

## Alzheimer's Art Quilt Initiative launches new exhibit honoring Alzheimer's patients

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*Oscar Durand | The Flint Journal* Flint Township quilter Ami Simms is the driving force behind the Alzheimer's Art Quilt Initiative, which has raised more than \$290,000 to date for Alzheimer research.

FLINT TWP., Michigan -- Flint Township quilter Ami Simms can show you exactly what Alzheimer's Disease stole from her mother, Beebe Moss. It's the image of a legless cow printed on a scrap of hand-dyed fabric.

Ten years before her death in 2008 at age 85, Moss was a successful fiber artist who designed her own line of quilting fabric, "Something Wonderful," for Marcus Fabrics of New York, featuring her hand-carved block print designs.

Alzheimer's Disease took all that away, said Simms, who has devoted her life to the Alzheimer's Art Quilt Initiative, the nonprofit she founded in 2006 that has raised more than \$290,000 to date for Alzheimer's research.



*Alex Slitz | The Flint Journal* The severe effects of Alzheimer's Disease are evident in this legless cow designed by late fabric artist Beebe Moss

"This has always been a personal struggle and always will be. And I think that's the way a lot of our supporters feel," said Simms, who is preparing a new touring exhibit and online quilt auction this month.

"Most of the people making quilts for us know this disease because a family member has it or had it. It's grassroots people all over the country who've been personally touched by this disease and are working for a cure."



Simms holds up one of her mother's printing blocks, skillfully carved into an elegantly detailed leaf, then another of a stylized elephant.

The third is a shapeless one-eared cat without a face. Like the legless cow, it was one of the last designs Moss created, after Alzheimer's had robbed her of much of her identity.

They are stark visual testaments to the disease's effects, as seen through the eyes of a victim.

*Alex Slitz / The Flint Journal Moss' faceless, one-eared cat was one of her final designs after Alzheimer's had robbed her of most of her artistic skills.*

"One of the great myths of Alzheimer's is that the person who has it doesn't know what they're losing, that they just forget. But they are absolutely aware," said Simms.

To keep her mother busy and productive in those final years, Simms gave her fabric squares to sew.

"It gave her a reason to get up. Every day she made a lap-size patchwork quilt, hundreds of them. But as her skills declined, they'd be full of holes and puckers, mismatched everything. They barely held together when you picked them up," said Simms. "There came a time when she no longer could even figure out how to thread the sewing machine -- the most basic thing any sewer knows how to do."

To save fabric, Simms replaced her mother's regular thread with water-soluble thread that would dissolve in the wash.

"Each night, I'd take what she sewed that day and wash it. Then I'd re-iron the squares and give them back to her, and she'd sew them over and over again."

The beautiful quilts exhibited and sold by the AAQI are a fitting tribute to her mother's legacy, said Simms.

The AAQI has raised most of its funds through the sale of books and quilts, and proceeds from "Alzheimer's: Forgetting Piece by Piece," a travelling exhibit of 52 art quilts offering visual interpretations of the Alzheimer's experience, sewn by artists all over the country. The exhibit has travelled to 37 venues in more than 30 states to date, with negotiations underway to exhibit at the Shelburne Museum in Vermont for its entire 2010 season.

A second travelling exhibit called "Alzheimer's Illustrated" is being sewn now and will feature the names of 10,000 individuals with Alzheimers, living or dead. The exhibit will tour from 2011 to 2015.

"We're inviting anyone who has experienced Alzheimer's in their family to add the name of their loved one in honor and remembrance," said Simms.

The group is also ready to receive its 4,000th donated quilt for its monthly online auction sales. In October 2008 the AAQI sold \$45,000 worth of quilts in 4.5 days.

The auction ending June 10 included quilts autographed by former First Lady Barbara Bush and National Public Radio celebrities.

The next auction runs June 15-25 featuring 37 vintage quilts donated by a Lansing woman whose husband had Alzheimer's.

"Many people get involved because after all their suffering with it, struggling to care for a loved one, they want to see the end of the disease. But Ami's group is exceptional in that they've been able to raise so much money and awareness," said Dawn Spicer, regional director for the Central Michigan region of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Michigan Chapter, which covers Arenac, Bay, Clare, Genesee, Gladwin, Gratiot, Isabella, Lapeer, Midland, Saginaw, Shiawassee and Tuscola counties.

The funds all go to support research, Spicer said, such as National Institutes of Health clinical trials into new treatments.

To add a loved one's name to "Alzheimer's Illustrated" or to learn more about online auctions and other projects of the Alzheimer's Art Quilt Initiative: [www.alzquilts.org](http://www.alzquilts.org).

To learn more about the disease and find local support groups: [www.alz.org/gmc](http://www.alz.org/gmc)

[http://blog.mlive.com/get-healthy-in-genesee/2009/06/alzheimers\\_art\\_quilt\\_initiativ.html](http://blog.mlive.com/get-healthy-in-genesee/2009/06/alzheimers_art_quilt_initiativ.html)