

Susan Howard

Designing Jewelry that

by Susan T. Hessel

Goldsmith/jewelry designer Susan Howard has been through her share of difficult challenges in her life, including a painful divorce and being robbed twice at a family-run jewelry store where she worked.

She suffered near bankruptcy and had nightmares that she later learned were a symptom of post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) associated with seeing her employer shot in the head during a robbery. Having since rebuilt her life, she has designed a jewelry line to help others heal. It is an effort that she calls turning from “victim to victorious.”



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“That is what my jewelry reflects, overcoming what you have gone through,” said Howard, who is based in Rehoboth, Massachusetts. “When you are down and out, you can look at it as an opportunity to lift yourself up.”

“Adversities,” she added, “are our friends. You just don’t see it when you are going through it.”

Although she creates other designs, Howard is committed to jewelry that “makes a difference” in the lives of the person wearing it.

Howard’s designs include COMFORT WEAR JEWELRY for those needing healing. COMFORT stands for (Compassionate, Optimistic, Mission, Focused on Reaching & Touching; WEAR is an acronym for Women’s Emotions Awakening Righteous and JEWELRY stands for Journey’s Every Woman Every Language & Race Years.



One piece, called A Tragic Event, is symbolic of the extreme struggles that everyone has from time to time. Each piece has a shield and a cross on it “because, without my faith, I personally would not have been able to overcome,” she said.

Makes a Difference

She also introduced “My Beautiful Child” a pendant whose sales benefit The Jewelers for Children, a non-profit organization dedicated to raising funds for a wide range of children’s charities, including Autism Speaks, Make-A-Wish Foundation, St Jude’s and the, Elizabeth Glaser Pediatrics’ and AIDs Foundation.

One of Susan’s dear friends was having difficulties conceiving a child. During the time her friend struggle to conceive, Susan started designing “My Beautiful Child.”

When a beautiful baby boy arrived weeks early Susan was able to give her friend her very own “My Beautiful child” pendant, bringing tears to her eyes. This piece is very popular on Mothers Day and is often given to Mothers and Grand Mothers. On the back is an inscription that reads. “My beautiful child I love you so. How much I love you I want you to know. A precious gift from the Lord up above. Never have I felt a greater love.”



There are pendants for those who have lost a parent, a spouse, a child or a friend. Another is called Overcoming Difficulties and still another, Seeking Forgiveness.

“Dear Lord, you have seen my anger and tears. You know my heartache and my fears. I will trust in you forever more. Grant me eagle wings so I may soar.”

Overcoming Difficulties, which features a soaring eagle in flight on its front, has been given to family members who have lost a loved one in Iraq or Afghanistan and to soldiers themselves who have had devastating injuries. The inscription on the back of that one says, “Dear Lord, you have seen my anger and tears. You know my heartache and my fears. I will trust in you forever more. Grant me eagle wings so I may soar.”

She recognizes many soldiers returning home suffer with PTSD, which also touched her life in very different circumstances. “So many emotions are deep inside that piece of jewelry,” Howard said. “I think of all these soldiers coming home and I know what they are battling. It is a spiritual battle. I would love to share that story with the world.”

Every time she engraves the name of the person being honored or remembered, Howard said, she feels “a deep connection to the person wearing it. I feel that somehow my spirit has helped that person. I feel connected to that person, knowing that they have that. It’s joy. It’s my reward. It lasts longer than money because we know money always runs out.”

A friendship over the Internet led to Howard creating A Beautiful Treasure, a pendant that honors the ability in those who have disabilities. Using one finger and backscratcher, this woman, who is quadriplegic, communicates with Howard via email. Although they have never met, Howard describes Terry Burkhardt “as one of my best friends.”

A Beautiful Treasure carries the inscription, “A beautiful treasure that is precious and rare, an angel that relies on others for care. The people you have touched are thankful to you. God bless for all that you can and can’t do.”

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Terry is proof that every life is a treasure, according to Howard. “She has a completely full life. She has taught me things that because of her disabilities I could only learn from her. It opened my eyes

to what a gift people with disabilities really are to the world.”

Howard grew up in Somerset, Massachusetts, where she was introduced to jewelry in a “fabulous art program” at the high school. “I had a torch in my hands since I was 15 years old. A great teacher, Mrs. Goulart, became a mentor of mine. At that point, I never thought of jewelry making as a career.”



One day, that teacher brought in a brochure for the Jewelry Institute of Rhode Island. Howard was thrilled to learn that she could have a career “getting dirty every day and making miniatures. There is something fascinating about working with tiny

little pieces of gold and creating miniature sculptures.”

Stuller, Inc., one of the largest jewelry wholesale companies in the country, now manufactures her work. The pieces are “not high-end jewelry,” retailing for about \$70 for silver and about \$250 in gold for the pendants alone. Any store may sell the line, perhaps less valuable monetarily than other jewelry, they are rich in values. “I am no stranger to difficulties,” said Howard, who has remarried and has three daughters. “I have joy in having come full circle in helping people. Through my faith and difficulties I am able to do such a thing.”

Without taking that leap to move to victorious, she said, “you stay stuck in the middle and remain the victim.”