

Karla Brom Proud
Business History: narrative
March 2006

My lifelong passion for gems, minerals and mining began in Southern California in the 1950's. My Grandfather had reinvented himself as a gold miner in the Grass Valley area of California during the depression era and shared his interests with me from the time I was about 6 years old. We would go to old abandoned gem and gold mines in Southern California and poke around and find treasure. From early on I had a growing display and collection of mineral and gem crystals....all neatly labeled and displayed. What started as a family hobby continued on to become my life's work. My family has told me that at about age 8, I said that when I grew up, I would own my own rock and gem store. In 1970, my grown up wish became a reality when The Collector opened in Fallbrook, California. After 35 years and 6 stores....the passion is still with me.

In 1968, along with my partner/husband, I leased and re-opened the famed Stewart Lithia tourmaline mine in the Pala Mining District. The area had been mined in the early 1900's and produced rare brilliant pink tourmalines that found favor with Tzu Si, Empress of China. There was once a Chinese mining camp below the mine. After the fall of the Empress, pink tourmaline lost its benefactress and the mines were largely abandoned. We were told that these mines were closed because of lack of material being found; however, we were convinced that there was more treasure in this piece of earth. We were proven correct and after 4 years of mining the Stewart and the Tourmaline Queen Mine, we struck pay dirt! The 'Queen' produced a pocket of gems of unprecedented size and perfection. "The most important find of gems in North America"...as proclaimed by the curator of the American Natural History Museum of New York City. Along with fame and good fortune, the find put our little mining company on the map and attracted buyers from around the world for pink California tourmaline. These were exciting times. One of our tourmaline finds even made it onto a United States postage stamp. Many of the rare specimens from the famous find now reside in mineral and gem museums around the world. Probably the most important piece from the mine was named the "Candelabra" and is now in the Smithsonian gem collection in Washington, DC.



The “Candelabra” tourmaline on quartz.
Tourmaline Queen Mine
Pala , California
1972 Find

Rubellite (red) tourmaline crystals topped with natural blue terminations.

With the ‘find of the century’ under our belts, we continued to mine gem tourmalines and eventually also gained the rights to the Himalaya Mine in Mesa Grande, California. This mine produced extraordinary bi-color pink and green tourmalines, unique in the world.

From 1972 to 1980, we had the opportunity to travel the world and visit other mining locales. We traveled to East Africa and became involved in the marketing and mining of gems like rare green Tsavorite garnet, blue Tanzanite and Kenyan ruby. In Southwest Africa (Namibia) we dealt in rare and beautiful mineral specimens from the Tsumeb mine. We traveled to Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and collected natural blue topaz from the Karoi region. I can’t express how lucky I feel to have traveled throughout Africa during these times; it was exciting and added treasured memories.

Also, during this period, we opened three “The Collector” stores in California. The stores featured natural collectible mineral specimens, gem crystals, gemstones and finished jewelry. They were truly showplaces of natural history and often likened to real museums. The stores were located in Fallbrook, La Jolla and Beverly Hills.

In 1980, upon moving to Honolulu, I opened “The Rainbow Collection” in the Ala Moana Shopping Center. This store was a first in Hawaii and offered fine gems, collectible minerals, fossils and fine jewelry. The store had certified graduate gemologists on hand as well as a full time jewelry designer and its own jewelry manufacturing workshop. I made a point of bringing exciting displays and promotions to Hawaii including a rare collection of natural gold, featuring the ‘Robins Nugget’ the largest gold nugget then in private hands. We had shows featuring the “Art of the Lapidary” which brought in artists in gemstones from around the world. We

exhibited the world's largest gemstone, a natural topaz over 20,000 carats. Yearly, the store would invite gem dealers to come in and bring vast collections of colored gemstones and offer prices direct from the mines. We won numerous design awards for our jewelry collections and gained national recognition in the trade.

In 1985, I opened "The Rainbow Collection" in Hawaii Kai as both an annex store and a complete state of the art jewelry manufacturing workshop. We employed 5 goldsmiths full time to manufacture jewelry for our custom orders, the two stores and a growing client list of wholesale buyers.



Precious Maile Lei Jewelry Collection
Designer: Karla Proud

In 1988, with a Japanese business partner, I opened a store in Tokyo Japan's Ginza district. The store was named "Bijoux Soleil" and featured fine jewelry designed and manufactured in Hawaii. We had developed several unique lines of jewelry that ranged from Hawaiian themes to cutting edge contemporary designs. The Hawaiian inspired designs found a ready market in Japan.

From 1990 thru 2004, The Rainbow Collection continued to provide Hawaii with unique custom fine jewelry and gemstones. I made the decision to close the store in August 2004 when a new exciting opportunity came my way.....Oregon Sunstone!



The Celestial Collection
Dust Devil Mine Oregon Sunstone

I believe that my heart has always been with the mining of gems. I've had a unique opportunity to go back to my roots in the gem business and become involved with Dust Devil Mining Company in Central Oregon. I was approached by close associates of the miners a couple of years ago with a gorgeous collection of natural Oregon sunstone. They asked me to design some custom jewelry pieces using this beautiful gem. I was hooked! Since closing The Rainbow Collection, I've been out to the mining location several times and had the joy of digging gems again! The sunstone is now the Oregon State gemstone. I have been asked to join Exotic Gemstones of Honolulu in putting this new gem on the map internationally. With my experience with tourmaline from California, I am uniquely qualified to market and promote the sunstone. I have designed lines of finished jewelry to promote sunstone and currently the collections are in 30 Fred Meyer Fine Jewelry stores in the Northwest. In Hawaii, the sunstone collections can be seen at Opal Fields and Reflections of the Heart on Oahu. On Maui, Maui Master Jewelers, Huttons Fine Jewelers and Sargent's Fine Jewelry are presenting the sunstone.

I feel that I've come full circle, since my passion began with digging gems from the earth with the guidance of my Grandfather, I have now returned to the place where the passion began. There is nothing like getting down and dirty and being the first person on earth to set eyes upon a rare and gorgeous gemstone. Wiping off the soil and holding the gem to the sun to see the color and sparkle. What can I say.....it moves my soul!

Karla Brom Proud
March 31, 2006