

[Story Submitted by: TQSWizard](#)



For eighteen years, I worked as a mental health therapist: Master's degree in Social Work and a California state clinical social worker license. I was often struck by how many clients would state that they felt better "simply" by someone intently listening to them. The great value that group therapy had for its members was taking private thoughts (their "life story") and making them public. That innate need that all people have to be known and to connect—to be seen, to be heard and, yes, even to learn from others. I was reminded of my therapy days recently by photographing two events in June 2007, Book Group Expo (www.bookgroupexpo.com) and The Quilt Show (www.thequiltshow.com). Both events occurred in different states, at different times, and involved different people and demonstrated that by listening and embracing their member's comments they improved upon their success. They also shared a common theme: members publicly pursuing their (mostly) private passions. The first event was held in San Jose, California. Ann Kent, one of the co-founders, belonged to a local book group. Like other book groups, they often discover unknown (mostly fiction) authors and regularly meet at someone's house for a discussion of the latest "group-read" book. These groups are a curious notion—you read privately and discuss publicly. Ann wanted to create a physical event and a virtual (web) place where other book groups could connect. She dreamt of a place where the authors and readers could exchange ideas about the books they have read and discuss how book groups could profit from lessons learned. This June, Book Group Expo celebrated its second year anniversary. Khaled Hosseini, the best selling author of "The Kite Runner" and "A Thousand Splendid Suns" was the featured author, as he was last year. He admitted in a recent PBS interview, that when he wrote "The Kite Runner" that this book could have been a template of how not how to write a best seller. Upon its publication, it was not seen as a success. However, book groups and independent book stores saw the book's value and by sheer word of mouth, slowly built the infrastructure for the book's success. Khaled said it was important to return to this year's Book Group Expo event as a way to pay homage to these book groups. Many expo participants stated how excited they were to meet like-minded book group members, in a salon setting, and to listen to, and interact with their favorite authors. Building on the lessons learned from the first show and this year's success, Book Group Expo already has plans to create similar events in Seattle and Minneapolis. The second event that occurred in June 2007 was the second set of tapings of The Quilt Show in La Veta, Colorado. Alex Anderson and Ricky Tims wanted to create an event (The Quilt Show) and a web place where the "World Quilt Community" of quilters can, like book group members, connect, discuss, and view their quilt designs. One of the major sections of this web site is the posting of quilts that the world community members have made—featuring some very creative work. These quilters pursue their quilting passions alone and then via the web site in concert with others. At The Quilt Show tapings, the audience arrived early for the tapings and sat enraptured listening to the guests, often taking notes, and making those "ah!" exclamations when they learned something new from one of the guests or from Alex and Ricky. They interacted with the guests and co-hosts. As co-hosts, Alex and Ricky pledged to acknowledge the compliments and suggestions from their web-site and studio audience members to keep doing this, less of that, and more of this. With the addition of several new crew members (new director, editor, and fourth video camera operator) this set of shows improved upon the success and "lessons learned" from the first set of show tapings which resulted in a faster-paced, more technique-driven set of shows. Like Khaled Hosseini, Ricky and Alex continue to paid homage to those quilters who have embraced this first of a kind event and web site created by and for quilters. In the tapings, Alex and Ricky continued to present passionate, well-known artists and authors whose design work and books continue to amaze those in the audience—even the non-quilting video crew expressed their wonderment. One show pursued a serious but life-enriching topic that kept the audience (and crew) near tears. Another show featured a quilter whose pursuit and subsequent quilt left the audience spellbound—how many hours did she say she spent on that quilt? She's joking, right? No one has that much patience! She also kept a journal of her quilt work, which resulted in the book, "The 1776 Quilt." Later in the show she revealed, an even larger and significantly more complex quilt design in progress. Both of these events in June 2007 celebrated the private and the public pursuit of a primal need—the creating, telling, and connecting of life stories though the use of words and fabric. Each event acknowledged the underpinning of that old Beach Boy's song lyric: "I need a mess of help to stand alone": every event needs an audience, every author needs a reader, and every quilter needs a viewer. As a photographer at these two events, I photographed people listening, intently. As a former therapist at these two events, I found them to be good therapy for all concerned.