



## EXPANDING YOUR QUEST FOR NEW IDEAS

**By Shelly Speedling**

June marks the 1/2 year anniversary of writing the Ornamental Express column for Concrete Today Magazine. I thank you for the inquiring phone calls and positive comments that you have made. My husband Dave gets involved with speaking on the phone too when people have called with questions.

Dave loves to talk and when it involves the topic of concrete statues or steel, well, you have his attention. He is willing to listen to new ideas although he has his own opinion on everything pretty much right from the start. So, when it comes to a new product to try, he is willing, but he will test that product over a period of a year, sometimes two or three, to make sure it holds up. I see this happening a lot when a salesman wants him to try a new paint, mold release, lightweight concrete additive, or simply a new style patching glove. When he finds something he likes, he stands pretty firmly with it. I know we were told early on that what works for one concrete pourer or painter, may not work for another. That is true. So, if you find something that works for you. Stick with it.

David learned in our first year of pouring molds that different releases have to be used. The type of release agent you are to use on commercial grade plastic molds is going to be different from rubber/fiberglass molds and also aluminum molds. When we first got into pouring we trusted a salesman and used his 'new' release. Well, we were very lucky that this 'new' release agent only ruined a couple of our molds because Dave only tested on a couple before ever using on all. We later heard that some

other people were not so lucky and they had all their molds destroyed because of using the 'newest' mold release. So, once again, proceed with caution. Speaking of molds, over the years, we have acquired hundreds of molds. You proceed with life and one day you set aside to check into just how many dollars into molds you have invested. You may think a few thousand and then all of a sudden you realize it is in the couple hundreds of thousands and what would happen if your place burned down? Yes, keep track of all of your molds and not only what the mold is, but where you bought it at for replacement purposes should you happen to need to do so. Only so much can be held in one's memory.

We have a catalog so everything is documented that way, but we also take photos of the poured piece next to the mold. We do this so everything is recognizable and recorded. All of our molds have a code assigned to them as well. This together with good accounting records should help if something drastic should ever happen in your business. Keep a second copy of all book work off premises too. We have the first in our office, the second backup at our accountant's and the third at our shop. We actually have a third copy lingering around too on disc (just in case).

Last summer and fall I had the opportunity to travel to over thirty different states. I traveled with different family members on these trips and a lot of the time I was not the driver when we would see a concrete statue place off on the side of the road. Well, number one thing my kids say is that if I am on vacation, I am suppose to be away from concrete statues and anything related... so, I know I could

at least say I had to pass by 10 different places that I really wanted to stop by at. (and I will someday when I am driving!) My kids of course grew up in this business and know that if my husband and I stop, we could get into long hours of conversation with the owners while they wait patiently!

So on my travels all I was able to do was enjoy the differing styles of statues I would see from the road. I remember seeing a gorgeous wing span eagle in Connecticut that I had never seen before. I also saw differing types of gargoyle statues

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south of Boston. I am excited when I see differing statues because I have so many mold books and usually I am aware of new items out there. One of my trips was down south to Waveland, Mississippi on a mission trip with our church. My family and I traveled there and assembled porch swings for the elderly, pulled weeds, and also my volunteer job was and still is to write newspaper stories on our churches trips there. I have seen so much destruction and it seems that the gutting and debris removal is unending.

While in Waveland though, I heard many stories of how Hurricane Katrina did not harm the parishioner's Virgin Mary statues. Story after story. Houses were completely destroyed but the Virgin Mary was intact. It reminded me of a story of a house fire a couple years ago in our area. There was a family farmhouse that was completely destroyed and within a few feet of it, their concrete Virgin Mary statue remained untouched. I think that if you are in business with producing concrete statuary, stories like these will eventually be told to you too. Listening to your customer and what he or she is telling you is the utmost in customer relations.

For example, we sell several different types of memorial stones and we do spend a great deal of time listening to people who have just lost their loved one. One minute I could be in my paint room or my husband pouring concrete, and depending on who the customer is, we could all of a sudden be the shoulder that customer needs to cry on. I have had many a tear flowing from customers as they decide what is the best saying to paint on their memorial bench. I have had a gentleman compose a poem for use on a memorial bench in honor of his brother who had been killed the day before. These are all situations that you may not even have thought about.

Maybe you are only thinking right now of getting into the business. Pouring concrete stones, benches, statues or whatever, you may find dealing with mourning customers is a little more tough than you ever could have imagined. It is a good feeling in the long run though. We provide a product that not everyone

can make. Memorial stones are growing in popularity. I don't think they will overtake giving flowers anytime soon but as cemeteries get more stringent rules, I see backyard memorial gardens becoming increasingly popular. People are able to then use the memorial stone as a center point possibly representing more that one person who has passed away. Plant some flowers and it becomes a beautiful spot to reflect.

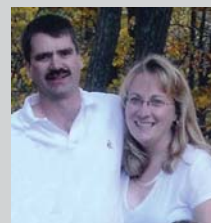
I just got a call recently from someone who told me that the memorial stone they received when their son died was one of the most beautiful gifts they had received. They said that the flowers were so overwhelming and that they gave them to the nursing home residents, but the stone just touched their heart. It was something that they could take to the cemetery plot and yet still bring home with them after awhile in remembrance. They were going to put it in their house then and place it next to their son's picture.

I don't think my husband or I could have ever imagined what an important role we take on in producing statues. Concrete statues touch the hearts of many whether it be a memorial, a childhood memory, or just a whimsical figure the customer wants to place in their garden. Statues bring emotions of both sadness and joy. For those that look at concrete statues still as tacky, tasteless, or useless, I say to them that they are really missing out. So much can be captured in a statue. Look around at the Statue of Liberty, the many statues at New York's Central Park, and how many other statues do we take for granted daily. Yes, those just men-

tioned are not made out of concrete, but those statues represent character and have a statement to make.....just as those sitting in your yard or garden are making a statement about you in your world. To the producers I say keep pouring the concrete and to the mold makers reading this, keep coming up with creative molds for individuals to express themselves. Your two types of fields are doing great work and I hear the results from customers daily who appreciate it.

### About the Author

*Shelly Speedling - Owner of SVJ Creative Designs together with her husband David. SVJ Creative Designs produces concrete statuary and decorative ironwork.*



Dave & Shelly Speedling

*SVJ Creative Designs also creates custom iron railings for homes and businesses. Shelly and Dave have three children ages 17, 15, & 11. They reside in Minnesota.*

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