



A CRAZY QUILT LIFE by May Cotton © 2025

I'd like to think of my life as a patchwork quilt, but it's been more of a crazy quilt. Born in Ohio, I was raised in Denver, and attended college in Iowa and Wyoming, where I graduated with a degree in English. Dan and I met in college in 1970 and married in 1972. From Laramie we went to Berkeley, CA, to attend seminary, then spent a year in Idaho, where we flunked out of the ministry. Returning to the Bay Area, we stayed 20 years before moving to Spokane, WA. Our only child and his wife and son live in Oakland, CA.

I belonged to Girl Scouts as both a member and troop leader. I was a church youth group member and a counselor, a library assistant and a librarian. I've clerked in stores, been both dishwasher and professional cook, driven a taxi, and been a housekeeper; I was a plan clerk, a typist, a secretary and even the reservationist for a Bed and Breakfast in a historic lighthouse. I worked as a bookkeeper, a safety professional, a lifeguard and an aquatics instructor before being forced into medical retirement due to chlorine poisoning. Beginning in 1981, I started my first business and have owned three others. I've worked in concessions as both food packer and cashier and have been a "temp" in many different venues. Like I said, a crazy quilt.

In putting my English degree to use, I have been a newspaper reporter, an editor, a technical writer, a proofreader, and a publisher, but ultimately, I am a creative writer. Since 2014 I have facilitated weekly meetings of *Not Your Mother's Writing Group*. I am a joiner but not a quitter, and in a handful of organizations I've held an assortment of offices, led workshops, Emceed talent shows, sung in choirs and played handbells. As to hobbies, I love reading, especially fiction, religion and politics! I also enjoy road trips, making collages, swimming, and snuggling with our cats.

My ancestors came from Holland and England in the 1530s. My mother was our historian, taking the reigns from her brother, who inherited them from their aunt. Our family has a long history of letter writers. My own letters have emerged from the boxes my mother left behind. My husband and daughter-in-law are also genealogists, which leaves me free to write the stories rather than research them.

As a member of the DAR¹ I've been Vice Regent, Historian, Chaplain, and Parliamentarian. Currently I'm taking a rest while focusing on my writing and curating the archives of my ancestral family, of which I am the last of those who cared enough to save paperwork.

When I joined DAR to appease my mother, I did not know that I am also from a line of DARs on both sides, with two great grandmothers whose daughters also joined and became genealogists. My dad's aunt documented her findings in the pages of *The Burnham Family* book where she recorded marriages, births and deaths; she also wrote them in the family Bible. I recognized her handwriting from the postcards she sent me when I was a child.

My eldest cousins are two of seven sisters to join DAR; one proved the Anderson line with the help of my mother's book, *The Andersons of Hilltop Farm* by Rebecca A. Burnham, which I finished and published after Mom died. My life might be a crazy quilt, but the borders feature a solid patchwork pattern steeped in American history.

¹Daughters of the American Revolution