



NOSTALGIA A CURIOUS JOURNEY

by Mike & Ren
Antonowicz

Nostalgia – A Somewhat True Story

As the title suggests this is a story based on true events, kind of. Names have been changed in some cases (when events were too embarrassing to pin on the actual participants) and on occasion actual names have been used if the event in question shone a favorable light on the doer of deeds.

Nostalgia was and is a 3 story antiques and collectibles co-op located in Providence RI. Providence is a smallish city of about? 250,000 souls. In reality it is a large town comprised of neighborhoods, each distinct in their own way; located on Wickenden St. in Providence's East Side, Fox Point neighborhood....the best part of a great city. Nostalgia grew to be the kind of establishment that would be at home in any town or city of the country.

Many tales begin at the end; funny that. This particular tale will begin at the beginning, but its course will meander near and far in its telling. My wife, Karen, planted the seeds that matured into "Nostalgia - A Curious Emporium." For the remainder of this tale Karen will be referred to by the name of Ren, a nickname which she has carried since the beginning of our relationship and by which she is best known in the world of Nostalgia.

In 2011 Ren's dad passed. Her mom, too, passed a couple of years later. Ren was heartbroken as she and her sisters were extremely close with their parents and their passing led her to re-evaluate her life and her place in the world. While not unhappy in her work as a college teacher she was not following the path that she had hoped she would be. She wanted to be hands-on and up to her elbows in her passion; vintage lifestyle and all that this involved. The clothing, the accessories, cosmetics, furniture, social customs and to be able to, in her own way, return to a gentler time.

How does one do that? There isn't a road map that leads directly into the past. No time machine or space portal to take her back to 1885 or 1740 or even 1920. What to do?

The answer to this question was both long in coming and yet, looking back, arrived at rather quickly. We would surround ourselves (as she had somehow tricked me into believing her dream was my dream too) with relics from days, years, decades, and centuries gone by.

With a modest inheritance and a “lets go all in” battle cry we decided to leave behind our current careers, change our living arrangements and seek out our future in the past. That done we, like Lewis and Clark, ventured into the unknown. We had decided what we wanted to do; find a location and open an antique store. What kind of store? Where should it be? How, in fact, does one do these things? These were but 3 of the many questions that needed to be answered before we could move forward.

We did not, in fact, just jump in as total novices. I had owned and operated several small businesses over the years. Having experienced both success and failure I felt well prepared to try a new venture. I had learned that getting something done was more important and expeditious than getting something done perfectly. I had also learned to look behind the façade of an idea or business and to learn what made a particular enterprise succeed or fail; realizing there are no guarantees and that without hard work and commitment most any business is doomed. We began this quest excited by the challenge of growing a business from nothing into a family supporting entity; at no time did we think we would become wealthy via the business but rather hoped to attain an enjoyable and sustaining lifestyle. I had worked for myself in the past and found it very challenging but even more rewarding. I was also aware that I had more confidence in myself than I probably should have and yet was unafraid to work my way through any obstacles. Some might refer to this as blind stupidity. So that’s me.

Ren, on the other hand, was all passion and knowledge in her fields of interest. She knew her stuff. The business side of the business held no interest for her and she purposely left it all to me....not realizing that that is what I wanted owing to the fact that was where my passion lay. She could and did get involved and assist on the business side over the years and I, while never to be a fashion maven, did in fact learn a bit about antiques, collectibles and general items of interest to our unique clientele.

While living but a mere 15 miles from our final choice of location (Wickenden St.) we traveled several thousand miles over a 3-month span seeking ideas and possible locations. We traversed the entire New England area. We followed the scenic route 1 from Attleboro MA to northern Maine. We stopped in many high-end tourist locales and many more mom-and-pop barns and one room shops along the forested back roads in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, western Massachusetts, Cape Cod, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

Our forays were very educational. We experienced many ways not to run a business. How not to display items. How not to “not greet” customers. We experienced the perils of having a dirty, dusty, bug infested and odiferous establishment. The negative side of what we saw far outweighed the positive....and this was a very positive thing for us indeed.

Many of the stores we visited made us feel as though we were intruding on their day. Seldom were we greeted or met with a smile; often spending 30 minutes in a location without the slightest acknowledgement of our being welcome in their business space. We learned quickly that if we were not greeted upon entering then surely there would be no “Thank you for stopping in.” The impression was such that we decided that our first order of business was that we would greet each and every customer that opened our door. We also made sure to thank them for stopping by as they left. So simple yet so seldom done. Over the years we had many customers tell us how welcome they felt when first visiting us and quite often led to their recommending our shop over others.

Early on we felt that we would find a location in Maine, New Hampshire, or Vermont that best suited where we felt we would like to live and where a business such as we were thinking of would best prosper. And so that’s where we concentrated most of our searches. While we found several that were enticing, never did we happen upon a shop or location that felt quite right. We decided to slow down and perhaps rethink our search.

Ren took me for coffee. It was just a nice sunny Sunday afternoon and she suggested we venture to one of her favorite coffee shops in the world. Ren loves her coffee. She needs it strong and hot and so we visited, for my first time, The Coffee Exchange on Wickenden St. The coffee was excellent. The location was cool, very unique, long established and the vibe was electric. After coffee we

strolled along Wickenden. Up one side and down the other. The feeling along the street was reflective of the feeling within the Coffee Exchange. This was a different, almost magical neighborhood. All age groups were walking along the street in groups from one to 4 or 5. There were older residents, families and a tremendous number of college students. The local schools were displayed on T-shirts, hats and hoodies: Brown, RISD (Rhode Island School of Design), PC (Providence College) and JW (Johnson & Wales). As we tucked inside a doorway to allow the walkers to pass and us to gawk we noticed a building across the street with the windows all papered over on the inside and a small almost illegible sign on the door – For Rent.

We asked around and found that this 2 story plus basement location had in fact been an antiques co-op for many years and had lain vacant for over 2 years. Upon hearing this Ren said “That’s why it looks so familiar. Years ago when I frequented the Coffee Exchange I would be sure to leave time to visit the This and That shop across the way as it was my favorite shop on Wickenden.” Once again it appears what’s old is new! It seems the building’s owners had operated the shop and grown weary of the day-to-day efforts involved to continue. They had multiple properties and no longer wanted to “run the business.”

We set an appointment, met the owners, walked the building and decided to “think about it.” At one point they had agreed to rent the space to a mortgage company and interior demolition and minor rehab had begun but things with the mortgage company fell apart. The space was tired and in need of cosmetic TLC.

We did in fact think about it. Ren’s brother-in-law Dwight Leigh was/is a long-time realtor in Rhode Island and he helped us analyze the location and felt it was a winner if certain things could be worked out. We negotiated with the owners and came to a tentative agreement.

We continued to look at other locations up north and found a spot in New Hampshire. We called the folks from Providence and told them we had decided not to move forward on their building.

Uneasy with canceling in Providence and unsure about relocating to New Hampshire we reversed ourselves and called on the Wickenden St location. We were, by now, worried that we had lost our chance to move onto Wickenden St.

Maureen, the building's co-owner said, "I knew you would call back. The space is perfect for you." She was right; and so it began.

The building's interior was in disarray. While the second floor was jam packed with the belongings of the owners along with the detritus of their previous business the space itself was fine; solid and needing only some new paint and a serious cleaning. The basement consisted of two open rooms and two closets. The floors were painted over cement, which we repainted to freshen their appearance along with a splash of paint on the walls and existing shelving.

Our main challenge was the first-floor space. Walls had been erected and partially finished. Other walls were studs only. The carpets were stained, worn and depressing; they had to go, and did. Our new landlords cleared their belongings and did a rough cleaning along with helping us replace and remove walls and investing in a new carpet. Over a 2-month period of time we made the space quite presentable, clean, added some fresh paint along with a more (conducive to occupancy) odor.

Now, with the premises looking as they should, we took the next step in our business plan. We had to find a way to bring in enough goods to fill the space, about 4,500 square feet. The space was actually 3 spaces. First what we saw when we first walked the building. The second floor was jam packed with all kinds of furniture, boxes, book and glass cases and whatnot. The first floor was a collection of lumber, carpet rolls, metal shelving and trash. The basement was dark and forbidding. The New space was empty and cavernous. Uh Oh! This was a very large and shoutingly empty building. It's not like we didn't have a plan.....well we did have a plan...didn't we?

It just seemed the space was so large and so empty. I believe we had some doubts at this time. Actually Ren, not one to hide her emotions, was nearing the panic stage of, "Oh my God, what have we done?" I, of course, hid my doubts behind my confident assertion of, "No problem. We've got this." I mean we had a plan. We had run the numbers. We were going to work our plan off what the This and That shop had done to run their business. We got this, well we didn't "Got This" right away; shit that was a goddam awful lot of empty space.

There was a duality of actions on our part. There was so much to do and yet one action seemed to lead almost seamlessly to the next step. While it was daunting

it was always doable. From September 1, 2013, until 13 or 14 months later I was at the store every day except Christmas. Ren was also either teaching classes or welcoming customers at Nostalgia every day with the exception of her annual sister trip to Salem MA. – The City Of Witches. Too spooky for me, I chose to remain at Nostalgia. Little did I know some of that spookiness would find its way to Nostalgia. More on that later.

Our good friends, Brian and Joy, supported us at each and every step along the way. I was too set on knowing that we couldn't fail and had few doubts. Ren, the worrier, lived in doubt and leaned heavily on Brian and Joy to buttress her belief that we had done the right thing. Even when they were not sure we had, they were friends enough to steadfastly stand alongside us.

OK, a little about how we were going to make this work. More than a few of the shops we had visited were operated as co-ops. There was also literature available to fill in the blanks as to how to go about setting up and running a co-op. To begin with a co-op in the business we had decided to run was set up this way; individual sellers, also known as "vendors" or "dealers", would rent space at our location and pay a monthly rent and also a percentage of sales (anywhere from 5 – 20%) depending on the costs that needed to be covered. We had devised a floor plan for each floor. Spaces were delineated and rented by the square foot and location within the floor plan. Our first floor was prime space followed by the second floor and then the basement. When the building was full and all spaces were rented we had on average 55 dealers or dealer spaces. Some folks had several spaces at a time. Others had an entire room and others still had a single shelf or clothing rack. To further confuse you we typically had 90 to 100 consigners with items in the store at any one time. A consigner would bring an item (or 50 items) in, and we would sell it and split the money. Consigner items were placed in several locations throughout the store. Consigners did not pay any rent, but they gave up a percentage of the sale (usually 50%).

The business plan was quite simple. Figure out what your costs were, ie our monthly rent, utilities, payroll, operating expenses such as computers, paper, printing, advertising, and any number of little items that would pop up along the way. Once we had a figure we then needed to build in an income for Ren & I. So to use a number such as \$10,000 a month in costs we then divided our square

footage (4,500) into this number to arrive at a cost per square foot to cover our monthly expenses. Of course, nothing is as simple and straightforward as that. Every customer that came in the door saw most of the first floor offerings. About 85% of people went upstairs and 75% did all three floors. Some things were at eye level. Some locations were partially hidden by ½ walls or other displays. Some areas had better lighting. On and on the permutations went.....more than you need to know but I wanted you to get a feel for the place. Ren and I also had space here and there within the building in which we sold a myriad of items over the years.

When we were getting ready to open we needed to bring in a bunch of dealers. Fortunately, Maureen helped quite a bit here by alerting some long-term dealers that had been with her in the This and That shop and from this group we garnered our foundational dealers. We learned a great deal from these folks and many of them are still dealers at Nostalgia.

As we traveled through northern New England, we filled our van several times along the way. We managed to find 12 or 15 manual typewriters from circa 1890 to 1970. Almost all were in working order. Most needed a little cleaning and mechanical adjustment. If they needed more work, we chose not to buy them. We paid between \$12 - \$25 dollars each. At times we bought them as a part of a "lot" (multiple items for one price). They ended up bringing in from 5 to 10 times what we had paid for them. The college kids loved them as did the dealers from high end locales like New York City. These folks bought them along with many other items we had picked up as they knew they could sell them in their shops for multiples of what they paid us; we were happy to move them along.

There were some items that we bought thinking they would be in great demand only to find that we had to hang on to them too long and were eventually happy to receive what we had purchased them for. Rocking chairs were a favorite of mine and they were a major bust. I also loved the dark stained (and very heavy) antique Victorian desks and chests. These too were a big loser. More often than not we did rather well with buying and selling our goods. We learned, after many a sore back, to stay away from heavy and bulky items and to concentrate on what we referred to as "single carry" items; meaning one person could shop, purchase, carry and fit their find into their vehicle.

Every city, speaking socio economically, has their sweet spot as far as price range. We had several, owing to our customers being quite varied in age and income. Over the years we sold several pieces for around \$1,500; typically, well-made furniture in great condition. The downside of these sales was that the pieces often took a while to sell and eventually even more on the negative side - I was on one end of these as we delivered them up creaky stairways. So I would say the high end sweet spot was around \$250. I learned not to buy anything that I felt I couldn't make at least a 100% profit on, preferably 200%. So if I sold a piece of furniture for \$300 I normally had paid \$100-\$150 for it. I sincerely believe that we never overcharged for a piece in this price range. I wouldn't buy something if we couldn't sell it to a customer for a good value for the customer; first to benefit the customer but also to move items along.

The college kids had a sweet spot of around \$40-\$50. They bought quality used clothing, LP's, jewelry, paintings and any manner of knick-knacks in this range. We also had good luck selling used instruments; mostly acoustic guitars. Here again we wouldn't buy the item unless it was in fine shape and we were able to at least double our purchase price. Guitars typically sold for \$95 - \$120.

Most of the dealers did a great job. Those with experience knew what to sell, how to price and display their goods. We had many dealers that sold clothing. Some chose to sell only vintage, others new and most a mixture. One man, Peter, was a master at finding high end great quality men's vintage wear. From very early on Peter secured our entire back wall on the first floor to display his goods. This was a stroke of good fortune for everyone that had space on the first floor as his offerings pulled customers from the front door to the rear wall and these folks got to see everyone's items. Over the years the same customers from near and far returned, usually with a friend, to see what Peter had on display.

Ron, one of my wife's favorites, had his own room on the first floor, a space of about 11' X 11". Stepping into his room was like visiting a movie set from 1955. He collected and refurbished kitchen counter-top appliances, typewriters, dish and glassware, small furniture and so many well cared for collectibles of that era. Ron, like Peter, had his own clientele but eventually chose to move on.

We were also very fortunate to have a multi-talented lady named Sherry that had space on all three levels which so fit her personality as she was a non-stop always

in motion kind of person. Sherry is a free spirit and world traveler and a draw unto herself as customers visited the store just to say hello to her.

Little did we know what a treasure we had in a soft-spoken dealer introduced to us by Maureen. Mayra. Quiet, unassuming, constantly busy and always with that easy smile. Mayra had been with Maureen for years. She knew the business, the clientele, the city and the neighborhood. If I had been smarter, I would have leaned on her earlier for so many of the small details and depth of knowledge in this little industry we found ourselves in. The bumps in the road were smaller and the hills less steep owing to her presence.

And then there was cocks corner! If you're thinking what I think you're thinking then your thinking is correct. A little background here. We were located in a very eclectic part of town. We had all ages, all nationalities, all socio-economic levels - professors, judges, janitors, the mayor and the governor, movie stars, construction workers, strippers, athletes, police and firemen, drunks, con artists and those wishing to be one of the aforementioned. We also had a substantial gay population. Wickenden St. was an everchanging kaleidoscope of the human condition and it was often breathtakingly wonderful.

One day a man, a very large man, came into the store, introduced himself as James and filled out a dealer application. He listed his area of expertise and the items that he wished to display. Statues and books. Nice man. Statues and books sounded like a great combination, and we invited him to become one of the team. He began with a small space in the basement. He was in every day and he soon became a friend. Now Jim as opposed to James. Jim was gay. He wasn't gay because he was Jim as opposed to James. He was surprisingly, to us, gay because he was the most un-gay looking guy I had ever met. He was and is a great guy and now one of our best friends. This is one of those meandering stories I mentioned earlier but now we are at the end of this little trip. (Spoiler alert: it's a happy ending, as we sold the business to Jim! He happily continues the Nostalgia journey...)

Jim rented an additional space on the first floor. The location was midway down on one side of the first floor where a short wall created a corner location. Jim spent an entire day setting up his space. He brought in box after box of items to

display. He built new shelves and added lighting. When he was done and had set up his display, he invited us to inspect his space.

From floor to ceiling, left to right, well lighted and multi-colored statues were everywhere. Different heights and settings, some stood alone, others in twos and threes but in almost each one was a penis. Different sizes, different colors and different attitudes. And so "Cocks Corner" was added to our offerings.

A firecracker of a woman burst through the door one day and continued talking to us for 20 minutes before we found a space in her colorful self-introduction to say hello and raise our hands like a stop sign. If there had been a cop standing there he would have had to ticket her as she was full speed ahead. Hello Annie! A lady in her mid-eighties, Annie was a trip. She had been with Maureen. She told us how she ran her business and how we should run our business. Before long she had told Ren she was beautiful, me that I was very good looking but not good enough to be married to a beauty such as Ren. She had been in town since before the street was paved, knew every retail shop in RI and how and why they were doing things incorrectly. Annie stayed with Nostalgia, and I'm sure she was telling them all that if we had listened to herwell, who knows? We did, in fact, learn much from Annie. I smile whenever I think of her. Sadly, Annie passed away not long ago, and she certainly will be missed.

Bob joined us early on. He had been with the This & That shop for years. He had a set of shelves in the basement and planted his gear right where it had always been. Bob was a soft-spoken team player and a real gentleman. He loved to come in, tell a story or two and would always be happy with his sales. He felt he didn't have to make money each month; he needed only to not lose any.

Over the years we had so very many interesting, entertaining, unique people become part of the Nostalgia family. We were so fortunate to have so many quality human beings take part in the Nostalgia experience. There were also a few people from the dark side. We had a thief, several expanders of the truth, more than one charlatan and a couple of nasty folks. This population was usually squeezed out rather quickly as the other dealers seemed to police their group or brought issues to my attention and on more than one occasion, I had to tell someone to come pick up their stuff by that day's end of business or they could pick it up next to the dumpster the next day.

Over the years we had over 100 dealers at Nostalgia. Some left because they moved away. Others found that they didn't have the time to be a dealer in the right way, ie visit and refresh their space at least once a week. Many dealers came in 4 or 5 times a week but most at least twice.

We also had people that overpriced their items. Others that had too many poor-quality items. Sadly, we had several that had a very narrow niche that they loved but their area of interest was too small to be supported by the general public. We had a few folks that tried to sell old, dirty, broken-down items.... they were very short timers. This leads me to one dealer in particular.

John was often referred to as a dumpster diver. He was famous for finding treasure in the trash. John could see a discarded item's refurbished value as it lay dirty and dented on a street corner. He was a bit of a conundrum as he was extremely generous with friends and those in need but was aghast when asked by a potential customer to provide a discount on any item he was selling. Generally speaking, dealers had a standing discount offer on most items of 10% when requested by a customer. John would not participate in this policy. I feel it frustrated customers and cost him many sales over the years. John obviously felt otherwise as he always cleaned, fixed and gave new life to his finds.

One busy afternoon we had a line at the register and a young lady stepped to the register and barked at me – “You have a \$40 picture on display in your window that I put in my trash last week.” She expected some sort of apology from me. Instead my reply was – “Do you often throw money away ?” It was one of Johns' many finds and it was now worth the \$40 if not more. I believe it sold that very day.

Early on Ren and I had to win our dealers' trust. Easily done with most of the dealers, others not so much. We had some hard cases. Some folks came and went, never able to accept us as the new kids on the block. We were not the same as the previous owners of the shop. We were not “Old Providence.” We did things the previous owners would not. We paid the dealers their earnings on a monthly basis. We returned their sales tickets and a register printed receipt of all items sold to verify the information. Many times we would face an irritated dealer that insisted items were being stolen and we were not doing enough to discourage theft. It was indeed a constant concern and we, along with many

customers, policed the premises. Most of the time (98%?) the missing item was found in an adjoining booth or even on another level as customers tended to leave things where they were if they had chosen to not purchase the item. I told you I would give you more on the spooky side of Nostalgia. I have called Ren "spooky girl" since we met, especially since she was on a team of paranormal investigators at historic Slater Mill in RI when we met. Ren's main experience at Nostalgia was to feel an intense uneasiness and general creepiness in one corner of Nostalgia's basement. I don't want to know...

The strangest thing that seemed to upset a couple of folks was our allowing our clientele to use the bathroom. We had but one. Many shoppers spent an hour or more in the store. It took effort and advertising dollars to bring in a customer; should we send them away rather than allow a visit to the toilet? Another contributing factor regarding bathroom traffic was we were surrounded by coffee shops and restaurants. Perhaps as many as 25% of our customers strolled the aisles with coffee in hand.

Most dealers had a full-time job and earned their living outside of their store income. For many it was more than a hobby but less than a job. As happens with any large group working together most were happy to be one of the team and a few demanded more recognition or some sort of control. These folks either realigned their efforts or left for greener pastures. Many returned later and others did in fact find a location that better fit their needs. For Ren and I there just wasn't enough money to put up with more grief than necessary from a disgruntled dealer. A large part of why we began the store was to enjoy our work and the people we worked with.

So allow me to introduce Gary. Gary's name wasn't Gary but Dennis. He introduced himself to us as Gary and so for the rest of his life he remained Gary to us. First impressions can be so misleading, even if those impressions take a year or more to morph into the person inside the person you meet.

Each morning I would carry items from the store onto the sidewalk out front; some heavier than others and the process lasted 5 to 10 minutes. One morning as I was holding the door and wrestling a piece of furniture through it a pair of hands lifted the far end and helped me settle it in place out front. I recognized the man

as someone I'd seen walking along Wickenden on several occasions. I thanked him, offered my hand and he said, "Hi, I'm Gary."

Later that day Gary reappeared inside the front door with an arm full of used records. He wanted to sell them to me. At the time I really wasn't interested in LPs but he had helped me. We disagreed as to the value of the records but because he said he really needed the cash I could have them for the money offered. Gary ended up with less money than he wanted, and I had some used records that, at the time, I wasn't interested in.

Gary came often over the next several weeks, always with more LP's. He looked like he needed the money. He was often disheveled, maybe in need of a shower. Always friendly and helpful. He would pick up the broom we used to sweep out front and clean the sidewalk without asking. He began to wait for me out front and help me move items to the outside. I would make us coffee and soon he was vacuuming or wiping down the counter or any number of little things to help. I thanked him always and eventually told him I couldn't afford to hire someone to do these things as we had just opened, and things were quiet. He said that was fine; he didn't expect me to pay him. He was not working, liked the store and hoped I didn't mind if he helped out and spent some time there each morning.

He was such a gentleman and loved the ladies. He would offer assistance should they need help such as carrying things to the car for them or making them a coffee or cup of tea to drink as they shopped. He was in his early sixties when we first met and had lived in and around Providence most of his life. We soon learned that he not only knew nearly every street in the city but also most of the inhabitants! He was at the front door area most of the day. He greeted each customer, "Hello thanks for coming to Nostalgia." Just as he heard me say early on in his visiting.

Everyone loves Ren, you can't help it. Gary became her number one admirer and protector. It was comforting for me to know that he was always looking out for her and she loved him. The store got busier, more money found its way into the cash register, and Gary had a job. A paying job.

Once on the schedule he was always on time, often early. He took on the duties he felt I shouldn't – as an owner – be wasting my time on. Although I never felt cleaning, organizing and preparing the store was time wasted. Quite the contrary,

I felt that these were not only worthy areas of priority effort but because they directly affected our customers' perception of the store; there was nothing more important. Gary understood this and made a huge contribution in this way.

Our relationship grew into a strong friendship. He had a depth of knowledge in a wide array of areas. Surprisingly so. Gary, like Sherry, drew people to the store. The folks that stopped by and asked for him or simply said – Gary told me all about this place – represented people of all stripes. From grimy, oil stained street cats to well-manicured men and women dressed to the 9's. Before long I stopped being surprised by the phrase – Gary sent me in.

Over time we realized Gary had a photographic memory. I spent 60 hours in the store every week starting each morning cleaning and straightening out various booths. Ren, myself and others that spent some serious time at the store were often asked by customers if we had such and such an item in the store; sometimes we did and could direct them to its location but most often we were either unable to say if we had the item or if we had, where it would be located. Each dealer had their own interests and peculiar collections. We typically had over 30,000 items in the store.

Gary would come to the store after being away for several days and walk the store for 20 minutes or so poking through everyone's offerings. Amazingly when asked by a customer he would say yes we do have 2 or 3 of those items and here is where you can find them! An item such as a 6 oz. glass with the coke logo would be a good example. I was standing next to him and a dealer when a customer asked and both the dealer and I said we were sorry but didn't think so, and Gary chirped up and said – we do in fact have that item and you can find it in this particular booth on the second floor, third shelf in the middle! Not only that but the dealer that had been standing next to me when the customer had asked the question was, in fact, the dealer who rented that booth! We lost Gary to cancer while we still owned the store and, for Ren, it was like losing a brother.

Hopefully we have all encountered the kind of person that is infectiously positive with the ability to light up a room with their presence. Our dealer and friend Julie Sampson is just such a person. Always happy, positive and warm; a great person to have on your team. Joyce Zarro was like a walking rainbow in her colorful

clothes, and she'd enter the store and stand in the doorway as if to say, "I'm Here!"

We had several employee dealers that made significant contributions to Nostalgia. These folks hold a special place in our hearts and memories. I'll mention a few here so they'll know we remember them fondly. Susan Romero, Marianna and Kurt Moore, Elena Vizvary, Martha Sherman, Siri Hanja, Ted, our website guru Leona, and of course Jim Fennessy.

I believe our first day, Oct 15, 2013, was a very quiet affair. We termed it a "soft opening" with little fanfare or advertising, other than a sidewalk sign. We had perhaps 8 dealers and about 30% of the floor space occupied. Ren & I filled (loosely) about 10 spots with miscellaneous goods to provide shoppers with some options. I believe we had total sales of \$27 for the day. Painful... but not unexpected. The space had been unoccupied and closed off for a couple of years.

We were disappointed that day and for the following week or so. We realized it would take time to ramp up. People had to find us. Dealers needed to be signed on and the space had to attract customers and give them a reason to return. We greeted each person that came in. We spent as much time with a customer as they wanted and thanked each of them for their visit as they left. We had music in the background. Coffee and water available. Candy dish always on the counter along with occasional other goodies.

By the end of October, the daily receipts had grown to over \$300. Weekends and holidays provided the most foot traffic. Our monthly sales grew from \$7K to \$9K to \$12K and eventually to \$16K (\$533 daily avg.) which was our breakeven point in year one. In the spring of 2014, we knew we would be OK as our sales never fell below our breakeven point from then on and we had a full allotment of dealers and consigners. Actually, from that point forward we always had a waiting list for dealer spots. More sales meant higher expenses and so at no time were we ever in danger of becoming rich. That wasn't our goal, thankfully, but if it had happened, we could have handled it. Again, I relate these numbers to provide a feel for our business. They are far too modest to claim bragging rights. On the other hand, we were making a nice living, enjoying our work, our dealer relationships and the many new friends we made in Providence.