

Myrna CG Mibus

Down Under Quilting with Anne Tuma

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When Anne Tuma greets you with a jolly “G’day” in her lovely Australian accent, you’ll think you have entered a land “down under” instead of a home in rural Montgomery, Minnesota. A quick look at the snow outside confirms you are not in Australia. Yet, when Anne invites you into her home-based business, Down Under Quilting, you’ll feel like you have left the chill of winter far behind.

Named Down Under Quilting for her Australian home, Anne’s business has grown 25 percent each year since she opened in 2003. Her growth is good for any company but really amazing when Anne tells you she just started quilting in 2001 and “never, ever, in my wildest dreams thought I’d be a quilter.”

So how did Anne get into quilting? And how did Anne get from Australia to the frost-covered farm land of Montgomery, Minnesota?

Anne and her twin brother, David, were raised on a dairy farm near Neerim South, Australia, a town of 750 located an hour and a half east of Melbourne. Their parents had a zest for life and encouraged Anne and David to go after their dreams. At age 18 and fresh out of high school, Anne purchased a coffee shop and deli. Never mind that she didn't have training in business management and food service; she just did it. Likewise, David wanted to learn about American farming, so he spent eight months working as an agricultural exchange student on the Tuma Family Farm in Montgomery.

Anne sold her coffee shop after five years and headed to America. While visiting her brother, she struck up a friendship with the Tuma's handsome son, Jeff. When Anne returned to Australia, she and Jeff started a long-distance relationship, fueled by letters and dollar-a-minute phone calls. A year later, Jeff proposed.

"Everyone was very excited," Anne says of the reactions of friends and family. Anne and Jeff were married in Australia in August of 1994 and, with the blessings of her family and friends, Anne moved to America to start her new life with Jeff.

Anne took a job at a pizza restaurant in town so she could get to know the people in the community. And though winters were a shock, and the heat and humidity of the summers surprised her, Anne quickly adjusted to her new life. When she and Jeff had children – daughter Chloe was born in 1996 and son Zach in 1999 – Anne switched to working part time. In 2001, one of her new friends introduced her to quilting. Even though she had no previous sewing experience, Anne discovered she had a knack for working with fabric and immediately fell in love with the

hobby.

Anne stayed busy with her family, quilting, farm work and her job. But by 2003, she wanted a change. She began researching options for a part-time business that allow her to be home with her children.

One weekend she visited a quilting friend. This friend owned a longarm quilting machine, a huge sewing machine made especially for quilting large quilts. Instead of hand quilting a quilt top to a batting and backing, or wrestling yards of fabric through a home sewing machine, a lot of quilters, like Anne, send their quilt tops to longarm quilters to machine quilt. Anne's husband, Jeff, saw the machine and said, "That's your business right there. You should get one of those."

Anne hadn't thought of getting a longarm machine, but Jeff's suggestion struck home and, true to her Australian nature to try new things, Anne started a new business venture.

Anne went to work. She researched longarm machines and selected one that would fit her needs. She created a studio in her basement that was welcoming, work-friendly and still had room for her family to relax and play. She hung quilts on the wall to showcase her work, ordered spools of quilting thread and quilting patterns for her machine, and set up shelves and work tables. As a quilter herself, Anne knew how many hours quilters put into the tops they bring to a longarm quilter, so she wanted to be sure she could do a good job with her longarm quilting before she took in customer work. Anne practiced for about six months to make her quilting designs smooth and thread tensions perfect. Finally, Down Under Quilting was up and running.

Now, in its fifth year of business, Down Under Quilting is thriving and Anne says the business has been a good fit for her. "Of all the jobs I've had, this is the one I've enjoyed the most and probably have the most

talent for,” Anne said. “Quilting gives me a chance to visit with people. One of the best parts of my job is sitting down with my customers to figure out what they want their quilt to look like.”

Anne now has loyal customers from all over Minnesota and several other states; some of her quilts have even made it “down under” to people in Australia, and her customers are quick to tell why they like bringing their quilts to Anne. “The work she does is fantastic!” says Hazel Holmes, a retired elementary school principal who has been quilting for “a long time.” “She's creative and her design ideas are perfect,” adds Lori Clausen, a beginning quilter from Lakeville. “Anne has really good ideas,” says Carol Sery a longtime quilter from Montgomery. She adds, “Anne's got a natural knack for quilting...and whatever comes back just looks great!”

But, it's not just her talent for quilting, her customers point out, that brings them to Anne time after time. It's the time she takes with them to make sure she understands what they want, the care she takes with each quilt. It's Anne's personality, her hospitality and laid-back Australian charm. Above all, it's the warm feeling they get when Anne welcomes them out of the cold and into the land of Down Under Quilting.