

Passion & Profit

Magazine

Hell on Heels

Burlesque-style dance class promotes confidence and connection

Liquid Gold

Beekeepers give back to nature and community

Wildly Creative

Entrepreneur shares how she chose between starting a business and a college degree

June / July 2024



From the Editor

I didn't find my passion for journalism until I was 22 years old. I was close to completing my sophomore year at BYU-Idaho studying psychology when I realized I wasn't happy and had no idea what I would do with my degree.

I took my first communication class in 2022 and fell in love with writing. I always knew I had a passion for telling stories, and my background in psychology helped me better understand the people behind the story. Two years later, I am preparing to graduate with a degree in communication with an emphasis in journalism and a minor in psychology.

I created Passion & Profit to tell the story of business owners who are a living testament that one can do what they love and make money. I hope their stories are inspiring and can be taken as evidence that "if you build, they will come."

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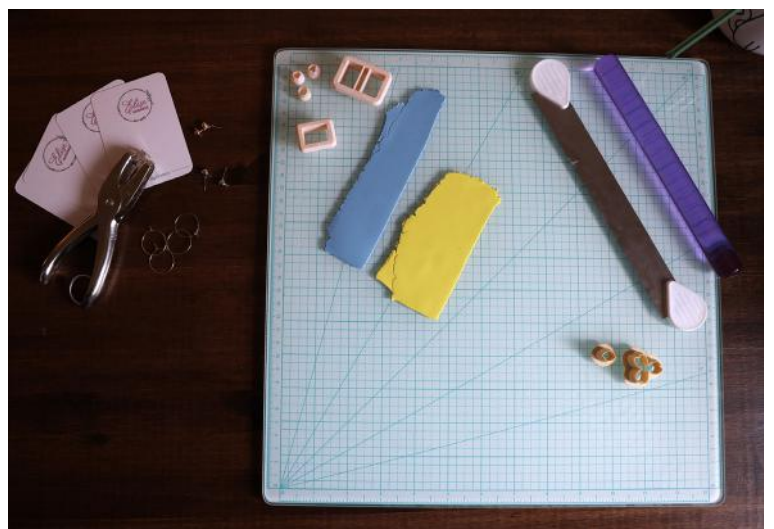
Elise Handmade offers bookish creations

Rachel Elise Emerick is the owner of Elise Handmade, a small business offering book-inspired creations.

It all started her senior year in high school when she took a ceramics class and learned to work with clay. From there, she became inspired to create.

“Those were my favorite classes, and that’s what got me through high school,” Rachel said. “I served a mission, then I came home and I just didn’t know what to do. Then one day I was like, ‘I just want to create again’ because I love

painting, just being creative. I saw someone making earrings out of clay, and I was like, ‘oh, I’ll take a look at it’ and just started playing with it.”



She began by making clay earrings, which were taking TikTok by storm at the time. From there, she began to hone her talents and focused on a comprehensive theme for her business: all things bookish.

She expanded from book-themed clay earrings to flexible clay bookmarks and stickers, all inspired by her favorite book series like “Harry Potter,” “Percy Jackson & the Olympians,” “Lord of the Rings” and more.

Recently, she also started to make and sell sewn book covers to protect books from wear and tear as they are taken on the go.



Looking back, Rachel sees “Harry Potter” as being one of the most influential book series of her childhood. She reminisces on going to the movie premieres for the “Harry Potter” films in high school and even dressing up as Luna Lovegood for the final film premiere of the series.

“I definitely (relate most to) Luna Lovegood, which is so funny because she’s just quirky and I love her,” Rachel said. “She’s so much fun and she’s herself, not gonna conform to anyone... she’s just happy with who she is.”

The Origin Story

Rachel originally came to Rexburg when she started college at BYU-Idaho, but after some trial and error, she realized school wasn’t for her. She got a job working at Walmart in the meantime, which made her realize how much she really loved being her own boss. This led her to create Elise Handmade and try her hand at running her own business rather than finishing a degree.

“School can be for some people, and they do really well with it...I think my brain just doesn’t commute well with the way that our school system is set up,” Rachel said. “I’m not making a ton of money, but I’m making enough to keep us afloat. It’s slowly growing, and it’s made me realize that I can do it, and I don’t need a degree to do it. I just need passion and determination... and sleep.”

After fine-tuning her business and improving her clay creations, Rachel expanded into painting covers of copies of the Book of Mormon, as well as learning a 17th-century art form called fore-edging.



Fore-edging

Fore-edging is the practice of painting the exposed page edges of a closed book with water colors as decoration.

The process involves pressing the book closed to keep the pages tight together and can be a tedious process as the artist has to reapply the water colors multiple times since the paper tends to soak up the colors.



Rachel first learned about fore-edge painting on TikTok from a UK-based artist named Maisie Matilda.

“She realized that fore-edge painting was on the endangered list of art forms,” Rachel said. “So she started just learning how to do it and it got (more popular). I kind of learned from her, and it’s just really cool.”



“I can do it, and I don’t need a degree to do it. I just need passion and determination... and sleep”

Fore-edged books are among the more expensive items offered by Elise Handmade due to the price of the books and the time it takes to complete the artwork. She is continually creating new products and designs for her shop, hoping to share her passion for books with others.

Growing a Business

Because Elise Handmade is run from Rachel’s home, she frequently has a booth at the Rexburg Farmer’s Market to sell products and uses social media to share her creations. Like many things she has learned for her business, Rachel learned how to manage her social media accounts from creators on Instagram and TikTok.

“I want to grow online, and social media has been a difficult thing, but I have slowly been learning how to use it,” Rachel said. “I’m not only the creative behind the business, but I’m also the manager, I’m the content creator. But I’m excited. I hope that I can grow a following.”



Looking forward

Currently, she is working on opening a digital storefront to sell more of her products online, which she plans to launch by the end of the week.

Being a business owner means Rachel wears many hats and has to show up for herself, and her business, every day to see results and growth.



“Start with what you love and work from there.”

In college, she could see her tendency to procrastinate as she turned in assignments late and struggled to maintain her grades. But since opening Elise Handmade, she has learned to manage her time and found the motivation and discipline needed to grow her business.





When she had just begun building Elise Handmade, Rachel noticed that when she tried to create products she thought others would love, they didn't sell as well. After much trial and error, she found that the items that sold best were the ones she put the most love into.

For those with a similar struggle, she advises loving what you do and letting your effort and passion breed the results.

“Just do it,” Rachel said. “Finding what you want to do is so hard ... I'm not perfect, but I love what I do now. Because of that, I feel like I've sold better. Learning what you want to do is a difficult thing, but start with what you love and work from there.”

More information on book-inspired products can be found on the official Elise Handmade Instagram [here](#).

Hand-painted copies of The Book of Mormon and fore-edge painted books can be found on Instagram [here](#).





300 hives and counting: The rise of Bee Box Honey

Beekeepers see the world differently. To most homeowners, dandelions are a nuisance. But to local apiarists and owners of Bee Box Honey Steve and Shannon Spencer, dandelions are their honeybees' first source of nutrition coming out of winter.

Through honey-colored glasses, most beekeepers would agree with Steve and Shannon that bees are complicated and fascinating creatures. Their perfect hexagonal hives are kept extremely clean and hygienic—they even leave the hive to excrete waste. If one of them dies, they will leave the hive so they can die alone outside the hive as a service to the other bees. They are extremely mindful of each other and work with their famous “hive mind” to do what is best for

their community within the hive.

“Their biggest goal is everything for the hive and everything for the species,” Shannon said. “The way that they reproduce ... everything is the benefit of their next generation. They’re not selfish at all.”

Steve and Shannon learned all this and more in the last few years since they began beekeeping. Steve first learned about beekeeping after working in the photography and marketing department with Cox’s Honey. He had a few opportunities to work out in the hives and fell in love with it.

They decided to start Bee Box Honey in April 2021, beginning with 12 hives.

“You know, we felt really inspired to do it,” Steve said. “We’ve done multiple businesses. But over the course of building businesses, you kind of take what you want and you take what you don’t want and you keep trying. And I think we’ve been really successful with this in terms of how fast it’s grown and we’ve gotten better at watching our money



financially, moving your money where you need it, so we get out and hustle.”

To keep costs low, the Spencers repurposed old equipment from other beekeepers rather than buying all new equipment. This year will likely be the first year they buy new equipment to continue building and caring for their various bee yards, but they attribute a lot of their success to this hustle to save on costs early on. Now, they have 320 hives in total between each of their bee yards.

The Buzz-ness

Bee Box Honey offers multiple products straight from the hives such as cosmic creamed honey, honey bliss lip balm and Snake River Valley Raw Honey. Summer is typically their busy season where they sell their products at farmers’ markets, **online** and through a few vendors who sell honey for them.

However, the cold winter months in Idaho can be detrimental for bees, so



Bee Box Honey sends their hives on vacation from February through May. The bees will go to California to pollinate almonds for a season, then make their way to Washington to pollinate apples before making their way home to Idaho.

Spring is generally when beekeepers split their hives by introducing a new queen and starting a new hive. Bee Box buys their queens from Hawaii that come ready to lay eggs so she doesn't have to go out and find new mates before starting the new hive.

Though many may have a fear of bees and their powerful sting, education has been key for the Spencers. As they learned more about the nature and disposition of honeybees, they learned how to replace that fear with fascination.

“One of the biggest things is bees are not aggressive naturally,” Shannon said. “And so if you're seeing a bee and you're in your

yard or garden, they don't want to sting you because you're not in their hive. The biggest thing is they want to defend their hive and their honey. So if you're not in that, they're not going to bother you.”

A Family Affair

Steve and Shannon are parents to four children that they homeschool year-round. They remember that the first year they started beekeeping, they had to get the kids excited to help and work in the bee yards. Especially since, at first, even Steve and Shannon were still figuring out how to bee keep and yield the best results. Now, their kids are comfortable working the bee yards.

“Our youngest boy is the biggest helper out in the field,” Shannon said. “But there's lots of stuff to do. There's prepping of the hives, lots of stuff at home in our little wood shop. And then there's bottling honey, filtering honey ... there's a job for everyone.”



The Spencers have worked in multiple industries, but never expected to get into beekeeping. Yet, it was no surprise for them to have a family business where everyone would pitch in and work together.

“We've always worked as a family, whether it was, you know, camping or cleaning out the garage or whatever, but it's so much better that we're in a business together,” Shannon said.



“We’ve really relied on Heavenly Father’s help with this business,” Steve said. “Not only do we know it’s divinely inspired, but we see manna from heaven, like, the blessings that we’ve been given, as we grow.”

A big part of the joy of beekeeping for Steve and Shannon is the impact they get to have on the community. Not only do their bees produce honey, but they

pollinate dozens of gardens in the area and are critical to sustainable crop production.

“I like the aspect of being an entrepreneur that actually gives back to the earth and gives back to the community,” Steve said. “I love helping people.”

Local farmers and others in agriculture have been a great help to the Spencers as well. At one point, they realized they needed more space for three more bee yards, so Steve made one call to a farmer who was able to connect him to multiple people who helped. Often, Steve and Shannon will give farmers honey at the end of the season in exchange for allowing them to keep bee yards on their land.

If you want to help protect and support the bee population in your area, the Spencers recommend planting pollinating flowers for bees and butterflies.

And, of course, let the dandelions live (at least in the backyard).

Steve and Shannon met at a chiropractic office in Utah where Shannon was working her senior year of high school. While they say they didn’t see a future after the first date, they eventually became inseparable and were married.

Steve eventually got a job opportunity in Texas, so they dropped everything and moved there without knowing anyone but each other. They did the same thing a few years later when they picked up and moved to Rigby, Idaho without so much as a house, knowing they would figure it out along the way.

“We’ve always had really big visions and dreams and we’re not there yet but that’s never stopped,” Steve said. “We are always stretching and always pushing to try to be better and do better.”

Beekeeping has been nothing short of a celestial experience for Steve and Shannon. They feel their faith has played an important role in their success and is what led them to start in the first place.

When I saw an Instagram account promoting a Heels Dance class in Rigby, Idaho, that said “knee pads recommended,” I knew it was an opportunity I couldn’t pass up.

Growing up, I always loved dancing in theory, but I never had taken a class and figured that at 25, it was too late to start. To me, dance classes were for spunky toddlers with tiaras or rail-thin prima ballerinas aspiring to make it big. But after seeing a video of women around my age in the beginner’s class performing a burlesque-style dance, I was decided.

I arrived at a small complex of buildings off a gravel road and entered the dim-lit studio. I was greeted by Kennadee Burt, the instructor, and joined by three other women in the class, all of us from different backgrounds and different ages.

Kennadee was easily identifiable as the leader of the group, not only because of her position in the room, but because of the confidence she seemed to have in her skills and herself.

We began to stretch, sandwiched between two mirrors so no matter where you looked, you could see yourself entirely. The whole class followed as she taught us different moves for a routine. She encouraged us to do what we felt comfortable with and just enjoy ourselves.

Bend. Twist. Sexy walk. Hit the floor and slide. Feel the music. Freestyle. Follow your body. Do what feels right.



Kennadee Burt:

Hell on Heels





By the end of the class I realized why knee pads are encouraged. The light bruising on my inner knees faded after a few days but the feeling of empowerment and support I felt left a lasting impression.

Kennadee's entire approach to teaching Heels Class comes from a desire to help women feel confident and sexy without being crude or disrespectful.

"I just found it was really hard to find that balance of 'I want to feel confident, feel sexy... but I don't want to go out and party,'" Kennadee said. "I don't want to be in those environments that typically build that confidence. So the Heels Classes that I attended helped me build my confidence a lot in a safe environment."

Heels can mean a variety of things, but Kennadee describes her class as being a burlesque or "sexy jazz" style of dance. While burlesque typically emphasizes sensuality and feminine movement, there is no stripping or nudity involved in the classes.

Toddlers & Tap Shoes

Kennadee took her first Heels Class as an adult while she was on a hip-hop dance crew in Rexburg where she attends college at BYU-Idaho, but her journey as a dancer began at just three years old.

Kennadee has always been a ball of energy, hell on wheels ready to attack any challenge that comes her way. While her mom, initially put her in dance classes as a way to

get out her wiggly toddler energy, it quickly became a constant in Kennadee's life.

She lived in 14 different homes before turning 18. But no matter where she lived, she was dancing, whether it was in a studio or in her childhood bedroom. At one point, she was taking so many classes and styles of dance that she would be in the studio for 14 hours a week. Despite her experience in various dance styles, her favorite has always been hip-hop.

At 16, Kennadee dropped all her other dance classes and joined a hip-hop dance crew. Since then, she's been on two other adult hip-hop dance crews in Rexburg and is currently on an adult dance team through Dance Fusion in Rigby. It was through Dance Fusion that Kennadee first took a Heels Class and inspired her to start her own.

"In hip hop, there's so many different types of people, different body sizes, and they all can dance, they all can do hip hop... and they're all amazing at it. If you look at hip hop dancers across the world, there's no one mold. I've seen plus size dancers do the exact same thing as skinny ballerinas that decide to do hip hop. So really that's what made me realize that what's beautiful about it is them expressing themselves."

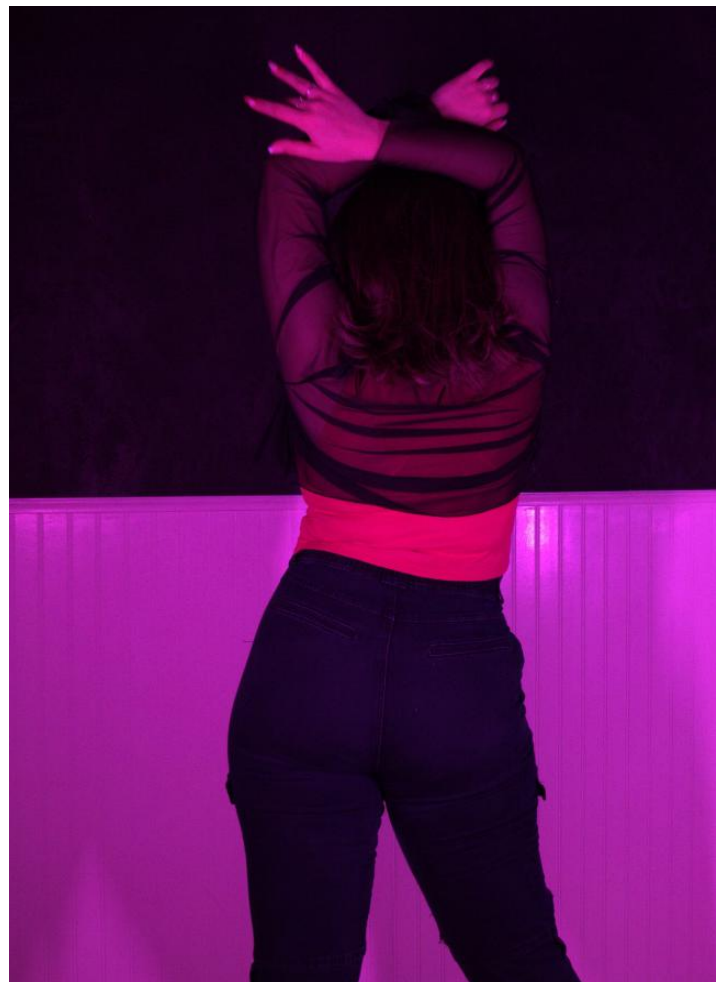
While Kennadee is a dancer, she is also a student, wife and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She served a full-time proselyting mission in West Texas from 2020 to 2021 and got mar-

ried to her husband, Adam, last year.

Faith & Feeling

While the two may not seem to mix, Kennadee's faith plays an important role in dance and the purpose of her Heels Class.

"One thing that I believe very strongly is that we're judged not only on our actions, but our intentions and our thoughts as well," Kennadee said. "And I think the intention in taking this class is a big thing. My intention in teaching this class is to help build self confidence in who we are and that we are deep down beautiful... We were given our bodies, they're a gift, and it's okay to feel good about yourself and with your spouse."



While her class isn't just for Christian women, Kennadee wants to create a safe space for those who may still be learning to own their sensuality and become comfortable in their bodies.

Music & Motivation

Part of creating that safe space includes being mindful in the way she dresses and what music she chooses for the class, which has proved more difficult than she thought.

“Choosing the music is so hard for me... because I don't want to pick music that pushes a crude message,” Kennadee said. “The message that I'm trying to portray is that... you're special. You can feel sexy in yourself. It's a private thing, and if you choose to share it with someone, with them. So I try to pick music that's more about a connection and sensuality than sexuality.” There is no shortage of songs about love

and sensuality, but Kennadee came to realize that most “love” songs that would be used for Heels dance are actually more about sexual gratification than genuine connection.

She noticed that even songs meant to empower women seemed to be more about encouraging putting yourself first, even at the expense of

“Your self-confidence and believing that you are a daughter of God is sacred.”

others, or to use sexuality as a tool for power.

“(Sexual relationships) have been twisted in such a bad way,” Kennadee said. “To the point where now people either go to one extreme or the other. They say either everything about it is completely bad or everything about it is fine and okay... The whole idea is that it's sacred, your self-confidence and believing that you are a daughter of God is sacred.”

For those who want to discover themselves and find a sacred confidence in their body,



Kennadee emphasizes the importance of doing so in a safe space and in a way that respects your identity as a daughter of God.

“The reality is people nowadays have been losing their confidence in who they are, and with the messages that are all around them, they don’t know what is appropriate and what’s too far,” Kennadee said. “So I’m trying to teach it’s okay to feel confident yourself. It’s okay to dance. It’s okay to know your body, but it if you don’t want to share it, that also is okay.”

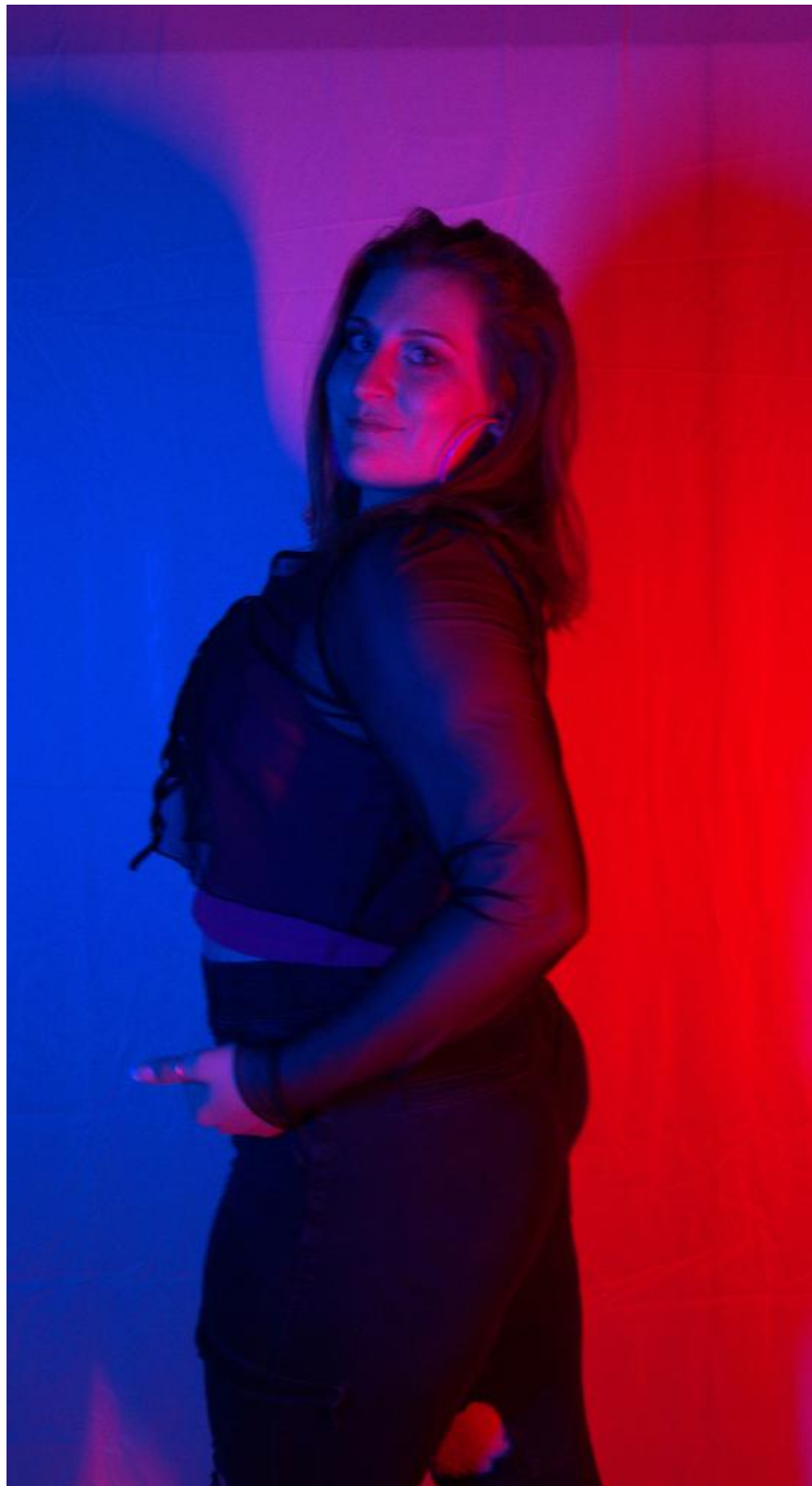
Strength & Stilettos

Kennadee is in her junior year at BYU-I majoring in history education with a minor in government education, with hopes to become a history teacher when she completes her bachelor’s degree.

While she may not always teach dance, she hopes it will always be a part of her life.

If she had to give one piece of advice to new dancers it’s this:

“Nobody’s looking at you. Nobody. The reality is, people who have done it forever never judge new people... they’ll (likely) think, ‘Wow, that’s awesome that they’re starting at that age, because I know how hard that is because I was there.’”



For more information about Kennadee’s Heels Classes, visit her Instagram [here](#).

Wonderful Workshop brings magic to Main Street



Up the creaking stairs of a historic building on Main Street rests the Wonderful Workshop, a business transformed into a Harry Potter-inspired workshop that offers wands, potions and magical merchandise.

Upon entering the second-floor office space, aspiring wizards may feel as if they have stepped straight into Diagon Alley. The shop is decorated with a variety of curated pieces such as a dragon head sculpture, the legendary Hogwarts sorting hat and a mini-fridge filled with glassy bottles of butterbeer.

Wanderful Workshop debuted earlier this year as the town's first and only wand-making workshop.

Jared Gustin, owner and creator of Wanderful Workshop, says the inspiration for the business came from time spent with his five children.

Wizards & Warlocks

"Me and my kids are huge fantasy fans," Gustin said. "Lord of the Rings, the Hobbit, Harry Potter. I have been making wands with my kids for years now. We just make them ourselves and we thought it was pretty fun, and we noticed that a lot of other people enjoy it too. So I thought it'd be fun to kind of bring a magical shop to Rexburg."

Customers can choose between creating their own magical potion or a customized wand. It costs \$7 to make a potion or \$25 to make a wand.



The workshop offers hardwood wands, hand crafted by Gustin, with the choice of a custom handle and magical core to be sealed inside the hollowed wand.

True to the Harry Potter world of wizardry, each magical core is a string related to qualities of the wand and the wizard. Options include werewolf, fairy, unicorn, dragon, phoenix and goblin core strings.

The lore behind the wand core from Harry Potter describes three Supreme Cores: Unicorn hair, dragon heartstring and phoenix feather. According to J.K. Rowling, unicorn hair wands are the most faithful to their owner and produce the most consistent magic to the wizard. Dragon heartstring wands provide the most power but are considered temperamental and often associated with the Dark Arts. Phoenix feather wands are the rarest but are capable of the greatest range of magic.



The Magical Menagerie

After the wand has been glued together, patrons sit to paint their wand however they like. Wands can also be decorated with copper or silver wire, leather or gemstones.

The workshop also offers potion making, where patrons can choose a potion bottle and use special vials of sparkling metallic paints and colors to create a custom concoction. They can then name their potion using a quill and ink to write on a special tag to attach to the bottle.

In addition to crafts, Wanderful Workshop sells a variety of medieval and wizard-themed goods such as leather bound journals, quill and ink sets, dice for role playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons, and more.



Gustin originally moved to Idaho after his service in the military because he felt it was a better place to raise his children. A true Gryffindor, Gustin's passion for the whimsical allowed him to see an opportunity to appeal to fellow fantasy fans when he moved to the area.

“For a couple years now,” Gustin said, “I’ve wanted to create a shop like this because I used to live in Twin Falls, and I’d be

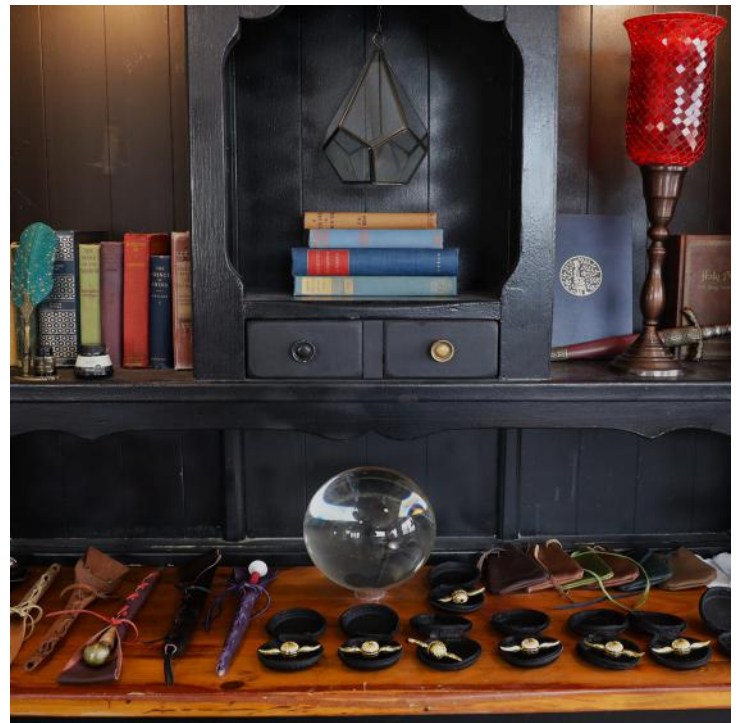


driving around with my kids, and I would always say, ‘Wouldn’t it be fun if we can go to a shop and just make wands and make potions and stuff like that?’ They always thought it’d be so fun.”

Recently, Wanderful Workshop expanded its offerings to include medieval-style weapons in addition to the potions and wands.

“(Now, we are) carrying more swords and blades and kind of fantasy weapons and stuff,” Gustin said. “Just because I always loved that when I was a kid, I’d gone to a shop like that, and they’re rare.”

Wanderful Workshop is located at 18 E Main Street in Rexburg next to the Family Crisis Center. It is colocated with other business offices including Kapex Cleaning.



Further updates and information about the workshop can be found on their **Instagram** or **Facebook**.



From biomedical science to sci-fi author's journey to happiness



“Kindness is not weakness.”

If indie author Kaylin Hughes could describe the main character of her novel *Pearl Cage* with anything it would be this.

“*Pearl Cage*” is book one in “Swept,” a dystopian science fiction series. “*Veiled Fortress*” is book two in the series, which will eventually include a third book and a novella before it is completed.

“My main character (Meena) grows up in a really sheltered community her whole life and is told that humans are really weak and can’t survive on their own outside the

community,” Kaylin said. “But she ends up getting a virus that strengthens her body and sharpens her senses, which is obviously a threat to what their whole community is built on. So leadership keeps it a secret and kicks her out. While she’s building her new life and figuring out all these new things that she can do, she ends up part of a rebellion that she didn’t know was happening.”

Kaylin Hughes could describe herself in a variety of ways: a mom, wife, college graduate, a creative. But she added “author” to her belt in high school when she began writing the “Swept” series. She always loved writing and building the fantasy world where the books take place, but it was only

Science fiction: An indie

when her Uncle Webb — to whom Pearl Cage is dedicated — read her book and encouraged her to look into publishing that she felt like the series could go somewhere.

Fantasy & Reality

Kaylin recently graduated from BYU-Idaho with a bachelor's degree in biomedical science in April. While she has always loved writing, she graduated with aspirations to become a physician's assistant to make a more steady income to support her family while continuing to write in her free time.

"I've known I always wanted to write, but I also know that being able to support myself on it is probably very unlikely," Kaylin said. "My husband and I used to think that we couldn't have kids, so one of us needed to find a way to make enough money to pay for fertility and adoption. So the plan was to be a PA. I got my degree in biomedical science, but we ended up being able to have our daughter and so I don't need that anymore."

Kaylin now stays home with her two-year-old daughter full-time and continues to write in her free time. She self-published "Pearl Cage" on Amazon in October 2022 and "Veiled Fortress" in September 2023. She plans to release the third "Swept" book by the end of this year and eventually will release a novella before completing the "Swept" series.

While many may think the real difficulty would be in writing and publishing her first two novels, Kaylin now faces a new set of struggles while trying to find a following for her series. She has taken the route many indie authors seem to take by cultivating her brand on social media. "Bookstagram" and "Booktok" are the sides of Instagram or TikTok where many bibliophiles connect to share book reviews and recommendations.

"I don't have a publisher, and I also don't have the money to have Amazon advertise for me, so I'm doing a lot of things myself," Hughes said. "I've got a couple people on Instagram that do books that read and review mine."

She also currently sells her books at the Rexburg Farmer's Market where she can connect with members of the community in person to promote her series. At the market, patrons can purchase a hardcover book directly from the author for \$15.



Supporting the Cause

According to Kaylin, one of the best ways one can support small authors is to get the word out and leave reviews about the books so others can learn about them.

“It just makes a huge difference,” Hughes said.

But she doesn't plan to stop there. After completing the “Swept” series, Kaylin will be moving on to writing an urban “romantasy” standalone series about two best friends that interweaves romance and fantasy themes. The books in this series can be read in any order since the storylines in each novel aren't explicitly connected other than including the same characters.

While Kaylin includes romantic themes in many of her books, she sets herself apart from many modern romance authors by not including any sexual scenes or “spice,”

a style known as a “closed-door romance” in the Booktok community.

“With a romance, I love the kicking your feet and giggling parts,” Kaylin said. “So that's what I would prefer to focus on ... there's kind of this gap in the market for people like me who don't want smut and stuff like that in their books. So if someone's looking for that, my books are probably more for them.”

Crafting the Protagonist

Most authors likely see bits of themselves in the protagonists of their stories, and Meena is no exception.

Kaylin wrote Meena as a character that reflected aspects of herself and other inspiring women in her life, even though she doesn't meet the typical status quo for the main character of many books in the genre right now. Rather than being a callous





young woman, hardened by the difficulty of her circumstances, Meena is soft and kind, but strong. “Kindness is not weakness” is the tagline on the back cover of “Pearl Cage,” something Kaylin learned from her mom that inspired the strength and caring in Meena.

Of everything she has learned since becoming an indie author, Kaylin’s passion for doing what she loves is most evident.

“I very much believe that life is to be enjoyed,” Kaylin said. “And if you’re not enjoying your life, then you’re just living to exist... You need to be happy, and if you’re not happy doing what you’re doing, find what can make you happy.”

While Kaylin has the potential to pursue further schooling that supports her biomedical science degree, she hopes to continue writing no matter what her day job is. She finds it unlikely that she will ever become a full-time author, but that is just fine with her.

“If it did get to the point where I could make it a full-time job to support my family, that would be incredible. But I’m also very accepting of that’s probably not going to happen, and I love it enough that I’m just going to do it because I love it.”

Kaylin’s books are currently available on Amazon [here](#). More updates on her series can be found on her Instagram or TikTok.

An excerpt from...

“Pearl Cage” by Kaylin Hughes

I run quietly, careful to keep the baby secure and safe. When we round the last corner to the commotion on my old street, the noise wakes the infant in my arms, and he cries out. But I barely notice when I make sense of the scene in front of me. Guardians have Pod citizens lined up on one side and posters stand on the other. The posters have their hands up, trying to calm the Guardians, but the Guardians are barking out crazy orders and waving their weapons at the citizens.

“Can’t have more and must be eliminated,” rise above the jungles of noise.

I notice Roana among the citizens, and from there I find the pattern. Anyone remotely connected to a defector. Friends, teachers, all of them innocent, except for the crime of knowing the wrong person.

One Guardian barks an order, loudly, and everyone stops moving and is silent. It’s as if everyone took a collective breath. Holding that breath, we watch as the last of the posters that broke through the Guardian barrier in the front gate skid to a halt as they round the street corner at the sight.

Eyes wide, they raise their hands in defense not of themselves, but of the captive Pod citizens. The officer who silenced everyone raises two fingers and another raises their gun, pointed at one citizen at random. Maynie, my friend, is the one he’s focused on.

I see the almost imperceptible shift of muscles to drop his hand and, like a snapping rubber band, I shoot forward. I don’t know how I move so quickly. I throw myself in front of Maynie with my back to the Guardian. I place the baby quickly in her arms. Her terrified chocolate eyes are the last thing I see before I squeeze mine shut.

There’s no pain like a bullet tearing your flesh open. No words for the excruciating sensation, and I had it all over my back. They just keep coming. My jaw clenches with all my effort to stay standing in shielding my dear friend and the baby. My ears feel clogged with cotton and my vision is already spotting when Jax rushes to my side, his arms form a cradle before my body can collapse to the ground.