

WHERE MEMORIES BECOME TREASURES

ART FROM ASHES

By LUCIE K. LEWIS, ED.D

Just a teaspoon of the "cremains" of a pet or loved one is transformed into a beautiful lasting treasure when entrusted to heart-centered collaboration of sisters

Jenny Bourgeois and Deb Brown and their friend Jane Giat, owners of Art From Ashes.

Art From Ashes is an Amherst-based company that began in 2006 after the death of Jenny and Deb's grandmother. The company began as an internet-based business and now not only serves customers all across the country but Australia, England and Canada as well. The idea for the company grew from the sister's long-held memories and personal losses. The first loss was the death of Jenny and Deb's mother, who passed in 1996. She was cremated and the remains buried. Jenny explains that at the time of her death they had wished that there was a way to create a remembrance of their mom; however, ten years would pass before they discovered what the remembrance could be. Jane, a clinical social worker/psychotherapist, joined the

team because the business idea resonated with her work on grieving.

The long memories trace back to childhood through Jenny and Deb's fond memories of playing with their grandmother's collection of glass paperweights. When she passed at 100 years old, they again looked for meaningful ways to create a remembrance that would honor her. Jenny explained that they had heard of artists using the ash from the Mt St Helens' eruption in glass paperweights, and they wondered if something like that could be done with their grandmother's ashes. They visited the Paradise City Art Festival to find an artist that they could work with to explore the idea because for them the remembrance must first be art. They found Robert Burch of Putney, VT who had worked in blown glass for over 35 years.

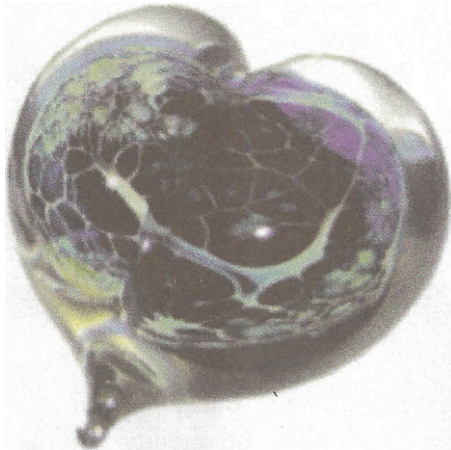
Jane, Deb and Jenny visited Robert's studio and shared their idea with him. After he warmed to the idea, he began testing how to incorporate the ashes into his glass creations. Since the ash changes the chemistry of the glass, it took a while to identify how much ash could be added to the glass without compromising the integrity of the piece. One of their first pieces was a beautiful clear globe that cracked during the process. It sits on a bookshelf in their 3rd floor office at 37 South Pleasant Street. The crack looks like the equator on an otherwise breath-taking piece.

Art From Ashes now works with four artists each bringing unique gifts and designs to their offerings. The artists are Robert Burch and his daughter Caitlin Burch, Kevin Kilgore and Nathan Macomber. A new artist, Nancy Tobey, will soon join the team. The glass



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designs include heart-shaped sculptures, round and dome-shaped (perennials) paperweights, perfume bottles, pocket-sized comfort/worry stones, vases, suncatchers, jewelry, glass-topped hand crafted walking sticks and one-of-a-kind commissioned pieces.



One of the commissioned pieces was a martini glass created to honor a special tradition that one of their clients shared with her husband. One very challenging design was a glass dinosaur, the favorite toy of the pet of another client; another was a breaking wave. In an interview for the PBS series, Making it Here that aired on October 19, 2009, Robert Burch said that "They push my skills as a glass blower right to the edge and then over. They definitely have come up with some incredible requests, but it has actually increased my skill as a glass blower." Information on the pieces, the artists and the process can be found on their website at www.artfromashes.com.

Customer service is foremost in the minds these three ladies when

working with a client, and this is attested to through the customer testimonials that thank them for "helping them grieve," "for the kindness and respect" that they showed, for being allowed "to be part of the process," and for "quality craftsmanship and outstanding customer service."

Their office is filled with their personal remembrances. Among the collection is a perennial with the ashes of Washoe that was gifted to them by the director of the organization that had taught the famous chimpanzee American Sign Language.

And yes, opening Art From Ashes allowed Jenny and Deb to finally have the remembrances that they had hoped to create to honor both their mother and grandmother. On the wall in the customer meeting room is a beautiful wall glass rondelle held by a wrought iron holder that holds the ashes of their grandmother and on the fireplace is a sun catcher that holds the ashes of their mom and dad in its center.

Art From Ashes makes owning these beautiful remembrances both affordable and easy. For more information on prices and ordering please visit www.artfromashes.com, contact them by email at info@artfromashes.com or call the office at (413) 303-1793. **EF**

