

My Quilting Bio

Ruth Cohen

I grew up in Upper Darby, Philadelphia and attended the University of Pennsylvania, majoring in chemistry. Trying to find a summer job in a pharmaceutical company, I was told they did not hire women scientists, so I decided to become a teacher.

Following graduation, I got married and moved to Ithaca, NY where my husband was a graduate student at Cornell. The only chemistry teaching positions available to me at that time involved teaching biology, physics and earth science too. As a math teacher I would only have to teach algebra and geometry, so I taught math. On the recommendation of my principal, I took an introduction to computers course at Cornell. There I met a professor who was looking for a graduate assistant to teach freshman math courses, so I became a grad student and earned a Master's in mathematics from Cornell.

When my husband was offered a position at NIH as a research chemist, we moved to Rockville. There I taught math for 5 years. I "retired" to stay home with my three daughters. When my girls were all in school, I returned to teaching. Finding it to be less fun as it was previously, I took accounting classes at Montgomery College. Calculating that I would be fairly old when I became an accountant and could do "interesting things", I decided to take computer programming classes. They were not only fun but interesting and challenging too. With my AA degree in Computer Programing, I was hired by the CIA.

I taught my three daughters to sew when they were young so they could be near me and not get into trouble! During their early childhood years I made clothes for them – including matching sister dresses, jeans, sweat suits and bathing suits; all with the Cohen logo. I also made all kinds of clothes for myself, pillows, and curtains. We made many things together and entered them into the county fair, earning many prizes and ribbons. One year we used all of our prize money to buy ice cream and treats! They were in junior high when they wanted "store bought" clothes.

And that's when I discovered quilts! No mandatory sizes, no curved lines, no darts, with colors and patterns to suit just myself! Or no pattern at all! Total Freedom! My first quilting class was a G Street in 1989. I made a full sized, *Quilt In A Day* Log Cabin bed quilt. I did finish the top in one day. The rest took longer. As I was not happy with the suggested pillow-cased and tied finish, I added stitching to make it more usable. I didn't make another quilt for my bed until my husband was in assisted living many years later.

I soon discovered fabric stores, quilt guilds, quilt shows, and small quilt groups. I've made many wonderful quilting friends. I learned techniques from friends, classes, guild programs, magazines and books. My involvement in guilds led to my becoming president of Undercover Quilters, a group at the CIA! I've made bed quilts for my family, quilting them on my no-frills Singer that only went forward and backwards! In 1984, I taught a math class at NIH and used that money to buy my Bernina. I was then able to do more interesting quilting, small wall hangings and baby quilts, not prize worthy but much more creative and fun. Trips too led to fabric purchases...enough to stock a small store. It's delightful to be able to make a quilt from

the stash in my closet! When my husband was in assisted living, I was able to make a lap quilt from my stash for each member of the wonderful staff that cared for him. They were as thrilled with their quilts as I was to make them. I no longer quilt my bed sized quilts, I hand them over to long armers and enjoy the many designs they stitch into what I have made.

I find being in small quilt groups and participating in guild challenges to be very inspiring. Although since my husband died, I seem to be less creative, despite that and the pandemic, I've still made lots of quilts: bed quilts for my 4 grandsons, pillows for my kitchen chairs, lots of charity quilts, pillowcases and many red, white and blue quilts for Quilts of Valor. Those quilts inspired me to make a new red, white and blue quilt for my own bed. It certainly brightens up the room.

I've had quilts in many guild and small group shows. I love how people admire what is presented during Show and Tell at guild meetings. It's very encouraging to have your hard work appreciated. But it is such a joy to actually sell a quilt you've made; to discover that someone else admires your work enough to pay to have it for their own. It feels wonderful.