

Melanie Kiper

Story accompanying donation of two cloth masks to the Omaha COVID-19 Collection (transferred from donor agreement)

April 26, 2020

I have sewn over 200 cloth masks in the last month as my contribution to help slow the spread of the novel coronavirus. Initially, I made dozens for family, friends, and neighbors. Then was asked by a local business to make 100 masks for their employees. After those were completed, I made dozens for the Nebraska Health Care Association.

I sew the masks on my mother's circa 1970 Kenmore sewing machine. She was an avid seamstress and taught me to sew on this machine when I was in the sixth grade. I used her machine numerous times throughout the years for many types of projects, but none more important than making these masks.

I use my mom's stash of quilting fabric and thread. Mom made many baby quilts throughout the years. When her oldest granddaughter announced a great-grandchild was coming in 2018, she made a special quilt for the baby and, unexpectedly, renewed her interest in patchwork and quilting. Over the next year she made over 35 quilts in various sizes and styles: one for each member of her immediate family and close circle of friends. This required a large stash of fabric. I will continue making masks until the stash is depleted or the masks are no longer needed.

I make these masks as a tribute to my mother, Shirley Hayes. She died in May 2019, after an 18-year battle with chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder. COPD makes it difficult for the patient to breath. Mom had many episodes of severe shortness of breath. Many with coronavirus disease experience severe shortness of breath. It is scary. I now own the machine and fabric stash. I hope my mother approves of how I am using them to help others stay healthy and avoid a disease that brings with it the same fear and sensation of suffocation she experienced for so many years living with COPD.