



Briefly Bram

BRAM EISENTHAL

West End's Bead Lady parlays childhood passion into adult career

For many of us, our passion for a particular thing goes way back to childhood, when life was simple and our minds weren't clouded with musings on what a rat race we actually endure day in and out. When Michelle Wiseman was a wee tot, she would entwine her body in the beads hanging in her grandfather's doorway. "I'd play with them, wrap them around my arm and pretend they were bracelets ... I think I was two or three at the time.

"When I went to the dentist for the first time, my mom took me to a bead store and I bought 15 to 20 beads with my own savings. I made a pair of earrings, took them apart, made a bracelet, took that apart, made a friendship pin ... those first 15 to 20 beads stoked a fire in me that became a secret passion, something I was destined to do my entire life," Wiseman said.

When you read superhero comic books, it's usually the secret identity issue that's the most interesting, because you learn who's really behind the mask. Well, I've just told you the story of The Bead Lady, the West End's most famous creator of beaded baubles. Wiseman's 32 now, a far cry from the little girl tugging at strings in her grandfather's doorway, and to say she's taken her passion to the next level is an understatement.

Wiseman handles 15 to 30 events per month, comprised of birthday parties for kids, where she teaches them how to make stunning beaded jewelry, but does the same for adults, as well. "Women book me, too, for various events, and I do bridal parties, religious events like bat mitzvahs, special needs events and hospital events like one I did for the Starlight Foundation."



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The Bead Lady, Michelle Wiseman.

Recently, she took her first cruise and "had my own groupies, a bunch of young girls, following me around the whole time as we did some impromptu beading workshops together." Her effect on kids is indeed magical. In fact, Wiseman has been teaching pre-schoolers at several Montessori institutions for seven years now. "I developed a course which I call Artastic, involving approaching art in a calming manner that helps the child get in touch with the artist within."

Five years ago, Wiseman started her beading business, Something Funky, which she credits to a push she received from two individuals. "First, while debating what to do with my life, a show on Anthony Robbins made a huge difference. He said that if you find yourself at a crossroads and not knowing which way to go, look to your fondest childhood memories. And then, I was put in touch with a woman named Rhea Fineberg, who had a mobile crafts gallery called Rhea Accessories. She eventually

carried my jewellery, acted as my agent and got me my first bookings. Rhea helped me develop the confidence in myself that was lacking initially and I owe her everything."

Walk into Wiseman's apartment today — her secret lair, if you will — and you'll notice one thing right away: its scarcity of decorations. "Yeah, I need more pictures on the walls and other stuff," she admitted, fixing her beady eyes on me ... just kidding, they're far from beady. "But when I'm here, I spend so much time in this space," she added, ushering me into her beading room, an actual room filled with beading accessories of every imaginable variety. She could open a store here.

I'm not into crafting, personally, but Wiseman's work is truly incredible, so much so I had her promise to create something beaded for my camera bag. I asked her whether she has ever regretted making this her career choice. "That first party I ever did — the one Rhea booked for me — I experienced such a powerful emotion I knew there and then this was what I was meant to do. I have never looked back."

Wiseman can be contacted for bookings at 514-817-2322. Her Web site is at www.somethingfunky.ca. On Nov. 24 and 25, she will also be participating in the Villa Maria Arts-Plus Festival, which will welcome her for the third time. Michelle's crafts at that venue are priced to sell for teens.

KlezKanada's event this week most special to date

The 11th annual KlezKanada festival Jewish music, culture and the arts is again this week, at Camp B'nai Brith. This year's event is truly the most unique date, featuring three giants in their field: Yiddish entertainer Theodore Bikel; Irving Fields, the 91-year-old composer, pianist and former pianist whose Bagels & Bongos record has sold millions of copies and basically helped create the lounge music moniker decades ago; and M. Haimovitz, the young clarinet player who heads up that department at McGill and already something of a legend.

Plus, this year's event will see a record 125 youth scholarships given to young musicians from all over Quebec, Canada and the rest of the world, including Russia and other Eastern European countries. The goal of KlezKanada is to have veteran musicians pass their knowledge on to the young, thus ensuring the survival of Jewish music and culture.

The founder of the event is Hampstead pediatrician Dr. Hy Goldman, who, along with wife Sandy and a hard-working faculty, spends the entire year planning each incarnation. This year, they have branched out by attending various other festivals such as the Ottawa Blues Festival last weekend. They also played a special sold-out concert at Montreal's Le National Saturday night, highlighted by Irving Fields's performance. I was there and it was terrific.

Go to www.klezkanada.com for more details.

• Bram Eisenthal's e-mail address Brambriefs@yahoo.ca.