

TEXAS STORY PROJECT INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWEE: **Barbara Ann McCraw**, 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 Barbara Mc Craw. The name of my quilt here today is "The Loving Quilt." "The Loving Quilt" was made in response to an ask for an exhibit on Black American history and some of the high and low points in America.

I chose the subject because my husband is a white man— we're an interracial couple— and it's really important to me to express some of the things I wanted to express and I found this the perfect chance to do it. Ernie and I have been married for 35 years, and we have learned so much about race relations in this country that I think I could probably write a book, but the way I express myself is through my quilts.

There was a time when I was a very shy little girl and I wasn't able to speak to people very well and so I drew pictures. I told my mother I loved her with my cards. I explained my anger in my room by myself with drawing, and so it was a natural progression for me to end up doing something like this.

I think that quilting started with sewing, sewing started with a need and that need was to make clothing, to make clothing for my children, to repair my husband's shirts and fix zippers and hem pants, but that naturally changed. When I had the opportunity to learn how to make a quilt, it was like I was able to show people my heart. I could show them my spirit, and they liked it, and they liked me, and it represented an acceptance, kind of, of who I was and what I was so much to the point that I'm a totally different person now. I'm not shy. I love talking to people. I love talking about quilts because quilts are internal. Quilts are spiritual. Quilts are textural and I believe that they touch people in ways that other art doesn't.

I also love working with tiny, tiny stitches and needles and complicated little techniques that I do and I guess it's what makes my work special. But while I'm working, I go somewhere else. I pray. Sometimes I find the tears are rolling down my face in memory of someone that I was thinking about. I ask God for help. I'm joyful. So many things. I guess that's why I quilt. Once I got into the quilting world, I found that there were so many people that accepted me— not because I was black or because I was white or because I was fat or skinny— but they accepted me because they loved my artwork and I was so grateful for that. It was like a gift.

I think when people experience my art, when they actually see it... I'll tell you the first time when I was at a quilt show and I walked up to a quilt that I had entered and there was a man and a wife standing there and I tiptoed up just so that I could hear what they were saying and I felt like the proudest person in the world. They just went on and on about *how did she do that?* and *how interesting* and *how wonderful* and you know, God gave us ego so I don't feel that it's bad to have one, but my ego was really touched that day. And so when I see people that walk up, I want them to see my heart. I want them to see my spirit. I want them to feel my love— the love for the subject and the love for everybody. And that's the way I feel.