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All in the Family



A Daughter Learns to Facet from Her Dad

Story by Rachel Dery



PHOTO COURTESY DAVIDSON'S JEWELLERS

I cut this round checkerboard amethyst, which is set in a pendant designed by Davidson's Jewellers of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.



RACHEL DERY PHOTO

Dad has taught me to be focused as I facet to lower the chances of making an error.

It was Thanksgiving morning. I was 7 years old. We had a few hours before we went to join the family for dinner. Dad asked me, "What do you want to do today, honey?" I didn't hesitate. "I want to cut a stone with you, Daddy," I said with a smile. I'd been patiently waiting for him to ask, desperately hoping it would be soon. I'd been eagerly anticipating this exact moment.

We cut my first stone that morning. Thus begins a story of a daddy and a daughter who share a passion for the art of gem cutting; a story of an extraordinary skill passed from father to child; a story of talent transferred from generation to generation. My journey begins with my dad's story.

My dad, Roger Dery, isn't just any gem cutter. In 1981, he began a wholesale colored stone business, Spectral Gems. Over the next 20 years, he was a traveling colored stone dealer, carrying calibrated gemstones that had been cut overseas. In 2001, he embarked on the journey of learning to facet his own gemstones. He re-cut his entire inventory and decided to take his company in a different direction. Spectral is now focused on precision-cut gemstones and is known throughout the country for quality gemstones and award-winning faceting.

That first stone of mine wasn't anything special; it was just an ordinary piece of white quartz. We didn't even do a fancy design, just a standard round. I cut that first stone sitting on Daddy's lap, his hand over mine on the quill. Honestly, Dad probably did more of the cutting than I did, but I was fascinated by it anyway. I couldn't wait to try it again. It was the first part of our journey, the beginning of this daddy and daughter sharing their passion for the thing that they loved.

We did it again the next Thanksgiving, then at Christmas and Easter. After a few years, he could leave me alone at the machine for a few minutes at a time. We moved beyond the basic round to ovals, squares and trillions. I even cut my first cabochon. Coincidentally, my favorite shape is the same as Dad's: the classic antique cushion.

And then, I sold my first stone: a 1.5-carat oval indicolite tourmaline. A jeweler called my dad looking for an oval blue-green tourmaline. My dad thought of my stone and said he would have to check with me, since I had cut it. The jeweler was enamored with my story and shared it with his customer. His customer purchased the stone from a 10-year-old gem cutter for his 10-year-old granddaughter. I proudly met the jeweler and reluctantly turned my stone over to him. I was selling my very first stone for \$365—and I could hardly bear to part with it.

A year later, Dad could even get some work of his own done while I cut. I was more confident and we were branching out to aquamarine, garnet, morganite and zircon. I couldn't get enough time in the shop. I loved learning about the Mohs hardness scale and mineral families, heat treatments and dopping techniques, different ways to polish and newly found mining sites. I was fascinated by where different minerals come from and how they are mined. I hung on words like grit, preforming, pavilion, crown, girdle, star and main facets, and culet.



PHOTO COURTESY MICHAEL SHERMAN JEWELRY DESIGNS
One of my round cab-top morganites has been set with pearls in a slide designed by Michael Sherman Jewelry Designs of Carmel, California.



PHOTO COURTESY DIAMOND DESIGN
A hexagonal morganite I cut with scissor-style faceting has been set in a ring designed by Diamond Design of St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada.



RACHEL DERY PHOTO
The first stone I cut with Dad, at the age of 7, was an 8-millimeter round white quartz.

As an 11-year-old, I finally decided it was time for me to start my own business and sell my stones. Rachel's Rarities was born. I chose the name because I love how each stone is rare in its own way, with unique qualities and characteristics. Each stone is different and no two will ever be exactly the same. I created a logo and invoices, and from then on my gems were sold in Rachel's Rarities stone papers.

I tagged along with Dad whenever I could. I even got to join him in Tucson for the annual gem show. Dad said I was good at choosing rough (I'd been looking over his shoulder for years). People smiled at the 11-year-old who knew to lift the rough to the light in order to determine its clarity.

Sometimes, a kindly rough dealer would say I could choose a piece of rough for free. Everyone thought it was adorable that an 11-year-old had her own gem-cutting business. Little did they know what they had gotten themselves into. They thought I would just choose the largest piece, but they quickly realized I knew what I was doing. I had, of course, been trained by the best. I would sort, examine and discard with deliberation until I had made my decision. I never failed to leave without an excellent piece of rough that the dealer should have sold for a pretty penny.

Then I began purchasing my own rough with the proceeds from my stones. Systematically determining "my" piece of rough was my favorite part. I loved discussing with Dad what shape it would cut and what size it would become and what color it would end up. When I finally made my decision, I would proudly put down my money and watch the dealer write out the invoice to Rachel's Rarities. I couldn't help leaving with a smile on my face.

Dad finally had to buy a second machine so we could work at the same time. I thought (and still think) that nothing is cooler than cutting across from him on our own machines. The time arrived when I finished half a stone without him. Soon after, I cut the stone that I just couldn't sell: a rectangular cushion purple spinel from Ruaha, Tanzania. It now sits on my finger in a ring that I received for my 15th birthday. I love looking at it. It brings back memories—time with Dad, our mutual passion for faceting, and our love for gems.

I'm 17 now and Dad and I are still cutting together. I don't sit on his lap anymore and he doesn't have to guide my hand with his. We cut our own stones, chatting across the room as we work. Dad's teaching me more and more, but showing me less and less. He tells me how and I try it. He says I have to learn to figure things out on my own. I still ask lots of questions and I still make lots of mistakes, but he doesn't have to check on

me nearly as often. He says I'm a natural. I think I just had an exceptional teacher.

I've sold a lot of stones since that first one—30 to be exact. The proceeds from the stones I sell go into my college savings account. With all the other commitments that come with being in high school and a year-round competitive swimmer, cutting with Dad doesn't happen as often as I'd like, but I find a few spare hours to join him once again at the machine. Sometimes, cutting with Dad is the best remedy for a stressful day. It reminds me of when life was simple. It helps me remember what is important in life. Going to the shop is my way to relax.

My stones still go into his inventory in Rachel's Rarities stone papers. Sometimes, I still make out invoices for him when one of my stones sells. I always want to hear about the people who purchase my stones. I like knowing where my gems are going to "live". Sometimes, I get to see pictures of the finished jewelry, and every once in a while I even get to meet the new owner of my stone. I love getting to know gemstone lovers like myself and seeing them wear a stone that I cut. A conversation between two gem lovers is never boring.

My favorite part about cutting stones is discovering the fire and sparkle waiting to burst forth. I love gemstones for their beauty and for the time and patience that went into unearthing that beauty.

This daughter has learned many lessons from her time in the shop with Dad. I've learned discipline and determination from the times I've had to finish a stone, even when facets wouldn't match up or a piece chipped off the stone or an inclusion appeared. I've learned endurance and resolve from all the times my stone didn't want to polish or the transfer was crooked or I hit the wrong index setting. I've learned not to sweat the small stuff. At 8, my world was coming to an end when my stone popped off the dop. It never fazed Dad; he said it just happens sometimes. Now I know it's merely a part of the process.

The lessons I've learned in gem cutting help me in life, too. Much like life itself, faceting a stone can be a long process with many problems and issues to work through along the way. You could say I've learned a few life lessons from the art of gem cutting: perseverance, patience, appreciation of hard work, preciseness, and many more.

There have been many other milestones in the nine years since I started cutting and there are many more still to come. I still haven't cut a pear shape or a marquise; I



RACHEL DERY PHOTO

During preforming, I form the rough into the shape I want and take away unwanted material.



RACHEL DERY PHOTO

After polishing the pavilion, I am rewarded with a glimpse of the splendor of the finished gem.



RACHEL DERY PHOTO

Cleaning the stone with a paper towel and alcohol allows the fire and sparkle to burst forth.

just can't bring myself to do it. They seem so inferior to me compared to the antique cushion. So, one by one, I just keep poppin' out antique cushions. Perhaps I should vary my designs a bit.

I've been watching Dad as he creates designs in GemCad lately. I'm thinking I should learn how to create my own designs. Maybe I'll start getting the hang of that soon. I'll also have to learn how to dop. Dad says it's not so hard. I haven't gotten around to it, but I figure he'll be teaching me that any day now. Once I know how to dop, I'll be able to finish an entire stone by myself.

I've been on his case about taking me on one of his buying trips to Tanzania or

Madagascar for a while now. He's just finished his thirteenth trip to Africa, and I'm thinking it's time for me to join him and see where the rough originates from.

We've come a long way since that first stone nine years ago, but I don't think it's the end of the story. Rachel's Rarities is still in business. The journey of a daddy and a daughter cutting gems isn't finished yet. We'll just have to see where the next stone takes us. Who knows what sort of facet we'll find in the road. 💎

Rachel Dery is a 17-year-old high school senior who lives in the greater Detroit area of Michigan. She hopes to combine her love for gemstones, journalism and history in her fu-