



Marti & Rhonda Sewing & Stitchery Expo, 2019

Of course I know Marti Michell as a mover & shaker in the quilt industry. International quilter, designer, author, business woman, Craftsy instructor, founder of the wildly popular Schoolhouse Series at International Quilt Market are just a few of Marti's diverse endeavors. Our paths have crossed many times at industry events. Two years ago, Rita Farro & I visited Marti's special exhibit at the International Quilt Study Center & Museum in Lincoln NE. We were awestruck at Marti's vast contributions.

Rita Farro's interview captures Marti's remarkable career. Thankfully Marti supplied a timeline too. I feel as if for the first time I am seeing and comprehending Marti's vast contributions to the home quilting industry. Curious, creative, tenacious, professional, all wrapped up into a friendly & kind Marti Michell. I have changed my mind. Marti is not only a mover & shaker, she is an icon in our wonderful quilt world.

Thank you Marti for your kindness and immeasurable contributions to our industry.

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Cover: Marti Filming on the Craftsy Set

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https://ritassewfun.blogspot.com/

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What Inspires YOU to Sew?









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Marti Michell

It is generally accepted that the quilt industry as we know it began in 1976, with America's Bicentennial celebration. But, it wasn't a simple matter to recreate the patchwork quilts of our pioneer grandmothers. If you think about the early 70's, fabric stores were full of polyester knits and there were absolutely no books on the subject. No fabric, no patterns, no rotary cutters, no templates.

But, lucky for us, as the automobile industry had Henry Ford, we had Marti Michell. Thanks to her innovative thinking, boundless energy and creative spirit, the quilt industry was basically reborn in the 20th century.

Recognizing her immense contributions, the Quilter's Hall of Fame inducted Marti Michell in 2020. The ceremony has been postponed until July 2021. (Marti will forever be the *Pandemic Inductee*.)

Marti didn't set out to become a quilt industry icon. It's more like it just kept happening

Marti and her husband, Richard, met and married at Iowa State University where she had a double major of Textiles and Clothing and Technical Journalism. After graduation, the young couple lived in several states as Richard pursued his career in the nuclear energy field. After their second child, Marti became a stay-at-home mom and a self-described, professional volunteer.





Marti at the Yours Truly cutting table.

In 1969, Richard's career moved them to Atlanta, GA and they have never left. With both children in school, Marti started a small sewing school (for garments) in her home. Influenced by the bicentennial, Marti was playing with patchwork. When her students saw the patchwork projects she was working on, they asked for those classes.

In this century, it is hard to believe that the only books on patchwork were in the library and 100% cotton fabric was hard to find. That was the era of polyester double knit fabrics and quilting was almost non-existent. So, Marti made some patchwork pillow projects, shopped for and pre-cut the fabric, wrote instructions, and bagged them.

Without knowing it, Marti invented pre-cut patchwork Quilt Kits. And that was only the beginning....

In 1972, Richard and Marti started their first company, Yours Truly. They hired a gift show sales rep company to sell their Puff Wreath kits. They also established a mail order catalog, GingerSnap Station. Two years later, they opened a GingerSnap Station brick and mortar quilt store in Chamblee, Georgia.

Marti would continue to grow her business and, therefore, the quilt industry, by listening to her fellow quilters and then sourcing or creating new products and/or merchandise that made sense. Her goal was always to help them make five or ten quilts in a year instead of one quilt in five or ten years.

Yours Truly started off with small kit projects because it was a real service and cotton fabric was hard to find. As a greater variety of fabric became available, quilters wanted to make





Woman's Day Log Cabin

their own color choices, so they decided to sell patterns and introduced the $5 \frac{1}{2}$ x 8" pattern in a plastic bag.

In 1976 Yours Truly offered their first full-size quilt kit, a die cut queen-size Dresden Plate. It was appropriately advertised on the back cover of the July 1976 bicentennial issue of *McCalls Needlecraft* magazine.

Marti was frustrated with the batting available at the time. Richard found a company that would manufacture batting in actual bed sizes. Yours Truly introduced the first King size quilt batt in the industry.

As their sales grew, circumstances allowed that Richard should bring his business skills to Yours Truly full-time. At that time, notions companies didn't want to deal with quilt shops. They were used to selling buttons, zippers, elastic, etc. Yours Truly became the first distributor to cater to quilt shops.

Things really exploded for Yours Truly in 1977. Marti had developed a Log Cabin quilt using a stitch and flip method. It was the first Quilt As You Sew block style done completely on the sewing machine. The Woman's Day Log Cabin – Quickest Quilt in the World, turned out to be the biggest offer Women's Day had ever made and held the record for many years. In fact, over five years, they offered it in five different color combinations.





Yours Truly Puff Wreath Kit International Quilt Museum, Lincoln, NE

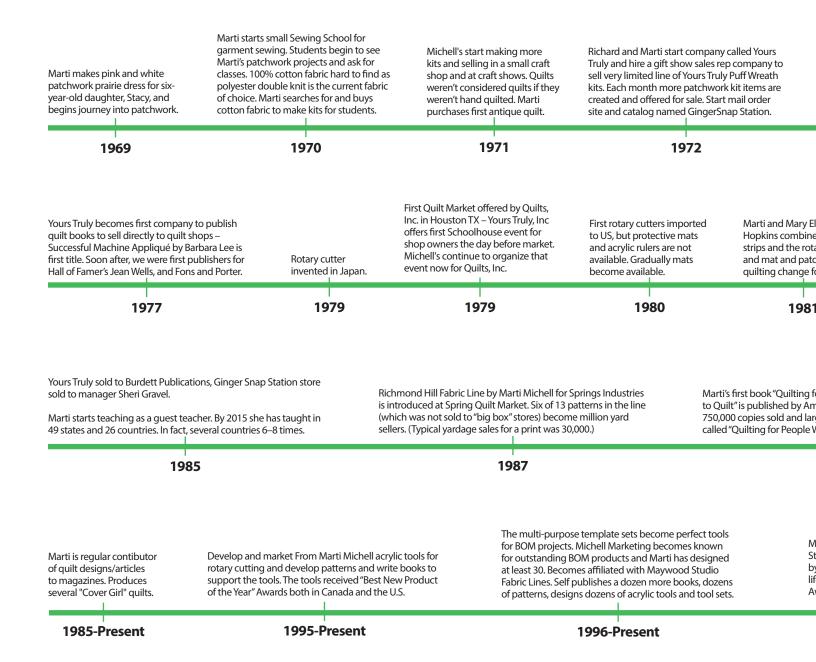
Marti had a nose for talent. In 1978, Yours Truly became the first publisher of quilting books solely for direct sale to quilt shops. Yours Truly provided *coming out parties* for many of the current stars of the quilting world. Their roster of authors reads like the *Who's Who of the Quilting World*, Mary Ellen Hopkins, Jean Wells, Harriet Hargrave, Liz Porter, Marianne Fons, Susan McKelvey, Cheryl Bradkin. When Quilt Market began in the fall of 1979, that became the target date for new books to be released

It's hard to remember how limited real career opportunities were for women at that time. At its peak, Yours Truly employed 175 people. Marti says, It was great to know that one author got a big enough royalty check to pay cash for a new car. One of our home sewers made enough money to build three additions onto her home. Dick and I are very proud of the success our authors and employees enjoyed.

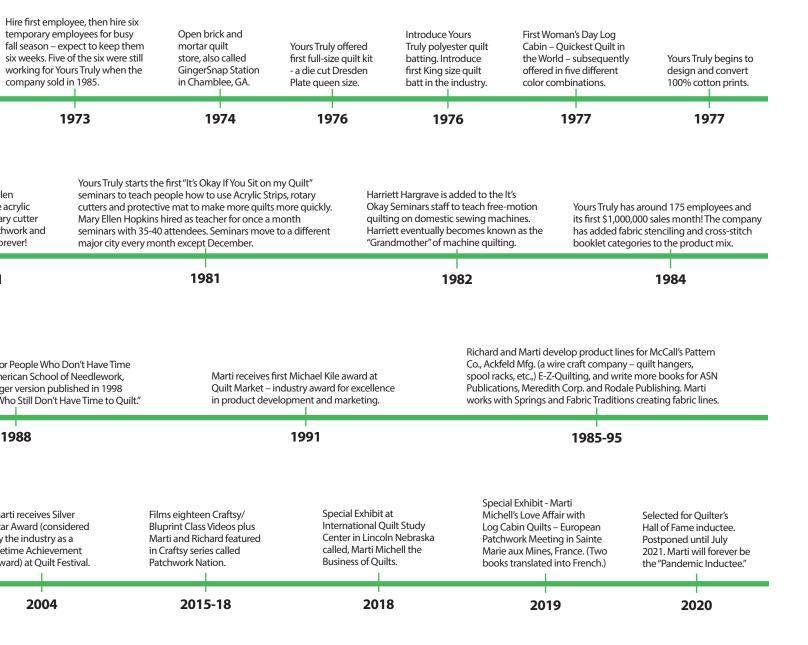
In 1979, the first Quilt Market was offered by Quilts, Inc. in Houston, Texas. That year, with Quilts, Inc. approval, Yours Truly developed a *Schoolhouse* event for shop owners and their staff that featured all of the Yours Truly authors and project managers the day before market opened officially. It was a great success and Quilts, Inc. allowed/encouraged us to continue until Yours Truly was sold. Then they asked us to manage and expand the Schoolhouse event to include any company with a booth at market. The concept was to have brief sessions (15 or 30 minutes) where designers, teachers, and fabric companies could quickly present or demonstrate their new lines or products.



Marti and Richard Miche



ll Quilt Industry Timeline





Marti's books & patterns.
See them all at www.frommarti.com.

For the last 40 years, at every Quilt Market, Richard and Marti continued to organize Schoolhouse events for Quilts, Inc. The day before market, hundreds of quilt shop owners and employees would line up early in the morning to receive the coveted Schoolhouse schedule. There are long lines outside of scores of classrooms, with attendees eager to see presentations of the newest and latest products, patterns, and notions. This spring there was a new twist, a Zoom virtual Schoolhouse

Even more important to quilters than the first Quilt Market, 1979 was also the year the rotary cutter was invented in Japan. It had a slow start in the U.S. because the people who imported it did not bring mats. Marti remembers rejecting it on first examination saying, *I cut on my dining room table. If I*

try to cut with that my table will look like the bottom of a pizza pan! A few months later, we heard there were mats available that would protect table surface, but I still wasn't sold.

A few months after that, she continues, I was with Mary Ellen Hopkins in her shop, Crazy Ladies and Friends. Mary Ellen and I had both developed some strip techniques (using scissors to cut strips). However, Mary Ellen had the great idea of finding someone to cut acrylic strips in varying widths, so she could use a pencil to mark fabric and then cut strips with scissors. As soon as I saw the acrylic strips I asked Mary Ellen if she had ever tried the rotary cutter against the acrylic strip, and she hadn't, even though she had rotary cutters for sale in the store. Within minutes we had put the two together using a stack of newspaper for our protective surface!" (P.S. newspaper NOT recommended.)





A few tools designed by Marti. Find more at www.frommarti.com.

It's hard to imagine a rotary cutter without acrylic rulers and mats, but after Marti and Mary Ellen Hopkins brought those tools together, quilting changed forever.

In September 1981, Yours Truly started offering *It's Okay If You Sit on my Quilt* five day seminars to teach shop owners and teachers how to use acrylic strips, rotary cutters, and protective mats to make quilts more quickly. Mary Ellen Hopkins was hired to teach seminars with 35-40 attendees. Seminars moved to a different major city every month. Using rotary cutters spread through the quilt world like wildfire.

Harriett Hargrave joined the It's Okay Seminars staff to teach free-motion quilting on home sewing machines. Harriett eventually became known as the *Grandmother* of machine quilting.

Marti and Richard sold Yours Truly in 1985 to Burdett Publications, and Marti did free-lance design, wrote her own books, and traveled the world as a guest teacher. Currently, she has taught in 49 states and 26 countries. (Montana, she's been invited, but was booked.)

Of course, Marti would become a popular fabric designer. The first line of fabric Marti designed in 1986 had 13 prints. Six of them sold a million yards each.

Along with her busy teaching schedule, Marti continued to design fabric and write books. In 1988, her book **Quilting for People Who Don't Have Time to Quilt** was published by American School of Needlework. 750,000 copies sold.





The Richard & Marti Michell family.

Marti developed a bunch of craft patterns for McCall's. At one time, she had four of their top ten patterns.

Because those ideas JUST KEPT COMING, Marti and Richard started their current company, From Marti Michell in 1995. See www.frommarti.com to view the current line of more than 100 acrylic template sets and specialty rulers, dozens of patterns and 20 Block of the Month programs. Marti tells this story:

Jane Gruchacz, a quilter in Florida, called me mid 1994 about speaking to her guild. During our conversation, she said she had an idea for templates that she would like to have me develop. I said, no, no, sorry, you have the wrong person. I cut everything with a ruler. I love geometry. I don't use templates. But why don't you do it? We'd be happy to help, and I'm sure we can help you get your product to Quilt Market.

Richard talked to her about margins, bags, printing, etc. Several weeks later, Jane called again. She'd thought it over. She had retired early to fish and garden and quilt, not to start a business. But she really thought if she could just show me these templates I would see their potential; couldn't she just come to Atlanta and show me?

Jane was right. Her very simple improvement on template corners was BRILLIANT! We worked out an agreement. Both Richard and I enjoy developing a new product line and getting it into the hands of quilters all over the world. From Marti Michell acrylic tools for rotary cutting received 'Best New Product of the Year' Awards both in Canada and the U.S.





Silver Star Friendship Quilt, 2004.

Marti has received many awards in her life, but none was more special than the Silver Star Award (considered by the industry as a lifetime Achievement Award) at Quilt Festival in 2004. The evening of the presentation, Marti was gifted her *Silver Star Friendship Quilt*, which was a total surprise. Marti's quilting friends from all over the world contributed blocks for the quilt.

It's hard to imagine what our quilting world would be without the efforts of Marti Michell. Although much of the work she did was anonymous, anybody who has ever attempted to make a quilt has benefited from her innovative thinking, problem solving, determination, and charisma. In 2018, she was honored with a Special Exhibit at the International Quilt Study Center in Lincoln Nebraska called, Marti Michell the Business of Quilts.

Now, 2020, she is being inducted into the Quilter's Hall of Fame.

Lucky for us, Marti Michell loves to quilt, or, does she quilt to love?

www.frommarti.com







What's **YOUR** Favorite Needle?

Double Eye – 80/12

Elna ELX705 – 80/12, 90/14, Assorted

* **Embroidery** – **75/11**, **90/14**, Assorted, Twin

Embroidery, Gold – 75/11, 90/14

Hemstitch – 100/16, 120/19, Twin

HLX5 – 75/11, 90/14, Assorted

- * **Jeans** 70/10, 80/12, 90/14, **100/16**, 110/18, Assorted, Twin
- * **Jersey** 70/10, **80/12**, **90/14**, 100/16, Assorted **Leather** – 70/10, 80/12, 90/14, 100/16, 110/18, Assorted Metallic - 80/12, 90/14, Twin
- * Microtex (Sharp) 60/8, 70/10, 80/12, 90/14, 100/16, 110/18, Assorted **Quick Threading** – 80/12, 90/14
- * Quilting 75/11, 90/14, Assorted
- * **Stretch 75/11, 90/14**, Twin
 - **Super NonStick** 70/10, 80/12, 90/14, 100/16
- * **Topstitch** 70/10, **80/12**, **90/14**, 100/16, 110/18
- * Universal 60/8, 65/9, 70/10, 75/11, 80/12, 90/14, 100/16, 110/18, 120/19, Assorted

Double Hemstitch – 2.5/100 **Embroidery Twin** – 2.0/75, 3.0/75 **Jeans Twin** – 4.0/100 **Metallic Twin** – 2.5/80, 3.0/90 **Stretch Twin** – 2.5/75, 4.0/75 **Universal Triple** – 2.5/80, 3.0/80 **Universal Twin** – 1.6/70, 1.6/80, 2.0/80, 2.5/80, 3.0/90, 4.0/80, 4.0/90, 4.0/100, 6.0/100, 8.0/100

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