



INSPIRED TO
Sew

*A glimpse into the creative heart of today's
most talented sewing & quilting artists.*

Rali Burleson



Rhonda holding dozens of Make It With Wool thank you notes.

Thank you. These two words are simple and powerful. Whether spoken or written, who doesn't like to be thanked for thoughtfulness or an action. If sincere, the power of thank you is held by both the thanker and the thankee. Over the last few weeks, my colleagues marvel at the gracious and sincere thank you notes received from Make It With Wool contestants of all ages. Every day is a glorious day when a thank you card is unsealed after a remarkable journey through the postal system.

Initially, this issue was pitched as researching the rich history of the annual Make It With Wool contest. The scope was broadened to the history of wool. Then Rita Farro, the ever curious, agile, and skillful writer, discovered an even more intriguing story involving the love of sewing wool and Lieutenant Colonel Rali Burleson, USAF, Retired. Rita's interview with Rali Burleson is inspirational for multiple reasons that you will soon discover.

Thank you for being a SCHMETZ fan. Thanks for taking the time to read this issue now.

PS: In the image above, I'm wearing a plaid Pendleton® wool wrap made a few years ago from a Connie Crawford pattern. Sew SCHMETZ & Grabbit® Too!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Rhonda'.

Rhonda Pierce
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<https://ritassewfun.blogspot.com/>
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Sewing
Star 

Rali Burleson

Issue #88



Make It With



Barbara Trainor Photography

Rali Burleson

Note from Rita Farro: When I started working on this issue, the focus was the Make It With Wool Contest. In its heyday, it attracted 19,000 contestants, and the top prize was an all-expense-paid round trip to visit the three fashion capitals of Europe. I contacted Rali Burleson, Director, Arizona Make It With Wool, because she has done extensive research on the contest history.

As a matter of fact, the PowerPoint she created, "Decades Of Wool Style," does such a wonderful job of explaining the history of the Make It With Wool Contest, I soon realized all I had to do for this issue was give this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/34jjh35t>

Hey, that was easy! You've gotta love it when somebody does all the work for you, right? Rali also sent me pictures of this year's National Make It With Wool winners.

Writing about the Make It With Wool Contest was writing about history. I felt like I was writing about the good old days and how great things used to be.

Then, I realized I was missing the most inspiring, current part of this story, which was the woman behind the PowerPoint, Rali Burleson. Although, getting her to talk about herself was like pulling teeth. When I asked for a bio, here's what she sent:



Lieutenant Colonel Nevin Cunningham (Commander) and Captain Rali Dobberstein
 Detachment 4, 9th Strategic Reconnaissance wing (Strategic Air Command)
 Royal Air Force Mildenhall, Suffolk, England
 Photo: Royal Air Force Lakenheath, Suffolk, England

I am a retired Air Force officer. My name, Rali, is a German nickname for kleines Reh (little doe). I began sewing in seventh grade at age 12 and have sewed ever since. After retiring from the Air Force, I used my veterans benefits to put myself back through college majoring in Fashion Design. I participated in various capacities with Make It With Wool since 2005, as a contestant, national judge, and state director. I live in Arizona with my husband, Scott. We have two sons.

Hummm, I don't think I've ever interviewed a retired Air Force officer. In a follow-up phone call, I learned the humble Rali Burleson was actually a retired Lieutenant Colonel!

When I pressed Rali for more information about her Air Force career, she sent another paragraph:

Rali Burleson was a world-class Air Force officer with 20 years leadership and management experience; recipient of 16 Department of Defense and Air Force-level awards and decorations. Working with the U-2 and SR-71 aircraft, she led and performed intelligence activities across the full range of military operations. Oversaw analysis and merging of collected intelligence. Developed intelligence plans and policies, and produced accurate intelligence analysis. Exchanged intelligence with other services, agencies, and governments. Integrated intelligence with combat operations.

SERIOUSLY? I was so curious. I sent a few questions to Rali:



Wool Skirt and Chanel-style Jacket
(Simplicity 5259 and Vogue 7975)



Bias-Cut Wool Coat Dress
(Burda 7587)
Barbara Trainor Photography

**What was the first thing you ever sewed out of wool?
What was your attraction?**

I have very fond memories of learning to sew. It was January 1970, the Jackson 5's "A-B-C, Easy as 1-2-3!" was at the top of the charts, and I was in my second semester of Home Economics at Greenway Middle School in Phoenix, Arizona, learning to sew. Sewing opened a whole new world. Stores like K-mart sold fabric and patterns. Thread (wrapped on Styrofoam spools) was cheap, ten spools for a dollar! I spent every summer, from 7th grade through college, sewing clothes for the upcoming school year.

I was in my early 20s and commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant on track to go into the United States Air Force. The first thing I ever sewed out of wool was See & Sew by Butterick 3835; Misses' Jacket and Skirt. Loose-fitting, line-to-edge jacket with purchased shoulder pads has shaped round neckline and hemline, full

length two-piece effect sleeves and topstitch trim. A-line skirt three inches below mid-knee is gathered into straight waistband has side seam pockets and back zipper closing. I remember picking out my fabric, a beautiful rust-colored wool, at the local Hancock Fabrics store with my mother. The pattern and fabrics (wool and lining) were my birthday gift. I am sure our thinking at the time was I was going to need a more professional wardrobe.

Did you always sew, even during your 20 years in the Air Force?

Sewing has always been important to me. I always found a way to bring "sewing" with me wherever I went in the world. I learned traditional and contemporary quilting while serving in the Air Force. Quilting classes were available at base Arts &





1948 Wool Coat Dress
(Vogue 9280)
soniaZeye Photography



Town and Country Wool Dress
(Folkwear 258)
Barbara Trainor Photography

Crafts Centers. I took quilting and clothing construction classes at schools and colleges when I could. If I had the space, my sewing machine accompanied me while on temporary duty. If I did not have the space, I brought handwork along (cross-stitch, hand-pieced quilting, wool appliqué, etc.) stored in an old wooden cigar case. If I was not working out at the base fitness center over my lunch hour, I was enjoying an hour of quiet at the base library "working on something" in the corner. I hand-carried my Bernina to each assignment. No commercial movers allowed!

What has sewing brought to your life?

Sewing, especially Make It With Wool, has brought immeasurable joy to my life! I feel as though leadership and sewing are my God-

given talents. As such, they should be shared with others. I think this is why serving as the Director, Arizona Make It With Wool is such a good fit for me. I am in a leadership place, sharing my passion for sewing with others. I have a wonderful support network in the American Sheep Industry, American Sheep Industry-Women, and the Arizona Wool Producers Auxiliary. My fellow national and state directors, as well as sponsors, make the job easy and enjoyable. Last but not least, I have the undying support of my family (husband, sons, and sister) as well as a talented assistant and pool of exceptional judges. I made life-long friends through sewing, especially Make It With Wool. How much better can it get? I honestly love my job as Director, Arizona Make It With Wool. We are one big, happy flock!

2021 National Make It With Wool Winners



Adult
Marcie Mirgon - Michigan



Senior
Roman Merck - Kansas



Junior
Cortney Olinger – South Dakota



Fashion/Apparel Design
Hailey Gray –
Baylor University, Texas

Tell me something interesting about yourself.

I love vintage designs; and, own a large vintage pattern collection. Vogue Patterns occasionally borrows old Vogue Couturier patterns from me to reissue. To date, five of my vintage patterns are available as Vogue 8686, Vogue 9105, Vogue 8999, Vogue 9346, and Vogue 9280.

I also recently (Jan. '21) won the EvaDress Pattern Challenge. Here is a link to my vintage 1943 entry:

<https://tinyurl.com/3t3mhjkx>

The military needed wool for uniforms. Wool was difficult to come by for home sewers during World War II, hence my decision to use cotton.

Rali sent several photos of herself, wearing the wool garments she loves to sew. After a lot of begging, she sent two pictures of her in her uniform, one of her sitting in front of her fireplace with her two sons when they were young, and another of her standing in front of the SR-71 Blackbird (see page 5).

There aren't many pictures of Rali in uniform, because her job in the Air Force was highly classified. It's interesting to learn that wherever she went in the world, and whatever she was doing in service to our country, her sewing went with her.

Isn't that what we all have in common?

The Make It With Wool Contest began in 1947, right after World War II. If we take a look back at that time in our history, it's clear



Rali with Ryan and Matthew before heading off to work.
Air Mobility Command Air Intelligence Squadron
Air Mobility Command, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois

how important sewing was to the women who participated in those early contests. They were making homes to welcome back their soldiers, sailors, and airmen, and sewing was a big part of that. The wild success of the early Make It With Wool Contest mirrored America's boom years of the '50s and '60s. Although today's numbers are down, the Make It With Wool Contest is still active. More information is available at:

<https://makeitwithwool.com/>

The Make It With Wool Contest isn't what it once was, but that's the way life works. Nothing stays the same. Everything changes and evolves. We don't cook the way we used to cook, we don't shop the way we used to shop, and we certainly don't sew the way we used to sew.

Change is an inevitable part of life, and it often comes with a silver lining. We now have microwave ovens, online shopping, and sophisticated embroidery sewing machines. It's always good to take a look back to see where we've been, and appreciate where we're going.

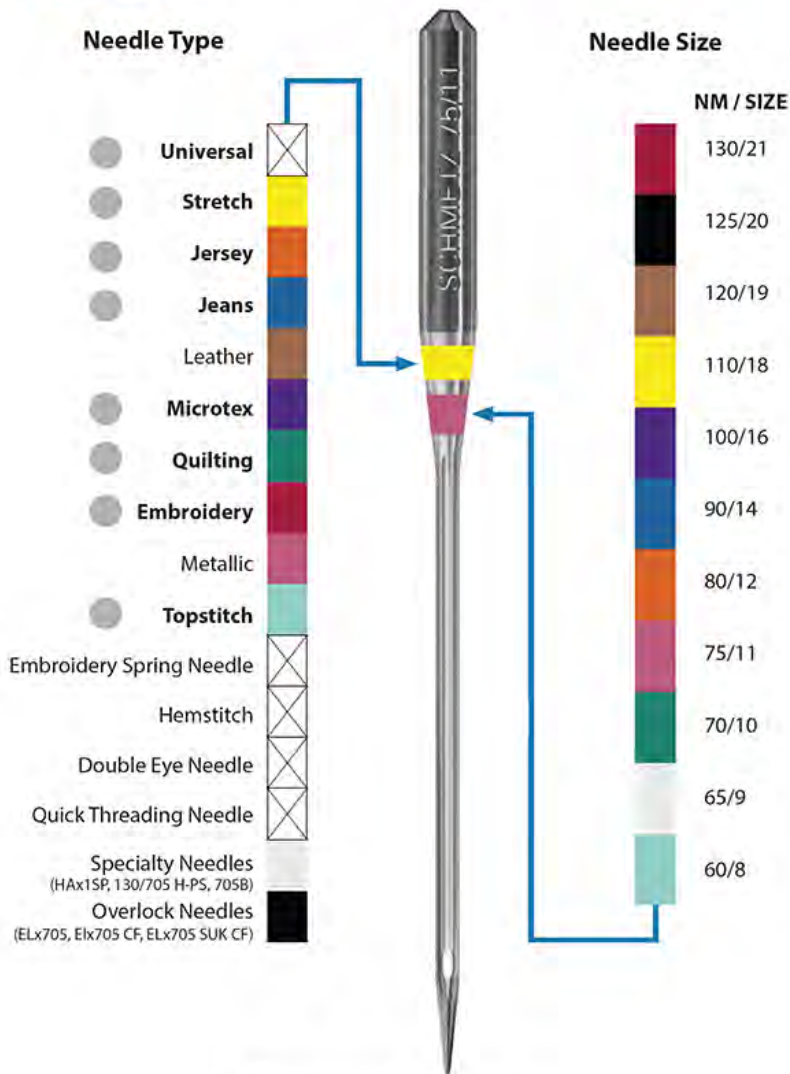
It's only because of the inexorable nature of change that we are able to salute pioneer Lieutenant Colonel Rali Burlison, USAF, Retired. And if the meticulous, creative nature of her sewing is any indication of the quality of the officers who are now climbing the ranks of our military, it's clear that the future of our country is in very good hands.

 — written by Rita Farro

Needle Points with Rhonda



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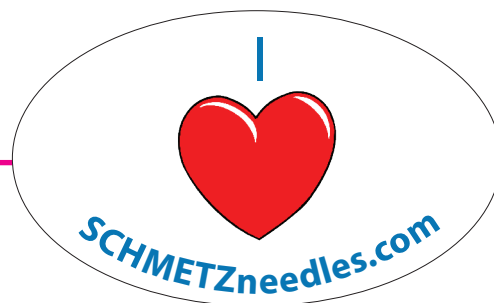
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the sewing machine performs
better with a new needle!*



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