The Gift of Making Things Beautiful



Melissa Badger has spent a lifetime turning ordinary things — and ordinary days — into something special.

By Christine Faith

Long before Melissa Badger owned a salon, hosted a holiday, or styled a single head of hair, she was building houses in the woods. Growing up in a home on a small country road off Hwy 16, she'd gather whatever her mother didn't mind her carrying outside and arrange it among a stand of trees into rooms of her own design. The trees are gone now, but the instinct never left. "I was always imaginative," Melissa says.

She came by it honestly. Her mother was artsy and always had a project going. They collected odds and ends and turned them into something new. Instead of buying Play-Doh, her mom made it from scratch. "That's what memories are made of," Melissa says. With a sister nine years older, Melissa filled the quiet of country life with playmates of her own invention: Tammy Lucas, Jessicut, and Leeby. Her mother didn't just tolerate them. She played right along and set places for them at the dinner table. For reasons lost to childhood logic, the trio lived in the bathroom closet. "My mom was very good about playing along," Melissa laughs. They stayed until she started school at five, and then, with real friends to play with, they quietly moved on.

Melissa went to college to study marketing, drawn to what she thought would be a creative career. Then, in her senior year, a friend introduced her to John, the man who would become her husband, and her plans shifted. "Not that he changed my plans," she says. "What I wanted changed." She wanted to stay close to family, and the jobs available near home leaned toward sales, not creativity. After several years at home raising her daughters, she knew she didn't want to go back to that kind of work. She wanted to create again. So she went back to school—Cosmetology. Twenty-two years later, she still loves the moment someone sits in her chair and hands her something new to work with.

Melissa never dreamed of owning a business. She liked doing her job and going home; as a business owner, regular hours are almost never in the cards. But when the owner (of then Symmetrix Salon) decided to retire, Melissa thought about the women she'd worked beside for 19 years—Kim Grimes and Fern Hoofman—and couldn't imagine letting that go.

So, in the middle of a global pandemic, she bought Symmetrix Salon and rebranded it into the now Tangled Salon. "Buying the salon? That seemed like the smart thing to do," she says with a grin. Six years later, Kim and Fern are still by her side, and the Tangled family has grown to include some new faces, too. Melissa calls them all, "a bunch of great people."

The love of making things beautiful followed Melissa home. Her mother decorated long before it was an art form, going a little over the top even in the modest '80s. Holidays were family-centered, and her mother was always the hostess.

When her mother became sick with cancer, Melissa stepped into that role. After her mother's passing, she kept the table set, hosting every holiday and throwing over-the-top birthday parties for her daughters, Carson and Macy Anne. The traditions her mother started live on in her daughters who have the same creative spark.

Her husband, John, has a front-row seat to it all. He has fond memories of the creative Christmas stockings Melissa filled for the girls, the festive decor that appears for nearly every holiday on the calendar, and most memorably, the family dinners and all of the talk and laughter around the table. Asked whether he enjoys all the celebrating, he admits he has loved every minute of it. "Just don't tell Melissa," he said with a grin. "It might send her on another trip to Hobby Lobby."

Last year proved the creative spark had been passed down. Carson married just before Christmas, weeks after Melissa had begun her own cancer treatment. It

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was a lot for one season, but her girls refused to let their parents' 29th anniversary slip by uncelebrated. With Carson teaming up with her new husband, they built a Jeopardy game about their parents' life together and pitted Mom against Dad. John won. Melissa is quick to note it was only because he remembered what gas cost in 1996. "They're very creative kids," she says, clearly proud.

Asked what gives her the most joy, Melissa pauses. She's never thought of her work as a blessing to others. She simply knows what she's good at and what she enjoys. "I've decided one of my gifts is making things pretty," she says, "whether it's your hair or my fireplace." She loves opening her home and letting people enjoy something they might not have at their own house, or maybe sparking an idea they'd never have tried. She'll admit she enjoys sitting back and admiring it herself. But the real reward is watching someone else light up. "It gives somebody else joy," she says, "and it gives me joy."

From a playhouse in the trees to a salon full of longtime friends to a holiday table her mother first set, Melissa Badger has always done the same thing: taken what's in front of her and made it beautiful, then invited others in to share it. Even in a hard season, she's still setting the table. SC







Creativity runs in the family. Melissa is [pictured] with her mother Johnita Burnett. Johnita's legacy of creativity and making others feel loved and treasured lives on in Melissa.



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