

an interview with...

Mary Hartmann

Mary Hartmann Designs, Bloomington, MN

by Gerrie McCall

Mary Hartmann is the designer of the Better Half Collection. A portion of her profits go to the Cornerstone, a Minneapolis-based organization devoted to preventing domestic abuse. Mary is also a member of the Women's Jewelry Association.

“The inspiration for the Better Half Collection happened around twenty-three years ago when I was engaged to be married. I hired an artist to design a picture of exactly what the scripture in Ephesians said to me. It was Ephesians 5:31 and it says, ‘And the two will become one.’ I said to the artist, ‘I envision the male body on one side and the female on the other. I’d really love for you to sketch this out for me, and I’d like to use it for the programs for my wedding.’ So she did and it was great. But the marriage ended in divorce. It was fine; it was a two-year young love. But because I’m such a love child and I’m a hopeless romantic, I really still believed



in that vision of the female and male body coming together in a union of one.

Years later I met a musician named David Young, and he wrote a song for me. I closed my eyes and listened to the beautiful melody and the lyrics of the song: 'You're my better half. I'm not half as good without you. I wouldn't want to live without you. You're my best friend.' Immediately the sketch of the male and female body came to my mind and I said, 'David, thank you so much for this song. I'm feeling incredibly inspired to bring this beautiful melody along with creating a piece of jewelry.'

My background was the aesthetic beauty industry. I really didn't know much about the jewelry industry, but I dove in. It was like taking the fast-track course in the jewelry industry. I started researching computer companies and CAD companies to see if they could bring to fruition this picture. I said, 'I would love to see this as a pendant and possibly create an entire jewelry line with this.' I kept dreaming and visualizing more and more pieces. The symbol in itself was very powerful to me, and nothing in me was going to stop with this vision and inspiration.



I took everything I had—my savings, my 401K—and just dove into this project. This was around two and a half years ago. I began signing up for courses and really trying to learn as much as I possibly could quickly so I could bring this message of love into the world. I signed up for the Women's Jewelry Association. I entered my pendant there and my line was chosen for the 2007 Macy's Fall Fashion Show, which was an honor. It was absolutely an amazing experience.

Because of that opportunity and the exposure there, a manufacturer called me right after, and right now we're negotiating. He wants to take the line to some of his customers and bring it to market. His goal is to launch it at the JCK in Las Vegas.

I've taken the piece to the gift shows and jewelry shows, and the response has been absolutely wonderful. You look at some

of the testimonies from the customers that have received the pieces and it really warms my heart.

I wanted to create a one-stop shop. The woman opens her package and she sees the lovely card that says *To my better half.*



I'm not half as good without you. I wouldn't want to live without you. She sees the beautiful CD in the card, so she puts the CD on and David's Better Half song comes on. Right after that there's his romantic, relaxing music for her to listen to. The symbol is one thing she can wear around her neck, but then it's a long-lasting memory to tie the music and the romance to the whole package.

It's really been a wonderful journey, watching this develop. Women are wanting to purchase it on their own. I found that I was limiting myself by launching it as just a romantic piece because I'm finding women are the purchasers when it comes to jewelry. Studying the market made me realize that. Men purchase during different seasons, but women purchase jewelry all year long. This is where the manufacturers and distributors are guiding and helping me on where and how to market this without limiting the piece itself.

In one of the chapters of my life I ended up being in a not so healthy relationship. It was



with a man that was controlling and abusive. When I got out of the relationship I told myself, 'When I get out of this, I am going to give back some way, somehow, to this organization because now that I've experienced it, I know and understand these people and how hard it is to transform.' It's not easy because you're caught up in loving that person and giving them the benefit of the doubt. You keep thinking they're going to change and it never happens. It takes a lot of hard work, love, family support, and encouragement for the victim to get out. It really does. It doesn't matter where you come from in life. I wasn't abused as a child, I never saw it. I came from a very healthy family. It's one of those things that just happened and I got caught up in it. My heart goes out to those that also get caught up in it.

There's a program in Minneapolis called the Cornerstone.

On a local level I'm involved in that. That's where you start. So right now I'm involved locally with Cornerstone and a couple of other domestic abuse organizations. I have invited my fiancé David to be at some of these seminars with me. He's a survivor of childhood abuse. The last event we both did, we both said one-minute testimonies and then we sang a song together. We were the very first ones on stage. He wrote a song called 'You're Free.' It's absolutely beautiful. We sang that song for the 450 people in the audience. It was just an incredible experience. The letter we received afterwards said that



we set the tone of the entire one-hour seminar. It was really exciting to be a part of that.

I'm a firm believer that we all go through things in life for a reason. As hard and as terrible as it sounds, that chapter that I went through for a few years had a purpose behind it. I personally feel that if I wouldn't have gone through

that, I wouldn't have had the deep empathy and the desire to serve and to give back in that foundation. Because of that experience I can sit with those women, I can cry with those women, and they know it's coming from my heart."

It's been really neat to see that the inspiration started one way, with the thought that it was a very romantic piece. But people are not just using the piece for a romantic symbol. The meaning for everyone is so individual. It's very powerful – a very a spiritual piece. I have surrendered and let go and let it take a life of its own. As an artist or an entrepreneur, you're thinking, 'This is the way it's going to start.' But you never know how the consumer will interpret it. As a business person you focus on one area and then you have to let it evolve on its own. I'm not going to limit it. It's not just a romantic love piece. It's going to be a symbol of healing, empowerment, and self-discovery."



Gerrie McCall is a freelance writer living in Austin, TX. She is the author of several nonfiction books.