



Early Days In The Decorative Concrete Statuary Business

By Shelly Speedling

Nearly twenty years ago, I was a young twenty-year-old student at a Minnesota University. Today, I paint concrete statuary for a living.

Do you look back at your life and think where did I go wrong? Or, do you look back at your life and think, boy I am glad my life has turned out so right? I am one who says, "I am exactly where I want to be and loving every minute of it." The Ornamental Concrete Industry has led me to use my talents of creativity as well as utilize skills in the bookkeeping field. This sparse population of concrete statue producers has opened my eyes to many new things as well as an opportunity to meet very knowledgeable people along the way.

I married earlier than most girls do nowadays, at the age of twenty-two. I went to college for communications and later for business. For nearly seventeen years, I have been self-employed with my husband. No one forewarned me of my husband's unending incredible work habits, always striving to learn more and more about how things are made.

My husband is a welder by trade and had a business where he would fix and repair farm machinery. Due to the onset of asthma he needed to lessen the work of going onto farms and being around the silage and hay. We were introduced to the ornamental concrete life when we began creating decorative iron heart plant

hangers. We arranged a small display of plant hangers in front of our welding shop and soon we were called on by Roger's Concrete Creations in Amery, Wisconsin.

I remember my husband phoning me to say that a gentleman wanted us to sell concrete items. As naïve as I was, I thought to myself, has my husband gone crazy? Where does he think we are going to put these large cement trucks! Little did I realize that if I would have just listened a little longer, he would

explain to me that this gentleman was looking at us

for representing his concrete statues which his business produced, not the liquid concrete itself! Then the light bulb came on in my head. What a great idea! Let's start selling concrete deer, bunnies, cows, etc., alongside the iron plant hangers and other decorative ironworks my husband was creating. We did this for nearly one year and learned we could make more money by learning to paint the items ourselves.

As a mother of two little ones at the time, I truly wanted to stay home with them. In order to do that, I agreed to learn that process.....although my husband will tell you it took a lot of convincing on his part to get me to do that! We traveled a couple hours north to Roger's, who had graciously offered to show me the basics of painting, to which I am very grateful to this day.

From those early days in the concrete lawn ornament industry to now, I real-

ize that a large amount of our success in our business comes from listening and learning from those who have been in the trade. From our beginnings of selling our own ironwork together with the statuary, enabled us to establish a clientele base.

We also had begun selling our iron plant hangers to other businesses and started doing shows.

One show we were informed about was the Nunnikhoven Concrete Mold Auction and Trade Show, held in Davenport, Iowa (Now called Advantage Plus, Inc.) Over a decade later, this show is still a great

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way for the novice to network with mold makers, paint & sealer suppliers, and purchase inexpensive molds to pour.

In the issues to follow, I will continue to share with you what I have learned about owning a decorative concrete statuary business. What made us go from purchasing already made statuary to creating it ourselves?

Well, remember my 'over working, needing to know how things are made' husband? Combine that ambition with me meeting up with fellow producers at the above mention trade show. As I sat in our booth taking orders and answering questions on our plant hangers, he was being lured into the mold auction portion of the show. Urged to 'just buy one mold'. "Thanks" to Jim Larsen of Larsen's Concrete, Hudson, Wisconsin and 'Thanks' to Dave Kleist of Gene's Concrete in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.....their unending encouragement to take their advice, not the wife's, had now made him become one of THEM! A concrete statue producer!

A warning to all wives out there, if they pour one mold, they are hooked. It gets in their blood.....and you will embark on a whole new territory. Little did I know back then, that I would find my niche too!

To Contact Shelly Speedling:

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