

A Side Hustle By Kim Hyde

Selling Jewelry at Street Fairs Designing, and Producing My Sterling Silver Jewelry Line

Working in New York City in the hub of the Diamond District exposed me to all elements of the jewelry trade on a daily basis. Jewelry storefronts were thick between Fifth and Seventh Avenues and along 47th Street. Everything a jeweler might need was represented: precious metals, smelters, polishers, refiners, cutters, investment casters, and other manufacturing processors. Knowing I was working in the Jewelry District, people I knew asked me to purchase pieces for them. I learned where to source almost any piece of jewelry anyone inquired about. I began to know retailers, exchanges (marts), dealers, suppliers, and manufacturers. In NYC in the mid-nineties I was the rare African-American on the street, so even more than my knowing people, others on the street recognized me. One friendly dealer, eager to clear out inventory, gifted me with \$5,000 to \$10,000 in jewelry and suggested I could resell it. This was the beginning of my side hustle while I worked at my day job as a Diamond Grader in the Gem Trade Lab of the Gemological Institute of America at 580 Fifth Avenue.

I was acquainted with other people who operated jewelry businesses on the side including several who designed their own lines. After selling my ready-made jewelry for a time I had an idea for a unique product. I had noticed that jewelry made from natural forms, including shells, was becoming popular. I had gold in mind, but sterling



silver was relatively inexpensive. I talked to an investment caster who used the lost wax method. I asked him if he could cast a cowry shell in sterling silver. I brought a natural shell to show him, and he agreed to do the casting. This launched my custom designed line. By the time my sterling silver shells were ready, my tools and magnifying glass were waiting along with my supply of screws, connectors, glue, and other components. I had been selling jewelry for more than a year and was receiving orders from established customers. My sterling silver jewelry met with interest and I soon had new orders.



By this time I was a regular at street fairs in Manhattan and occasionally in Brooklyn. The larger jewelry shows were held inside. Once I bought a table for a show at the Jacob Javits Convention Center in Manhattan. I learned to find good selling locations and to display my products to advantage. In my late teens and early 20s I had sold jewelry in a retail store, where I picked up selling tips. Combining my interpersonal skills and my natural sales ability, I suggested jewelry pieces to customers that would be most flattering. After selecting a few pieces I buffed them to brilliance with my cleaning cloth, and I learned to hold any piece that glittered up to bright light.

Selling jewelry in New York City over a period of three to four years gave me insights into micro-venture operations and practices. This perspective helps me relate to founders who have started their businesses by selling at Saturday flea markets, cleverly sourcing their products, and developing online customers.

SILVER SELECTIONS. NEW YORK, 1998

