

Conversation with a dream weaver

Marie Gray surprised herself and wowed her fiancé 36 years ago when she picked up a couple of knitting needles and some cream-colored yarn, and wove a simple, sleeveless mock-turtleneck tube dress, very *de rigueur* in 1962. Thus, the professional model and *Queen for a Day* hostess invented the original St. John knit ensemble, a creation that evolved into a fashion empire.

"I made it all up as I went along," says Gray. "My knitting experience was limited to half of one sock and a failed attempt at a sweater."

But love conquers all, and Gray was determined to impress her future husband and eventual St. John CEO Robert Gray. "I wanted him to realize that I was not just a fashion model who spent every penny on designer clothes."

The dress became Gray's trademark, combining the fashion elements she prizes today: timeless, elegant, classic designs that fit flawlessly.

After tying the proverbial knot, Bob Gray encouraged Marie to set up shop in the living room of their home, where she created several additional

designs on a huge loom, including what would become her signature suit.

Potential buyers were contacted, they placed orders, and a label was launched.

Rather than unravel at the seams, the Grays bought two more looms and moved their business into the garage. Soon, a presidential hopeful was born. Their daughter, Kelly, was spoon-fed the business, and in 1995 the innovative designer, her model and business leader took her rightful place at the helm of the company.

"She completely understands the ins and outs of the business," says her mother. "In some ways, she's much more talented than her mom and dad. But we all get feedback from one another. Kelly heads retail, merchandising and advertising and keeps us on track in the design area. Bob tracks sales and oversees all of the financial end of the business, and I'm involved in all of the design aspects."

The trio's design aesthetic makes converts of practically every woman who tries a St. John on for size, including First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. The one-loom cottage industry

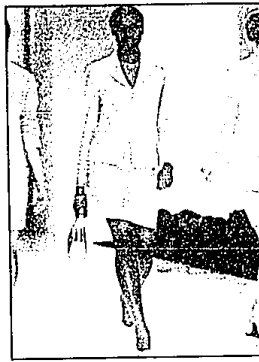
has become a multimillion-dollar conglomerate thanks to the entrepreneurial savvy of its founders, as well as the flexibility of its product.

Says Marie Gray, "The clothes fit precisely and flatter the wearer. They're soft, comfortable, elegant, feminine and the colors are gorgeous."

In town on Nov. 12 for a Neiman Marcus and Lovelight Foundation fashion show and luncheon, Gray presented her 1999 Cruise Collection. Highlights included simple sheath dresses paired with long cardigans or short jackets; ethnic-inspired tunics and short bronze skirts; classic evening suits and glamorous gowns embellished with crystals and embroidery. The color palette ranged from earth tones to bright shades of azules and blue tourmaline.

As is the nature of the fashion industry, Gray was already spinning yarns about Fall/Winter 1999. "I brought my sketchbook with me," she said as she penned drawings in her Townsend hotel room. Next spring was quickly becoming a fond memory.

—Linda Bachrach



St. John style: Above: Rainbow sheath 2-piece suit, \$1,280. Left: Kenya tunic, \$750 and bronze skirt, \$250. From the St. John 1999 Cruise Collection at Neiman Marcus, Somerset Collection, Troy.

Where can I find?

This feature is dedicated to helping readers locate sources for hard-to-find merchandise. If you've seen any of the items in your retail travels (or basement), please call **Where Can I Find?** (248) 901-2555. Slowly and clearly leave your name, number and message, and you should see your input in a few weeks. Due to the overwhelming response to this column, we only publish the requested item two or three times. If you have not seen a response or heard from us, we were unable to locate the item. Thank you.

WHAT WE FOUND:

Weatherhaves can be found through White Hall products in Montague, Mich., or on the Web at www.WhitehallProducts.com.

An adult paint-by-number set can be found in the Spillsbury Company catalog 1-800-772-1760, 3650 Milwaukee Street, P.O. Box 8922, Madison, Wis. 53708-8922. They have three different ones at \$37.95. Also in the back of the current issue of *Woman's Day* magazine is a mail order for Paint-By-Numbers.

Linda has a 7-foot Mountain King artificial Christmas tree she would like to donate to a charitable organization. She will deliver it.

Back issues of Martha Stewart's Wedding magazine can be ordered at 1-800-950-7130 for \$5.00 or on the Web at www.MarthaStewart.com/summerwedding.

Levin Beauty Supply in Oak Park and West Bloomfield carries Uninhibited perfume, as does the Beauty Boutique catalog (440) 826-3008.

The Catholic Baltimore catechism can be ordered through the Mother of Our Savior Co., Inc. catalog 1-800-451-3993.

Found the game "Stock Market" for Kathy. Zen Shleido perfume was seen at Hudson's Fairlane and Arpege Dusting Powder at Neiman Marcus at the Somerset Collection in Troy.

The J.C. Penney Fall/Winter catalog on page 1074 has light coral bathroom carpeting, color Tiger Lily.

The Hallmark Wayne Gretzky ornament can be found at Gibraltar Trade Center.

WE'RE STILL LOOKING FOR:

Peggy wants soft sole Minnetonka moccasins at discount prices.

Christina is looking for the plastic transmission bearing #24591-5 for her Oster Kitchen Center, Service #97208ff; the part is obsolete.

Judy is looking for Lilly white flour and cornmeal other than the one sold at Danny's.

Walt is looking for a 1950 Big Beaver High School yearbook.

There are a number of people who still want hanging laundry bugs, Chatty Cathy dolls, Santa Bears, Christian Dior's Diorissi-

mo Eau Toilette and Velvet Pastry flour, or any other brand; and Avon's Rich Moisture cream.

Bev is still looking for her Libby Cobalt blue wine/juice glasses.

Brian is looking for plastic Lego train tracks.

Lena is looking for a Bride & Groom figurine music box from the Christopher Collection.

Lori wants Nat Robbins' Sparkling Burgundy lip liner.

Wendy of Livonia is looking for the game "Rock Em Sock Em Robot."

Dr. Wovnoski is looking for a d.t. telephone machine from the 1960s-70s.

Tom is looking for a number of items: 1974 St. Joan of Arc yearbook, FLYNOW lawn mower, and a CD from WCSX (94.7) last year called "Parodies for Charity."

Gail wants the perfume Mon Classique de Morabita from Paris.

Lillian is looking for Grandee leather driving gloves (Indies).

Patty is looking for the first Harley Davidson Barbie doll and clips for the skinny Clairol electric rollers.

Janet is looking for a 7-inch front wheel for a wheelchair. Adrienne wants a Dept. 56 Oil Lamp "Plum Pudding."

Compiled by Sandi Jarockas

RETAIL DETAILS

POLAR EXPRESS MAIL

Beginning Friday, Nov. 27, kids can write and send their letters to Santa through the Magic Mailbox at The North Pole Connection in Summit Place mall. All letters are guaranteed a response from Santa. Also hear up-to-the-minute news from Mrs. Claus and other North Pole residents. This interactive holiday center is located in the Hudson's wing, Summit Place, Telegraph and Elizabeth Lake Road, Waterford.

RETAIL GIANTS

At a special awards presentation and luncheon at the DIA on Nov. 16, the Michigan Retailers Association and *The Detroit News* honored three local retailers as Michigan's Retailers of the Year. The winners, divided into small, medium- and large-volume categories, are South Lyon Cycle in South Lyon, Jules R. Schubert Jewellers in Troy and Hudson's in Southfield.

ZOO-TO-DO

The Mosaic Youth Theatre will premiere a trilogy of short plays titled "AM-TV: All Amphibians."

All the Time," at the Detroit Zoo's Wildlife Interpretive Gallery on Nov. 28-29. The free, 30-minute performances coincide with zoo's hosting of the Smithsonian traveling exhibition, "Vanishing Amphibians." 12:30 and 2:30 p.m.

FAREWELL

Christopher Gerard Jewellers, voted Best Jeweler of the Year in 1996, is closing its doors. Designers of the Red Wings Stanley Cup rings, the store has been in business at 28001 Southfield Road for many years.

Great Selections for the Great Outdoors

- Patagonia • Marmot • Dana
- Dagger • Mad River • Osprey
- Fischer • Vasque • Black Diamond
- Sierra Designs • Mountain Hardwear

Benchmark

32715 Grand River Ave.
(Between Orchard Lake Road
and Farmington Road)
Farmington

248 477-8116

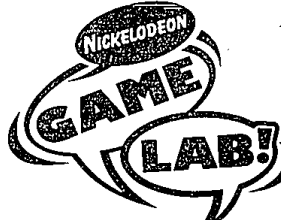
Purveyors of
Excellent
Outdoor
Equipment



Save Your Holiday Receipts!

from Nov. 1st thru Dec. 31st
and apply 10% of their value
(less sales tax) to any in-stock
item(s) you purchase from
Jan. 2nd thru May 31st, 1999.

That's like getting...
10% OFF Everything!



Presented By

MediaOne™

This is Broadband. This is the way.

Observer & Eccentric



CALLING ALL KIDS!

NICKELODEON, the only network just for kids, has teamed up with MediaOne to give Observer & Eccentric Hometown Newspapers area kids a chance to participate in outrageous games from their favorite NICKELODEON shows as NICKELODEON's GAME LAB comes to town on December 31. The 45-minute shows will take place at 4:15 & 6:15 p.m. in the heated tent across from the Community House in Birmingham.

Part of First Night Birmingham '99
Buy Your Buttons Today!
(Kids 5 & under FREE)

Available at:

- All area Kroger stores
- The Community House - Birmingham
- Videomax - Birmingham, 3385 Woodward
- First Night HQ., 725 S. Adams, L-17 - Birmingham



THE BATTLE OF THE BLUES BANDS III 1998

Fender

audio-technica

dw

Zildjian

FEATURING SPECIAL GUEST
GREG KOCH & THE TONE CONTROLS
COUNTRY OF FENDER GUITARS

ROBERT FREDMAN

JOHN KAY AND THE RHYTHM KINGS
WITCH DOCTORS

GUITAR CENTER BIRMINGHAM • 30330 GRANT AVENUE • BIRMINGHAM, AL • 205-998-6161
GUITAR CENTER SOUTHWEST • 27533 NORTHWESTERN PKY. • SOUTHWEST, AL • 205-334-8075