



Carla Hamilton Is Quilting Again



November 16, 2015

Quilter Carla Hamilton came in for a tour of AccuQuilt recently and she inspired us with her incredible tenacity and positive outlook on life even in the face of a disability that halted her ability to quilt. Carla, 68, has been visually impaired for the past seven years and had completely given up on quilting because she couldn't see well enough to cut fabric without risking injury to herself. However, approximately two and a half years ago, Carla's friend Mary introduced her to the [GO!](#) and Carla immediately went to purchase one for herself. She's been on a quilting roll ever since, making an impressive 27 personalized quilts for her family members last Christmas. She had no idea a fabric cutting system even existed for quilters, and now she's in a full blown love affair with her GO!



Three friends who meet every Wednesday for the love of quilting – Ginger (left), Carla (center), Tammi (right)

So tell me about how you were first introduced to the GO!

My friend Mary introduced me to it about two and a half years ago. I go up to visit her where they live on the Canadian border, and I spend about a month with them once or twice a year. She and I have always quilted together, but I had pretty much stopped because I couldn't see well enough anymore to cut and not endanger myself (laughter). Everything I've ever done in my whole life has been visually oriented ... sewing, handwork, needlework, needlepoint and all that sort of thing. So I was really kind of getting depressed because I couldn't visually do it anymore.

And so when I was at Mary's she says, 'Don't you want to make a quilt?' I told her I just can't cut it out and she said, 'Wait a minute, I've got this GO! machine!' She took it out, put it on the dining room table, and showed me how to use it. Suddenly this whole world opened up to me. It was just wonderful. I went and bought one right then and there. It just made it so I could quilt again. I've been hard at it ever since.

How many dies do you own and which are your favorites so far?

I own ten dies and I would like some more. I really want to get the snowflake. My favorites right now are the [GO! Square-2 ½"](#)... really like that because I do a lot of scrappy quilts so it's nice that I can cut a whole bunch at once. Then I love the [GO! Strip Cutter-2 ½"](#) and [GO! Strip Cutter-3"](#), and while I was there at your office I bought the [GO! Strip Cutter-6 ½"](#).

I really like them because if you have those strips you can really do a lot. And I make up my own jelly rolls with the strip cutters. I'm one of those people who believe that she who dies with the most fabric wins! So I have quite a stash!

You're getting a lot of use out of your fabric cutter.

I am! I use it all the time. I love the trend of polka dots, so I'm making a polka dot column quilt right now.

When did you first begin quilting?

I've been a quilter since back in the 70s, and then I didn't quilt for several years and then I started again. It's kind of funny, one time I went up to see Mary and told her I had a new hobby and that I just loved it. She asked me what it was, and I told her quilting and she said me too! So she dragged out what she was working on, and that's kind of how we started quilting together.

How many quilts have you made thus far in life?

About 98. I have 12 grand children and every one of them have quilts, and I have three children who have multiple quilts, and five brothers and sisters and friends who all have quilts I've made for them.

What other quilting projects are you currently working on?

I have several cut out already for Christmas. I have a brand new great granddaughter, Abigail ("Sweet Pea") who was born in May, so I'm making a crib quilt for her with kitty cat panels and I'm doing a nine-patch to go with it.

Do you make a lot of quilts for Christmas gifts?

Last year was the last time that I will have hosted the Christmas party at my house because I just can't do it anymore, so we're moving it to my son's house this year. So last year everyone was here, and I made a quilt for every single person. I made 27 quilts. Every quilt I made I did specifically for that person using their preferred colors. Like my grandson, he's 16, and he said 'Nana, I want a Seahawks quilt, but I don't want Seahawks fabric, I just want their colors.'

I'm sure everyone loved receiving such a special gift that was made with a lot of love. Wow, that's an impressive amount of quilts you made in a year. Were these all bed size quilts?

No, not all of them were bed size. A couple were lap quilts, a few were nursery size, and the rest were either twin or queen size. I have a really good quilt shop too ... [The Fabric Patch](#) in the neighboring town and they do my longarming for me. They do a fabulous job.



"Rosie's Toesies" – Made before Carla's eye injury

Do you keep any quilts for yourself?

Actually, the polka dot one will be the first quilt of mine that I will keep! But I love to give gifts and I love to quilt so it's just what I do. For Christmas this year, I'm making all the table runners and napkins.

What's the one project you haven't tackled yet that you would like to?

Well, I will never do it, but I would really like to make a radiating Lone Star where it starts in the middle with a light color and then radiates out to dark. But I won't do that because I just can't see well enough to do the piecing. I can do the cutting on my machine but not the piecing [laughter]! And I've always wanted to make a red and white and I think I might still do that if I can find a simple enough pattern.

What is your vision impairment?

Well, I've got a virus in my eye that left scar tissue on the retina, and it's in the center of my eye so I have really good peripheral vision, you know, but otherwise... unless I can enlarge the print quite large then I can't read it. If you mailed me a letter, I'd have to have someone read it to me. But I have an iPad, and with that I can enlarge everything big enough for me to be able to read it.

Does a magnifying glass also help you?

Yes, I have a little handheld that I use. But regular printing on the page...there's not enough contrast between the actual letter and the page so then I can't see it. But, I have wonderful grandbabies who love to read to Nana when she needs it, so it's okay. You know, you can either sit around and whine about it, or you can just do what you can do and that's what I've chosen to do.

So you don't have any problems putting your fabric on the GO! cutter?

Oh no! I think it's one of the easiest machines I've ever used and with my visual impairment it's so safe. That's what I really appreciate



"Fiji Dreaming" – One of 27 special quilts Carla made last Christmas

One of the quilts that I made for Christmas last year was for my granddaughter who got married in May in Hawaii and went to Fuji for their honeymoon. I happen to have in my stash a huge quantity of Indonesian batiks, so I made her this nine-patch with all these different batiks with black as the accent. She loved it!

So it sounds like you have a knack for design.

Yeah, I really love that. And there again, the GO! has helped me so much because I already have in my head what I want, so all I have to do is figure out what I need to cut it out and away I go.

What does your sewing space look like?

In my sewing room one wall is totally lined with bookcases and the fabric is all in baskets and on those shelves. Then I have cabinets in there also. Then I have a desk that my sewing machine is on in the middle of the room so I can turn around to all the places I need to... then I have my music behind me on another little desk. I have three big windows and my cutting table is in front of the windows. I always have my ironing board up of course.

How did you and Mary become friends?

We went to the same church. I was a widow at the time with three children, and one of the leaders in our church suggested Mary and I be friends ... so they introduced us and the rest is history. She's

about it because there is just no opportunity for me to cut myself. It's really wonderful AND I can cut out a whole bunch at once, which I really like that, too.

Have you cut yourself before?

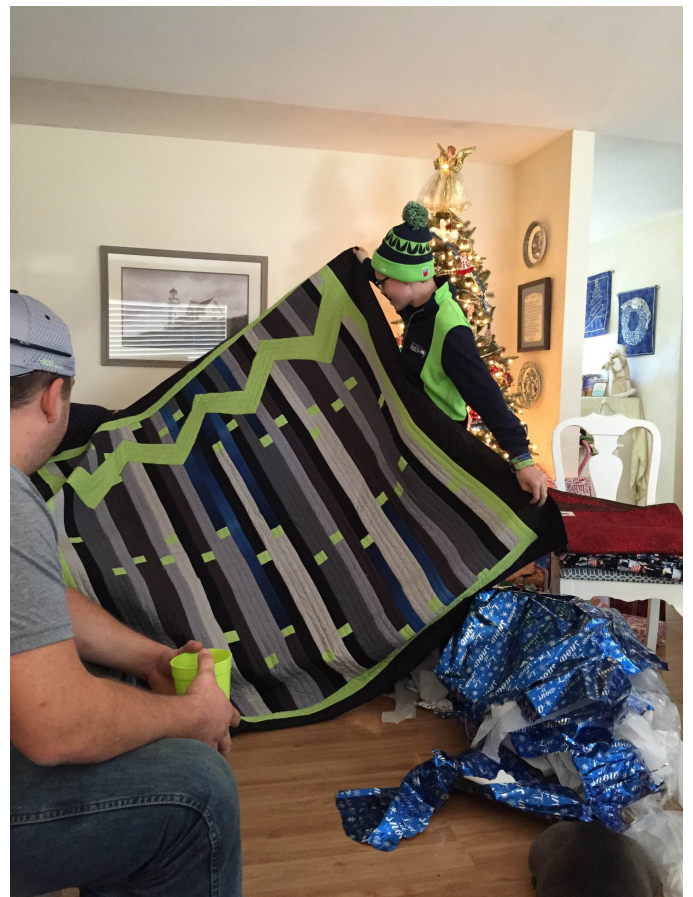
Yes, with a rotary cutter. I've actually even cut myself with scissors. I have really poor depth perception, and so I snipped my finger with the scissors. I just have to be really careful with that kind of stuff. But if you need to cut out 250 2 ½" squares, you don't really want to have to be that careful for that long to keep from cutting yourself. But when you can slap it on the GO!, wind it through and you're done that's pretty wonderful.

Had you even heard of a fabric cutter prior to Mary showing it to you?

No, no. I knew that there was something that you could cut paper with, but I didn't know that there was anything available for fabric.

What is your favorite part of the quilting process?

Well, I think my very favorite part is pulling fabric, and since I have a large stash I love being able to put different combinations together. I've always had a pretty good gift for color. People tell me all the time they don't know how I do it. I can look at something and go shopping out of town and bring back exactly the right color I need. Every time.



"T.R.'s Touchdown" – For a special Seattle Seahawks football fan, Carla's grandson

probably closer to me than my own sisters. She always says that we know too much about each other to not be friends. Our daughters who are both 39 now, are best friends ...

When you came to tour AccuQuilt was it a planned visit?

Yes, Mary and I wanted to come check on her daughter and make sure our girl was doing well. She is in the army and transferred from Alaska to Omaha. We wanted to tour a quilt shop while there and when we finally figured out AccuQuilt was in Omaha then we knew we had to go because both of us love it so much. And then we had such a wonderful time. You guys treated us like royalty. And we both decided that if we could ever work there we would because you have a Dream Studio! Oh, it was wonderful!



From left to right: President Greg Gaggini, Carla Hamilton, Mary and her daughter Kelli, and Chief Energizing Officer Steve Nabity

Did you get to play around in the Dream Studio a little bit?

We spent a little time in there. One of the things that was really interesting is that Mary had made this mystery quilt and somebody in your place had the same one on the longarm while we were there. That was fun to get to see somebody else's interpretation of that quilt.

Tell me about the weekly quilting sessions with your friends at your home.

We do show and tell with whatever we've been working on. My friend Ginger has been working on blocks for the Quilts of Valor so she's been bringing those to show us her progress. Then if we have an issue that we're not sure about, like the layout, then we bring our project so everyone can give their opinion. Once in a while we'll get together and go to lunch or go to a quilt shop.

Another friend, Tammy ... she and her grandmother quilt together, and one of her aunts bought her and her mom a GO! Big, plus a whole bunch of dies. Tammy didn't know how to work it, so I gave her a lesson on how to use the GO!. When we were at your place, Pam gave us a demo on the GO! Big so that's why I could explain to her how to use it.

How many of you quilt together?

It's just Ginger, Tammy and myself. Ginger has a longarm, so she often will do the quilting for us. Tammy does beautiful work. Her piecing is just gorgeous but she has some issues with color so she will often ask me what I think. It's just the kind of stuff we do. We usually spend about 2-3 hours together.

It's great to spend time with friends who have a common interest, so you can bounce things off of each other. You all have strengths in different areas.

I think quilting is one of those things that can really bring people together. If you're a quilter, it's your passion. And when you have passion you want to share it.

You know, I am totally responsible for my friend Ginger being a quilter. She and I worked together in the church office. She was searching for a new bedspread and couldn't find what she wanted so I told her I'd make her one, and when she saw it she thought she could do it. Now she's worse than I am. Her sewing room makes mine look like I don't have any fabric [laughter]!


Right now she's doing a lot of panels that she's embroidering and then she's going to put them together like a Redwork quilt, only she's doing it in purple because that's her color. For many years, every new baby that was born in our church, Ginger made a nursery quilt for them.

What advice would you give to other quilters who have physical limitations that have prevented them from quilting?


One of the things is don't give up. I think that's what happened to me. I'd just given up and then along comes the [GO!](#) and now I'm back to being a quilter again. I'd highly recommend it because you've made it so simple to use. If you have any ability at all to put fabric on the die, then you can cut. It's very heartwarming and life-fulfilling because I love to give gifts and who doesn't love a quilt?

Lynette A. Griffin is the Journalist Extraordinaire at AccuQuilt, and if you have a quilting story to share, she wants to hear it at lynette.griffin@accuquilt.com.

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