

## From the Editor

The endeavor to make the rest of the world (non-leather crafters/artists) sit up and take notice of exquisitely produced leather items and recognize them for what they are – artworks created by real artists – is like pushing the proverbial boulder uphill. Why we do it is simple: for the preservation of heritage, to venerate skilled craftspeople as they deserve to be, and to inspire future generations to new levels of excellence.

Back in 2000, my father, Bill, was inspired to create a space at the Rocky Mountain Leather Trade Show in Sheridan, Wyoming, where the show itself could be used as a platform to expose visitors to exceptional leatherwork. In a small back room of the hotel, accessed only through the restaurant, he and my mother, Dot, set up the first World Leather Debut display.

It was nearly a catastrophe. Mailed in artworks arrived in broken, rain-soaked boxes that fell apart as soon as they were cut open. Dot remembers trying to store the boxes under the table skirts, crawling around on the floor searching for this or that box til midnight in a desperate attempt to have the display open for the following morning. One artwork even got forgotten in their hotel room and never got put on display. (Dot called the artist to confess this detail, an astute thing to do, and a testament to her business ethics.) The lighting in the small room was horrible, casting more shadow than light. Since it was just the two of them running the show, they hired a security officer to guard the items. Dot told Bill that she would never allow him to do this again. In short, it was a great idea, but lacked in execution and left her pulling out her hair late into the night.

Despite its rocky beginnings, the artworks filled the room to capacity that first year. People were amazed by the superior level of artistry on display and the reactions were overwhelmingly positive. That got the ball rolling. For the second year, Dot and Bill paid an electrician to redo the lighting in that room. The entries flooded in, and visitors to the show knew to start asking where they could go to see them. In 2005, Brian Stelzel was named the World Leather Debut Manager, a role which he still holds today, and due to his leadership of the event and his attention to detail, the Debut has grown from four to sixteen categories and is a compilation of leather art unmatched anywhere else in the world. Indeed, a ribbon of any color earned at the Debut is one of the world's highest achievements in leathercraft.

The boulder continues to be heavy, but thanks to Brian's stewardship with the World Leather Debut, the efforts of places like The Brinton Museum partnering with Jim Jackson for a retrospective, saddleries, boot maker shops, and leather shops that strive to stay relevant, and to the vibrant life the world of leather craft has taken in our social media channels, there are more hands than ever leaning into the slope and shouldering the burden side-by-side. Together, we are a team, and here at *Leather Crafter's Journal*, we are proud to be part of this challenge.

*Charie*

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