

Karen Kopitzke

There were always quilts in my home as a child. I still have one that my mother made and another that my great-aunt made. My sister has two tops that my mother made.

My first try at making a quilt was in the late seventies. I didn't want to deal with cutting templates out of cereal boxes and marking stitching lines so I decided to make a cathedral window quilt. Life would have been far easier if I had gone the cereal box route. I think I finished a piece about 12 inches square before I decided that I should probably stay with garment sewing.

I have always said that I am not very bright about the projects I choose to make. My first quilt was a double wedding ring. The second was a lone star. I seem to be attracted to patterns that are complex. No four-patch quilts at my house!

Around the year 2000 a friend said she was taking a quilting class, and I shared my dislike of the cereal box templates. When she told me about rulers and rotary cutters, I was overjoyed and signed on for the class with her. The class was to make a double wedding ring quilt. How hard could that be? I had been sewing since I was eight years old. I decided it would be a bed quilt as a gift for my son, and off I went to class. Turned out it was a bit trickier than I expected: The intended queen-size quilt turned into a six-block wall hanging. It still hangs on my son's wall.

Then I went to an appliqué class with Pat Cox and found my passion. My first appliqué quilt is red and green. I decided the border needed a strawberry vine. Hundreds of strawberries were cut from a strawberry print fabric and appliquéd down. The strawberry tops were made of green silk ribbon and required 50 yards to complete.

Machine piecing has never been of much interest to me. I seem to be always struggling with seam widths and blocks too small. I bought a book by Jinny Beyer about hand-piecing and found I really like to piece by hand. Somehow, by hand, seams and blocks come out just right. I even found it was easier for me to make a mariner's compass by hand rather than any other method.

I love classes and am always ready to try a new technique or process. Quite often what I learn is that I probably won't do something that way, but exploring the possibilities is always fun. Of course, there is always a nugget of information or an aha moment that makes the class well worth the effort.

I buy and use a lot of kits. I have heard that the best part of quilting is choosing the pattern and the fabrics. That part of the process stresses me out. That doesn't mean I don't have a comprehensive stash. I love stroking fabric. Not just cotton. I have a nice collection of wool and silk as well. The part of quilting I do love is handwork. Probably because I get to do more fabric stroking. I quilt my own quilts either by hand (if I consider them special) or by machine.

Currently I am finishing up my New Zealand quilt. In 2013 I was able to go on a month-long tour of New Zealand and Australia. Around the same time I came across a Block of the Month that was a Hawaiian style using New Zealand plants. The blocks are all needle-turn appliqué and hand embroidered. Because I chose not to make the sashing in the pattern and the blocks are set on point, I had to design the embroidery in the setting squares. It is hand quilted using a rainbow thread.

Why do I quilt? I am a fidgeter. If I don't have something in my hands, I start messing with things like pulling threads on a sweater or making a hole in my jeans larger. Quilting—especially handwork—satisfies the need for something in my hands. The feel of fabric in my hands and the rhythm of sewing is very soothing — even if I am unsewing. Yes, you even get to unsew with handwork.

My volunteer work with Minnesota Quilters and the Hudson Heritage Quilters has given me the opportunity to expand my skills, both personally and as a quilter. Best of all, quilting has given me a circle of friends of all ages.

