

American Values Inspire Lifetime Philosophies

Jorge Adeler's philosophy of life came about as a result of two very simple, but distinct objects: turquoise and pennies.

A GOOD LIFE IN ARGENTINA

The Native American gemstone taught him the value of being different and the penny dishes at 7-Eleven stores taught him to give back. But his story really starts in his native Argentina when, at 16, he stopped taking money from his father and started to earn his own way. He tried his hand at a variety of jobs, including, antique dealer, hotel operator and restaurant operator. "I did it for survival," he says. He eventually found his niche as a newspaper reporter and photographer.

"I came from a good family in the city where I lived, and had a good job at a newspaper that gave me access to things, like admittance to sporting, political and social events." But that all changed when, at 18 he married his wife Graciela and took a trip to the United States for his honeymoon. It was the early 1970s.

A NEW LIFE IN THE STATES

"I just went crazy for the United States. I was impressed with the courtesy and kindness of the people," he says. "If I was (standing) in line, it didn't matter what my name was, I will wait like everybody else, and at my turn, I would get what I was looking for. I didn't have to use influence, I didn't have to use connections, I didn't have to use any bribery. It was a beautiful, refreshing environment of a country that I fell in love with immediately."

Struck by the part of the U.S. Constitution that says every person has the right to pursue happiness, Adeler knew he wanted to re-start his life in America, so he went back to Argentina, worked hard and made plans to return. In 1975 – with \$450 in his pocket, no English and his wife and two daughters in tow – he landed in Washington, D.C.

GEMS FIT THE BILL

He knew he wanted to work for himself and needed to start a business selling small items he could store in a closet of their very small apartment. "I started my business selling \$5 onyx hearts from the back of my station wagon on the sidewalks of Washington, D.C.," he says. That's where the turquoise comes in. It was 1975-76 and the U.S., especially in the Capitol, was gearing up to celebrate its 200th birthday, including creating trinkets to commemorate it. Turquoise, because of its abundance in western states and connection to Native Americans, was named the precious gemstone of the bicentennial. "At that time, everything was about turquoise, and I decided to do what nobody else did. I set up shop selling rhodochrosite (from Argentina), lapis (from Chile) and malachite (from the Congo)," Adeler says. "In theory, I had what nobody wanted, but nevertheless, it was different. You always catch the eye of somebody who is looking for something distinct."

THE QUEST FOR SOMETHING DIFFERENT

His instincts were right and he thus began a successful career creating gemstone jewelry. As a reporter in Argentina he traveled to areas where the people of small villages worked with the stones, carvings and miniatures. So he went back to trade trinkets with them for their work, such as fish hooks for stones and gloves for rocks and minerals. "The first trip I bought a shoe box of it and within 5 years I made 19 trips and was bringing back a container with 7 tons of minerals and carvings," he says.

Soon he was off to South America, Brazil and Colombia. "I started my business with the philosophy that if you do something different, like going to the mines or to the farms, or making things by hand, you might be able to present a new perspective," he says. "I began to grow within a segment of the population who always, always asked for something different."

WHAT ABOUT THOSE PENNIES?

He says the little dishes of pennies at 7-Eleven, with a sign that reads "if you need one, take one, if you have a spare one, please put it in," was evidence of another aspect of American life he wanted to emulate. "To me that was the secret of a successful society or a successful family or a successful relationship. Those dishes, the vast majority of time, always are full," he says. "And to me, that was vital to how I wanted my life to be. I put back when I have extra, then when I need something, I can ask without embarrassment."

Over the years Adeler's business increased to seven stores in the Washington D.C. area. He says they were growing in the "American way," meaning they got big enough to form a corporation. "But that wasn't us," he says, and they decided to close the stores and purchase a building in Great Falls, Virginia. It is an "entirely, strictly and only a family business," that includes his wife and daughters Wendy and Valentina, a graduate gemologist.

"We are a small store, but I have the pleasure of designing pieces for artists and for people from Hollywood and the White House. I made a pair of cuff links for the Pope," he says. "I really have a fun business. "Every day when I go to sleep, I can't believe how lucky I am," he says. "I want to make sure I express my gratitude for the extraordinary life that I am living. I want to put my pennies back."