

“No reprieve is deserved for any man who neglects the female need to be romanced”

Michael J. Contreras

I am a hopeless romantic, and I love to make things with my own hands for someone whether it is a gift, a greeting card, or in this case, a piece of jewelry. I love the excitement it brings to me when I am lost in my own realm of creativity and ideas.

But most of all, I enjoy the wonderful love I feel when I give something to someone that I have spent a part of my life creating- just for them.

The natural flow of romance always amazes me with all of its little quirks and fancies, and it is in the sea of romance where unique and original expressions of love are born. So, I decided that when I proposed to my girlfriend Judith, the ring that I offered to her had to be made by me. It had to have my passion flowing through it, it had to speak volumes to her as she looked at it, and it had to make her feel safe, secure, and happy with the love that I had for her in my heart. Welcome to my adventure.

I wanted to propose to her with a ring that I made for her with my own hands, my own heart, and my own soul. I wanted to turn my emotions into something tangible, something that she could feel. This ring would serve as a symbol of my undying effort to be worthy of her love, and a promise to keep her protected within my heart.

I did not want a machined ring, with its machined look; perfectly uniform in every dimension of shape, style, and color. That was too cold and industrial. She isn't a robot. She's warm flesh and blood, with a need to be loved, and a desire to be beautiful and adored. Only a handmade custom ring from me would suffice.

Her ring had to have the human element in it... my element; sketched from a vision, forged with a passionate love, filled with emotion, and tempered with the promise of forever.

It would be imperfectly beautiful; gracefully lacking symmetry; not precisely round, thicker in some places than others, flourished here and there, including a secret symbol that only she and I know the meaning of. It had to shine. It had to feel strong and dependable. It had to be worthy of touching her skin. It had to be GOLD. It had to be 100% hand-crafted for her; making it the only one in existence. That's what I wanted.

But how was I going to make this imaginary ring a reality?

After spending months researching the many ways to make a ring, and speaking to some master jewelers, I realized that there was no way I could afford the equipment that was needed to make even the simplest of rings. Plus, there was so many things that could go wrong, making my project even more complicated and unattainable. But... I refused to accept defeat. I would make that ring for her if it was the last thing I ever did.

I visited Steve, the owner of "Goldmine" who purchased my old gold jewelry pieces a few years ago. I explained to him that I wanted to make a custom gold ring for my girlfriend. He told me that I definitely needed to visit Rick Terry Jewelers who specialized in custom jewelry designs.

Excited, I drove down to Rick Terry Jewelry designs, and waited in a short line. I was greeted by Ernie, a Master Jeweler. I explained to him what I wanted to do and that I had been told by many others that it was virtually impossible to actually make my own custom ring. He quickly reassured me that not only could the ring be made, but it could be made by me at my own house with a few simple tools. Then he explained to me the process that we would use. It was called the "Lost Wax Casting" method. I could carve the ring out of jewelers carving wax, inscribe whatever decorations and words into it, and then, he would take the wax ring and cast a duplicate of it into whatever grade of gold I chose. I was speechless. He made it sound so easy, unlike all the other jewelers I had spoken to.

Ernie gave me a wax ring to make my ring out of and I quickly left the store with a new excitement and restored confidence.

I spent about 20 hrs practicing with different tools to carve, shape, and mold the ring.

It was so much more difficult than I expected. I have created many things from scratch, but this was one of my most challenging endeavors. The detail work was tiring, and the eye strain was very uncomfortable. Even with excellent vision, I had to use a strong magnifying glass. The wax was slippery and it was so easy to gouge a scratch in the wax and sabotage all those hours. That happened 5 times.

Finally, after learning from my mistakes, I was ready to carve **The ring. Her ring.** I could only work on the ring in the evenings, after I came home from work, and usually only 30 minutes at a time before I started to get eye fatigue from the close detail work on such a tiny object.

But I did it. Finally, after investing approximately 40 hours on my labor of love, I had a wax ring that I was proud of.

I brought my wax ring back to Ernie for his inspection. Much to my surprise, he advised me to take it back home and etch the carvings a little deeper because the polishing process may make them fainter, and he wanted to be sure that this ring turned out just the way I wanted, without any disappointments. I respected his professionalism. After all, he was the expert.

One day later I returned, nervous yet excited. Ernie inspected my wax ring with owner Rick Terry, and after many undeserved compliments on my work, they took it to be cast in 18k gold.

One week later I received that much awaited telephone call from Mr. Terry himself telling me that my ring was ready to be picked up. I was quite nervous about how it turned out and could not wait to see for myself, so I asked him what it looked like. He spoke the one word I needed to hear. "Excellent."

I had to sneak away from my girlfriend Judith, in order to drive over and pick the ring up. When I walked inside the jewelry store, Ernie and Mr. Terry greeted me and took the ring out for me to see. As soon as I saw that beautiful yellow ring shining with all of my little designs carved into it, I could barely speak. It was so much more brilliant

and stunning than I could have ever imagined. It was literally a dream come true for me, and hopefully, it would be a bigger dream come true for Judith.

Romina, one of the jewelers, paid me the highest compliment on my ring by saying to me with a smile, "I would wear it."

When I look back at all of the disappointments and frustration I endured before meeting Rick Terry and his wonderful crew, it becomes quite clear, how, many will claim to be the brightest experts in a field, but when put to a challenge, only a few will actually shine, and Rick Terry and his employees made my dream of making a custom ring manifest from a vision in my mind, to a beautiful, extraordinary band of specially decorated gold, ready to give to that special love of my life.

With all of my heart I thank everyone at Rick Terry Jewelers for their patience, time, and advice, and most of all, for believing in me as much as I believed in myself.

And hopefully, if I get the right answer, I will be carving out another ring...

Mine.

Very Sincerely,

Michael John Contreras