

GlassDharma

Life with Purpose and Style

I've never been much for cities. Interestingly though, I'd always lived in cities: Santa Clara, Redding, Sacramento, while all of the time dreaming of living on the coast near big trees in a small town.

I cringed every time I saw a landmark razed to make way for "progress", and felt trapped every time I found myself in a traffic jam (which was often). So many of us "Boomers" had visions of change for the world back in the sixties, but with JFK, RFK and MLK gone some of us just got lost, got the wind knocked out of us, knuckled under, and just "went with the program".

Eventually I became an auto mechanic, then went into retail management, and then accounting among other things. I started several businesses that went nowhere. I got married, raised a family then got divorced. Somewhere in the middle of all that, I learned the art of lampworking. A part of me started to wake up and feel alive again. After my divorce, I met the love of my life and after several years we married.

We decided to buy our own house and one day while we stopped to look at a house for sale, we saw one down the street that was also for sale. It was huge. Just for kicks, we decided to go see it. It was obviously much bigger than we could afford. A beautiful custom 3 story with a wrap-around deck on the 2nd level. It sat on a greenbelt with huge oak trees and a small creek on the property line that ran year around. When we looked at the spec sheet, we were floored – it wasn't that far out of our price range!!

Knowing I could make more money in accounting than I had been in lampworking, I told Gail "I could get a real job if it meant living in this house". So after 9 years of lampworking, I dusted off my resume and for 7 years we both worked the corporate world and enjoyed what we could while living in the city.

One day, enjoying one of those "hot tub moments" out on the deck, we were discussing where we would like to retire. We both had always liked being near the ocean and as a result of that conversation we found ourselves visiting the Mendocino coast on long weekends. We sure didn't know the how – we just knew that this was the place for us.

Several years later, Gail was given notice that her position of 18 years as a technical trainer was going to be moved to the east coast. Did she want to move there ... or take the severance package? Well, that was a no-brainer – Mendocino coast, here we come!. We still didn't know how all of this would work, but just trusted the process and took one step at a time. It felt like jumping off of a diving board without looking, but trusting that there was water in the pool.

Through that process, I got back into lampworking and worked part time for a glass shop in Fort Bragg and also started my own lampworking business on the side. It was there at the glass shop that I noticed they had glass drinking straws for sale. I had been reading recently about how plastics leach toxins into our foods and knew for quite some time how plastics not only increase our landfill, but so much plastic never even gets recycled and ends up in our environment, destroying wildlife on land and in our oceans.

A plastic straw may not seem very threatening, and to be sure, there are bigger forces out there in our society that seriously need to be addressed. However, my interest was peaked. I started doing research on how many plastic straws are used on a daily basis world-wide. I saw this as an

opportunity to make a significant difference. It is not so much teaching people how not to pollute – most of us at least here in California recycle to an extent. What needs to happen is we need to change how we think. How silly is it to have so many single use plastics in our society, knowing how damaging they are, knowing the huge percentage that never gets recycled and not do anything about it?!

I saw that glass straws could be a teaching tool. How easy is it to learn to say “no straw, please” when ordering drinks in a restaurant? From there, how difficult is it to insist on a paper bag at the grocery store – or better yet, buy fabric reusable bags to bring when grocery shopping? From there, what else are we doing just because that's the way we've been doing it? What if, someday, the concept of single-use plastics is only a dim memory?

I now feel myself fully coming to life again, coming into my own. Here is where I can make a difference on this planet. Now, I'm more than just taking up space and sucking air.

After we put up the website in April of 2008, I was approached by quite a few green bloggers that were excited about what I was doing. Boy, was that inspiration to get my act together. As was noted by one blogger, I was still using plastic packaging tape!! I suddenly realized that as an individual, I have an impact on this planet – as a business owner, that impact is multiplied many times over. A significant part of where I spend my time now is on issues not just about plastic tape, but green web-hosting, daylighting, etc. I may not be able to implement everything right away, but there is no end to what can be done to green GlassDharma's footprint.

At GlassDharma, we re not as concerned about whether global warming is human caused or not, we're more concerned about finding ways to have a positive impact on our environment. Instead of focusing on reducing our footprint, let's green our footprint and learn to be better stewards and green our impact on the environment instead of the “do less damage” approach.

One last thing. GlassDharma would not have survived (or even started) without the support of my loving wife, Gail as well as my sister Cheri (our marketing manager). And of course the rest of my family, friends and business associates that all have cheered me on in this cause who are too numerous to list here. But it has been the response of the global community that has kept me going when the more difficult challenges of business have arisen.

Almost daily I get emails from customers saying: “I got them yesterday. I already used one on my way into work for my graveyard shift. I love it.. Thanks... K.” -- **or** -- “We recently received our order and wanted to let you know that we love them ... Our GlassDharma straws are perfect and the kids love them too... Great product! Thanks, J.”

When I see emails like these on a regular basis – from people who bother to respond like this, who just bought a simple product, I know this is something that the planet needs ... not just glass straws – but the concept of what it represents. We CAN heal the damage that has been done to our environment, we only need to change our minds THAT it can be done.

My favorite quote “We must be the change we wish to see In the world”. M. Gandhi

DL