

twisted metal & silver & silk | jason holley & rosalind ford

What happens when you blend a Dungeons and Dragons™ player with a field biologist and a mutual attraction to silver? The result is one couple and two businesses -Twisted Metal owned by Jason Holley and Silver and Silk owned by Rosalind Ford. Jason and Rosalind make their living in the craft industry of Newfoundland and Labrador. Jason makes chainmaille inspired jewelry, art pieces and sometimes even lingerie. Rosalind makes jewelry out of naturally handdyed silk woven through fine silverware. They are artists and business people who came to their careers by very different routes.

While in university Jason made a hemp bracelet as a gift. The bracelet was a hit and friends started putting in their orders. Soon the word was out and Jason was making bracelets for strangers. By the end of the semester he had made a few thousand dollars. Instead of getting a job for the summer, Jason decided to create his own with the help of the Youth Ventures program. He sold his bracelets as a street vendor in downtown St. John's and set up a booth at the Salmon Festival in Grand Falls-Windsor. By the end of the summer he had made about \$10,000! He had tasted success in business and decided to develop his artistic and craft making skills full time.

Rosalind completed a Bachelor of Science degree in biology and worked as a field biologist for several years. This was seasonal work and she needed money. Growing up in Baie Verte, she was exposed to crafts by her mother, a quilter and an expert at sewing and needlepoint. Rosalind was also "crafty", sewing her first doll at age eight. So she decided to take evening classes and then enrolled in a 2 year textile studies program offered by the College of the North Atlantic. Rosalind also took advantage of the opportunity to complete an apprenticeship offered by the Cultural Industries Development Program. Rosalind had never imagined that she would be self-employed and credits Jason, whom she met in a class, with the entrepreneurial influence.

Jason had taken the plunge into business after his successful summer bracelet venture. However, he was cautious and worked hard. His Dungeons and Dragons™ hobby inspired his chainmaille jewelry and his business became Twisted Metal. Jason paid his bills and reinvested everything else back into his business by acquiring more tools and supplies, accessing more training, and paying more fees at craft fairs. As he gained credibility and recognition, he was able to access grants from organizations such as the Newfoundland and Labrador Craft Council.

Jason and Rosalind have received accolades for their work. Jason won an award in the 2007 Arts and Letters Competition and was also commissioned to make the awards for the provincial Arts Council Awards Show. Rosalind also succeeded at the provincial Arts and Letters Competition and won the Emerging Artist Award at the Atlantic Crafts Trade Show in 2007. This was the beginning of Silver and Silk.

Jason and Rosalind work together as a team even though they keep their businesses separate. Rosalind laughs and says that they are in healthy competition with each other. In 2008 they moved to Amherst Cove and put off a show together. Their work differs and appeals to divergent tastes.

Jason makes necklaces, bracelets, earrings and pendants by combining small aluminum or

silver rings. His jewelry ranges in price from \$15 to \$ 1500. The inexpensive \$15 pieces are popular with teens and young adults- so popular they help pay most of the bills. Jason's more expensive pieces are intricate chainmaille pieces made of silver.

Rosalind's delicate silver and fabric jewelry is priced from \$35 to \$150. Her jewelry appeals to women, generally over the age of 30. Both Jason and Rosalind say that the price of silver jewelry must go up. This does not mean more money in their pockets as, unfortunately, the price of silver is rising on world markets.

Both Jason and Rosalind create products other than jewelry. Rosalind works in fabric and dye. Her natural dyes are made by her from material both local and imported. One is a traditional Newfoundland dye made from lichen called mollyfodge which grows on the island. She sees herself as a crafty scientist making butterflies, birds and whales out of dyed fabric.

Jason has taken inspiration from his chainmaille jewelry to create lingerie for fashion shows and he also creates larger art pieces made from ceramic rings. He links the rings together while wet. Once dry, he fires them in an outdoor kiln until they look like metal. When they reach 1000 degrees, he removes them to cool in sawdust. It is hot and smoky work. This art work is taking more and more of Jason's focus and creative energy. Galleries across Canada are showing interest and he was featured on the cover of Fusion, a journal for glass and clay enthusiasts.

Jason and Rosalind enjoy talking about the craft industry and their continuing journeys as craft artists. They are excited about being part of a community of young crafts people and have worked together to facilitate access to craft fairs for young artists. As members of the Craft Council, they organized a youth committee. They realized that the fees charged for a booth at the Craft Council Fair were out of the range for most young people. So Jason and Rosalind, as the "Crafty Privateers", organized the Fresh Fish Craft Fair in 2007. From there a number of young participants went on to get involved with the Craft Council.

Although Jason is naturally entrepreneurial, neither Jason nor Rosalind had a background in business, nor did either have a natural inclination to accounting and other administrative details. But to be successful in business this is a necessity. To them it's just paperwork but they are getting better at it.

When asked about how they conduct market research, Rosalind says that they do it all the time, sometimes without realizing. They go to craft fairs and stores and look at what is for sale, how it is made, the materials used and the pricing. Most crafts people are also happy to share information about how well particular products are selling. Rosalind says that the best way for a crafts person to determine if there is a market for a new product is to make a few and put them out there to gauge the public's reaction before investing much time and material into several pieces.

A crafts person, like any business person, has to be able to withstand disappointment, and even failure, and be prepared to adapt. The first time Rosalind entered a craft fair, she paid \$350 to rent the booth, in addition to the money she had invested in her product (dolls), and only sold one for \$36. But, she learned from this. She realized her dolls had too many small buttons making them inappropriate for children but they were not artsy enough for collectors. So she modified the dolls and three weeks later went to a different craft fair and took home

\$500.00.

Rosalind and Jason both have goals for their respective arts careers. Jason is interested in further developing his ceramic pieces. Rosalind is interested in sharing her talents through workshops and teaching. She has particularly enjoyed her work in the province's Arts Smarts program and with the Labrador Creative Arts Festival. She has also recently had two gallery shows - one in St. John's and one in Grand Falls-Windsor.

Together they plan to open a shop in Amherst Cove where they currently live and work. There, they will be able to showcase their products as well as products of other young artists and crafts people. Amherst Cove is on the less developed side of the Bonavista Peninsula in terms of tourist traffic. But it is only 15 minutes from Bonavista and more tourists are making the journey down that side. She also notes that the tourist season in the Bonavista/Trinity area extends from May to October. The store will also stock art supplies and Rosalind hopes to teach art classes in the space. Rosalind says that the tourism growth potential for this peninsula has not yet reached its maximum.

Expansion takes capital. The Craft Council has a program of matching grants up to \$5000 per person. This will assist with the purchase of materials and equipment. Their original business plan was developed with the assistance of the Y-Enterprise Bureau. A business plan is a work in progress and as a person's goals and circumstances change so must the plan adapt. They are now in the process of revisiting their business plan.

Twisted Metal and Silver and Silk are both sole proprietorships. One of the things the owners will have to get advice on is how to structure their businesses once they have a store. There are taxes and other implications that they will need to consider.

Jason and Rosalind say that Newfoundland and Labrador has been a good place for young crafts people such as themselves to start businesses. The crafts community is supportive and the work of the Craft Council is invaluable. The provincial government even has a Craft Industries Development Program! On the business end, there are agencies such as the YEnterprise Centre to provide advice and direction. Although the population of the province is small, Rosalind says the economy is good so people are spending more.

There are many aspects of their expansion to work out, but they do have an idea for a name for their shop. The projects they have done together, they have done as the "Crafty Privateers", an appropriate name in a place where the ghosts of pirates haunt the shores, and where chests full of silver may be hidden in caverns along the coast.

Jason and Rosalind are pleased with their success so far. In the early days Jason enjoyed being an entrepreneur because he liked the flexibility and freedom to pursue his outdoor hobbies. These days they both still enjoy the flexibility; however, the freedom has become more about choosing how to work and what to work on. One thing is for certain, these two crafty privateers will be busy as they continue to forge their careers from silver and ceramic and silk.