



MOVING STORY QUEEN OF HEARTS

MARY SIRETT FELL IN LOVE WITH CORNWALL – AND CORNISH PEOPLE
LOVE HER QUIRKY JEWELLERY

Words by **Liz Norbury**, photographs by **Charles Francis**

Each one of the exquisite miniature hearts handmade by jeweller Mary Sirett for her necklaces is engraved with a special message. It might be “I love” or “I can”, “I trust”, “I listen” or “I accept”.

Mary calls them affirmation hearts. “If you have a simple, encouraging statement with you all the time, it can boost your confidence or combat worries,” she explains. “I’ve had lots of positive feedback from people who’ve been given one as a gift, or when they’re going through a hard time, and they say it has really helped them, and become a treasured piece of jewellery.”

A heart necklace may even inspire people to change their lives – just as Mary did when she and her family moved from London to Cornwall five years ago.

She had already made one major decision when she gave up a hectic career as a television production secretary and researcher to devote her time to her craft. “I’d always liked making things, and it came as a delightful surprise when people wanted to buy my work,” she says. She went on to have a stall at Covent Garden Market, and her work was

exhibited in prestigious London galleries.

Having established Mary Mary Jewellery as a successful business, she had no plans to leave north London. “We lived in a fantastic street with a wonderful community,” she recalls. “But I had always dreamed of an outdoor life – and then I fell in love with a dilapidated beach chalet.”

She explains how the love affair began. “We used to come to Cornwall for camping holidays, and I started looking at chalets. As soon as I saw Sandford, I knew it was the one for me.” Built more than 70 years ago, the chalet nestles in the dunes at Riviere Towans, above Hayle’s three miles of golden sands, and enjoys panoramic views across St Ives Bay.

Sandford’s state of dilapidation did not deter Mary and her partner Derek Holman, a carpenter, who were determined to restore it to look as it might have done in its 1930s’ heyday. “We spent three years doing the chalet up and getting to like Hayle more and more. And we loved the landscape,” she says. “Then one summer we just thought: ‘Let’s move to Cornwall – it’s now or never’.”

Mary now has an Aladdin’s cave of a studio at Foundry



Farm Workshops in Hayle, and she and Derek and their children Millie, George and Tom live nearby. “The studios are starting to flourish, as there are lots of different people here: mask-maker, ceramicist, lamp designer, visual artist, framer, photographers, and textiles workshops,” she says enthusiastically. “We’re open every day, but Thursdays is a good day to visit, as most of us are committed to being there then.”

It is here that Mary creates the quirky heart jewellery which has become her trademark. As well as the tiny affirmation hearts, she makes chunky ones in almost every colour of the rainbow.

She uses millefiori techniques with polymer clay, building canes like sticks of seaside rock, with different coloured clays creating intricate patterns. These are stretched and sliced into tiny pieces, with gems and crystals embedded to give a sparkle.

“The hearts are what I’m known for, but I also get inspiration from nature, and love making flowers, dragonflies, starfish and even spiders,” she says. “I’m grateful that my work enables me to source such beautiful gems, crystals and metals, most of which I get on my trips to Hatton Garden.”

The weeks leading up to Christmas are the busiest time of the year for Mary: her necklaces and bracelets, beautifully packed in pretty boxes, make perfect gifts, and are in demand at craft shows all over the country.

She still has a stall at Covent Garden – but Cornwall is where she and her family want to stay: Derek’s passion is for kayaking and the whole family are members of Hayle Canoe Club.

The chalet is now fully restored in traditional beach hut style, with a fresh, contemporary twist. When the holidaymakers have gone home, it becomes Mary’s retreat. She loves taking the family dogs – Amber, a wire-haired vizsla, and border terrier Ruff – for winter walks on the beach and dunes.

“It’s a magical place,” she says. “I find it spiritual and restorative. And one of the joys of living with the Cornish pace of life is I now have time to learn yoga and transcendental meditation.”

Whenever she can, she heads a couple of miles inland, to the stables at Whitecross where she keeps her horse, Luna. “I leap on her and ride bareback all around the foot of Trencrom Hill. It makes me feel 12 years old again.”

For details about Mary’s jewellery and renting her chalet, call 07875 052898, or visit www.mary-mary.net