

# Loving, Learning, and Growing

by Laura Rasmussen

Photography by Bill Rasmussen

In 1960 I was a secretary at Disneyland in Anaheim, California, in the Talent and Production Department based in City Hall, Main Street. Just a short distance from my office was the Crystal Arcade where Bill Rasmussen sat behind the torch making Disney characters day after day. Sure, I watched him work. He made it look so easy. Eventually I got his attention, and the rest is our history. We married in the fall of 1961, making it forty-seven years ago. We brought together his two girls, my two girls, and a couple of years later, we brought our son into the family.

## Working Together

Glass has been our life, our livelihood. Bill worked at the shop on Main Street, and we bought glass wholesale from other lampworkers in the area to resell. Soon after we married, I was introduced to the torch. It was my job to sit there and put ends together. It has always been Bill's habit to be finished with a rod when it gets to be six to eight inches long. Eventually he would end up with a pile of ends. I would get up early in the morning and go to the park to put those ends together.

The early morning hours at Disneyland were quiet. The night cleaning crew would be finished with their duties, and everything was sparkling clean. When finished I would buzz home, get the girls off to school, and see Bill off to work. Often I would join him for lunch at Carnation inside the park, and we'd discuss new ideas for things he would make.

## Ever-Evolving Roles

Tikis became the rage in the early '60s, so we developed a brass tiki mold that Bill fashioned with a grinder. In addition to putting ends together, I learned how to gather a glob of glass to fill the mold. If you've never worked with boro, you cannot imagine how stiff it is compared to soft glass. I would work to get a big gather on the end of a 10 mm rod. It had to be just the right size to avoid any excess squishing out the sides, thus eliminating cleanup. When I had the right amount of glass balanced on the rod, I would heat it to almost liquid and drop it in the mold and press it with a block of brass. Nine times out of ten I had a good, clean image. I would line the tikis up on the workbench, with the holding rods still on them, waiting for Bill to put loops on and clean off the holding rods.

Back then we had only clear Pyrex—or boro, as you know it today. We used a lacquer-based paint to color the glass. Painting was done by the sales clerks, our girls, or me. We had a little building behind the shop where we painted merchandise and kept inventory. On the other side of the alley was our huge propane tank, and behind that was the berm separating us from Adventureland.



Laura 1961

*"I had no interest in glass as a creative medium. I merely wanted to meet the cute guy behind the torch!"*



Laura 1968

A note about the kids—Disneyland was theirs. It was their playground and our babysitter. Back then life was gentler and we didn't need to worry about what or who would happen to them, so they ran loose—reporting in as asked, of course, but having a ball.

I eventually moved away from my early morning forays to the Park, mainly because we moved farther away when our son was born, so my shop chores changed. I would sit at the breakfast bar painting itty bitty poodles or swans for necklaces. I'd hang them on chains and bundle them up for inventory. An additional job of mine was getting the glass rods. In the 1960s a twenty-five pound case of Pyrex rod was twenty-five dollars. It was my job to drive to Los Angeles in the big boat of a station wagon and pick up one thousand pounds of glass. I made the trip several times a year.





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## Enter Beadmaking

Sometime in the early '90s, Lewis Wilson sent us his tape on beadmaking. We watched with great interest, mainly because of the bright, beautiful colors offered in the soft glass. We ordered some Moretti glass, a Minor Bench Burner, mandrels, and bead release. Bill really got into making beads and encouraged me to give it a try. I did and wasn't the least bit interested. I was involved in watercolor at the time and knew I didn't need another obsession in my life.

A few years later we opened a glass gallery on Whiskey Row in Prescott, Arizona. The shop was my baby and I loved it. Bill convinced me we needed a glass bench setup where he could work when I took a day off. Then he suggested I make beads while waiting for customers to appear, so basically it was baptism by fire. The minute you light the torch the store fills up with people. Turn the torch off, they leave. I did, however, impress them as I wound the glass on the mandrel, made a few dots, and proudly showed off my new accomplishment. I became a full-time beadmaker even though I didn't want to. It's all Bill's fault—or is it Lewis's?

## Still Going Strong

Glass has always been a job to me, whether putting ends together, painting Mickey Mouse, or making beads. When I walk into the studio I am going to work. I suppose this stems from the fact that I was taught to think that way from day one. Putting ends together allowed Bill an extra hour to make more Lady and the Tramp sets. Dressing in costume during the slow months to replace a sales girl helped stretch the dollar.

I turned seventy-five in November. I work about six hours most days of the week, but I can be coaxed to Barnes and Noble or the Olive Garden very easily. I look back on the past forty-seven years and marvel at the changes that have taken place during that time. Beadmaking spread like a virus, with some of the most incredible designs and colors coming from the finest in the world. Pipe makers have mastered the new boro colors, marble makers dazzle us with floating art, and new colors come out almost daily. In those forty-seven years, we have had shops in some pretty great places besides Disneyland—Waikiki, San Francisco, Mystic, Connecticut, Boston, and Prescott, Arizona. In 1965 we took delivery of a Porsche at the factory in Stuttgart, Germany, and traveled to Italy to visit Murano. While Bill is on the brink of retirement, playing golf almost daily, I slave away over a hot torch. What's wrong with this picture?

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