COVID Story Quilts:
GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE PANDEMIC

On view April 22 - May 23, 2021

A partnership between Cameron Art Museum and the Advocacy Project displaying the unique perspectives of our community and how we have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic
This special exhibition displays the unique perspectives of our community and how we have been impacted by COVID this year. The experiences of local nurses, children, teachers, and families are juxtaposed with quilts from Nepal, Zimbabwe, and Virginia. With color, fabric, word, and image, we come together to process this collective experience – through art.

COVID Story Quilts is a partnership between Cameron Art Museum and the Advocacy Project, an organization that works with marginalized populations of the global south to bring attention to the issues they face. One of the most successful of these projects has been advocacy quilts. The project has sent peace fellows to many countries around the world to work with survivors of gender-based violence, families of the disappeared, war refugees, people living in poverty, victims of Agent Orange, and others.

During the pandemic, the Advocacy Project supported some of their partners in telling the stories of how COVID has affected their lives. As a result, they have constructed quilts from Nepal (families of the disappeared) and Zimbabwe (young girls resisting child marriage). A group of high school girls from Arlington, Virginia, became interested in supporting this work and created COVID blocks of their own, which were also assembled into a quilt. The contrast among these works is striking as they offer different perspectives on how the COVID virus affects different populations.
YOU KNOW 2020 HAS BEEN A TOTAL DISASTER WHEN A HURRICANE IS HEADED DIRECTLY AT YOU AND YOU'RE LIKE... MEH.

Covid Germ?

Trash

HARRIS

COVID

Jack

I got a headache over COVID-19. Life another kid I asked and you should not.
This Pandemic has made me thinking a lot!!!

For me, family, health, safety, school, friends, life.

AC

Finley

Collin
My daughter has not been to school for over a year because she is medically fragile and her sensory issues have made it impossible for her to wear a mask. My husband has had to take leave from work to care for her.

Dylan

COVID-19
March 2020 - March 2021

Please be safe, wear a mask so we can hug each other again.

The Pandemic has affected our schooling but has increased our family.

Allegra
I had purchased a puzzle in December while shopping for Christmas presents. My plan was to bring it into my classroom and set up a social area for students with the puzzle and a few games I had found. But instead I found myself putting it out on the dining room table at the end of the day when our spring break was changed, our in person classes were suspended, and we were in the midst of uncertainty as to when we would return to school. It was a nice release to the end of a day of trying to record teaching videos for online lessons and lectures. My cats approved! I hadn’t put a puzzle together in ages, and the distraction was a welcome one.

The pandemic has affected me both positively and negatively. For one, I’ve spent more time with my pets and my family, and been able to do more fun things with them, so I am very thankful for that. It has impacted me negatively because I haven’t been able to see my friends or my grandparents in a while, and when I do see people, I have to wear a mask, and be pretty far away. I think I have been resilient during all of this because I have been taking advantage of all this free time and I have been playing outside, riding my bike, and skating in the street.

Hello,
Henry and Martha Here.

We have moved all over the country when we were younger. Our children; Donna, Willi, Jane, and Drarina were all born in different places. From Massachusetts, New York and Nevada. Our children passed down that traveling spirit to their children as well. We moved to the beach here in North Carolina because who doesn’t love the beach! We can’t wait until everyone can visit us again so we can walk the beaches.

Blue Hearts

A little over ten years ago, I made a quilt for my mother on her 85th birthday. It was a “heart quilt,” pieced in blue fabric - blue having been her favorite color.

In January 2021, my mother passed away soon after testing positive for Covid 19. This block of blue hearts made from remnants of the fabric from the original quilt is a tribute to my mother, a woman loved by many and whose passing has left many family and friends feeling blue.
I’ve braved through this pandemic using the one tool I have: humor. Honestly, it’s the only we have in such tough times. If it helped our ancestors, it shouldn’t be that different for us. May we benefit from the “strength” they’ve passed down to us.

Karla Holland
@thegorgontransplant

So much anger,
So much unhappiness,
I commit from this
Point in my life
To do what I can to
Spread kindness and happiness
Whenever I can and to
Celebrate life and to
Live each day in
Peace and gratitude.

Eric

I was sad when school closed. I really liked my kindergarten teacher. I got to spend a lot of time with my family. I was afraid of getting sick. I am super happy to be in school and I am going to play soccer for the first time tomorrow on a team. I hope I can invite my class to my birthday party, last year we had to have it in a park.

Andrea, 6 years old

It’s sad that our country has suffered such a devastating loss. I think about the elderly people that passed away in nursing homes and can’t imagine how scared they were. I remind myself to remain humble and grateful, and to never take anything for granted again.
My granddaughter and her family arrived in July 2020, so her parents could work remotely and I could oversee school and help with her toddler brother. Our days were very busy! Unlike many, I was so fortunate to have family close by. While here she went to school, starting later in the day than local children. This gave us mornings for the many places Wilmington has to offer. She will never forget The Cameron!

HOPE
by Jim Downer

As the Sunrise fulfills the promise
Of another day of Love,
So does the Sunset hold the Hope
Of the one that’s
Yet to come.

The pandemic has affected me because we have to wear masks for sports and school. It is really hard for people who have asthma, My friend quit sports because he had to wear a mask. I also quit soccer for that same reason. My friend’s dad works in a hospital and has to wear a mask in his own house!

COVID has done a lot to us. Every place you go you wear a mask.. Everywhere you stay separated. At school, for a while we could not do group work since that was not separated. We always wear masks - to stores, school, and sports. My ears are tired, but it is what you are supposed to do, wear a mask! However, masks have saved people for getting COVID and have helped control the spread.

Eliza Jonson, 5th grade
My Story

My story is that when Covid-19 started me and my friends could not talk. Then we started to call and Zoom so now we can talk.

Covid has changed the way could see family because where they live is closed cause of Covid.

I'm thankful for that I'm safe and my family is safe from Covid.

Covid has changed the way to get supplies because it’s harder to find some things that you need.

Margie L

My idea/suggestions

You need to wear a mask.
I think we should not be able to have large gatherings and also I think the government should supply the thing we need if they want us to stay at home.

Lammar McNair
3/18/2021

ANGELS

Live amongst us
Sometimes they hide their wings, but there is no disguising the PEACE and HOPE they bring.

Unkown

Let your light so shine

My Story

Once Covid 19 started everything changed. Everything shut down, and school went online. Once that happen I couldn't see any of my friends. I had to do school online which also changed, and all ballet classes went online. Really everything went online. But now it has gotten kind if better with the vaccine and such.

Lillian DeVoid
Marley Terry, 6 years old, formerly of Carolina Beach and Wilmington, NC, now lives in Denver, Colorado. Shared in her quilt square “she’s wearing a mask and feel trapped by the virus even when she is outside.”

My picture is about not being able to travel on planes. Not seeing friends and family, not playing with friends. That is what is in it. It is very hard to do and it’s just a way of life at this point. But you are able to spend more time with family. That is my picture.

Claire C

For my drawing, I drew a dog, video games and my glasses fogging up because of my mask. I drew my dog, Spencer, because I have gotten to spend lots of time with him since I’ve been at home a lot. Spencer helps me feel better when I’m sad, so he has been a source of support and comfort during the pandemic. I also drew an Xbox controller, because I have had lots of time to play video game with my cousin Jack during Covid. We talk on the phone while we play, almost every day. Getting to play with Jack and my other cousin Maura has been one of the happier things for me during the pandemic. Last, I drew my glasses fogging up when I wear my mask all the time.

Alayna McCulley

How have I found my strength in Covid nineteen?

I lived in Maryland and all of the sudden they pulled us out of school. Not long after that I moved to Wilmington North Carolina. I made new friends, went to a new school, and lived in a new neighborhood. It was scary but now I’m used to it.

Addison McQuate
Age 7 and a half, Grade 2
During the pandemic, I enjoyed being with my family more. We went outside more. I did not like the parks being closed.

Layla Sutton

Riding bike outside
Our garden beds loved this year
Our new sport: Tennis!

Jessica, Age 44

Covid 19 has been hard for everyone. My story for Covid 19 is I moved and I could not play with my brother and sister. It was fun but I missed playing with old friends or had to make new friends. I now call old and new. That is my story.

Teaching, cat on lap
Wilmington is on the map
Almost out of sap

David, Age 39
COVID is not fun  
Lots of people are dying  
Go COVID Vaccine!

Harmony, Age 8

What strengths or talents have you seen in yourself during the pandemic?

My talents are creating works of art. I have made time to paint, draw and learn to make slime. I am also good at doing lego sets.

Sydney H.

I like how we can spend time together. I don’t like how we can’t go places without a mask. I did not know and is new to me is remote learning. I felt happy because we can spend time together. What inspired me was how people save others who have Covid.

Love Summer

My Year

Through the past year I have spent a lot of time with my friend. So I wanted to thank her and my family. I also wanted to thank my cat he follows me around the house and cuddles me at night he is so very cute.
“Cat Love” quilt square
V. Rugo

During the Influenza Pandemic of 2021 there were many things that cause fear and isolation, but my adopted cat “Spot” helped me combat these problems. I was able to laugh at her antics, when there was not much to laugh about. I was able to hug and talk to her when hugging was not allowed and talking limited. I continue to be entertained by her and she makes time move more quickly when every day seems longer than 24 hours and the weeks and months are the same, monochromatic. She is a rainbow.

Now and Then

A year passing by in the slow motion of emotion
An art class, get out the vote, please wear that mask
Now and Then
Virtual cocktails, birthdays, funerals and book clubs
Now is the time for tears as we share in loss, as we say
goodbye to those we do and don’t know
But then, something is being born, in this moment, in this time
When the external world get smaller, the internal expands
As we adjust, we see more
Sometimes what we see scares us
Sometimes it is the exquisite now as found in a bird on a feeder, family on the other end of a screen, a friend laughing
Then, as now, precious moment are what is left.

Jeanne Rotunda-Weinberg
Your Face

Your face
- Mouth and nose Masked -
Your face
- Eyes pouring out
Smiles like Sunbeams -
Your Face
has become the temple
with eyes that search
for the good in the world.

Will your eyes
See
in my face
- Mouth and nose Masked -
Will
your eyes see in my eyes
- Sunbeams -
Puring out smiles
From

The temple with eyes that
Found
The good in the world?

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March 13, 2020

I had 3 friends over for Mahjong. I decided that would be the last time I would get together with others for awhile - until the virus passed. We all know what happened next. I started a flurry of home decorating - sewed pillows, made wall hangings and new picture groupings. I challenged myself to “use what I have” to sew new window treatments. I stayed busy all day, every day. I took 3 yoga classes a week via Zoom. And then one day, I had no motivation to do anything, no interest in cooking a meal or eating it. We quarantined and our son and family did too so we would have a summer visit. I pushed myself to plan activities. My husband has had health problems, so we remained the careful ones. And I cried about that. So isolated after family left.

Life eventually worked out and is looking better. Now I cherish our meals together (Friday night pizza) and our quiet evenings. As we start going out again, I want to be more discerning about activities - appreciate quiet times with friends. I have learned that I can “make do” a lot. And I can now call up sweet moments with family even though they are far away. It feels like they are with me in every way.
COVID-10 Collage

After much thought about the last year I could not separate any one event or incident which specifically changed me.

Rather, we have all been changed by the many cascading consequences as we navigate the ever-changing responses to survive COVID-19.

What COVID-19 has made clear to me is life is precious. Our Democracy is precious. Our health and safety is precious. And, all of it can be taken away by others acting in fear or disregard to other. Yet, I have witnessed many momentous events this past year. 2020 has been a year of pain and loss. It has also been a year of remembrance, celebrations and firsts. My hope is that my collage will touch on many events which you also found momentous as well.

Barbara Hart Anderson
Wilmington, NC
March 2021

In the beginning of school I did it online. We did it through Zoom. There were a lot of problems that sometimes occurred during class. It was hard to do school through this but the teachers helped. I used this to express the errors that went on in online school. Some of the ones I didn’t include on my quilt square are that sometimes the assignment doesn’t show up on Google classroom or can’t access the document. Sometimes it sounds very mufflely or airy, and sometimes my computer would completely turn off for no reason. Even though there were hardships I am grateful that I still got to learn and attended school.
Pandemic Reflections
by Carolyn Cook

Objectively, time kept on ticking; clock hands continued to rotate; days turned into nights; nights into days, weeks into months; calendar pages continued to flip over...

Subjectively, my inner pace of time slowed to a turtle pace. My ‘avoidance motivation’ engaged to grasp the invisible threat of COVID; to bypass potential harmful situations; to cope with not being with family, health concerns; to grapple with canceled events, lack of social interaction, travel, shopping, girlfriend time. The need to juggle a calendar full of appointments, promises, obligations ceased...

Life slowed down, time to breathe, time to simplify, time to embrace the safety of home, my turtle shell, time to pray for those less fortunate and for those working to keep me safe...

Resiliency allowed me to find inner peace and focus on the things I most enjoy but often don’t make time for, like quilting, knitting, cooking, gardening: these are the things that sustained me during lock-down, as well as Believing things would eventually return to normalcy.

I am alive, vaccinated, relieved and thankful!

During the pandemic I learned more about technology and how to use computers. The pandemic also inspired me to write a book, it’s going to be really cool when it’s published. Something new I did was my family held a few more people for church at our house, I think that holding church at our house was really fun. What I enjoyed about the pandemic was doing church at home, spending time with my family, and being able to stay home and bake desserts. I experienced outdoors more and nature.

Lily Sutton
How the Pandemic Has Affected Us

We are truly grateful for all the good care our son Danny gets at his group home but it has not been easy on us this past year... For months we have not been allowed to visit him or bring him home for overnight stays - when we were allowed to see him it was once a week for 45 min and we had to practice social distancing - which meant no hugging, no kisses, no high fives, no pats on my head, no holding his hand. These are all the ways we communicate with him and he with us because he is non-verbal. Danny is 27 years old - he was born 15 weeks early - and has lived in a group home since age 12. He has severe developmental delays, mild CP, Autism, non-verbal. He has never been away from us his whole life we've brought him home for overnight stays. My quilt piece has a broken heart on it to represent our sad hearts missing him and the stripes on shirt to represent how we feel he’s in jail and can't leave. The crazy hair from being unable to get to a good salon. The XO's are for the love we can't wait to show him once he's allowed to come home.

March 2020

The weather was mild, nice for the time of year. The season of Lent had just begun, quite normally. The Covid virus had also just begun to appear, everywhere. Churches were especially vulnerable and particularly choirs. Then the churches were forced to close.

There were no Sunday services and the music, my personal favorite, was silenced. This was completely foreign to me as I have attended Sunday worship services for all of my seventy-five years. I felt lost. Many churches began streaming services on the internet on Facebook and YouTube. You could attend church services in your pajamas whenever it was convenient for you. I remember watching Pope Francis’ beautiful Easter vigil from the Vatican in a nearly empty cathedral. Who knew on Ash Wednesday that what we were giving up for Lent would be Easter!

Things have slowly begun to improve but it still feels strange. We've returned to our churches with social distancing, masks and no physical contact. Our pews are showing wear from all the harsh cleaning. There are no faith enhancing activities like bible study or choir practice.
March 18, 2021

Being a seventh grader in March 2020 sucked. Everything closed, my grandmother in NY became sick, and I could visit or help her; she wouldn’t allow it. Online school was easy and boring and I actually missed my teachers. Sadly, the only time we left the house for the first few days was to food shopping, and my mother would run into the store by herself and I would wait in the parking lot with my dad. It seemed like there were two worlds - NYC and NC didn’t seem affected the same way, and my grandmother’s stories and the news were a constant reality check.

The summer dragged on and people clustered into social circles, and my world became so much smaller. We started going to the beach and the pool and my parents were adamant about staying active and my immediate family has bonded in a way that I could not have imagined by sticking together. My skills as an artist have radically improved during this time, and my strengths are my individuality and commitment to family. Thank you for reading my story.

2020 - Covid-19 and more... before Covid-19 was declared a pandemic my year was already off to a difficult start.

In January I had my second knee replacement surgery and recuperation was a challenge. Less than half way through physical therapy Covid-19 became a “thing” and my therapists had to cancel sessions for 6 weeks which left me to exercise on my own. I had to toughen up and bite the bullet which didn’t always go so well.

I also incurred a slight fracture in my arm and arthritis in my back. Yes this will definitely be a year to forget!

Thank goodness for quilting! I still managed to finished multiple quilt projects; one was supported by my quilt ship. To keep customers sewing their website posted a quilt block and directions each week for 12 weeks. I was able to use up lots of “stash” fabric and ended up with my own Covid Quilt.

Being home also challenged me to try new recipes and - yes - sourdough bread. I made many loaves and gave many loaves away to family and friends.

Being 2020 and modern technology, Face Time became the only way of visiting with family especially during the holidays. Holidays are not the same without seeing children and grandchildren which were all growing up too fast and lived hundreds of miles away. We all know safe traveling was not an option...

2020 was definitely a year of mixed emotions but we have been lucky since no one in our family got sick and we are telling the story of our year...
I was one of the lucky ones in 2020. I already worked from home so I did not lose my job due to closure, but I did have a 20% reduction in pay. It didn’t feel like it at the time, already living paycheck to paycheck, but who knew how horribly managed this global pandemic would be by Trump. It didn’t have to be this bad. At the time of this writing, nearly 540 hundred thousand American are dead. These people did not have to die.

What sustained me during this time is volunteering by sewing masks and distributing other PPE to the community. It made me feel like I had control over something to which I had no control.

The square I contributed to the quilts shows my frustration. With the sewing machine, with the virus, with the incredible selfishness of the people who followed Trump and refused to believe in the virus, refused to wear masks. It sums up the whole experience.

But the bright side is that I met a lot of great volunteers, I learned how to sew a mask - I might only be able to sew that, but I sew the heck out of it! I know what stabilizer is, I can sew a mask with clear view. I co-founded a volunteer group, I made my idea of donating masks to every educator in the county along with other items to show our appreciation come to fruition.

Mimi Marquis 3/19/2021

NC Coastal Pines Girls Scouts Troop 1823

Girls Scouts Troop 1823 is a small, diverse group of girls at the Daisy, Brownie, Cadet and Senior levels. Our troop is sponsored by St. Stephen A.M.E Church as part of our Christian Education and youth ministries.

During the Pandemic, we have played it safe! But we have also had lots of fun learning new things and new ways to have fun while on “lockdown”. Our activities have included learning more about seasonal gardening, selling cookies and learning about entrepreneurship, and participating in World Thinking Day (a Girl Scouts activity that teaches us about other cultures and encourages us to embrace diversity). We even made our first video this year! COOL! It’s been hard being out of school or only present part-time. But we believe in our hearts we’ll get through this. While we wait, we’re enjoying the outdoors!

Carmen
Joi
Lucinda
Michaela
Natalie
With the unknown and unimaginable, my life was in havoc as I had to deal with COVID! The quickness and unexpected arrival brought changes that I had to address immediately to move forward - decisions had to be made for my peace of mind.

But Jesus... came through right on time to reassure me that this too shall pass! The spiritual side of me took over and carried me through and continues - it did not mean that I would not have some dark times; however, I don’t linger there for long. Some of the old songs of the church began to make a lot more sense:

“Precious Lord, Take My Hand
When Peace Like a River
We’ll Understand It Better By and By
What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

The bottoms line, that through it all ... Pray, have faith, believe. You will make it through each moment and the reality is... I am doing just fine - thank you, Jesus!

L. Danyce Dicks - 3/2021 - Wilmington, NC

To BE with You

2020 Pandemic
Too many sick
Too many died
Too many cried

Wear a mask
No task!
Social distance
Lonesome existence

Nasty Virus
All around us
Days apart
Saddens the heart

Silver lining!
Sun shining!
It’s been so long
Here’s my song

Get a shot!
Means a lot
To be hugged
Beloved!

ALL...
To BE with YOU.

Betty Gibbons
2021
My husband and I are in our 70s, so when the advisory went out to isolate at home as much as possible and minimize contact with anyone outside of our household, we looked for alternatives. I expected to spend some time painting watercolors, making Japanese Termari balls, and trying out new recipes. My husband decided to tackle a backlog of good books that he wanted to read.

However, in late March I saw a notice from the Cape Fear Chapter of Open-Source Medical Supplies (OSMS) seeking volunteers to help provide much-needed PPE to community organizations. Soon, I became one of many volunteers sewing cotton face masks - definitely a new skill that took some trial and error to perfect! Initially, our group was focused on providing PPE for healthcare workers and various community organizations that requested them. Some of the more talented made N95-equivalent masks or those with a clear front, and other made face shields. Over the simmer we distributed masks for children, youth groups, and adults as they were requested.

In September, the founders Dr. Kyle Horton and Mimi Marquis, started a project in conjunction with the New Hanover County Schools to provide PPE kits to returning educators - a daunting task as there are 43 school and, at a minimum, we wanted each kit to contain a hand-sewn mask, disposable masks, and hand sanitizer. Sewing became nearly a full-time job for me! My husband also pitched in cutting fabric and elastic, and delivering finished masks to our assembly location. It was not until February of 2021 that kits were delivered to Laney High School - school No. 43!

We won’t put away our sewing machines just yet, as it looks as though COVID-19 and its variants will be with us fir the foreseeable future! It has felt good to be able to contribute to the community. Were we younger, we would have physically assisted with food distribution or another volunteer activity, so the mask project has given us a sense of helping albeit in a limited way.
On March 13, 2020, I returned to the US from a three-week trip to Southeast Asia to find a very different world. Borders were closing, schools were closing, stores, and restaurants, and theaters were closing. Many of us were afraid of this new, unseen enemy - COVID 19. For the first two weeks home, I voluntarily isolated because of my travels. I didn't leave my house. Friends left food on my front porch. All further trips planned for 2020 were canceled. My family was suddenly out of reach and I didn't know for how long. It would have been so easy to just retreat.

But I needed a purpose and I quickly found it in making face masks. Face masks, like many other things to help us contain the virus, were clearly in short supply. But I had fabric and I had time. So, I began to sew, not sure where I'd find takers for my masks. The first ones I donated to Trinity Grove nursing home, to the people who had taken such good care of my husband during his last months. I gave them to friends, and friends began asking for more to give to other friends. I discovered Open Source Medical Suppliers and realized just how great the need really was. I sat at my sewing machine for a couple of hours each day and made masks which were donated to schools, doctor's offices, nursing homes, and underserved communities. As of this writing I've made over 1,300 masks - never taking a penny for them, just asking those who could to pay it forward.

These little fabric face masks provided benefits to many. They provided a level of safety to front line workers, they showed people that there were those who cared, they created new friendships as OSMS sewists met online for regular meetings. Most of all, sewing these masks gave me the purpose I needed to make me feel less helpless in the face of this pervasive enemy. Sewing these face masks gave me hope.

Now, along with so many members of the Wilmington community, I've created these Pandemic Story Quilts to remind us that we have been through a life-changing experience. In the experience, we have felt sadness, grief, and loss. But we've also found humor, strength, and perseverance. We are resilient. Life will get better and we will have learned from this experience. I know I have.

Bobbi Fitzsimmons
Maskmaker
Initially, our family struggled with the sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the confusing messages from the federal government. Our youngest grandchild was living with us temporarily and when his pre-school shut down, the gravity of the situation set in. Spending more time at home did not disturb us as we love being with each other and I enjoy working in my garden. Yet, the uncertainty of the future gave us reason for anxiety.

In addition to COVID-19 we lived to witness the senseless killings of African-American people such as Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, questioning the society we live in, and especially after having lived through the Civil Rights era as teenagers. We had hoped that at this stage of life, things were truly better in race relations - not perfect, but better.

It was then that we realized our faith would sustain us as it sustained our ancestors over the generations... the Howes of Wilmington, NC; the Thompsons of Sampson County, NC; the Suttons of Nash-Edgecombe County, NC; the Corbins of Arkansas; and the Browns of Mississippi - all families from whom my husband and I have descended. Continued work, civic engagement and efforts to build better community would be required. I spent many hours reflecting on how my father (a physician) would’ve interpreted the effects of the pandemic were he still alive.

My husband (Phillip) and I looked to the 23rd Psalm, a favorite passage of scripture to sustain us and give us solace when we saw so much fear and anxiety in the community. Food shortages, increased homelessness, sickness, unemployment and death... overwhelming matters in America. It also gave us a sense of calm as we watched violence erupt in plain places such as supermarkets when people refused to embrace safe practices like wearing a mask.

Our square symbolizes the faith of generations of our family. It paraphrases the 23rd Psalm and speaks specifically to how we have sustained ourselves over the past year. It also speaks to how we will sustain ourselves in the days ahead.

Submitted by Mrs. Cynthia J. Brown
Wilmington, NC
Our quilt square represents our church - the congregation, our current leadership, its history and the building that we have gone to for worship, prayer, education and fellowship for generations.

Founded in 1865, St. Stephen African Methodist Episcopal Church was established under the leadership of Rev. William Hammaett Hunter, D.D. He served as chaplain of the union troops who marched on Fort Fisher in the Battle of Forks Road, and later Wilmington.

By 1879, the church had outgrown the small wooden structure initially erected at North Fifth Avenue and Red Cross Streets in Wilmington. Membership was over 1,000. So through collaborative efforts with people of other faith, race and ethnicity, the current edifice was built, with a four-story annex erected between the years of 1913 and 1915.

The sanctuary was home to numerous worship services including the worldwide A.M.E. Church General Conference of 1986. During the 1898 Racial Massacre in Wilmington, the officers and pasters of the church were besieged by threats of violence by the Red Shirts but survived. And in the earlier years of the twentieth century St. Stephen provided recreational, educational, medical, and social services in its annex.

During the COVID pandemic, St. Stephen closed the doors to its facilities but gathered as a congregation on virtual platforms to continue its worship, prayer, and Christian studies. Using prescribed safety measures, the church has sewn masks, delivered food and health/sanitations supplies to those in need, donated funds to aid those in need, provided scholarships for youth pursuing higher education and continued its collaboration with other community partners. We have also served as a supply distribution center for the North Carolina Conference of the A.M.E. Church serving as conduit for the more than 90 churches in our Conference.

Today, more than 155 years since its founding, St. Stephen continues our legacy of faith, drawing strength from our past, having faith for our future and continuing our legacy of service to the community. Following is a reflective thought and passage of scripture from a church member about living through the pandemic:

“As we have gone through an entire year of devastating circumstances that resulted in feeling unsure about positive outcomes, I had to deepen my faith and trust in God. I often listened to music and these confirmed it all: ‘In times like these we need a savior. In times like these we need a savior. In times like these we need a savior. In times like these we need an anchor, be very sure that your anchor holds and grips the solid rock, the rock is JESUS.’ I put my confidence in Him.” Hebrews 6:19 - Dawn McClammy

Submitted by Mrs. Cynthia J. Brown
Christian Education Director & Church Historian
Strength, balance, courage, flexibility, creativity, resiliency, gratitude and healing are all things that come to mind when we reflect on the year of the pandemic. Everyone has experienced a great deal of loss in so many ways. But one of the ways we have discovered is that the things we have lost, are also the things that we are most thankful for and the things that we find comfort in when trying to move forward.

One of the things we found that we missed the most was sports as we knew it. We missed watching it on TV and in a stadium and playing together with friends. But we soon found new ways to enjoy it and focus on practicing and developing new skills so that when we are able to come together and play again, we can be a better teammate.

Live music and concerts as we knew it changed overnight. Over the summer months especially we felt this loss tremendously. The joy and healing that it brought took a toll. But we were able to find new ways to experience the vibes that we loved. We used this time to learn to play new instruments, explore new talents, discover new artists and listen intently to lyrics to find meaning and resolution like a unique dorm of therapy.

We missed hanging out with friends, going to shows and the theatre, festivals and events. Simple things like going out to dinner or attending a community gathering were a luxury we no longer had. But we soon discovered new ways to enjoy the company of others, celebrate milestones, and work from home. Zoom was our new best friend and drive-by parades were happy times. We visited with neighbors from our porch engaging in loud conversations across the yard. We used the extra time we now had to plant vegetable gardens, finish projects at home, nurture our creativity and really get to know our family members that we were lucky enough to live with. We played games, we read books, we watched movies and documentaries, we experimented in cooking new recipes, we painted and colored and did crafts, and we talked and listened more. Time was a new gift we had been given.

Time was also a thief as we began to contend with the real fear of losing someone you loved. As time marched on, there was almost no one that wasn't somehow impacted by someone who has experienced a glimpse of COVID. The reality.
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.
Alpha Psi Omega Chapter

Founded on the campus of Howard University in 1908, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority was the first Greek letter organization established for the college educated African-American women. By 1913, the sorority was incorporated to ensure its perpetuity. It is rooted in concepts of sisterhood and supreme service to mankind.

The local chapter was chartered in Wilmington, NC by five visionary women in the home of Dr. Frank Avant in 1932. For the past 90 years, the chapter has built a legacy of service in the local community. From civic, educational, nutritional, social and recreational opportunities for children and families, the Alpha Psi Omega Chapter has been a leader in our community.

During the pandemic, the Alpha Psi Omega Chapter has stopped in person meetings and currently utilizes virtual platforms to conduct meetings and to set strategies for service in the community. The chapter strives fervently to maintain sisterly bonds amongst members through safe and healthy activities.

Embracing the sorority’s five (5) program targets, the chapter has worked fervently to continue service during the pandemic through programs that encourage education with a focus on HBCUs, appreciation for the arts, health and wellness, assistance to immigrants and refugees and assistance in economic planning.

From sewing masks to civic engagement, the chapter encouraged safe and healthy lifestyles during the pandemic. Through the work of our Graduate Advisor, mentoring, support and encouragement were provided to undergraduate members of the sorority at UNC-W (Omicron Phi Chapter). And celebrating our chapter’s history, the chapter found safe ways to catalogue history, interview some of our longest standing members and begin donations to UNC-W’s new Center for Archives and History at Randall Library.

The pandemic quilt square submitted by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated/Alpha Psi Omega Chapter symbolizes the spirit of the chapter during the pandemic - “Resilient Pearls Serving through Changing Times”

Submitted by Mrs. Cynthia J. Brown
Alpha Psi Omega Chapter Archivist
The panic set in during the first quarantine. Prior to that, I kept up with the news about the growing spread of the Coronavirus, but had doubts when a friend in Seattle told me there was talk of shutting the entire city down. How could that ever happen in a place where everyone is in constant motion? And then it did. There is Seattle, here in North Carolina, and everywhere in between.

A monster was on the loose, far worse than anything we had been exposed to during this lifetime. A ruthless killer with no set pattern that attacked without warning. We were told to wait it out; it would be over soon. But it only got worse.

Soon, the numbers of the dead became names, and the names became those of people I knew. Of those people, most eventually recovered, some are now known as “long-timers” - those who still have lingering issues, and some are now Covid-19 mortality statistics.

One of the most difficult losses was a master carpenter who became a family friend as she built a new fence around our backyard to replace the old one destroyed by hurricane Florence. He also built the Little Free Library I have in front of my home - using reclaimed wood because he preferred to recycle and re-purpose things to help our earth. Our friend became ill with Covid-19 and was hospitalized. Less than a week later, he took a turn for the worse and died. He was a kind and gentle soul.

Throughout this time of uncertainty, loss, fear, and sorrow, the silver lining for me has been the arts. Arts programs nationwide have always topped the chopping block when budget cuts loomed in schools, in local, state, and national funds distribution, and whenever something needed to go. Yet, it was the Arts that stepped up to help a grieving world cope.

Instead of shutting the world down, the Arts brought us together. We are treated to free nightly opera performances at the Met, Broadway shows, ballet and dance programs, concerts, virtual tours of museums, historical sites, and the world. We can take online classes and workshops. Major film festivals and Arts conferences became accessible to all. The Arts have been taking our minds off what we can’t do and giving us back so much more. Please remember this when things eventually turn around. Support the Arts the way they support us now.

My quilt square is dedicated to the memory of Victoriano De Los Santos Cruz. El fue un buen hombre.

Barbara Dolny-Bombar
Wilmington, NC
March 2021
The COVID-19 pandemic brought the harshest of realizations and reckonings for me professionally and for my family. Like so many, the need to stay home for safety brought with it listlessness and a lack of purpose. When you add to this the stress of my father’s catastrophic cancer diagnosis that metastasized to his brain during this tumultuous time - 2020 pushed our family to the edges. We almost befell the tragedy that far too many suffered in losing the life of our beloved patriarch.

Instead, we were the lucky ones whose lives were spared, but we did know a heartbreak that we never knew was possible. We knew the soul-crushing agony of being unable to safely hold your loved one’s hand while they are suffering in their darkest hour and unable to speak. As a physician, I am comfortable with death in as much as you can be. But this distance and the depravity of closeness was even too much for me to bear. To know I could not comfort my dad in his darkest hour was seemingly overwhelming.

And for me professionally was the reckoning that having moved into primary care and Veterans medical advocacy meant that my skills as an internal medicine physician were no longer immediately and particularly useful. Thankfully for everyone, I would never have to respond in a field hospital or manage your ventilator - skills I was once competent in but no longer. When it was clear that reviewing ventilator settings wasn’t helping anyone, through the tears of watching my colleagues suffer immeasurable loss and without PPE on the front-line; eventually I found purpose.

In March of 2020 as hospitals lacked masks and there were no face shields, I saw the helpers rising to the occasion. Millions without experience who had never sewn, or knew anything about medical supplies - people who just had an innovative mind, or a sewing machine, or a #3D printer - they volunteered. For me, I though: I took home economics for one semester and know how to suture. Surely, I can sew fabric face masks. Well, a sewing machine that survived 50 years could not survive my lack of skill and the COVID-19 pandemic. But only with breaking the machine and more metaphorically my spirit did I realize that my real purpose was as a medical advisor and connector for a group making DIY medical substitutes.

I was in co-leading a group of volunteers who became Cape Fear Open Source Medical Supplies (OSMS) that the listlessness finally faded - the purpose then took over. And where I had failed in breaking my mother’s sewing machine, other stepped up time and time again to sew. What started as a 1,000 masks challenge with significant fear of failure became a 5,000 then a 10,000 mask challenge... and still going. So while 2020 brought harsh reckonings and realizations, I will forever remember the purpose I found in my heart because of the spirit and tenacity of others - and in our Cape Fear OSMS volunteers in particular. I will forever remember the helpers and heroes who gave me hope. So in the words of Superman, always remember, “there is a superhero in all of us. We just need the courage to put on the cape.”

Dr. Kyle Horton
Today I awaken to the song of a solitary chickadee. Every day there’s so much, the more you look and listen, in one place, a world can open up to you, reveal itself, teach you, give you beauty, provide healing, and create companionship with life in so many forms. Its all there; growth, change, injury and renewal, and sometimes heartbreak and grief.

This year has developed my awareness and reverence for the natural world just outside the window. I’ve watched house finches successfully raise a group of siblings, excitedly chippering around, revisiting the nest they built on the platform outside the birdhouse (because bees were living within), only to see another group of 3 fledglings and parents disappear in the night. That one was really hard. They nested on the makeshift platform I made, close to the front door, and I checked on their progress every morning on my way to make coffee. Joy, then silence, emptiness. In my relative solitude, that family had become my immediate family. For a few days, I refused to believe they were gone - fledglings to young to have flown away - but didn’t want to get too close to the nest, as the mother was hyper-protective, actively deflecting any interest, including that of other finches. I blamed myself for not creating a secure enclosure for the nest. It took a long time for me to come to terms with the metaphor here, of the cycles of life, of something dying to feed the life of another, of ecology and the balance of nature, of not having control, or acceptance, of appreciating beauty, love, happiness, when you know it, when you have it, because we never know how long it will last. And when we have to let it go, let it go with gratitude for what was.

Watching the changes in spring, autumn, winter, and now spring again, and the rhythm in this, I found solace in such a variety of hard-working survivors, survivors because the natural world can really teach about how quickly things can change. Throughout all the emotional challenges of this year, not only the pandemic, but also the struggle to reach a more just equilibrium in society. I could practice orienting to be in the present moment with the help of the natural world I was lucky enough to walk out into. This privilege has come into high relief, as so many survivors this year in cramped spaces, without such a view out their windows, without the ability to simply step out the door and into a small patch of nature, perhaps going to jobs that endangered them daily. The disparities in terms of access to such spaces and to simple necessities like a real grocery store in the neighborhood, safe workplaces, and access to health care, need to be acknowledged and rectified.

In the smaller scope of one lifetime, I’ve found the 2020 etc skills to be the tools to manage the depression and anxiety that have been my demons, my lessons to learn. So, yes, I am grateful for this year, and I hope the upheaval can be fodder for healing and growth, in the micro- and macro-cosm.

My square contains a fraction of friends and teachers, a baby Carolina Anole on mint leaves (so small), Beauty Berry bushes with an Orb-weaver spider, a Buckeye Butterfly, a just-blooming Texas Star Hibiscus with a Bumble Bee, Long Lead Pines, a Praying Mantis, and a male Baltimore Oriole and female Cardinal. I’m thankful for this opportunity to share the love, because what the world needs need now...

Catherine Cloud
RAP AROUND PANDEMIC 2020

Wear Masks, Wash Hands, 6 Feet Apart Stands
Ar-abs, Mask Too, And Now So Do You
Please San, i-tize, and Don’t Touch Your Eyes
Wipe Sur, fa-ces, Clean Up Hers and His
Stay Home, Less Do, I Miss Hugging You
Get Out, Ne-ver, Got Cabin Fever
I’m Bored, We Done, and Get Less Sunshine
Less Pep, In Me, Low Vitamin D
You Learn, New Ways, of Spending Your Days
Step Out, Look, See, and Feel Like You’re Free
Stay Home, From School, Some Kids Think It’s Cool
You Jug, gle Life, Like Kids, Pets and Wife
You Work, From Home, You’re Often Alone
Stay In, Your Room, and See Folk On Zoom
Top Half, Is Dressed, They Can’t See the Rest
You Spend, More Cash, but Feel the Backlash
Few Funds, Oh Heck, Got Stimulus Check
Buy Food, Drink Tea, Build Immunity
Less Ex, er-cise, Weight Gain’s No Surprise
The More, We Sit, We Feel We’re Less Fit
Don’t Cough, My Way, I’ll Run from the Spray
You’re Hot, Your Dry, Your Temperature’s High
You Cough, You Sneeze, Is This the Disease?
Is It, Real Folks, or Media Hoax?
We Dread, We Fuss, Corona Virus
Who Will, Get Sick, From This Pand-dem-ic?
Can’t Smell, Can’t Taste, Get Tested With Haste
Don’t Leave, the Scene, Be In Quarantine
What’s In, Vaccines, Nothing Bad, It Seems
Make Meds, Not Smiles, The Tests Need More Trials
Vaccine, Not Me, Even If It’s Free
I Don’t, Ac-cept, Injections Just Yet
Stay Calm, Don’t Flinch, The Needle Won’t Pinch, It Goes In One Inch, See Now, It’s a Cinch
But If, I Do, I’ll Get One, Then Two
And Hope, I’m Safe, and My Mask Won’t Chafe
Don’t Trust, The Lie, That Says You Won’t Die
Please Un, der-stand, the Risk Now at Hand
You Ne, ver Know, Till Side Effects Show
My Friend, S/He died, No Last Touch, I Cried
COVID, Nineteen, Why Are You So Mean?
Re-sil, ient, See, Is What We Must Be!
To stay, A-live, together we Strive!

Written by Denise Hinds-Saami with guidance & by Mother Audrey Hinds’ oversight
3/19/2021
Student
I stare at the screen
Today I am nervous
Before, when face to face
I was not heard
Before, when face to face
I did not ask
Before, when face to face
I did not share

Zoom
It has started
I am in class
Everyone is here
I try to speak
I am not heard

Zoom again
This day feels different
I say my name
They listen
I am heard
I share
There are questions
I explain
I feel confident

Zoom again and again
Others share
I listen
I ask, they respond
The teacher explains
I understand
I am engaged
I am heard
They know who I am

Zoom again and again
I am not shy
I am confident
I too am a member of this class

Zoom
Teacher
I stare at the screen
Today I am nervous
Will I be heard?

Zoom
It has started
Everyone is here
Will they speak?

Zoom again
Today is different
They are relaxed
That girl, so shy
Speaks
She shares

Zoom again and again
They listen
She engages
They know her now

Zoom again and again
She is confident
She too is a member of this class

Judith Chandler
P: I am in the hospital and I have Covid.
RN: I am a nurse at the hospital in the Covid unit.

P: My family cannot be here.
RN: I cannot be with my family.

P: I am covered in gown, wires, tubes and a mask.
RN: I am covered in a gown, gloves, cap and a mask.

P: I am struggling to breathe, there is such a weight on my chest.
RN: I am struggling to breathe, there is such a weight on my chest.

P: I feel so isolated. Can I video call my family?
RN: I feel so isolated. Can I video call my family?

P: Even though I am prone; I am a person, I have a name, I have a face.
RN: Even though you cannot see me, I am a nurse, I have a name, I have a face.

P: I could not wait any longer to hang out with my friends and family.
RN: Why couldn’t you have waited a little longer to hang out with your friends and family?

P: I feel so scared and alone and helpless.
RN: I will be strong for you, but I feel so helpless.

P: Forget me not; tell my family that I love them.
RN: I will forget you not; I will hug my family a little tighter tonight.

P: Thank you for all that you do.
RN: I’m sorry I couldn’t do more.

Family: They sent flowers for the memorial... they were Forget Me Nots.