our grandmother made, and the our great - as in your great-great-grandmother - made and I was just, what?! And it was just this like magnificent moment to get to feel this really tangible connection to you know, the matriarch of my family on my dad's side who I never got to know but who had left behind these soft, warming intricate, interesting objects for the home, that were made in the home, right? The home as gallery, studio. And so now I get to have them and get to be warmed by them both emotionally and physically, and so that's a part of the excitement or the importance of quilt-making as a practice to me. I don't use patterns and my grandmother and her mother and grandmother did and they're really beautiful and that sort of is more in line with my practice as an improviser in dance-making and in writing. It's just more exciting to me or correct for me to not go with the pattern, but maybe that's in store for me someday - I have worked in sort of like a wonky Log Cabin pattern, which is fun. But for the most part I prefer to just improvise.

Okay, back to our book. So I want to read just a few moments of these different quilters that they interviewed and some of the things they have to say about their own compositional practice as well as their life in New Mexico. Most of these interviews were done in the 70s. So this quilter says: I don't use a compass to plan out my circles. Sometimes I draw around a plate if it's the right size. Sometimes I take my drawing board, put a tack in the middle, tie my string to the tack, and circle at the end of the string. That way, I can make them as big or small as need be. Then I plan whatever pieces I'm going to do inside the circle. One time I made a Dresden plate that like to never circled. I had them center edges about 1/16 of an inch off. I watched my papa build a wooden windmill when I was little and he had the same problem. About 1/16 of an inch off. Oh, how beautiful that windmill was when he got it finished. Standing up against the sky, it meant water, you know, but it really just looked pretty by itself, tall and with the top turning this way in that whirring around. Back when I slept in the attic room, there was windows at each end and I had my bed under one of them. I could hear the windmill at night. That sound was my lullaby. The windmill seemed like the biggest

circle then, bigger than the moon or a wagon wheel and always in motion.

So that's another part of quilt-making for me is this perfection in the wabi-sabi, right? And so she reflects on her father's windmill that's off, you know, it wasn't measured correctly. But then to look at it, it's the most beautiful circle. Because I think quilt-making as a practice, I think any compositional form of art-making, you know, you could be painting, you can be drawing. It asks us to pay attention, asks us to really, really notice what's at stake and what's around us and to heighten our attention to the point of -you know, every crooked circle being this new information to apply to our aliveness and our practice. So circle-making, there's really beautiful pictures, if you want to find me somewhere. I'll add this actually, too. Again, usually my show is on Sundays from 3 to 5, Friendship Village. And so I record all my episodes and have them in like a show archive on my website, which is just Marlee, my name with two e's, Marlee Grace dot space and you can click radio show and then usually if I like mention a resource or a book or something, I link it there, but maybe I'll add this and share some pictures because there's this really - right now I'm looking at this really beautiful quilt called Sunburst, made in New Mexico in 1930, made by Pearl Zeschuk.

Okay some more quilt stories from this book. After my boy Razzie died when he was 14, I began to quilt in earnest all day sometimes. There was still the two younger ones to take care of but losing my oldest just took away something. I lost my spirit for housework for a long time. But quilting was a comfort, seems my mind just couldn't quit planning patterns and colors and the piecing, the sewing with the needle comforted me. That's when I learned I'd rather be making things than growing things. Although I still garden and enjoy it, I put in my sunflowers and zinnias every year but not a truck garden like I used to. Dr. Cooper was practicing medicine and Josephine then and being the wife and nurse for a country doctor, I never had time nor need to quilt. We was often paid in quilts for services. And when I got more than we needed, I passed them out again. One time a big tornado struck the country and some of those little towns were leveled. Lord. It was a sad mess. I went along with Doc to nurse. I had stacks of quilt in the wagon ready right then for the emergency and I was cutting up them quilts for bandages before the day was over. Some was used for bed rolls. Folks couldn't do any better than just to roll up and sleep right there on the ground so they could

start rebuilding. The only thing worse than tornadoes is drought. I keep my best quilts put up for special occasions or just to bring out and look at, put on the bed once in a while. I'll pass them on to the kids, of course.

They each have an heirloom picked out. But in those busy days before Doc passed away, I had lots more everyday quilts made of outing and feed sacks and wool suitings. We use them for pallets for the kids to crawl around on and we wouldn't think of a picnic without a pallet. We used to take a pretty quilt out to the Mesquite Thicket for a special picnic when we was courtin and put an old quilt under it. Lord, was that pretty on a spring day.

[sighs]

Quilts are pretty, there's just that part of it too, like a quilt, a quilt is a beautiful thing. A quilt - there's a line in the Foxfire book, there's a little essay in there about quilt-making and the title is A Quilt is Something Human. And sometimes when I think about quilting or teach quilting or dream about quilting that's like the phrase that comes to mind: a quilt is something human. It carries so much of, you know, I think just a fabric carries so much of our emotional landscape inside of it.

I'm going to read one more piece from this book, The Quilters: Women and Domestic Art: an Oral History. Again, by Patricia Cooper and Norma Bradley Buford and this kind of brings me back to Friendship Village the idea of friendship and there's a really special practice called friendship quilts.

And you know, you may be familiar with a wedding quilt or -- Eliza, my teacher who I mentioned, has I know made like you might want to call it like a grief quilt when a friend has died. To make that person's loved ones a quilt out of their old clothes, objects, blanket sheets, etc. I've seen it in lots of different ways. There's many different ways to make a friendship quilt. But there's a beautiful picture on this page with this quilter holding her friendship quilt made for her by her friends, it says.

I hardly have a room big enough to put up a quilt frame in my house. That's why my husband finally built me that quilting house out back. When we first come here, I just had my frame hanging from the ceiling over the bed so I could pull it down over the bed and quilt. My

husband never could understand it, but I just quilt for myself. Sometimes if I have a color scheme working I can get my house. Oops. Sometimes if I have a color scheme working I can get my housework done and be ready to go to piecing by 7 a.m. I always like to get my colors worked out. Now and then he gives me a hand. I've lived in three towns in my life and I've got three friendship quilts that each place gave me when I moved. My name's in the middle and even the men signed and sewed their own blocks. Not many of them living now. I'm making a big quilt for my other grandson with big red stars in the four corners and a goose chase all around. A friend of mine who draws real good is making me a buffalo to go in the center because that's the name of his football team. For my little girl grandbabies, I'm making quilts for their dolls and buggies. I make about six at a time with little girls things on them. I tell you they're just darling. I do the little sun bonnet girl pattern a lot and every one of them is a little different. I make some little changes in the pattern, the hat or the foot turned a certain way, give each little girl a personality all her own.

So those are some thoughts about quilts and yeah, I love the idea that we can make quilts for people as gifts and that they can hold stories inside of them, both untold stories and, you know, more obvious ones in the way we choose fabric or design things or just yeah, just anything sort of in the in the vein of storytelling and archiving. So I'm happy to have been able to share a little bit about my love for quilts today and my thoughts about quilts today, and I hope that yeah, I'd love to know what you think about quilts. So you can tell me or you can ask me advice about quilts on Friendship Village on Sunday from three to five. My email address is friendshipvillageradio@gmail.com. So if you have stories about quilts of Madrid or New Mexico or where you're from or yeah, wherever you're listening from or you have ideas around quilts. I'm just, I'm all ears, I'm open, I love quilt making and yeah, thanks for - thanks for listening to a little story time about quilts.