



Sewing HIV Stories

In a blog post titled “[Sewing Stories Together](#),” POZ managing editor Jennifer Morton writes about how she ended up making a POZ memorial panel for the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Below is an edited excerpt.

January 8, 2024 By Jennifer Morton

I appreciate the skill and patience that goes into making a quilt. My mom loved to make quilts and proudly wore a sweatshirt that read: “Quilters Always Come With Strings Attached.”

I also appreciate the love and devotion that go into each panel of the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Today, the Quilt consists of more than 50,000 individual panels and features more than 110,000 names. Weighing in at 54 tons, it’s the largest community art project in the world.

In November 2023, the Mizell Center in Palm Springs, California, displayed sections of the AIDS Memorial Quilt—including new panels created by local community organizations—for a special exhibit. The event featured a panel discussion during which participants reflected on the history of HIV and explored the origins and evolution of the Quilt. As one of the exhibit’s community partners, POZ was also encouraged to contribute a panel. I’d never considered making a panel before, but given my deep appreciation for quilting—and the Quilt—it didn’t take long for me to decide it was something I absolutely wanted to do.

Conceived by Cleve Jones in 1985, the Quilt was founded as a memorial to celebrate the lives of people who died of AIDS-related causes. It was first displayed on the National Mall in Washington, DC, on October 11, 1987, as part of the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

Today, the Quilt continues to be displayed around the world, helping educate people about HIV and the continued impact of the epidemic. Launched in 2022, the Change the Pattern initiative focuses on displaying sections of the Quilt in communities in the South, where HIV disproportionately impacts people of color.

While working for POZ, I’ve been fortunate to see a number of Quilt displays over the years, including a large display on the National Mall in Washington, DC, during the 2012 International AIDS Conference.

The Quilt is a powerful tool for advocacy and education. The stories of the people represented in the Quilt remind us of the many others lost in the four decades since the first cases of HIV were reported. And although some people in the United States today are still dying of AIDS-related

causes, most people with HIV are not thanks to effective antiretroviral treatment.

The POZ panel for the Quilt was designed using POZ magazine covers featuring people with HIV who have passed away. Some of these individuals died directly of AIDS-related causes, and some did not. But they each have a unique story that deserves to be remembered.

Anyone can make and submit a Quilt panel. I was lucky to have an amazing volunteer from Mizell (thanks, Kate!) help me turn my vision into a reality, but you don't have to be an artist or a sewing expert to create a tribute to a loved one.

Explore the AIDS Memorial Quilt and get inspired! The entire Quilt and each panel can be viewed online, and it can be searched by name.

Quilt Facts

- The Quilt was conceived by Cleve Jones in 1985.
- The Quilt was first displayed on the National Mall in Washington, DC, on October 11, 1987.
- The Quilt includes panels from every U.S. state and 28 countries.
- Each Quilt panel is 3 feet by 6 feet, representing the size of a grave.
- If you spent 30 seconds viewing each panel, it would take 17 days to view the entire Quilt.
- Materials in the Quilt include badges, Barbie dolls, buttons, car keys, condoms, corsets, feather boas, gloves, hats, jeans, vinyl records, wedding rings and more!