

Welcome to Imagine a World: Nancy's Larks + Be Kind, an exhibit imagined and created by Maxine Hess + Jeanne Hewell-Chambers. Our first stop: The Minni Room.

Maxine was capturing Holocaust survivor stories when a neighbor introduced her to Minni Warnke Scott, saying "You need to meet this woman." At the end of World War II, Minni was looking for a job when she came upon a posting at her alma mater, Hunter College in New York City. The job required applicants to be fluent in German - which Minni was - so she applied, was hired, and traveled to Germany where she spent 3 years as a Research Analyst at the Nuremberg Doctors' Trials. There she heard unimaginable, unspeakable stories of experiments conducted on human beings, of entire villages being decimated, and of the euthanasia of physically and mentally disabled individuals who were murdered through the Aktion T4 program.

Aktion T4 was a top secret organization of physicians created by Hitler to murder people with disabilities who were considered "life unworthy of life" and "useless eaters". Hitler's personal physician Karl Brandt, planted the idea when he petitioned Hitler for permission to kill his 5 month old baby boy - known in history books as Baby K - who was born with multiple deformities. Permission was granted, and the organization formed.

Let's hear Minni tell the story in her own words. [Watch video]

After the trials, Minni never spoke German again (even though one of her college degrees was in German), and she never returned to Germany, even to attend her father's funeral. At age 73, Minni entered a pre-cohort doctoral program at Union Institute and University with the intention of fulfilling her life's passion and to leave her mark - her legacy - by creating a curriculum for Middle and Junior High students to learn what can happen in a world of unkindness, hate and fear of the "other." Minni wanted students to learn a most important thing, "Be kind to people."

The photos you see in the Quilt of Shame are of Aktion T4 Nazi physicians. Minni gave them to Maxine. "The experience was quite emotional for me," says Maxine. "I printed them on silk organza because they were dead and were now shadows. I buried the silk organza photos in my yard and left them there for several weeks. I really didn't want to touch them and wasn't sure what I would do with them when a friend gave me a much damaged quilt. I removed the photos from the dirt and stitched them

into the quilt following the original quilting. Stitching through them was a way for me to release the anger and disgust I felt.”

“When I met Jeanne and learned of The 70273 Project,” Maxine continues, “I was compelled to create the Quilt of Innocence. I found several photos of disabled children who were euthanized under the T4 program and a quilt remnant that appeared to have been made for a child because of the colors. I printed the photos of the children on silk organza, cut the center out of the octagons on the quilt, placed the photos within those spaces – all to create safe spaces for the children to rest in. The Quilt of Innocence is hung away from the Quilt of Shame on purpose. It was too painful for me to place them together.”

“I first learned of Aktion T4 while watching a documentary in February 2016,” Jeanne says. This big, fat, crazy idea whooshed in, sat on my shoulder, showed me some images, and urged me to launch something called The 70273 Project. Ten days later - before I had time to think myself out of it - I published a blog post inviting people around the world to join me in commemorating the disabled people who were treated unkindly AND to promote kindness to all people today and forever. When two Aktion T4 physicians marked a red X at the bottom of the information sheet about a disabled person, that person was located, picked up, taken to one of the six “reception” centers, and murdered. The white background represents the paper, and the pair of red X’s represents the marks of two physicians which became a death sentence. Each quilt block is made up of two red X’s on a white background. Each pair of red X’s represents one disabled person murdered because they weren’t perfect. I chose to commemorate with quilts because I have long told stories using cloth and thread, because there’s something comforting about quilts, and because quilters are the most big-hearted, kind people I know. Quilters of The 70273 Project did not disappoint. We’ll talk more about that in our next stop.

“Two months after Jeanne and I introduced ourselves,” Maxine notes, “we met for lunch in Atlanta. When Jeanne told me about the drawings of her mentally disabled sister-in-law Nancy (who you’ll hear more 2 rooms from now), I immediately said, ‘Whatever you decide to do with those drawings, I want to collaborate with you.’” And here we are in fall 2024, bringing all those pieces together at last at the Southeastern Quilt and Textile Museum in the Imagine a World: Nancy’s Larks + Be Kind Exhibit.

Now let’s move on to Stop #2, The 70273 Project Room.

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\* Note to Parents and Teachers from Jeanne:

I use past tense because we are no longer accepting blocks because all 70,273 people have been commemorated. There are however, still many opportunities to become involved. In February 2024, I placed the leadership baton in the hands of my good and amazing friend Peggy Thomas, who is leading The 70273 Project into its next chapters. She and a group of wonderful volunteers are working to finish the last two pieces of my original visiting, and they have some fantastic ideas of their own they're laying the groundwork for, so stay tuned! At The 70273 Project, we will always promote kindness to all and educate anybody who will listen about disabilities. If you're interested in hearing more or getting involved, please reach out to her: [Peggy@The70273Project.org](mailto:Peggy@The70273Project.org)

## Stop 2) The 70273 Project

In Room 1 we talked about how each pair of red X's symbolizes a disabled person who was murdered because they were different and deemed imperfect, but in this room, I'd like you to select a pair of red X's and look at them closely. Are the red X's the same size or different? Can you tell what kind of fabric they are made from? Does the fabric look smooth or textured? Are the red X's narrow or wide, straight or slanted? Notice the shade of red, the stitching, how the red X's are attached, and think on this: Every stitch in every quilt in this room and every stitch in the more than 800 quilts that wouldn't fit in this room were sewn by kind people from around the world. Look at these red X's as art and notice how different each pair is from the others. This is true for people, too. It's true for the people who made these quilts, true for the people standing around you today, the people you work with, people you socialize with, people you're related to. Every person - every single person - is differently beautiful in their own way. Every single person is a work of art.

Many of the kind people who made these blocks and quilts speak a language other than English. They may speak in languages you don't understand. Does that mean they aren't kind? Does that mean you shouldn't treat them with kindness? Does that mean they have nothing to say that you would find interesting? Does that mean you can't communicate?

"We can't unring this bell of history," I wrote in that initial blog post, "but we can wrap it in kindness." Take a minute to quietly look around the room. While the quilts in this room do commemorate disabled people who were murdered, collectively the quilts speak to the tremendous amount of kindness people in 143 countries spilled out into the world in connection with this project in one way or another. The first room was a room about a place in the world and a time in history when there was no kindness. This room is a testimony to kindness around the world. It's amazing to know that there is so much kindness out there even as we stand here marveling at the evidence. And yet there's always room for more.

When you're ready, let's go into the next room, the room I call Kindness, Route 1.

### Stop 3) Kindness, Route 1

Welcome to Kindness, Route 1! In The 70273 Project room, we witnessed kindness on a global scale. In this room, let's talk about how kindness from one person can change countless lives.

The first thing you probably notice is the Kindness Forest in the center of the room. Did you notice that the moss on the forest floor is a veritable cacophony of bright colors? Maxine and I gathered crocheted doilies and tablecloths from women we will never know, then Maxine dyed them to make our forest colorful. The trees were crocheted from all kinds of materials by Ann Rowles, a friend of Maxine's. Pause for a moment and notice how the Kindness Forest makes you feel.

If you'll begin to the left of the door closest to the front of the building and follow the path around the room, the first quilt you'll see is a quilt Maxine and I made collaboratively to tell the story of our friendship.

The title of the quilt is **POSTCARDS FROM A JOURNEY OF FRIENDSHIP**, and here's the Artists' Statement:

Storied fabric.  
Seasoned quilts.  
Softly frayed edges.  
These are just a few of our favorite things.

Kindness.  
Women's issues.  
Social justice.  
Personal histories.  
These are just a few of our shared interests.

We, like many others, discover our common threads through art, and more often than not, we use cloth to tell our stories and speak our truths.

"You, too?" If we had a nickel for every time we've said that to each other, we'd buy all y'all lunch.

We're not carbon copies, yet even in our differences we find opportunities to rejoice, chortle, and learn. If that's not the mark of true friendship, please tell us what is.

Next is a quilt with a white pinafore. I made Playground of Her Soul to tell the story of my disabled sister-in-law Nancy who was treated unkindly when she was 3 years old. Some people we don't know hung her with a rope from a swingset. Her body lived, but her brain was permanently altered. Nancy has a vocabulary of about 12 words, and 6 of them are the word "love". "Love" is a word she uses quite often.

Nancy lives in Florida, and one day when I visited her, we went to get hot fudge sundaes. When it took a while for the delectables to get to us, Nancy got fidgety. She is not good at waiting for ice cream or milkshakes! To give her something to do, I put pens and paper in front of her, and to my great surprise, she did something she'd never done before in all the decades I'd known her: she began drawing. She would make a mark on a page, then lift the pen to let me know it was time to turn the page. She filled my journal, then emptied the napkin holder making marks on napkins until the sundaes came. Seeing that she was communicating with me, I began stitching her drawings that very night. That was in 2012. Today, she still draws, and I still stitch her drawings.

That's what you'll see on the walls in this room. I tell different parts of Nancy's story in different fabrics and threads. Some are about her family because when someone is unkind to one person, they're also unkind to that person's parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, friends, classmates, teachers, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Unkindness to one person is unkindness to many people. The good news is that when you're KIND to one person, you're also kind to their parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, friends, classmates, teachers, aunt, uncles, and cousins. A little kindness goes a very long way!

The drawings stitched on the black orb are the third set of drawings Nancy made. Every time we visit Nancy, we leave paper and markers for her and bring back the drawings she's made since our last visit. I bring the drawings home, scan, format, and label them, arrange them in digital folders, store the originals in page protectors in binders, then I begin to stitch. This black orb is the third piece in the series I call In Our Own Language.

See the purple stitchings on a white background? Those are Nancy's first marks she made at the restaurant that day. That's In Our Own Language 1.

Next is a triptych - 3 panels - of In Our Own Language 2. Those stitched drawings are sandwiched between sheer window curtains that once hung in my favorite Great Aunt Irene's living room. Aunt Rene loved Nancy, and whenever they were together, Aunt Rene would make her way

to sit with Nancy, refusing to leave Nancy's side - even for cookies and ice cream. (Oh that didn't mean she didn't want the sweets. She just asked people to deliver plates filled with sweets to Nancy and her!)

This is how Nancy and I communicate now, you see. She draws, I stitch, we communicate - all without words. Through her drawings, she lets me know how she's feeling - if she's happy, sad, hungry. Can you find drawings that look happy? Sad? Mad? Frustrated? Sleepy?

She also lets me know what she's seeing. The blue panels displayed opposite In Our Own Language 3 (the black orb) are her 4th set of drawings stitched with pink and white thread. These drawings were made when we took her to Daytona Beach to spend a week with us. She spent the mornings on the hotel room balcony observing, and in the hot afternoons, she came inside the cool room to draw. Do you see the birds?

Nancy's birds may not look like birds, but they are still birds.

These trees crocheted by Ann may not look like any trees you've ever seen before, but they are still trees in our Kindness Forest.

Nancy may not look or sound or eat or walk like anybody you've ever known, but she's still Nancy, a woman, a human being who deserves - and receives on a regular basis, I'm delighted to say - kindness.

So are each of you.

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Please linger as long as time permits. Revisit points of interest, ask questions, and before you leave, maybe purchase some raffle tickets and pick up a leaf, pen a sentence or two about a time you were treated with kindness or a time you treated others with kindness, and drop it in our Kindness Box. From 4 to 6 p.m. on December 5, 2024, we will gather here for our Kindness Celebration, an evening of storytelling about kindness, including reading aloud the stories from our Kindness Box. Thank you for coming.

Jeanne and Maxine