

From Porcelain Crowns to Pharaoh's Horses

By Kathryn Marchi

How many of us can say that we have a hobby, a passion and a career that when combined, satisfies our very soul while providing financial support? Eileen Johnson is one creative and talented person who was able to draw from all three and enjoy each at various times in her life. In time she found a way to blend them into business and pleasure. To this day, Eileen is continuing to pursue her combined passion.

Born in New Jersey to a naval architect father and a professional artist mother, Eileen was surrounded by creativity and encouraged to explore her own. She was always drawing, sketching, painting and working on any art projects she could find. At six years of age, Eileen was given her own sewing machine and began stitching doll clothes for dolls in the neighborhood.

At age eight, she discovered horses. In exchange for riding lessons, Eileen cleaned stalls and did other jobs around the farm. This love of horses became a passion that would continue throughout her life.

Entering high school at 13, Eileen took a class in jewelry and metallurgy. She learned soldering, how to work in sheet metal and how to set stones. As a project, she designed and made an intricate sterling silver cuff bracelet. With that, she was hooked on designing and making jewelry. This became a hobby that she would enjoy throughout her schooling.

At 16, Eileen began working in a dentist's office where she became

fascinated by the method for making dental crowns and bridges. By coincidence, she was told by a school guidance counselor that a manual dexterity test indicated she might be a candidate for a career in dental lab technology. Eileen then found an excellent school at the University of Kentucky where in 1974 she graduated with an associate's degree in applied science of dental technology. Not only did she train in the skill of making dentures, partials, maxio-facial restoration, crowns and bridges, she also specialized in business management. After working in the dental technology field to garner more experience, Eileen opened her own dental laboratory in 1978. This was her career and the intricate work involved certainly had its roots in her hobby of hand-crafting jewelry. During this time, Eileen reconnected with her beloved horses and bought her first horse in 1976. She would ride and own horses from that time on.

It is clear that jewelry and dental technology are required craftsmanship, but how did Eileen's passion for horses enter the equation?

After 25 years of running her own dental lab, Eileen decided to retire. As a gift, her aunt gave her a family heirloom from her grandfather -- a gold pocket watch and fob with an intricate engraving of the "Pharaoh's Horses," a replica of a well-known painting by British artist, John Frederick Herring. Still dreaming of making jewelry, Eileen decided that this beautiful engraving would be her signature piece and would help launch her new business in jewelry. A passion, a hobby and a career now evolved into one!


After a year spent in England pursuing her interest in horses, she returned to the United States and began making plans for the future. Securing a copyright certificate on the Pharaoh's Horses design, she named the new business, "Tempi," which means "change." Finding her home on Maryland's Eastern Shore, she built a studio and began to create pendants, earrings, cuff links, key fobs and charms, all with the "Pharaoh's Horses" design. These jewelry pieces were



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made in sterling silver, ancient casting bronze, gold (a yellow alloy) and 14-karat gold. Eileen crafted and finished each piece by hand, carving and molding the prototypes with the same tools used in her dental business. The dream of owning her own jewelry design business was launched.

As Eileen enjoyed riding her horse and visiting area horse shows, she began to include other riding disciplines in her designs such as horses used for dressage. She also developed prototypes for specific horse breeds, foxes and companion dogs to horse lovers. As the pieces became better known, Eileen was asked to expand into depictions of waterfowl and birds. The Calvert Maritime Museum recently asked her to include boats specific to the Chesapeake Bay such as the log canoe, bugeye and skipjack.

Eileen was also asked by Friends of Rappahannock to use their logo in a design to celebrate their 25th anniversary. The Mystic Maritime Museum in Connecticut has also expressed interest in her work. Locally, her jewelry can be found at Atkins' Arboretum, the Rotary Artisans' Fest and other displays in Centreville and at recognized horse shows along the East Coast. At present, Eileen's goal is to exhibit her jewelry at the Easton Waterfowl Festival. 

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