



Written by Lauri Copeland

With the understanding that mathematical equations were never my forte, is there a balance when combining lampwork glass with ones' "normal" existence? Is it possible to divide daily routine to include the allure of glass, without neglecting obligations? Since adding glass, I struggle to find the solutions to these self-imposed problems.

While at the recent "Best Bead Show" in Boston, I enjoyed several conversations with Harold Cooney. As Special Content Editor of The Flow magazine, Harold asked me to consider writing an article offering my experiences (or lack thereof) as a woman working with glass. The result are these ramblings.

If you have had the pleasure of melting glass, you have already experienced the magical effect.

You know how molten glass has a tendency to invade not only your waking moments, but also your dreams. My first torch should have come with a warning: Caution, this medium is addictive. Lighting this torch will change the course of your life. Some type of label should be in place, as I had absolutely no idea.

I have always had the need to create with my hands. Early on I knew art class would be my favorite. There is just too much structure in math. While you crunch numbers, I'll doodle on paper with pencils or markers, thank you very much. As an adult I choose a somewhat predictable and conservative path while continuing to doodle in creative outlets. Fiber arts eventually became my preferred medium. As fate would have it our fiber guild had an outing to a local lampworking studio. I can still visualize that first latticino demo. It was amazing to watch the glass first become molten, then pulled and twisted into a long, slender cane. I was immediately hooked.

I did my homework online before ordering my first setup. I then picked up the necessary fuels. Never mind that I was clueless as to how to begin. My friendly glass supplier walked me through several steps, and I was off.

My mission; to make beads. I knew immediately this was for me. Playing with fire is like running with scissors. You're not supposed to do it, but sometimes you have to break the rules.

I read everything I could get my hands on. I frequently stalked online message boards to fuel my obsession. Like so many other bead makers, I first put soft glass through its' paces. Nice, I thought, but the color palette was not exactly what I had envisioned. About two years after I began, I was introduced to borosilicate. Boro produced the ethereal, luster quality for which I was searching. I was now off on a new tangent; to incorporate boro color into mandrel beads. At this time, there were only a handful of bead makers working with borosilicate. I was mesmerized as the glass developed a variety of unusual surface designs. The metallic, shifting hues were hypnotic. These were the organic tones that I had been craving. I cranked up the torch and went to work.

Glass as I mentioned, is all consuming. I happily and obliviously torched on while the rest of my world spun in a different direction. Kansas City is not exactly the Mecca of art glass. My family and friends in the "normal" world didn't understand or share my glass fascination. You've heard the questions, "You do what?" "The jewelry is nice, but where do you buy the glass beads?"



To defuse some of my frustration, I had a deep need to share my love of glass with others like myself. By traveling to shows and conferences, I fulfilled this need and developed intense bonds with fellow flame workers. These friendships include all types of glassaholics. Regardless of the finished product, the joy of hot glass is our common thread. I am grateful to have found a niche within the glass community.

Unfortunately, my evolving skills and relationships did not develop without a cost. Without going into specific details, I will admit that melting glass has affected every aspect of my life. Most of the changes are for the better. Some changes have affecting me in ways I can't often discuss openly. There are scars. At this point there is no turning back. Melting glass full time has resulted in permanent life changes. I am aware of this and I have few regrets.

When looking to solve the original question: Yes, glass can be incorporated into one's daily schedule and obligations. However, through my experiences, this choice will alter the flow of everything you know...or think you know. There is a fine balance between the desire to achieve your artistic goals and the need to put food on the table. If all goes well, the passion of glass, along with the pressures within this path, may equal overwhelming pleasure. Proceed with caution.

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