



LITTLE PIECES OF

*Joy*





## Beader Deborah Smith is helping women unlock their creative talent, one colourful step at a time

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**NOT MANY WOMEN CAN SAY** they pay their bills with beads. But Deborah Smith does. What started as a casual hobby when her children were small has become her main source of income.

Walking into Beads Glorious Beads in Kingsland, Auckland, where Deborah works part-time and teaches beading, is like entering Aladdin's Cave. Poring over piles of beautiful beads made of everything from crystals and pearls to porcelain and shells has become a form of therapy and a permanent passion for the Auckland mother of three.

Tucked away in Kingsland Terrace behind the suburb's hip main shopping strip, the beading shop is a relaxing haven for all sorts of women who come, not just to buy beads, but also to snatch some precious time out to explore their creative sides.

"Beading is like a form of meditation," says Deborah, 48. "It's about focusing on the here and now, one bead at a time. You just sit there and become absorbed. It's also like being a child living in a lolly shop," she jokes, admitting she was so taken by the shape and shade of some ruby Swarovski crystals recently that she "just wanted to eat them".

The briolette crystals inspired Deborah to enter the Glass from the Past section of last year's Auckland Beads Awards, which she won with a piece inspired by the flapper fashions of the 1920s.

Looking at the elaborate winning piece, which is made with thousands of Swarovski crystal-based pearls, it would be easy to be intimidated into thinking beading requires serious skill. There's no doubt that Deborah is an expert. She has learned many of her beading techniques from jeweller Catherine Clifford, who first asked her to do some piecework 11 years ago. But Deborah and Jo Breier, who owns Beads Glorious Beads, say the basic techniques of beading – including ribbon work, chain mail, wire work and bead weaving – are straightforward.

"Some of the stitches are like knitting," says Deborah, who grew up with a pair of needles in her hands, encouraged by a creative mother who taught her four daughters all sorts of crafts. "Mum was one of those mothers who bottled and knitted and sewed. We were brought up to always be doing something."

Deborah reminisces about the Catholic sisters' 'fair cupboard'. It was jam-packed with wool, material scraps and other bits and bobs that were saved to make →





The shop is an Aladdin's Cave of beads for sale and pieces that Deborah and Jo (below) repair and clean.

Oakland, California, Deborah returned to New Zealand in 1990 and married in 1993. She met Jo Breier when the two women sat beside each other at the Mt Albert YMCA, while they watched their daughters having gym lessons.

"I watched Deborah turning up week after week with a basket of wire and beads," says Jo. "She had one child on each side of her and would be reading them a book and working on her beading at the same time."

The two soon struck up a friendship and when Jo decided to fulfil her dream, opening Beads Glorious Beads in 2003, Deborah was an obvious choice to help her run the shop.

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craft items to sell at the annual school fair. "Nothing was ever thrown away. And we'd never dream of sitting in front of the television without having a handcraft to go on with. I was always keen to try things like weaving."

Despite her creative side, and having "a fancy to be a builder", Deborah applied for nursing and for teachers' training college when she left school. She was accepted for both but chose teaching. "The highlight was being in the art room." After several years of teaching and working in daycare centres in Auckland, London and

Deborah says women in their 40s who come to her classes bring a real energy, and want to reward themselves.

"They've often done all of the things they thought they should have done, like having a family, a career, or both. But all that time they've been harbouring the desire to do something creative for themselves – and beading allows them to do that."

Some people spend hours arranging and rearranging their beads before they begin to thread them, while others will get straight into it, says Deborah. "Some women lack confidence when they first come in. We enjoy helping them to break through those barriers and it's great seeing people's self-esteem develop when they start to unlock their talent."

One of beading's biggest advantages is that if you don't like what you have made, you can take it apart and start again without worrying about wasting money on materials.

As well as teaching and creating her own pieces for sale, Deborah also re-strings, fixes and cleans jewellery for others. "If I am lucky I'll get some lovely antique pieces to work on. I get a lot of pleasure out of that."

And keeping her hands busy with beading has also had other advantages for Deborah while she's been bringing up her children – Nell, 15, Riley, 13, and Joe, 12. "I've never had to learn how to score at cricket." ☐

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