

1.

What's in a Name?

The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt was conceived in 1985 by AIDS activist Cleve Jones, co-founder of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. To Jones and his colleagues attending a candlelight vigil marking the assassinations of San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk, the montage of placards they'd taped to the front of the San Francisco Federal Building commemorating loved ones lost to AIDS resembled an enormous patchwork quilt.

2.

It Began With a Single Panel

Jones created the first quilt panel in memory of his friend Marvin Feldman. Bereaved families, spouses and friends were encouraged to share their grief by creating panels. Measuring 3 feet by 6 feet (the approximate size of a grave) and made of fabric, decorative objects and personal belongings, they paid tribute to individuals or groups of people who had died of AIDS. Panels would then be assembled into 12-foot by 12-foot blocks.

3.

Transforming Castoffs Into Comfort

Cleve Jones envisioned the Quilt as a tool to reveal the humanity behind the AIDS death toll. In his book, *When We Rise: My Life in the Movement*, he says quilts evoke images of pioneer women making camp by their Conestoga wagons or slaves hoarding scraps of fabric from their masters' houses – castoffs and discarded remnants of different colors and textures that would be sewn together to create something beautiful, useful and warm.

4.

A Movement is Born

Public response to the Quilt was immediate. People in major U.S. cities affected most by AIDS sent panels to the San Francisco workshop. Amid increasing deaths and the public's growing national frustration with inaction by the Reagan and Bush administrations, the grassroots project grew exponentially. In June of 1987, Jones teamed up with Mike Smith and several others to formally organize the NAMES Project Foundation.

5.

Gathering Momentum

By the time it was first shown in October of 1987 during the second National March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights at the National Mall in Washington, DC, the AIDS Memorial Quilt included 1,920 panels and covered an area larger than a football field. A subsequent 20-city tour raised more than \$500,000 for hundreds of AIDS service organizations and added another 4,000 panels.

6.

Blanketing the Mall

By 1992, when the number of AIDS-related deaths in the United States had passed 250,000, the AIDS Memorial Quilt comprised panels from every state and 28 countries. By October of 1996, when AIDS deaths surpassed 580,000, the number of panels had grown to such an extent that the Quilt covered the entire breadth of the National Mall. This was the last time the Quilt was displayed in its entirety.

7.

A National Treasure

All told, the NAMES AIDS Memorial Quilt comprises more than 48,000 panels representing more than 92,000 individuals and weighs well over 54 tons. The Quilt is housed at the NAMES Project Foundation headquarters in Atlanta. As many as 3,000 panels are publicly displayed every year to ensure the ongoing preservation of what the United States Congress in 2005 declared a national cultural treasure.

8.

(NO HEADLINE – QUOTE ONLY)

“Today we have borne in our arms and on our shoulders a new monument to our nation’s capital. It is not made of granite or steel and was not built by stonecutters and engineers. Our monument is sewn of fabric and thread, and was created in homes across America and wherever friends and families gathered to remember their loved ones lost to AIDS.”

- Cleve Jones, Washington, DC, October 1992

9.

(SECOND QUOTE FROM JONES' SPEECH)

“We bring a quilt. We bring it here today with shocked sorrow at its vastness and the speed with which its acreage redoubles. We bring it to this place at this time accompanied by our deepest hope: that the leaders of our country will see the evidence of our labor and our love and that they will be moved. We bring a quilt. We have carried this quilt to every part of our country and we have seen that the American people know how to defeat AIDS.”

- Cleve Jones, Washington, DC, October 1992

10.

The Quilt Today

The Quilt remains the world's largest community art project, and has been the subject of countless books, films and articles, and theatrical and musical performances. More than 14 million people have visited the Quilt at thousands of displays worldwide. Through this activity, the NAMES Project Foundation has raised over \$3 million for AIDS service organizations throughout North America.

In 1989, the Quilt was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize.

11.

The NAMES Project Comes to SRQ

The Southwest Florida Community AIDS Quilt Project began in 1994 when several HIV-positive men wanted to memorialize the friends and loved ones they'd lost by creating quilt panels with the names of those they'd lost to HIV/AIDS in the Sarasota-Bradenton area.

As envisioned by Cleve Jones all those years ago, the Quilt project provided therapy for a community paralyzed with grief, rage and powerlessness.

12.

The SW Florida Project Takes Flight

With the help of Sister Frances Nevolo, OLC, executive director of Bethesda House of Catholic Charities from 1992 to 2002, word about the project spread and contributions to the creation and upkeep of quilt panels flourished.

Sarasota's Temple Sinai supported the movement by introducing new quilts to be dedicated every year at their Seder of Hope, an interfaith Passover gathering for people touched by HIV/AIDS.

13.

Small Town Pride

In December of 2004, in honor of World AIDS Day, the first Southwest Florida quilt panels were hung in the Selby Public Library's rotunda and were viewed by thousands.

Since 2003, the entire collection of the Southwest Florida Community AIDS Quilt has been displayed during Sarasota PrideFest, creating a moving experience as people walking through the Quilt Room recognize the names of those lost to AIDS.

14.

Keepers of the Quilt in SW Florida

The Southwest Florida AIDS Quilt is housed at the National Headquarters of CAN Community Health in Sarasota. A Governing Board made up of mostly volunteer community members is dedicated to the safety and appropriate display of the Quilt. Each panel is photographed, numbered and displayed on a website to be used by libraries, high schools and the general public as a source of historical information and creative inspiration.

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