

Oral History Interview: Georgia Bonesteel

BIOGRAPHY STATEMENT:

Georgia Bonesteel was born on July 21, 1936 in Sioux City, Iowa. She graduated from New Trier High School (Wilmette, Illinois) in 1956. She attended both Iowa State University and Northwestern University where she focused her coursework on textiles and home economics, and she graduated with her degree in 1958. After she got married, she moved to New Orleans and started a business called Cajun Quilters. She also worked on a show called *Sewing is Fun*. Once she and her family relocated to Hendersonville, NC in 1972, she took on multiple career opportunities, such as teaching at Blue Ridge Community College, running a quilt shop out of Bonesteel Hardware, and filming her PBS show, *Lap Quilting with Georgia Bonesteel*. She has won many awards, and she is credited with the invention of lap quilting. As of 2024, she still teaches and works to promote quilting within the community and across the country.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

quilting, teaching, fabric, Blue Ridge Community College, sewing, New Orleans, PBS, TV programs, week, North Carolina, students, lap quilting, WNC Quilters Guild

SPEAKERS

Rachel Quinn, Georgia Bonesteel

Rachel Quinn 00:01

Today is August 7, 2024 and the time is 9:18am. My name is Rachel Quinn, the Archivist at Blue Ridge Community College Libraries, and I am interviewing Georgia Bonesteel in the Baltiero Brothers Archive Studio in the library. Georgia is a well-known American quilter, author, and the host of the PBS NC show *Lap Quilting with Georgia Bonesteel* for several years. She has won many awards throughout her career, and she is credited with the invention of lap quilting. She started experimenting with quilting in 1969 when she lived in New Orleans. When she and her family moved to Hendersonville, North Carolina in 1972, she joined a quilting group called Opportunity House, and she became a quilting instructor at Blue Ridge Community College. Today, we will be discussing how she got into quilt making, her career leading up to Blue Ridge, her time as an instructor, and her work with the quilting community up until the present day. All right, so I saw in an interview that you learned to sew at your mother's knee. So can you share with us what it was about sewing that interested you, and how you got involved with that with your mom?

Georgia Bonesteel 01:10

Well, indeed, I was fascinated from the very beginning, watching my mother sew, and she could do anything. I admired my mother quite a bit, and I was drawn to her skills, watching her cut out something and put it together. She would secretly make doll clothes, I guess, when we were- my sister and I were asleep at night, and then present them to us as Christmas presents with our dolls. And this is going way

back. People don't use dolls or play with dolls like they used to. So I was always fascinated with it, and there was just really no question that when I went on to school that I would go further with that, with her skills that I learned. And so I took clothing and textiles at Iowa State College. And of course, Iowa State was known for their home economics class. And so I was there for two years and did really intense classes where you learned how to design your own patterns and I was in my element there. I loved it, and then I fell in love and transferred to Northwestern University, where I wanted to go originally, but they did not have a keen Home Ec class, so I was good to go for Iowa State for two years.

Rachel Quinn 02:49

Were there any special projects that you really liked during your times at those universities? Like-

Georgia Bonesteel 02:55

No, I can't remember anything particular, no, except I think back- I still use those skills that I used- I learned at Iowa State. They pertain to what I actually do today when it comes to garment making, yes.

Rachel Quinn 03:16

Later on, you moved to New Orleans in 1969. I saw in an interview, you said that you started using leftover fabrics for quilting. So is that your first time quilting ever and experimenting with that?

Georgia Bonesteel 03:31

Not really. I had- I evidently was a high energy child, and so my mother channeled me with a needle and thread, and they would give me boxes of like hexagons that were cut out, and I would- I was told to sew those together, so I actually did patchwork, but it didn't really stay with me until in New Orleans, I was given a box of fresh tie scraps from a factory, and these were not worn ties that had soup spills on them. These were the actual fabrics that came from cutting out a tie at a factory, and most of them were silk. It was before polyester was universally used for making ties. So I was in awe of the fabric. I mean, it was absolutely beautiful. So I was told to do something with them, and we created a business called Cajun Quilters, where I ended up making little evening bags, and I worked with a lady called Terry Flettrich. She was a star of a noon day show in New Orleans where she would do entertainment and give the weather and that kind of thing. So she was very well known in New Orleans. And so I became friendly with her and worked on a show that she did called Sewing is Fun, promoting Kenmore sewing machines for Sears and Roebuck. So I was her sewing assistant, and I showed her the neckties I was making. And then it dawned on her that her son in law was president of Countess Mara Tie Company. So I get, I got to go to the factory and see the ties cut out, layers of silt, and so then they sent me boxes of that, and I ended up making purses. But they didn't really come to life until we put batting in them. They were kind of flat, just- It was patchwork until I put the batting in, and then they became quilted, and they had shadows on the surface, and that's when I learned the essence of connecting three layers. And so when we came to North Carolina in Hendersonville, I had those skills behind me, and I was still making purses and selling them in little boutiques in the French Quarter. [Interview paused briefly for phone call]

Rachel Quinn 06:32

All right, so I think you were talking about how the foundation you got was sewing its fun and working with the ties and making little purses, kind of gave you the foundation? Yes?

Georgia Bonesteel 06:42

Well, to me, the fun story is we were excited to leave New Orleans. We liked our experience there, but it's hot the year-round in New Orleans, and so our move to North Carolina really developed from the fact that my parents had retired to Tryon, which is just south of Hendersonville, and so that meant that we would be near family. But the day we moved in, somehow the word had gotten out in the community, on the street that we moved in, that I was a seamstress, so the day I moved in, a lady came down and said that they were getting ready to move and that she taught sewing at Blue Ridge Community College, and she needs someone to finish the class she was teaching. So I fell into teaching a class in sewing, and I, of course, cannot remember who it was, but it was a great opportunity. I think she only had two or three classes left, so that was my initial exposure to Blue Ridge Community College. And of course, then I worked with the staff out here and told them that yes, and I did teach a couple of basic sewing classes, but my real interest at that time were the quilted handbags. So without knowing a lot about a full size quilt, I ended up teaching a quilting class. So it was kind of a serendipity, and I will say that I was just one class ahead of my students. I mean, I had to do research to figure out what I was going to teach the next week. But I think when I started teaching here, it was a skill that hadn't been tapped in the community. It just brought out so many people. It was, it was very exciting. It really was. And I taught 11 week classes. I don't know if you teach 11 week classes now, but every session was an 11 week class. And Harold McLaughlin (I looked, found his name), I remember working with him. I know that he retired to the southwest, but I worked with some wonderful people here, and they were, they were amazed at the number of people that came to the classes. They really were. We had full classes every time.

Rachel Quinn 09:16

How many people usually were in a class?

Georgia Bonesteel 09:18

Well, it, it had to be at least 20, at least 20. I mean, the rooms only would permit so many, and we had sewing machines, so it meant bringing sewing machines into the class. And the last class, we would have a big show-and-tell, and we would invite people from previous classes who hadn't finished their quilt. And I have pictures that I'm leaving and sharing with you of one of the- It was the only auditorium you had at the time. I know you have new ones now, but it would be full. It would just be full of people coming and they would come down on stage and show their quilt. And we talk about techniques. And that was the conclusion to every 11 week class.

Rachel Quinn 10:07

Was it the auditorium in the old Patton Building?

Georgia Bonesteel 10:09

Yes, it was, yes, yes.

Rachel Quinn 10:12

Did students have to bring their own sewing machine?

Georgia Bonesteel 10:15

Yes, yes.

Rachel Quinn 10:16

So that was a requirement?

Georgia Bonesteel 10:17

Yes, I don't think you ever had sewing machines here, did you? I can't. . .

Rachel Quinn 10:20

I don't think so.

Georgia Bonesteel 10:21

No, I don't think so. They had to bring their own. Some of the- I don't have that many pictures of in-class. I have pictures of the auditorium, and I have some pictures of the old buildings that I'll leave and share with you.

Rachel Quinn 10:42

What was, kind of like, what were the assignments in the quilting class?

Georgia Bonesteel 10:46

Well, was- we'd made a sampler quilt, and it was all- every week was like, we'd start out with a basic four patch, and we'd teach the variations on that, and then we'd go to a nine patch. Each week we'd get a little more advanced, and by advance in the quilting world, it meant that there were more seams in the block, you know. It was more things to cut up and then sew back together so, and then we'd end with crazy patch and applique, and we kept it fairly basic, and we had fun putting together a quilt that we donated to the college, and it represented aspects of Hendersonville. It had Pardee Hospital in it. It had the Playhouse in it. So in class, we talked about our whole city. I mean, it was- And the exciting thing about that class is that it developed personal friendships that people then went on- It was the impetus for starting our Western North Carolina Quilters Guild. So we had- everyone had created a bond because they all like to do sewing and patchwork, and then it allowed us to start that organization, which is still very active here in town.

Rachel Quinn 12:14

So I saw when I was doing my research that kind of, during the 60s and 70s, there was a quilting interest revival?

Georgia Bonesteel 12:22

Yeah, yes, there was.

Rachel Quinn 12:23

So the students that were coming into your class, were they ones that were, like, just starting their quilting journey, or were they also ones that had been learning on their own and wanted to more formalize their education?

Georgia Bonesteel 12:34

I would say it was a mixed bag. We did have young people in the class. I'll tell a story. I will never forget it. She has looked me up, and we're still in touch with each other. We had a young lady in the class. She did not know she was pregnant. I'll never forget. I remember even where she was sitting, and sure enough, she delivered a baby and did not know- went to the hospital and had a baby, but she was in my class. But we had young people. In the quilt world, you'll find a lot of people that will say, "I've been waiting to make a quilt until I could retire. I've saved my my daughter's fabric." This is when a lot of people were making clothes for their children, and some of it relates back to the Depression even. I mean, the fabric that had been left over and saved, and they think, "Oh, I'm going to make a quilt out of that fabric." So we had a mixed bag, but we had young people, but it was mostly, I would say, middle aged people.

Rachel Quinn 13:47

Did you ever get students that were overwhelmed by like having to design a pattern for a quilt?

Georgia Bonesteel 13:52

Yes, yes, yes, yes. I had some amazing stories. I had one lady, in fact, this was sad. She called me back and said she wouldn't be coming back because her husband didn't permit it. He would not let her come well, he found- It bothered him the joy she was having in quilting, and he didn't want her to have that. I mean, I just will never forget that. In fact, I know where she lives, it's not far from here, and so, you know, had all kinds of emotions that ran the gamut in the class, but most people, it opened a lot of doors for a lot of other people that it gave them confidence. When you start drafting a quilt or even a little pattern, and it re-awakens your interest in math. A lot of people said, "Oh, I could never do math." Well, when you start drawing something on paper and having to do math and learning, you know, that a quarter inch is point two five on the calculator. I mean, all of a sudden they found they had new skills that they had not touched or felt like they couldn't do. So I felt that quilting opened a lot of doors for people.

Rachel Quinn 15:24

Did you teach multiple levels of quilting, or was it just mainly an introduction?

Georgia Bonesteel 15:29

No, it was all one level. Now, as I went on in the quilt world, yes. When I would teach at big symposiums or big workshops like in Houston or Paducah, you would have to put down as a teacher whether it's a beginning, intermediate, or advanced, and usually, I was intermediate. In other words, people that would come to my classes had to have sewing skills. They knew how to work a sewing machine, but in the cases at Blue Ridge, it was, you know, they, they just, we just started out very basic. In other words, we would learn the parts of a sewing machine, learn how it worked. That was very important, and of course, we had different machines in the class, so we had to learn them all.

Rachel Quinn 16:18

Okay, I saw that kind of around this time, you invented lap quilting. quilting.

Georgia Bonesteel 16:26

Yes.

Rachel Quinn 16:26

So is that something you used in class with your students?

Georgia Bonesteel 16:30

Yes, yes, that's a very good question. When I first- I taught my first class with Blue Ridge out, which is now in Flat Rock, the brick building on the corner, which is where there's a coffee shop, and where the cinema is down below, you know where. That is where I taught my first class, and when I went to class, I carried in a wooden frame from Sears and Roebuck, and my idea is that we were all going to sit around that frame and quilt that quilt. We would design a quilt and put it on there. Well, that did not work, that did not work. And I'd read somewhere about quilt-as-you-go, or working in sections, and I realized that that was the way to go, so I promptly changed the whole theme in the class. And so that we developed blocks, we sewed borders on those, then we cut out a batting and a backing, and we would quilt those in our lap, either with a hoop or without a hoop, and then we'd make 20 of those, and then we'd put them together. So that was the theme of- and that's the way we did every one of them. And so I think a lot of people still have some of those quilts, hopefully completed. Sometimes I'll run into a person and they'll say, "Oh, I have that partially done. It's up in my closet. I didn't quite finish" but and then I'll see some of those quilts next to new shops here in town. It ran the gamut of a family, and they didn't quite know what to do with it, so it ended up in a resale shop. So those quilts come back to haunt me every once in a while. So hopefully people finished and kept warm underneath them. That was the whole idea.

Rachel Quinn 18:31

Was the process very different from like just mentally visualizing the quilt for those different sections versus working off of a frame?

Georgia Bonesteel 18:39

Well, it was a little different. You had to learn- First of all, what made my classes unique is that most people associated making a quilt with sewing the pieces by hand. So all the patchwork was done on the sewing machine, connecting the three layers was done by hand. Today, that's not the rule, necessarily, because machine quilting has come into vogue so much so. So we could have machine quilted those blocks together, but we didn't. I taught hand quilting and mostly without a hoop, although it could have been done with a hoop, too. And then the technique had to be made complete by then sewing those blocks together, which was a unique thing to do, sewing part of it, and then hand doing- doing hand application on the back side. So yes, there was some skill in that and, but that was part of the class.

Rachel Quinn 19:49

Did you find students were- did they prefer the machine to hand sewing? Or did you find them getting frustrated with the machine?

Georgia Bonesteel 19:56

No, I just made them do it. It was like, "You will do this." And I mean, I think they, they like the idea of the machine patchwork and the hand quilting was necessary because then at some point- as the classes went on, I did teach full quilt tops, so then they could still hand quilt, and then towards the end, and I don't know when I stopped teaching out here, it wasn't that long ago that I did teach a class here, but machine quilting has come much more into vogue. Yes,

Rachel Quinn 20:39

Do you prefer hand sewing?

Georgia Bonesteel 20:41

Hand quilting, you mean?

Rachel Quinn 20:42

Yeah, hand quilting.

Georgia Bonesteel 20:43

Well, I'll have to be honest. At my age, I have some osteoarthritis, and it's hard to hand quilt, and I think most people that you talk to my age will say, "Oh, I have turned to machine quilting because it's easier. It's not so hard on my body."

Rachel Quinn 21:02

It lets you enjoy your craft longer.

Georgia Bonesteel 21:05

Yes, that's a good thought. Yes, it is. Yes, hold onto that- your skills that you already know. Yes.

Rachel Quinn 21:12

You talked a little bit about how the different segments of the quilt that the whole class was working on were kind of featured different aspects of the county. Did you let students choose what they wanted to focus on? Or did you have kind of an idea of how you wanted the narrative of the quilt to be?

Georgia Bonesteel 21:30

I think it became a group, a verbal group opportunity. Everyone had something they were more enthralled with, you know. I do volunteer work here. If you can find that quilt somewhere, I think it would speak to- I wish I had more pictures of it, but I do know we donated it out here, so hopefully you can unearth that quilt somewhere.

Rachel Quinn 21:57

I already asked Anthony to start asking around, so. . .

Georgia Bonesteel 21:59

Okay.

Rachel Quinn 22:00

Hopefully, we get some answers.

Georgia Bonesteel 22:01

Okay, all right.

Rachel Quinn 22:03

Can you share a little bit about the Opportunity House?

Georgia Bonesteel 22:09

Well, I'll be honest. I mean, I knew what a quilt was when I came to town. I was so busy doing my, my little necktie purses that I thought, well, in order to learn more, I'm going to go to the Opportunity House and join in. They had, not necessarily a club, but they had a group where you- they hand quilted on a big frame every week, and that must be why I got the idea to get that Sears and Roebuck frame to bring to my first class. So I'd go down there and quilt with them, and they, they were all older ladies, but you could bring in a quilt top, and in probably a couple of months, they would quilt every week, and then you would come pick up your quilt, and you would give the money to the Opportunity House. It was, it was a charity thing those ladies did, and I'm convinced that they taught me how to quilt on that frame, but I still think they took my stitches out when I left because I was very novice. I didn't know about that. I didn't know exactly how to do it, and it was hard. It was hard. You had to, you had to rock the needle and in order to take small stitches and. But it did expose me to full size quilts. And then I started, you know, doing my research and learning more about it in preparation to teach a class.

Rachel Quinn 23:35

Do you remember the first full-size quilt you did on your own?

Georgia Bonesteel 23:40

Well, I have, I have the one I taught out here. It's a white on white quilt. It was what I used as my sample. And I still have that. And I show that quite often. Yes,

Rachel Quinn 23:55

Let's see. So besides teaching at Blue Ridge, you've also taught at other organizations and institutions, too. Were those classes structured differently?

Georgia Bonesteel 24:14

Yes, yes, quite a bit when you, when you leave the scheduled program of an 11 week. I think, as a professional, you learn what you feel is the most popular thing. What other people outside a class situation of week to week would want to learn and you kind of zone in on one specific skill. So when I taught classes outside of Blue Ridge, it would be like, "Come learn Bargello techniques", or, you know, there were more specific things, and I learned, I discovered things. I learned working with a flexible curve, and so then I would teach flexible classes making mountains with a flexible curve, and things that would appeal that are unique and different, but quite often they related to my start at Blue Ridge. And it was those classes that allowed- it actually gave me the security and the tangible evidence of what you can do in quilting when I went to UNC TV with my proposal of doing a quilting class on PBS.

Rachel Quinn 25:37

Cool, so can you talk about that?

Georgia Bonesteel 25:39

Yes. I mean, I went over to Blue Ridge when our- I made contact. It was my mother who had the idea. She had seen a knitting class on PBS. She said, "Georgia, why don't you do a quilt class?" I said, "Good idea, Mother." You know, Mother always knows best. Mother always knows best. So I made contact with UNC TV, and it so happened that our son, Jonathan, was looking at schools. He was like a junior at Hendersonville High School. And so we went over and toured the schools, and I made an appointment at UNC TV, and I, I took with me quilts from my Blue Ridge Community College class, several of them. And that- they were excited about it, and I was excited, and that was when I did my first shows over there. And I used many of those things, results of what the students had made.

Rachel Quinn 26:42

Cool. So if people watch those episodes now, online, they can see some of the work your students have done?

Georgia Bonesteel 26:48

Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Rachel Quinn 26:50

How was that, like, balancing the two schedules of being an instructor here, and . . .?

Georgia Bonesteel 26:55

It was hard. It was hard. When I taught on TV, I would leave home for a week. I put my sewing machine in the car, and all the quilts and I had- there were 13 shows that I did. They're 30 minute shows, and there were 13 of them, and I wouldn't do it all a week. Sometimes I'd do six of them for a week, and then I'd come back home and rest and then go back. So yes, and I did it every two years. It would take me two years to develop a new series, so it was a lot of work. And then we bought the hardware store. So then- and I was writing books also. I wrote books to go with the PBS shows,

Rachel Quinn 27:43

So you just didn't sleep at all?

Georgia Bonesteel 27:45

No, I just didn't sleep. That's always- it's a lot of work. I look back and think, "How in the world did I do it?"

Rachel Quinn 27:56

Can you talk a bit more about the hardware store and the quilt shop- kind of quilt corner you had within the hardware store?

Georgia Bonesteel 28:03

Right, right. Well, once, once, my shows aired on on PBS, and they first started just in North Carolina, with six shows. They were very popular. So then the next year, we added another seven to make that 13. It was a package of 13 shows. Then it went around the country, and I guess people just assumed that I had a store, and somehow they'd find my house, where we lived here in town, and they'd drive up wanting to buy fabric. And then we bought the hardware store, and it was just a natural progression to make part of the store a quilt corner, so it's Bonesteel Hardware and Quilt Corner. And there, there was a classroom upstairs. So I taught upstairs there, and I think I did a couple of classes, and Blue Ridge allowed you to do this, sponsored by Blue Ridge, but taught upstairs at the store. Yes, you could teach off campus, but still be sponsored by Blue Ridge. In fact, I did that at my home one time. Yes, yes. I taught a garment making class at my home through Blue Ridge.

Rachel Quinn 29:18

Oh, cool!

Georgia Bonesteel 29:20

Don't ask me how or why they did that, but they, they allowed that. And it was, it was very good.

Rachel Quinn 29:26

What were the quilting classes like that you did that weren't sponsored by Blue Ridge?

Georgia Bonesteel 29:32

Well, one was a garment class, yes, yes. And those people formed quite a bond, and in fact, I'm going to see them later on today. It was, it was a group called Cover Lovers. Well, that's how they named them. And one of the ladies, her name was Frances Gardena, said, well, she had done a research, and that quilts in North Carolina were called kivers- K, I, V, E, R, S- and that kind of makes sense. Calling them a kiver. And we laughed. We said, "Well, we can't call ourselves Kiver Lovers, so we're going to call ourselves Cover Lovers." So covers is also in regard to quilting. So they have been together for 40 years.

Rachel Quinn 30:22

Wow

Georgia Bonesteel 30:23

Same people. Couple of people have dropped out, a couple of people we've added. So that's been very interesting. So that just goes to show you the bond of quilting, how it goes on and on. It really does so, but we started that first class was in garment making. We made- we discovered that patchwork could relate to vests and jackets that we made, and so that's what we did. And then the classes at my store- all kinds of things, but they were all quilt related. Sometimes it would be a new line of fabric that came in, and we'd put kits together, that sort of thing.

Rachel Quinn 31:06

Did you see a lot of students from Blue Ridge come join you there, too?

Georgia Bonesteel 31:08

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Rachel Quinn 31:12

And did they join your Cover Lovers, too?

Georgia Bonesteel 31:17

Well, no, we kept the Cover Lovers small because we would meet at people's houses, but they became members of the Western North Carolina Quilters Guild, and now the Guild has really grown. We put on quilt shows every two years at Bonclarken. We do a lot of charity work. The Quilts of Valor has become very much a part of our community. It's a national association that makes quilts for veterans, and they have to be, of course, red, white and blue, and they have to be a certain size, and they are part of our Quilters Guild.

Rachel Quinn 31:58

I have seen stories about that in newsletters I get from the Veterans Museum.

Georgia Bonesteel 32:03

Yes!

Rachel Quinn 32:04

Yeah. I saw one recently come through about that.

Georgia Bonesteel 32:06

Yes, yes. Very emotional presentation. It really is, but it recognizes their service. You know, every line of service, Marine, Navy, all of them.

Rachel Quinn 32:23

Do you have- Is there any kind of, like, room for creativity with those? I know there's certain colors and size requirements, but other than that, do you kind of make it. . . ?

Georgia Bonesteel 32:32

They're all different. They're all different. There's- in the fabric world- there's something that's become very popular now. They're called designer panels, and some people will get a panel and then add patchwork around it, that sort of thing. But, but there's a variety, a good variety.

Rachel Quinn 32:56

So you're still very active in the quilting community, still participate in a lot of different activities. But do you still teach?

Georgia Bonesteel 33:18

Yes, I do. I'm now doing something that is really kind of fun. I'm working every Saturday down at Beginnings Quilt Shop, and it is so much fun to be in there, cutting fabric for people, learning how to work the register, which is all computerized now. Now, in fact, I often wonder how we did it years ago. Now, you have a scanner that scans the the QR reader on the end of the bolt of fabric, and then you

sell it, and that'll go into the computer, and you'll, you'll know how much fabric you've sold. I mean, how do we do all that before? It comes up with the price, you know, adds the tax and then, but it also does an inventory of the bolts of fabric in your store. So, I'm amazed how far we've come. I truly am. And of course, the price of fabric has really changed over the years.

Rachel Quinn 34:17

I'm sure. How much was fabric when you first got started?

Georgia Bonesteel 34:20

Well, we would buy fabric for \$2.25 a yard and sell it for about \$5. Fabric is now \$12.99, and \$13 and \$14 a yard. That will tell you the increase. And of course, during my PBS shows, I had the opportunity to go to Cranston. I went. We did one quilt show that is probably one of my favorites. It's called From Field to Fabric, where we open in a cotton field down in South Carolina, and we then went through the whole process of spinning the cotton. We went to all those factories, and when you see that, it kind of leaves the impression of, "Well, now I know why fabric costs so much," but not \$15 a yard. But I think that exposed a lot of people to the price of fabric and. So anyway, what I'm doing now is I'm working on Saturdays. I'm getting ready to fly to Montana in about three weeks where I teach a week's class at a ranch, and for the last few years, I have turned down opportunities because I've been a caregiver for my husband, and I've missed teaching, but I think I will get back into limited traveling now. My children said, "Mom, it's time for you to hang up the needle and stay closer to home." But there are teaching opportunities here in the state and in the Southeast, so I'll probably be doing- still teaching.

Rachel Quinn 36:06

I kind of want to ask more about the Montana ranch. What's that like?

Georgia Bonesteel 36:09

Well, it's fantastic. I have a co-teacher, Charlotte Warr Anderson, and this will be our 36th year that I've gone out there. And it's a ranch between- it's called Nine Quarter Circle Ranch. It's between Bozeman and Yellowstone, and we teach in the morning, and then people can fly fish or ride horses in the afternoon or hike. There's wonderful hiking opportunities. And then on Wednesday, we take a field trip back into town and tour Bozeman, which is a wonderful town.

Rachel Quinn 36:47

That sounds like a fabulous time. I love that.

Georgia Bonesteel 36:49

It is, it is.

Rachel Quinn 36:51

This might be a hard question, just because you have such an amazing and long career with quilting, but do you have, like, a special quilt or project that you've worked on that has, like, a really special meaning for you that you'd like to share?

Georgia Bonesteel 37:06

Well, there have been so many, there have been so many, and I've had a lot of ups and downs. My son had a collection of quilts that I had made specifically for him, and their house burned down, and they lost all the quilts. He- I'd made a special quilt for him, and one of- part of my business at Bonesteel Hardware, we were one of the first in the western end of North Carolina to have a long arm quilting machine, and they've become very popular today. Most people, they will have their quilts, they will- someone will say, "Well, how did you get your, who did your quilt?" And they'll say, "Oh, I quilt by check." In other words, they write a check for someone to quilt their quilt on a long arm. Excuse me, so we had the first long arm, and that quilt that I made for Paul, I got the idea to- he is a musician, but he's also a professional video photographer and does documentaries. And he had done a documentary where he'd wrote a song, it was about Russia, if the people- If the People will Lead, the Leaders will Follow. And he had a wonderful song that he wrote, and I quilted the words of that song on the quilt that I made him. And I'm not sure anyone had ever done that before, to use the needle on that long arm to write, and that quilt was burned up in the fire. So, you know, there been good things and I need to, I guess, make that quilt again. But so that was a special quilt. I think any quilt that I've made that is in regard to the mountains. I teach a lot of quilts that are mountain related, and we have always loved living here in the mountains. I think it's very special. So and then, of course, that first quilt that I made at Blue Ridge Community College. That all white one, that's a special quilt to me, so. It's like asking your favorite child, you know.

Rachel Quinn 39:28

I know. I knew it was going to be a hard question, but I thought to ask.

Georgia Bonesteel 39:32

You can't really do that.

Rachel Quinn 39:38

Do you see any of the younger generation getting interested in quilting?

Georgia Bonesteel 39:42

This is our big challenge today. It really is. The young people today, many of them have to work full-time, so quilting probably- it depends on being inspired by a neighbor seeking out fabric at a quilt shop, and you'll say, "Oh, look, they've got quilting classes." But the young people are not picking it up like we hope they will be, but I think having quilt shows like ours every two years brings in- opens people's eyes that it's not your quilt- It's not your old lady quilt anymore. It's art quilts. Many of the quilts that we see at our quilt shows are art worthy, and they are for the wall as much as they are for a bed to keep warm, so and if you look around at the Folk Art Center. I'm a member of the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild in Asheville. If you go to their exhibitions or their shows, you'll understand how connecting those three layers and creating that shadow on the surface has many opportunities. And hopefully we'll get- Yeah, and also, when young people feel- learn the fact that it can be a money-making thing, that you can become a professional. I mean, when I teach and tour, I make good money. And so if people would learn that, that, "Oh," you know, "I can use this as a profession and make money", I think they will take that opportunity to learn quilting and patchwork.

Rachel Quinn 41:25

I hope so. I- my grandmother, she didn't quilt, but she kind of learned the craft from her mother.

Georgia Bonesteel 41:34

Oh, yeah.

Rachel Quinn 41:35

So a lot of her quilts are still in the family.

Georgia Bonesteel 41:37

Oh, that's good.

Rachel Quinn 41:40

Yeah, it's definitely one of those things where you just put off because you're like, "Oh, I don't have time. I'll learn it later."

Georgia Bonesteel 41:47

That's right, that's right.

Rachel Quinn 41:48

But it is something worth pursuing.

Georgia Bonesteel 41:50

Well, it's kind of interesting. I teach out at the John Campbell Folk School, and several years ago, my husband had gotten ill, and so I had a teary-eyed session at the end of one of my week classes, and I announced I would be retiring, and it always bothered me. So I got a phone call about a month ago, and they wanted to know if I can come back. I said, "You mean I can unretire? This is wonderful." So I'm teaching there next August, so right now, a day doesn't go by when I think, "What am I going to teach?" I've got to design a new quilt for my class at John Campbell next year, so. . .

Rachel Quinn 42:31

Yeah, yeah, I will have to keep that in mind.

Georgia Bonesteel 42:32

Yes.

Rachel Quinn 42:38

I guess now kind of just, I like to leave the final question for the interviewee, just to, kind of like share any final thoughts or feelings or memories that they would like to- the listener to hear that's kind of like a wrap up.

Georgia Bonesteel 42:55

Well, I'm very proud of how quilting has become immersed into the community here. I see it in many different facets, and the relationships that it's given to people, I think, has been very worthy, very worthy. And I'd say that's probably the thing that I'm most happy about. Gather my thoughts here. A

year and a half ago, we lost a son-in-law, and when Bill came to town with my daughter (my daughter lives in town here) he said, "Georgia, we're going to start a Quilt Museum." So, Bill, we had a couple of meetings with the City Fathers here, and the mayor came, and we went to the Travel and Tourism and we were really on a roll to start a Quilt Museum. And I still think that might be in the future here, and that would be a way to preserve quilting and the relationships that have gone on, and it would bring people far and wide from North Carolina and outside of North Carolina. The Travel and Tourism used to kid me. They'd said, "Well, other than the Carl Sandburg home, you were the biggest draw to Hendersonville for a long time." And I think I will end with this note. Don't ever underestimate the power of TV. It's truly amazing. It really is, and the fact that I can look into that little hole of a camera and talk about what I love and the relationship and show quilting on a machine and show the results of it. Reach so many people around the country and that- and they wanted to come and see where it was done. I mean, I guess they thought, even though it was over Chapel Hill, but, and I have never thought of myself as a star. I just, you know, I've had people stop me on an airplane and say, "Oh, are you that person?" But it's, it all relates to the quilt. It really does. It relates to the quilt.

Rachel Quinn 45:36

Well, thank you so much for coming in today and sharing these stories and memories with us. We really appreciate it.

Georgia Bonesteel 45:42

Well, thank you.