

TEXAS STORY PROJECT INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWEE: **Marion Coleman**, Textile Artist

DATE/LOCATION: June 19, 2015 at the opening of the quilt exhibition, "And Still We Rise," at the Bullock Museum, Austin, Texas

My name is Marion Coleman and the name of my quilt is "Her Heart Was in the Clouds." This quilt is about Bessie Coleman, a Texas native, and it was my pleasure to really tell a Texas story since I'm from Wichita Falls, Texas, so when I heard about the project, I wanted to do something about home first.

So I make quilts because I'm interested in telling stories. I'm a social worker by training and I'm always interested in people stories, particularly families and children. So, with this quilt I'm talking about Bessie going from her childhood in East Texas and how she moved on to Chicago where she served as a manicurist and met with people who helped her realize her vision of being a pilot because in the early 1920s she was not allowed to become a pilot in the United States. So a group of benefactors including the publisher of the Chicago *Defender* helped her go to Paris (France) where she was trained as a pilot.

So when you see the quilt in person you will see how it moves in a circle, representing of course the circle of life. You can see the beginning and the middle and I like to show maps so you see maps of Texas, maps of Illinois, maps of Paris, France, and a map of Florida. So after she received her pilot's license, she came back (to the U.S.) and flew as a show pilot, sort of barnstormer, and at the end, she and her navigator had an equipment failure and so she died. So that's the circle about it.

So you'll see that the quilt is all various shades of blue and I'm representing being in the clouds. Now, I quilt because I love fiber, I love people, and I love the textures that you get from quilting. And of course I'm from a family of quilters. I'm very blessed. My great-grandmother was a quilter. She's from Cameron, Texas. I have a 104-year-old aunt who lives in Temple, Texas. I was hoping to get her to come tonight but she was...probably a bit too much going on for her to do that tonight.

I started to quilt some 25 years ago when I wanted to make a quilt for my mother for a birthday of hers and I was just fascinated by the idea that you could put pictures on fabric and I love old pictures so you can see a lot of my quilts in this exhibit I'm using photo image transfers.

When people come to see these quilts, I hope that they'll be touched and think about their own stories because we all have a story to tell and in a way, even though I'm telling other people's stories, I'm telling a bit about myself by what I put in the stories, in the quilt themselves, and what I think about the world around us.

So I'm just happy to be here as a Texas girl who grew up and was born in the 1940s. It's real exciting to see what can happen in 50 years time. It's delightful to be here and I'm thankful for it. And thank you, too.