

CANA Supplier Profile

Heartsong Memory Beads



Dolly Libby, at work in her studio.

CANA member

Heartsong Memory Beads, winner of the 2008 Ginny Award for Outstanding Achievement in Memorialization, took some time to give *The Cremationist* insight into their unique service. You can read the interview below.

Q: What is so unique about Heartsong memory beads?

Dolly Libby: Our memory beads are uniquely created by hand one at a time. We offer a variety of styles at very affordable prices and are happy to create custom orders. Our memory beads can be artfully set into a beautiful piece of jewelry or a dazzling suncatcher. Our customers find great comfort in wearing their memory beads

and having their loved one close. They can choose to share their story of their memory bead or keep it a secret to themselves. Our Inspiration Collection consists of 35 different memory beads, each one simply set on a leather bracelet. As family, friends and teammates choose the bead that speaks to them, it inspires them to share why they chose that certain bracelet and with this amazing heartfelt memories are shared and re-told.

Q: What is so unique about Heartsong Memory Beads, the company?

Libby: The company began from a background in glass artistry that came together with a background in jewelry and the loss of our son. With the encouragement from family and friends we formalized the business. The company has grown out of an offering of comfort. Each memory bead is made with compassion and handled with dignity. Finding comfort during the grieving process is important.

We relied on the information we received from CANA and the help from contacts we made in the death care industry to create our chain of custody processes for the handling of the cremated remains and the creation of the beads. Our processes follow the strictest of industry standards for handling the cremated remains. We create a very personalized product and it is our hope that these memory beads will bring comfort and be part of the healing process for those who can benefit from them. We operate our business with heart and compassion and offer a 100 percent guarantee for every bead.

Q: You describe the beads as beautiful pieces of art to share your story over; what's your story? How did you get here, how did the company get started?

Libby: Easter morning, March 31, 1991 – the day our perfect suburban Seattle lifestyle came crashing down with the tragic death of our youngest son Dylan. Somehow he pushed a few rocks loose and squeezed under the fence that surrounded our swimming pool. He fell into the pool and never regained consciousness. Our hearts were so very broken and we started our long journey through grief. Through counseling we learned the only way through grief is through it. There is no way to hide from the pain. We cried, and talked and journaled and cried some more and slowly started to try to put the pieces of our lives back together. I became a Montessori teacher and opened Heartsong Montessori School working with small children, and these children helped me find my hope and joy again. In 1993 our wonderful daughter Savannah was born.

In December 1997, Bill was offered an engineering job in San Diego, California; to keep our family together I closed Heartsong Montessori and we all moved to our present home. What was supposed to be a year sabbatical became much more as I took up stained glass and lampworking. We opened a glass studio and offered classes and custom windows.

The first memory bead I made was with my son, Dylan's, cremated remains. I didn't know if the glass would be compatible with the cremated remains or if it would break as soon as it came out of the annealing kiln. That first bead was a little rough, but I put it on a chain around my neck and was amazed at the sense of peace I felt wearing it. I was surprised how many times

a day I would touch it and feel a sense of Dylan with me. As my lampworking skills improved, the memory beads became more varied and colorful. As word got around among friends and relatives and friends of friends, more requests for memory beads came in and HeartSong Memory Beads was established. When a family sees their memory bead for the first time they hold it tight *Bill and Dolly Libby pose with their cat Ziggy outside their home.*

cremationist – Vol. 45, No. 1, Winter 2009 **17**

and then open their hands and admire it some more. They clutch it close to their hearts. They often are moved to tears. They thank us over and over. We know these memory beads help hearts find some comfort.

Q: Where do you see the future of memorialization going?

Libby: Cremation has been in existence for almost as long as the human race, and has gone through various stages of popularity. Cremation technology continues getting cleaner and greener, and as technology has improved, modern cremation equipment has reduced the carbon dioxide produced significantly. In this generation of baby boomers making many of the arrangements for their parents, finances, changing cultures and changes in religious attitudes have resulted in a strong growth in the choice for cremation. As demand for cremation gains in popularity, so will we see a demand for development of a greater variety of cremation and memorialization products. As funerals and memorials take on a more personalized nature, so will the demand for more personalized memorial art.

Q: When was your company founded? Was there any stigma associated with the marriage of art & cremated remains at the time?

Libby: We have had a small glass studio for about seven years. I made my first Dylan bead five years ago in a lampworking class. Wearing it brought me an amazing closeness to my son who I dearly loved and missed beyond words. It was a great comfort to me and often just touching it would get me through those meltdown moments. A few of the people I have shared my story of Dylan's bead with at first thought the very idea of a memory bead with cremated remains was a little strange. Grief and its very deep feelings can be hard to put into words to others. With some time, about half of these people came to be more comfortable with the idea of memory beads.

Earlier this year, one of our friends shared with me that she felt the memory beads were pretty out there and a little weird. Shortly thereafter, a family member was diagnosed with a very aggressive cancer and died within weeks. Having been through the horrible ordeal of losing a family member, her thoughts changed towards the memory beads. She ordered a suncatcher for herself and each of her siblings and treasures it. Our memory beads help to maintain closeness to a dearly-loved one.

This form of memorial art is not for everyone. As individual as the experience of losing a loved one is, so is the form that a memorial to the loved one will be.

Q: How have you seen attitudes toward cremated remains change since you've been in the industry? Where do you see attitudes headed in the future?

Libby: We have found a great deal of acceptance from the funeral directors we have approached. We offer a sample display of the beads for the families to examine to help determine if this form of memorial is right for them. This form is one of a growing number of options presented to the families. Funeral directors are seeing the benefits of presenting a variety of memorializations. Cremation is the beginning of the memorialization process and these beads and the other available memorial options are the continuation of that process.

Q: What do you value most about your CANA membership?
What benefits do you find the most useful?

Libby: We value the variety of information offered in *The Cremationist* keeping us updated on all that is happening and changing in the death care industry.

We look forward to attending the Symposium in Las Vegas this spring. We also plan on attending the Annual Convention in Denver this summer.

Heartsong Memory Beads is owned by Bill and Dolly Libby of San Diego, Calif. For more information, visit their Web site, www.HeartsongMemoryBeads.com or call 858.354.7059 Dolly Libby, at work in her studio. to speak with Bill and Dolly Libby directly



*Bill and Dolly Libby pose with
their cat Ziggy outside their home.*