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MidMo Etsy: Maha Libdeh and ReAuthored

by BECKY NEEMS on OCTOBER 30, 2013 12:00 PM · NO COMMENTS

People say there's always something valuable inside a book. Maha Libdeh gives that idea a whole new meaning with her [Etsy](#) shop [ReAuthored](#). Libdeh creates cases for iPad, Nexus, Kindle, and Nook out of discarded books. She's also known for her book plates and picture frames that she sells at [Poppy](#) in downtown Columbia. Libdeh has been mentioned in [Vox](#) before about her [unique business](#), but this week we asked her about her transition to working out of her home and preparing for upcoming craft shows.



Photo by Becky Neems

Vox Talk: When did you get started with *ReAuthored*?

Libdeh: We started it in May of 2011. I've been doing it by myself since this last January 2013. I've been running it out of my home since June of this last year.

VT: How did you come up with the idea of it?

Libdeh: It was really random. JC, who I started the business with, sent me this blog post about a guy who had taken a box cutter and cut pages out of the inside of a book. And it was a book like, "How to Feed Your Man," or something funny like that for a significant other. He put a Kindle inside it and gave it to her as a gift. So she thought she was getting a misogynistic book but really inside was the Kindle. It was really hap-haphazardly done but it was a neat idea. When I saw it I thought "That would be

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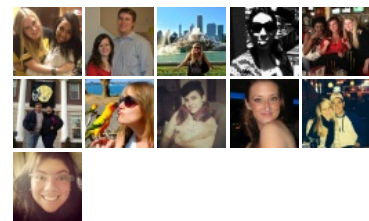
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really neat if you actually could keep a Kindle in a book.” And we just kept talking and talking about it. And it grew into something bigger. We were ready to do something new (career wise). We got the opportunity to leave those jobs and start something. So we did.

VT: How do you find the books or decide what would be a good book to use?

Libdeh: I go to library book sales so when libraries are done with the books, when they don't have any more use for them, they'll sell them at these big book sales. All the proceeds go towards helping fund the library to get new books. I'll normally go the last day or the last two days of the book sale and they are \$3 a box and \$5 a box. I want to have a better system to find books. So tomorrow I'll get up at 8 a.m., I'll drive to Springfield and bring a U-Haul trailer to their big library book sale and get like 500 books. I'll haul them back here and I'll get back here at like midnight. It's going to be a really long day doing that. So what I'm doing now is keeping track of great books. I'm working with the recycling center to find a way to source those books by ISBN (International Standard Book Number) that are discarded.

I use various criteria for actually picking the book. For devices it's size, quality, the type of binding and overall aesthetic. For picture frames, I use pretty much anything as long as the cover is pretty. For book plates I can use anything that has a pretty color. Those books that I can't use for anything else but were getting thrown away nonetheless I use for the book plates. They've become my number one best seller at Poppy downtown.

You can get them one for \$6 two for \$10 or five for \$20.

VT: How do you know what page in the book to press in to create the case?

Libdeh: I almost don't know how to explain it. I think it's based off aesthetic but also the way the book lays. Books with sewn bindings are set up in very specific ways like chapters and the way the folds are. So the way the page lays in its own chapter is how I pick them. Certain books are more fragile based on where they're located. Once you've looked at enough books it makes it easier to see the difference.

VT: How do you bind it? How does the process work?

Libdeh: I use a 20 ton clicker press. It uses force to cut oppose to a sharp edge. I take those dyes, they look like cookie cutters made of steel, and I set them on the book and calibrate it. I press the button, it comes down and pushes that piece down. It makes a perfect clean cut down the book. My son calls the machine Paul and he's convinced that



Photo by Becky Neems

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Paul likes to eat books. He says “I think Paul’s hungry. We need to feed him some books.” After I press them I glue the inside of the pages with a paint brush. I lay dry adhesive on the bottom of it then the fabric is dyed and sent to a machinist to make clean edges. I take the pieces of fabric, adhere it to the bottom and use super glue on the edges. There’s nothing done on the outside. It’s all done within that little cavity.

VT: How many hours you think you spend on it a week?

Libdeh: Oh God, I probably wouldn’t even want to know. I wait tables at [Bleu](#) part time as well for 15-20 hours a week. I work on *ReAuthored* realistically 60-70 hours a week. Especially taking it from two people to one person.

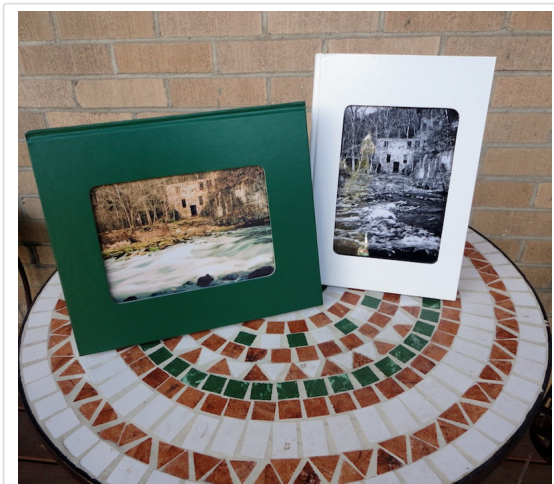


Photo by Becky Neems

VT: Do you do anything different with the business after transitioning to one person?

Libdeh: With the transition I completely redid my business model. So before I custom made all my products, which worked really well but it was really time intensive. Now I’m doing them in large batches where I’ll make 30 iPad 3 cases at one time and list them all on the website, so people can see what they want. Doing that causes this big lag between not doing custom and not having many pre-made cases. So I’m working around the clock to make as many pre-made cases as possible. My part-time employee Anthony does the photos and listings. I normally try to list 30 to 40 a week. I’m making some progress.

VT: What’s the most popular?

Libdeh: My science books are my best sellers. They’re beautiful books. They’re old, really well bound. They’re meant to be medical books. I’ve found a lot of patterns in what types of books are bound in what types of ways. Mass produced books are going to be produced in the cheapest fashion. But then science books, law books, things like that, are really well bound because they’re meant to last and get lots of use.



Photo by Becky Neems

VT: When did you put the cases on Etsy?

Libdeh: Right when we first started so two and a half years now. It's crazy to think it's been that long. I get more traffic on Etsy than my website.

VT: Any events coming up soon?

Libdeh: I'm doing two huge craft shows in December. It's the first time I applied for juried craft shows. One is in Chicago and one in St. Louis. The [Renegade Craft Fair](#) in Chicago is going to be in the Pulaski Park Field House from December 7 and 8. It's going to have 40,000 visitors in two days. The one in St. Louis is [The Rock N Roll Craft Show](#) from November 29 through December 1. It's really exciting but really intimidating at the same time.

VT: Do you feel overwhelmed working on your own and adding the craft shows to the mix?

Libdeh: Not overwhelmed just busy. I've forsaken all free time to get through the holidays. I do over half of my sales during the holidays. I want to be prepared because the past two years I couldn't make them fast enough. For the past two years it's been on the website and Etsy, not even thinking about the craft shows. I enjoy all of it, even on the days I feel overwhelmed. I still enjoy it.

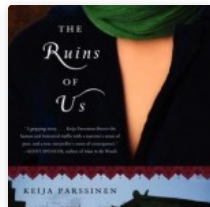
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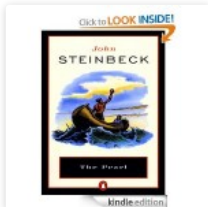
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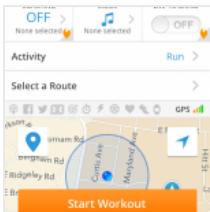
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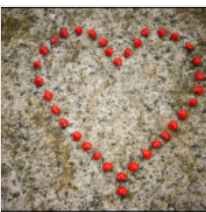
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