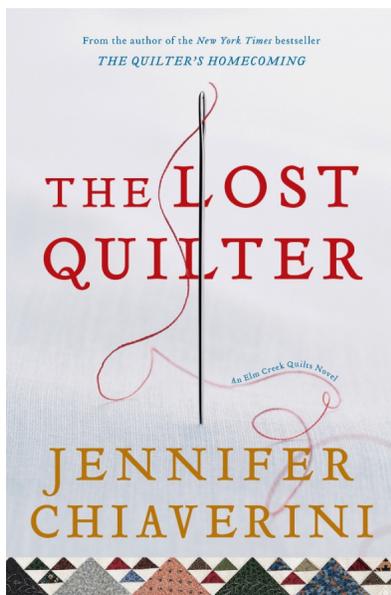


The Lost Quilter: An Elm Creek Quilts Novel

by Jennifer Chiaverini
A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit



About the Book

Master Quilter Sylvia Bergstrom Compson treasures an antique quilt called by three names -- Birds in the Air, after its pattern; the Runaway Quilt, after the woman who sewed it; and the Elm Creek Quilt, after the place to which its maker longed to return. That quilter was Joanna, a fugitive slave who traveled by the Underground Railroad to reach safe haven in 1859 at Elm Creek Farm.

Though Joanna's freedom proved short-lived -- she was forcibly returned by slave catchers to Josiah Chester's plantation in Virginia -- she left the Bergstrom family a most precious gift, her son. Hans and Anneke Bergstrom, along with maiden aunt Gerda, raised the boy as their own, and the secret of his identity died with their generation. Now it falls to Sylvia -- drawing upon Gerda's diary and Joanna's quilt -- to connect Joanna's past to present-day Elm Creek Manor.

Just as Joanna could not have foreseen that, generations later, her quilt would become the subject of so much speculation and wonder, Sylvia and her friends never could have imagined the events Joanna witnessed in her lifetime. Punished for her escape by being sold off to her master's brother in Edisto Island, South Carolina, Joanna grieves over the loss of her son and resolves to run again, to reunite with him someday in the free North. Farther south than she has ever been, she nevertheless finds allies, friends, and even love in the slave quarter of Oak Grove, a cotton plantation where her skill with needle and thread soon becomes highly prized.



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Through hardship and deprivation, Joanna dreams of freedom and returning to Elm Creek Farm. Determined to remember each landmark on the route north, Joanna pieces a quilt of scraps left over from the household sewing, concealing clues within the meticulous stitches. Later, in service as a seamstress to the new bride of a Confederate officer, Joanna moves on to Charleston, where secrets she keeps will affect the fate of a nation, and her abilities and courage enable her to aid the country and the people she loves most.

The knowledge that scraps can be pieced and sewn into simple lines -- beautiful both in themselves and also for what they represent and what they can accomplish -- carries Joanna through dark days. Sustaining herself and her family through ingenuity and art during the Civil War and into Reconstruction, Joanna leaves behind a remarkable artistic legacy that, at last, allows Sylvia to discover the fate of the long-lost quilter.

The Lost Quilter by Jennifer Chiaverini, published by Simon & Schuster. Permission to use book jacket image and book description granted by Simon & Schuster (<http://books.simonandschuster.com/>).

Book details:

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<http://books.simonandschuster.com/Lost-Quilter>

Other formats: large print, 2010, ISBN 978-1-59413-357-2; audiobook, 2009, ISBN 978-1-4361-9871-4. Available through the State Library of Ohio Talking Book Program: <http://www.klas.com/talkingbooks/ohio>.

The Elm Creek Quilts novels, published as hardcover originals by Simon & Schuster, includes seventeen titles to date, beginning with **The Quilter's Apprentice**, published in 1999. The most recent titles are:

- **The Lost Quilter** (2009)
- **A Quilter's Holiday** (2009)
- **The Aloha Quilt** (2010)
- **The Union Quilters** (2011)

In most of the books, the main character is a master quilter named Sylvia Bergstrom Compson. She and her young friend Sarah McClure open a quilters' retreat at Sylvia's family estate, Elm Creek Manor. Sarah and Sylvia run the "quilt camp" with the help of their friends, the Elm Creek Quilters. Other books are historical, featuring Sylvia's ancestors and earlier residents of the Elm Creek Valley.

The Elm Creek Quilts books were written as stand-alone books. **The Lost Quilter** may be enjoyed without familiarity with other Elm Creek Quilts books. The publication order of all the books, and the chronological order of the storylines, may be found in the FAQ on Jennifer Chiaverini's website: <http://elmcreek.net/index.php/main/faq>.

Series information courtesy Jennifer Chiaverini; used with permission.



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About the Author

Jennifer Chiaverini was born in Cincinnati, grew up in Waterford, Michigan and Thousand Oaks, California, and lives with her husband and two sons in Madison, Wisconsin.

A graduate of the University of Notre Dame and the University of Chicago, she is also a former writing instructor at Penn State and Edgewood College.

In addition to the sixteen volumes of the Elm Creek Quilts series, Chiaverini is the author of four volumes of quilt patterns inspired by her novels, as well as the designer of the Elm Creek Quilts fabric lines from Red Rooster Fabrics.

Author biography courtesy Jennifer Chiaverini; used with permission. Photograph used with permission from Simon & Schuster.

Author Resources:

Jennifer Chiaverini's official website

<http://www.elmcreek.net/>

Author page on Simon & Schuster site

<http://authors.simonandschuster.com/Jennifer-Chiaverini>

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Talk About it!

(Spoiler warning! Some discussion questions refer to key events in the book. Do not read if you don't want to find out what happens.)

- At the quilting party when Joanna is a child, the elder Mrs. Chester says slave owners are "enslaved as much as [slaves] are and must resign ourselves to it" (p. 55). How is this true in her perception? What does this say about her understanding of Joanna's life? Do you agree or disagree with her?
- Joanna sees Miss Evangeline's engagement as "being sold off to the highest bidder" (p. 132). Do you agree with Joanna's impression of antebellum courtship for people of Miss Evangeline's social class? What are some differences and some similarities between the marriage arrangements of Colonel Harper and Miss Evangeline, and Joanna and Titus?
- Joanna gets off to a rough start with Leah and Leah's daughter Lizzie. Why, then, does Joanna risk her own safety, and possibly her life, by helping Leah when she is punished with the stake? What does she mean when she tells Titus "I am Leah" (p 142)?
- Joanna and Leah both face very difficult situations during their lives. What finally breaks Leah? What makes Joanna stronger?
- When Titus has the chance to run while fetching Miss Evangeline from Charleston, he doesn't take it because he can't bear to leave Joanna and their unborn child. But later, he makes the decision to join General Hunter's colored regiment at Hilton Head. What caused him to change his mind about leaving Joanna and Ruthie behind? Why was Joanna able to forgive him both times?
- After her violent encounter with Missus Givens, Hannah stops speaking entirely. Joanna has to hide her reading ability from all her masters but tries to use it to prove her story of being a freed woman. How does the power of language and literacy affect the slaves' lives?
- Despite having a comfortable life, Miss Evangeline lies and exaggerates about everything. Why do you think she does so? What does she gain, if anything, and what does she sacrifice?
- When Mr. Lewis approaches Joanna about being a spy, she is understandably distrustful of his motives. Her price is the freedom of Hannah and Ruthie, should they be split up and sold. Do you think Mr. Lewis is really capable of keeping his promise? Do Joanna's reports truly help Mr. Lincoln's army?



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- Joanna's Birds of the Air scrap quilt is a record of landmarks on the way back north to freedom. What, aside from a map, does the quilt represent? What does it mean to the modern women at the historical museum on Edisto Island?
- Sylvia finds great satisfaction in learning about Joanna North's story, even though she has not conclusively proven that Joanna North is the Joanna that Gerda mentions in her memoir. Do you think Sylvia will eventually prove they are one and the same? Why or why not? Do you agree that "it was enough to know that such a woman existed" (p. 336)?

Enhance Your Discussion

- Do some online research to learn more about how quilts might have been used as signals for the Underground Railroad. Do you think the quilt code theory is valid? Why or why not?
- Take a look at the Birds in the Air quilt on Jennifer Chiaverini's website: <http://elmcreek.net/index.php/gallery/quilt-detail/birds-in-the-air/>. Have you ever made or seen a Birds in the Air quilt before? Why do you suppose Joanna selected this particular pattern for her quilt?
- The Quilters of North Freedom, the fictional sewing circle founded by Joanna North, is reminiscent of the remarkable Quilters of Gee's Bend. To read more about this formerly little-known community of quilters in rural Alabama that has become widely renowned for their craft, visit: <http://www.quiltsofgeesbend.com/index.shtml>
- If you have read the other Elm Creek Quilts books, how do you feel **The Lost Quilter** ties in to the "family" of books? Does this answer questions raised in other books? Does it raise questions about the rest of the series?

For a complete reading group guide, check the Simon & Schuster page for **The Lost Quilter**, which also features a video interview with Jennifer Chiaverini:

<http://books.simonandschuster.net/Lost-Quilter/>

(Click on "Book Club Resources" for the reading group guide)

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Explore more!

If *The Lost Quilter* piques your interest in the Underground Railroad, consider taking a field trip, or explore online if you cannot travel:

Visit the **National Underground Railroad Freedom Center** in Cincinnati

<http://www.freedomcenter.org/>

Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 11:00 - 5:00

The Freedom Center opened in August 2004 on the banks of the Ohio River in downtown Cincinnati, Ohio. Its purpose is to tell the story of the struggle for freedom in the United States through exhibits and programs that focus on America's battle to rid itself of the ugly scourge of slavery and treat all its citizens with respect and dignity.

Plan an itinerary of **Ohio sites on the Underground Railroad**

<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/underground/states.htm> (scroll to "Ohio")

Some of these sites in Ripley, Mt. Pleasant, Ashtabula, Zanesville, and other Ohio towns are open to the public during certain hours and offer scheduled or on-request tours.

Learn more about the Underground Railroad:

<http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=1518>

Ohio Historical Center

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/>

National Geographic

<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/underground/>

National Register of Historic Places

See also:

Ohio Civil War 150

<http://www.ohiocivilwar150.org/>

2011 marks the sesquicentennial (150th anniversary) of the start of the American Civil War. The Ohio Civil War 150 website, a project of the Ohio Historical Society and its partners, includes digital collections, teacher resources, a statewide calendar of Civil War-related events, discussion forums, a timeline, and much more.



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>

If *The Lost Quilter* inspires you or your group to try your hand at quilting, there are many resources to help get you started.

Check the **Ohio Quilt Guilds** (<http://www.quiltguilds.com/ohio.htm>) directory for a quilting organization near you. A Quilt Guild is an organization established to support learning about and appreciation of quilts. Quilt Guilds are typically membership organizations, though many welcome visitors. They usually have regular meetings featuring programs, "show and tell", and learning opportunities. They may sponsor quilt shows, create and donate quilts to community organizations, or offer classes or workshops. Quilt Guilds can also refer you to local quilting bees, which are usually smaller groups of quilting enthusiasts who get together regularly to quilt.

Explore the **quilting books** at your local public library. Here is a directory of public libraries in Ohio: <http://www.library.ohio.gov/LS/Directories>. Depending on the classification scheme used in your library, books about quilting can be found in a number of locations. Libraries using the Dewey Decimal System frequently keep quilting books in call number 746.46. You are welcome to ask a librarian for assistance!

The **Internet Public Library** (ipl2) offers a resource guide on quilting, including websites, blogs, and books: <http://www.ipl.org/div/pf/entry/48521>.

The **Ohio Historical Society** frequently offers quilt exhibits at its historical sites. Recent exhibits include *Quilting Stories* (2008), *Quilting African American Women's History: Our Challenges, Creativity, and Champions* (2008-09) and *The Journey of Hope in America: Quilts Inspired by President Barack Obama* (2010). Learn more at <http://www.ohiohistory.org/>.

See also:

Red Rooster Fabrics: Jennifer Chiaverini

<http://www.redroosterfabrics.com/content23.html>

Information about and samples of Jennifer Chiaverini's Red Rooster Fabrics fabric lines and Elm Creek Quilts quilt patterns.

About Choose to Read Ohio

Choose to Read Ohio (CTRO) spotlights Ohio authors and promotes reading across Ohio. The State Library of Ohio, in partnership with Ohioana Library Association, developed this initiative to encourage Ohioans of all ages to share literature by authors native to, residing in, or associated with Ohio. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: <http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>.