

JOURNEY TO THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

Story Quilts by Beth Mount

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JOURNEY TO THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

Journey to the Beloved Community story quilts express a vision of a world woven together with a common thread: all of us count and each of us can help create aspects of a beloved community

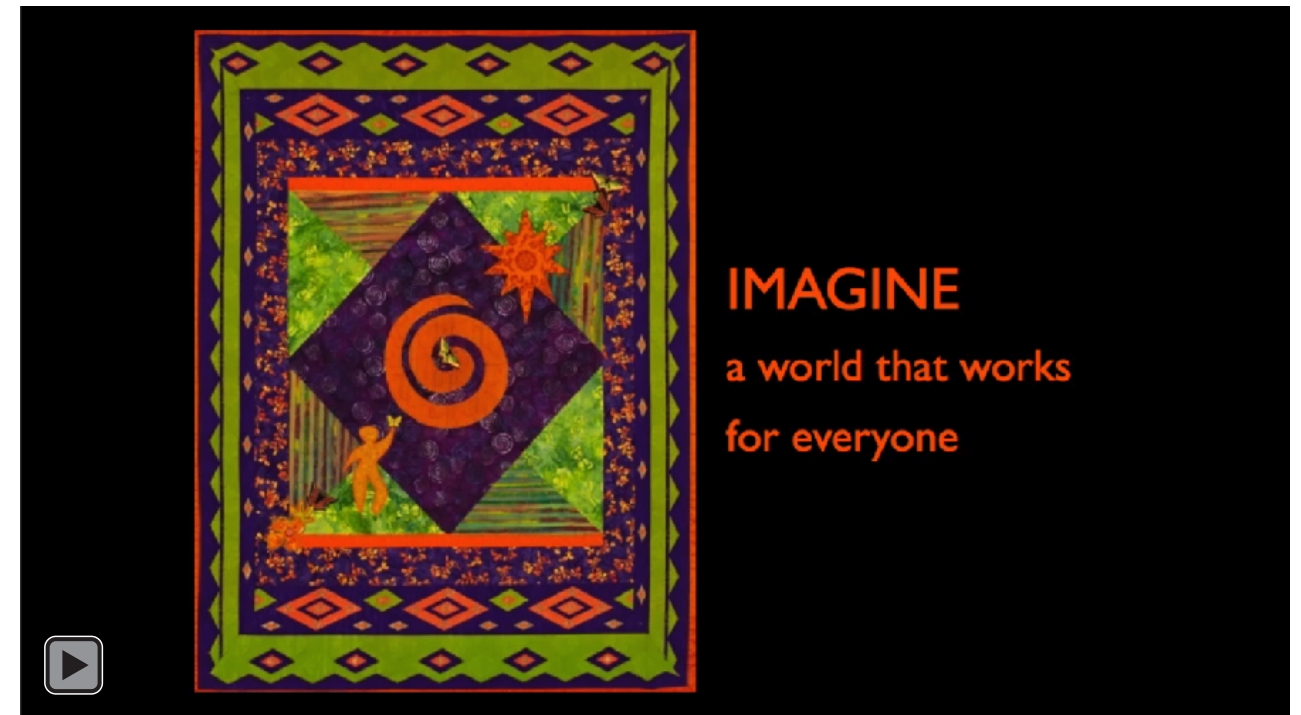
Detail from *Be Not Afraid... All Will Be Well*



My life work of four decades is devoted to the possibility that all people, particularly those with disabilities, are seen in the light of their capacities and potential. My community works steadily on many aspects of personal, neighborhood, organizational, and cultural change so that the hopes expressed by people and their allies have some concrete impact on the structures of society. I stitch together symbols and patterns of the longings, joys, struggles, and beauty of thousands of people who are learning how to bring the gifts of every person to life and to create a more inclusive community by doing so. This work has affirmed in me the belief that all people have gifts to bring, and that the fabric of community is strengthened when we incorporate the capacities of labeled people into the civic life of all.

The quilts serve as metaphor and example of weaving together of the colorful interests of many particular people into tapestries of shared concern. Consequently, the quilts display vibrant assemblages of diversity—fabrics, patterns, and identity—from people of many cultures finding a way toward an aesthetic that expresses harmony, balance, rhythm, vitality, beauty, and joy in the process of creation.

The method of making these quilts engages people in co-creating visions and platforms for change. The experience of making these artworks with thousands of people confirms for me the potential of each individual to be a fundamentally creative being. This Art Spirit is beautifully described by Richard Kamler:



Art is our one true global language. It knows no nation. It favors no race. It acknowledges no class. It speaks to our need to heal, reveal and transform. It transcends our ordinary lives and lets us imagine what is possible. It creates a dialogue between individuals, and communication between communities. It allows us to see and to listen to each other.

Everyone is an artist when involved in the construction of their world. The creativity, imagination, and contributions of all people are needed to revitalize and restore community.

Growing up in Atlanta during the 1960's civil rights movement I was influenced by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s call to remember that *we are all tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality*. Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people share in the wealth of the earth. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice are transcended in an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood.

Legal and civil rights create the foundation for equal opportunity; the vision of the beloved community however, invites personal and social relationships created by love. Relationships that cannot be legislated. Dr King describes this agape love as an *overflowing love seeking to preserve and create community*. Undoubtedly, the people I know benefit from and contribute to this art of relationship building.

Working among people from many of New York City's 140 cultures for the past two decades confirms my understanding that Dr. King's vision touches the hopes and dreams of all people. At their core, all of the major world religions call people to justice, compassion and hospitality, to realize that *the moral arc of the universe bends toward justice*. Every human being is essentially oriented to this sense of a just order in the universe. It is up to each of us to join in creating a world that supports this alignment. Each quilt represents pieces of this promise, memories of the effort made.

I am deeply inspired by the world wide community of quilters who cultivate beauty, form, and order from discarded and jumbled fragments of cloth. By the women of Gees

Bend who transformed the scraps and rags of life into astonishing artworks. By Faith Ringgold's provocative and imaginative story quilts that speak truth to power. By the dedication of the unseen visionary artists who find endless ways to fashion something out of nothing, who wake us with the integrity and joy that spring forth from shadows into light-filled form. By the acts of kindness and courage of those who dare to dream of a world that works for everyone.

May these story quilts touch that spark in each of us that longs for the Beloved Community, a world that works for everyone, where every life is treasured and our time together is filled with meaning and beauty.

The beloved community is not a utopia, but a place where the barriers between people gradually come down and where the citizens make a constant effort to address even the most difficult problems of ordinary people. It is above all else an idealistic community.

—Reverend Jim Lawson

WADDIE WELCOME AND THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

Fear Not... All Will Be Well

*Waddie Welcome and the Beloved Community
gives us all a chance to see what we can come to
mean to one another. Welcome's story is not about
civil rights, it is about doing the right thing.*

—John Lewis



Waddie Welcome and the Beloved Community is a Savannah legend. The story as told and retold connects us to the vision of the beloved community. In the words of Reverend Jim Lawson, *the beloved community is not a utopia, but a place where the barriers between people gradually come down and where the citizens make a constant effort to address even the most difficult problems of ordinary people.*



When we feel compassion for another we return to our deepest nature. The inner door opens, and it becomes effortless to reach out and connect. The greatest antidote to insecurity and egoistic self-concern is compassion—it brings us back to our basic inner strength. The quality of compassion is inborn, the inheritance of every human being; whether one is a believer or not, on this level there is no difference. What the teachings of the world's religions seek to do is help us recognize this heritage and provide us with a systematic means to foster it, enhance it, and bring it to perfection.

—The Dalai Lama

In this story quilt Waddie Welcome and his soul friend Addie Reeves appear to us as angels bearing Addie's handmade phone book. Mrs. Reeves' phone book is the legacy of a life given to the service of the wider community as she lived out the spirit of the beloved community. She and Mr. Welcome radiate a spirit of generosity, compassion, and respect. They invite us to *fear not* the discomfort of difference that so often keeps us apart.

Waddie Welcome lit up a room and the space between people. He embodied the light of fearlessness, deep respect and concern for others. Mr. Welcome had a way of inviting people into his space with his winning smile and alert eyes. Entering the space around him was like visiting a different world, a somewhat strange and wonderful place in which people might see the world and each other



129" x 114"

2012



anew. Mr. Welcome is often described as a teacher with a book of life lessons inside of him. His being was a moral compass, a conscience, and a presence who revitalized kindness. He was often surrounded by a cluster of people deeply attracted to the quality of liveliness fostered in this space.

Mr. Welcome and Mrs. Reeves are portrayed with a circle of twelve figures, allies and advocates who crossed the line into the compassionate realm of community building: Lester, Jeff, Tom, Debra, Dottie, Deacon Hart, Jane, Mary, Mario, Adrian, Margaret, Susan, Mr. W.W Law, Regina, Kim, Gillian, and many more who live and tell the story. The circle is also a wheel, representing the

power of people making change together.

The central figures in the Waddie Welcome story quilt are bordered by sixteen squares which represent the Savannah Squares framing the heart of downtown. These garden

spaces –Ellis, Telfair, Washington, Greene, Chatham, Pulanski, and ten others– are not colonized or commercialized. They are free spaces in which relationships and civic life might grow. The flowers within flowers in each square signify the blossoming of relationships in shared soul space. Like the Savannah gardens, when the conditions that nurture goodness in relationships outweigh everything else, the potential in people blooms and ripens. The Waddie Welcome story brings us back to that treasured space between us in which wisdom and community grow.



[Read Waddie Welcome & The Beloved Community
by Tom Kohler & Susan Earle](#)

[Learn about sharing Waddie Welcome's story](#)

WISH FULFILLING JUSTICE

Whereas desegregation can be brought about by laws, integration requires a change in attitudes. It involves personal and social relationships that are created by love—and these cannot be legislated. We will have to learn to relate to each other across those non-rational, psychological barriers which have traditionally separated us in society.

*—Kenneth Smith and
Ira Zepp*





This artwork tells the story of Janice Bartley who lives happily in her own apartment in the Bronx, New York. Janice's life reminds us that her capacity to live independently is directly related to her interdependence with others who are dedicated to her well-being. The 25 people surrounding Janice

each have a part in sustaining her vision. They reach across ethnic, faith, and economic differences to solve problems together, negotiate hard times and have fun, secure needed resources, provide day-to-day support and build a stronger community in which Janice's gifts can unfold. Janice is a remarkable, generous woman who inspires everyone in her circle—so her qualities of courage, wisdom, and determination radiate from her joyful presence

64" x 56"

2009



[Read a booklet about supporting people with developmental disabilities to live in their own homes](#)

MAKE YOUR MARK: BE AN EVERYDAY HERO

It has become a common feeling, I believe, as we have watched our heroes failing over the years, that our own small stone of activism, which might not seem to measure up to the rugged boulders of heroism we have so admired, is a paltry offering toward the building of an edifice of hope. Many who believe this choose to withhold their offerings out of shame. This is the tragedy of our world. For we can do nothing substantial toward changing our course on the planet, a destructive one, without rousing ourselves, individual by individual, and bringing our small imperfect stones to the pile.

—Alice Walker

