

## MY FIRST QUILTING RETREAT

by Billie Neth

Soon after joining the "Quilt and Lunch Bunch" quilt group, they asked if I was going to go with them to their retreat. "Sure", I said, not knowing what a quilting retreat was. They explained that they "sew, eat, and sew" for three days at Mrs. Anderson's Lodging House in Leavenworth, Washington's little Bavarian village.

I had been invited to join the Quilt and Lunch Bunch by Margaret Fortune, my friend Laura Armstrong's mother. I had known of Margaret since I was in Jr. High School. She was noted to be an excellent seamstress, outstandingly perfect quilter, artist, musician. No matter what she did she did perfectly. I had a history with several other members of the "Bunch". Janet Brown's boys had been in Boy Scouts with my sons. Dorothy McGhan and I had gone to high school together. Nansi Bainard and I had known each other since about 1945 when we attended Brownie Girl Scout day camp at Howard Amon Park. Pat Miller's sister-in-law was a friend and neighbor and her niece Jenny had been my daughter Laura's friend since kindergarten.

My new quilting friends were Eula DeWitz, a wonderful hostess with a Texan flair for everything she says and does; Barb Smith, the guild service chairperson, a petite lady with more energy than anyone I know. She made me tired listening to her daily schedule. Bonnie Thompson, a sophisticated, well traveled grandmother who is acquainted with my daughter-in-law; and Bev Lien, the kindest, nicest woman I have ever met. AND, they are all very, very creative, talented, perfect quilters.

I volunteered to drive to the retreat with Dorothy, Margaret, and Wanda as my passengers. Wanda was a member of the Bunch I had not met as she had recently moved to Florida, but came back to go to the retreat. This is a dedicated bunch of quilters.

On the morning of our departure, Dorothy, Margaret, and Wanda arrived with luggage, sewing machines, bags of quilt pieces, sewing boxes, etc., etc. I had opted not to take my sewing machine and only do hand work and Wanda had accidentally left her sewing machine in her car trunk locked in Margaret's garage. We managed to get all the items into the trunk and get it closed knowing it would explode when we opened it again.

The trip through our desert, across rivers, through lush farm lands, and finally into the wooded hills surrounding Leavenworth was uneventful with only one rest stop visited.

We arrived at Mrs. Anderson's and unpacked leaving the sewing equipment in the class room behind the lodging house. The classroom had rows of long tables where sewing machines were set up, flannel boards propped against a wall waiting for show and tell items, a large ironing board with a substantial steam iron, microwave oven for warming our tea water, coffee pot, and refrigerator. The large bathroom was clean and decorated in a country style.

Going into the lodging house was like going back in time. The walls were covered with an array of antique photos of the town and area and old furniture and carpets with classic old clothing displayed in every nook and cranny of the entry way. Dee's Country Accents fabric shop was attached to the entry way to the lodging house. Every color, pattern, style of fabric was on display ready for cutting and purchase along with shelves and shelves of how-to quilting books.

The kitchen was ready for breakfasts decorated with old aprons hanging on a clothes line along the walls. Long wooden tables sided with benches and old wooden chairs were ready for us to have white china mugs of hot coffee, tea, or cocoa, with our white china bowls filled with cereal ready for the pitchers of ice cold milk.. Toast and muffins were toasted and ready for the butter and jam.

As I went up the steep stairs to my room I didn't know what I would see. In the hallway area there were more antique photos. A small library with rocking chairs adorned with old quilts was in the area at the top of the stairs. My room was small but well appointed. The room had an antique type bed covered with an appropriate type bed cover. My room was graced with an outfit hanging on a hook consisting of a green crepe, lace collared dress with a gold lame' pill box hat and purse as accessories. Against the other wall stood an antique golden oak dresser complete with an embroidered cloth on top. The only thing not in keeping with the decor was the small TV set on top of the dresser.

After settling in, it was time to have lunch. We went to a soup kitchen down stairs in a building on the main street. A place I didn't even know existed. The soup was delicious, especially the white chili for which it is famous. The restaurant was unique in its decor - the whole place was decorated with dollar bills - real dollar bills!

Back to the classroom after lunch ready to sew. But, much to my surprise out came bags, baskets, tins, and sacks of treats. Brownies, candies, cookies, cakes, crackers, cheeses. No one told me about snacks. Well I decided not to eat any, well maybe a brownie. Next year I will know what important things to bring.

Soon the classroom was alive as it would be for two more days with whirring motors on multiple sewing machines. It sounded like that reference to dueling guitars, only this was dueling sewing machines. The click of silver needles going up and down using yards and yards of thread. Each machine making a different sound some chug chug, some whir, whir, some zoom zoom. The slicing sound of the cutters going through layers of fabric swish, swish. The hiss of the steam iron as each new piece was carefully pressed. The hum of the microwave as water was heated for the mugs of aromatic tea and sweet soothing cocoa

All this was interrupted periodically by "darn, why did I do that?", or "now that was stupid", or "that won't work". They had no idea how good those remarks made me feel. These creative, talented, long time quilter's made the same mistakes I make.

Everyone was working on a different type project. Margaret was putting the finishing touches on a quilt started by a former member, Doral West. Pat was finishing a quilt of little cottage type houses colored on each square. Janet was working a two or three Christmas quilts. Wanda was finishing a quilt for a grandchild on a sewing machine borrowed from the owner of the establishment. Dorothy was working on a service project lap quilt. Bev was finishing one of her beautiful wall hangings. Eula was working on a western motif quilt. Barb had an African motif on her table runner. Nansi was creating a colorful optical illusion, eye catching building block quilt. I was coloring kitty cats on squares to be embroidered and arranged in a small quilt for my niece.

We were up early and still up late sewing, sewing, sewing. Of course, with time out for eating, eating, eating. When my family goes to Leavenworth we eat at the schnitzel, bratwurst, sauerkraut, type restaurants. Not this bunch. We ate Italian, Mexican, Fish/Steak House restaurants. Places I didn't even know existed in Bavarian Leavenworth.

One evening when we returned from dinner, I contemplated going to my room and watching TV. As I sat with my sewing box closed, and the crayons put away, Margaret looked over at me and said in her elementary teacher voice, "Billie, have you finished your project yet?" You can bet I opened up the sewing box, pulled out another square, opened the crayons and started coloring, as if I were in elementary school.

Soon it was time to pack up and go home, leaving all the good times, good food, and good sewing behind. Packing the car was a challenge. It was a puzzle to be put back exactly as it was. After a few tries we got , all the luggage, sewing machines, boxes, bags, etc. into the trunk.

We retraced our road to home, back through the green forests on the hills out of Leavenworth, through the lush farm lands, across the bridges, back to our desert and home with our finished quilting projects and ideas about new projects for our trip next year to Mrs. Anderson's Lodging House and Dee's Country Accents to sew and eat and sew and eat for three more days.