

# The What-Knot Shop

Written by Walt Robbins, Jr., ID0001 – 18 Aug 2012

The What-Knot Shop was born in Nov. 1982. Shirley had started taking oil painting classes at the Painted Memories Art Shop in Yorktown, Delaware County, Indiana. The owner, Jackie S. needed some “Rack-Jacks” made for a class project and she asked if I could make them for her. I said “Sure, no problem”. The reality hit me that I had no tools except a radial arm saw that was not very accurate. I made the rack-jacks and proceeded to make other wood plaques as well. It seemed like a neat, easy way to make some money – Lo and behold I had my very own business! I finally had it- I was my own boss!!

Just like a thief, I began to think if it is so easy to make a little money it should be just as easy to make lots of money. We started buying equipment – we started a catalog of our products as well. Keep in mind that Shirley is NOT at all fired up about his whole mess at all! She keeps reminding me to keep it small and in perspective.

We do some craft shows at malls and at the Convention Center in Indianapolis. None of these venues were very profitable for us. I was trying to develop a wholesale business at this time. I lacked a very important element for this however – I was not a salesman. I managed to snag a few customers, but not any big steady ones. In August of 1984, Jackie sold Painted Memories to Marilyn M.

Jackie wanted to continue teaching, but didn't have any place to hold the classes. Shirley and I offered to fix up our attached garage so she could hold classes there. With the help of Jackie, Vickie, Barb, Cliff and Dad, we cleaned, paneled and got the garage ready. We opened in the garage on 4 Sept 1984.

We operated from the garage for about one month and then realized that we were growing and would soon need more space. It was with this bit of reality that we began looking for larger quarters for our budding business. The building located at the southeast corner of 9<sup>th</sup> and Batavia in Muncie was available and was offered to us for \$25.00 per month rent plus utilities. The building was about 2000 sq. Ft. of usable space and had a nice, large showroom, plus 2 classrooms and plenty of storage.

We moved our meager inventory and fixtures into this facility on 3 Oct 1984 and opened for business. We had our home phone number, 765-282-9004, changed to the business and got ourselves a new personal number. This building had been built in the late 1940's and had no insulation and it was a stone building. We soon found out you could not heat the thing and the heat bills (gas) ran around \$250 to \$300 per month.

Business continued to grow slowly, as it should. The classes were filling slowly as well, but we were not getting many sales from drop-in traffic.

We did a lot of remodeling work to the building at our expense. Our Christmas time off work at our regular jobs in 1984 gave us the opportunity to remodel the classrooms, make them larger and more comfortable.

Our Daughter started working for us while we were still in the attached garage at home. She did a fine job and was learning the business along the way.

During the summer of 1985 we obtained some nice used carpet and R. B. Walker helped us lay it in the showroom area (30' x 30'). It took us about 10 or 12 hours to complete mainly due to my inexperience at laying carpet. The completed job, however, looked quite nice considering all the troubles we had with the laying of it.

In July of 1985 we came to a decision concerning the building we were occupying. The landlord would not give us a lease or any type of guarantee that we would have our location for any specific time period. We decided to attempt to buy the building. It contained 3 apartments and another smaller business room that could be rented. We made an offer to purchase to the building owner - it was turned down and a counter offer was made that was totally unacceptable to us. I told them that I didn't HAVE to stay in their building and that I would move.

This was the worst mistake I could have made. This building was in a perfect location for our clientèle and our classes were full and we had begun to have a retail trade as well. My lack of business sense was not in control. My pride had been stung at being turned down by the building owner and unfortunately, I listened to the devil on my shoulder.

I truly think everyone else was happy with what we had – We (I) started looking for other locations to put our little business. Finally after looking at only two other places we found the “Mall Shoppes” located just west of the Muncie Mall on McGalliard Rd. in Muncie. It was a brand new building and we had the opportunity to design the interior space to suit our needs. The rent (Lease) was \$840.00 per month which included all utilities.

A meeting was held with Jackie, Vickie and our daughter to announce our move and to listen to suggestions and ideas. Everyone seemed excited and anxious to move.

It took the owners about a month to get the new room ready for us. We finally were able to move in on 4 Aug 1985 and opened for business on 5 Aug. The traffic increased instantly and so did interest in classes. The sales doubled almost immediately upon moving.

The downfall of the business began almost the instant we moved to the Mall Shoppes. Everything should have been better for everyone, but just the opposite seemed to occur. Every time I tried to change operating procedures it made someone mad. I never really convinced anyone that this was a different ballgame now.

Everything was a problem, everything was a pain in the neck for someone. This was beginning to affect our marriage as well. All we could seem to talk about was the business and its problems, and believe me it had plenty of them now.

Toward the end of October Jackie and Vickie decided that I was the world's biggest tyrant and that I was the root of all the problems. As I look back from several years they were right – I was not cut out to be a business owner and had absolutely no business being in charge of employees.

Shirley's job at Warner Gear was beginning to suffer because of all the problems we were having with the business. We had several LONG talks about the situation and decided that we were going to get rid of the thing one way or another.

We contacted a couple of people who had shown some interest but they no longer were able to pursue it. We next met with a person who dealt in business that did not have property attached to them. We signed a contract with him but it was quite obvious after a month that he was not having any luck so we canceled the contract.

In the end we surrendered the lease in April 1986 and paid the penalty for the early cancellation and moved on. We moved our inventory and supplies out of the Mall Shoppes and back to our garage at home. We tried to operate from the garage again but it was too late and we closed the business for good on 31 Aug 1986.

The Mall Shoppes were destroyed by a huge fire on 21 Oct 1987.