

Silverwear

HANDWOVEN JEWELRY FROM CROGHAN

ADIRONDACK PACK BASKETS ARE CUTE, WOODSY, grandfatherly, potbellied and a little sway-backed. The containers have become objects of regional romance, like balsam and buffalo plaid. At some point they evolved from useful to decorative, valued for what they symbolize as much as what they can carry.

Lisa Nortz, of Croghan, makes a version that can carry only a few Tic-Tacs. She has woven thousands of life-size trail-worthy carriers from reeds over 20 years of her life, but lately her attention has turned to a delicate miniature you can wear on a chain.

“Six years ago, in 2001, I had an idea for a necklace that wouldn’t go away, and I kept trying to get my dad to make it for me and he wouldn’t,” explains the 48-year-old silversmith, who learned the trade from her parents, Pat and Butch Bramhall, who also live in Croghan, on the Adirondack Park’s southwestern edge. “He said, ‘Lisa, you can do it yourself.’ So I got out my tools, ordered some silver and made that pendant. And then I just went crazy, just fell in love all over again with jewelrymaking like you can’t even imagine. I didn’t even know that supper went by—I didn’t know, I didn’t care—I was so immersed in it.”

A single pendant takes Nortz the better part of a day to weave. She finishes the inch-high fine-silver baskets with a leather strap—just like the real deal—fastened with a sterling buckle. “Soldering that little belt buckle is harder than anything else I do on that darn basket,” she says. “It’s miniscule and usually I do melt a few before I get one.” The pendant, which also comes as a pin or tie tack, sells for \$375.

Nortz’s parents started Stonehouse Silversmiths when she was 12. She got into the craft in high school and continued into her 20s. “I put the silversmithing on hold for a few years while I raised my boys, and that’s when I started basket weaving. It was easier to pick up and drop” while she attended to two growing kids, she explains.

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Her sons, Josh, now 27 and living in Rochester; and Jeremy, 26, in Oneonta, also learned silversmithing from their grandparents. They pitch in, making a variety of bracelets, earrings and pendants for Silver Bench, Nortz’s home-based business. “I send them raw material and they send it back done,” she says. She sells her jewelry at craft shows throughout the North Country, on her Web site and directly from her Croghan studio.

Nortz’s chains are works of art in themselves, and she loves linking different shapes and combinations of loops. “Most silversmiths just buy chains that are manufactured and attach them to whatever they do,” she says.

Even so, Nortz calls her work “very basic—it’s hammer, pliers, saw, file.” Her parents, on the other hand, make what she calls “magnificent creations . . . real true honest-to-God silversmith stuff.” The Bramhalls’ creations have been winning awards for three decades and were profiled in these pages in October 1985. Nortz says she’s “very lucky” to work with three generations of artisans. “I can always get ahold of my mom and dad and say, ‘How do I do this?’” 🍷