

It's All About Love: Gert McMullin and The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt
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Abstract (Summary)

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the lived experience of an activist and artist who has made significant contributions to The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt in order to develop a richer understanding of The Quilt. Gert McMullin is considered to be the original volunteer whose journey began with a small group of strangers in San Francisco who first gathered to remember friends they feared would be forgotten. Their goal was to help people understand the devastating impact of AIDS and to take action.

This study explores several dimensions of The AIDS Memorial Quilt and situates Gert's life story within this larger context. The AIDS Memorial Quilt can be understood as the world's largest community-based art project, a political statement, and as a memorial. I examined the life and work of Gert McMullin within these three contexts in order to better understand the narrative of The AIDS Memorial Quilt .

Through a series of in-depth life story interviews, document and artifact analysis, and participant observation, I gained a more comprehensive understanding of the people, places, and events surrounding the development of The NAMES Project, The AIDS Memorial Quilt and Gert McMullin. I came to believe that Gert is the most integral person in the story of The Quilt and without her personal qualities of love, compassion, activism and creativity, The Quilt would probably not have developed or survived in the manner that it has.

The understandings that can be gained through exploration of the story of The Quilt have value to students and school workers especially those in art classrooms who hope to orient their teaching toward social change.

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