

Laura and Ronn Martin – Sew Loved Quilt Shop

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Laura was six years old. There was a big present for her under the Christmas tree. She excitedly opened the package and was delighted to find it was a sewing machine from her grandmother. Her interest in sewing grew, and decades later it became a sort of magic carpet which would bring her and her husband back to Kansas. This is today's Kansas Profile.

Laura and Ronn Martin live at Elkhart. They went off to the big city for their careers but came back to Kansas.

Ronn grew up at Elkhart. Laura grew up on a farm near McCracken, a rural community of 190 people. Now, that's rural.

The two met at Tabor College in Hillsboro. Ronn earned degrees in computer science and Laura earned degrees in psychology and counseling. They followed his career to the Dallas-Fort Worth area in Texas where he worked in information technology. They also raised a daughter and son.

When Laura was a little girl, her mother had been a seamstress on the farm. "One of my earliest recollections was sitting on my mom's lap while she sewed," Laura said. One Christmas, Laura received the aforementioned sewing machine from her grandmother. With help from her other grandma, she even did a 4-H sewing project. Laura loved sewing, but when her mother encouraged her to try quilting, Laura had no interest at the time.

Years later when family came for a visit in Texas, Laura's mother-in-law went to a local quilt shop. Laura observed the results. "I saw the entire process, from when she took the fabric out of the bag, handed the receipt to her husband, studied the pattern, and carefully cut out the pieces," Laura said. Then Laura watched a beautiful quilt come to life.

"I thought to myself, 'I could do that,'" Laura said – "especially the part about handing the receipt to my husband...." She tried quilting and was hooked. She even worked part-time at a quilt shop in Texas.

When their children graduated, Laura and Ronn decided to make a change and move back closer to family. Ronn's computer job enabled him to work from anywhere, as long as he had high quality Internet access which they found in Elkhart. It also meant that Laura could have her own quilt shop.

Laura and Ronn bought and remodeled a historic building in downtown Elkhart. In June 2018, Laura opened her new store. She called it Sew Loved – as in S-E-W – Loved Quilt Shop. In addition to the obvious reference to sewing, she cites as inspiration the Bible verse which says God so loved the world.

"There are a hundred women that quilt in our area," Laura said. "Some of them can make quilts as beautiful as anything you will see at the international quilt show in Houston," she said.

Quilters can purchase fabric, notions, and other supplies at Laura's quilt shop. Laura offers classes for all levels of experience.

"We offer kid's sew day on days when there is no school," Laura said. "Kids can spend a couple of hours and leave with a finished product."

That was so popular that it led to a moms sewing time, which is scheduled later in the evening after supper. Laura also has a longarm device, which is like a giant automated sewing machine that can quilt great big pieces of fabric.

“People come to the shop by the carloads,” Laura said. “We serve five states.”

What about the transition from the big city to small town Kansas? “The people are so wonderful and down-to-earth,” Laura said. “We had forgotten what pretty sunsets looked like,” Ronn said.

For more information, go to www.sewlovedquiltshop.com.

It’s time to leave this quilt shop in Elkhart. We commend Ronn and Laura Martin for making a difference by returning to their Kansas roots. As we go, we observe one final treasure on display: It’s the original sewing machine which Laura received as a present when she was six years old. It’s a reminder that she was so loved.

And there’s more. Remember how Ronn’s job required high quality Internet access? We’ll learn about that next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.