

Missing Monsters

One local woman's attempt to reconnect people with their lost, missing monsters

I had the chance to meet Missing Monsters creator Deanna Miller and chat with her about her unique crafty business. From her studio located in a sun room off the side of her bedroom, Deanna sits at her sewing machine with fleece in one hand and scissors in the other to create monsters so cute you wouldn't mind finding them under your bed. After talking for a few minutes I realize that the spunky, happy looking monsters emanate their creator's spirit, and the business model of connecting people to their lost monsters captures Deanna's desire to help others.

Missing Monsters has become one of my favorite crafty businesses in town. Not only can you get a one-of-a-kind, made-just-for-you creation, but you can have some fun while doing it. Anyone can “report” a missing monster by giving Deanna a complete physical description of their monster, and she will “find” the monster and send it to your home. Monsters are also available for adoption on Deanna's Etsy shop (http://www.etsy.com/shop.php?user_id=5108216) and at local Monster Shelters (http://www.missingmonsters.com/site/?page_id=6) like Chop Suey and Sticky ToGoGo.

Owner/Crafter: Deanna Miller

Website: www.missingmonsters.com

Trade: Crafty business helping people find their lost monsters; also calls it soft sculpture

Established: November, 2006

Other DIY affiliations: Deanna has been part of the Richmond Craft Mafia (<http://richmondcraftmafia.com/>) since 2007

How did Missing Monsters start?

The idea for Missing Monsters was really formed by the stylists that I worked with at Vapor Salon in the Fan. I showed them the monsters I had made for my niece & nephew, and they encouraged me to pursue selling them. They were my cheerleaders from the get go, from helping me create the business model to keeping monsters at their stations and spreading the word by talking to all their customers about Missing Monsters. Actually, the very first monster I sold was to the owner of that salon!

Have you always been crafty?

I was kinda punk in high school, which means that like a lot of other parents of punk kids, my mom had some frustrating moments when I'd alter the clothes she just bought me. I also made a lot of my own skirts back then, but I never learned how to read a pattern. Then I went on to art school and got a degree, but still never learned how to read a sewing pattern.

What's the best thing about running your own business?

Getting to plan my day. I don't really sleep in – actually a lot of people would be shocked to know how early I get up to start making monsters. But, I love the freedom to go to the gym in the middle of the day, or to meet a friend for lunch. Or to be able to watch Regis & Kelly during the day. I love them!

On the flip side, what's the worst thing about running your own business?

There are days when I'm trapped in my studio and my only contact is with monsters. I love having people around while I'm working, just to keep me company, otherwise I get a little lonely. My roommate will agree that some days I'm like a little puppy that's been waiting for her by the door, and as soon as she walks in I start talking her ear off! My long term goal is to grow Missing Monsters to where I can have a few people working alongside me. I would love to have it be just like Ace of Cakes – relaxed and fun, while getting to be creative with other people

What has been your most bizarre encounter with a customer?

There was this guy in NY who wanted to get a special monster made for his ex-girlfriend. He specifically asked for a cold-black-icicle-heart monster, but that is how she had described his heart! At first I didn't know what I should do, but I made it and sent it to her letting her know that this was made for her. I dunno, I still kinda hope that maybe it showed a different side of him to her and maybe they got back together over it. But, that was the strangest request. I have gotten a few more people wanting monsters made for the ex's and it always feels weird to be the middle man.

Most rewarding encounter with a customer?

A little girl named Arden from Brooklyn, she wrote me the best thank you note ever! She told me that her monster's name is Debbie, and she told me that if she hadn't used me to find her monster, then she has no idea what company would have helped her! It was the sweetest note that just made me feel really good about all of this.

Share with me something you enjoy about making the monsters.

I am really happy that I've figured out a process to make sure that I don't waste any fleece. I buy a lot of fleece to make the monsters and I would hate to throw any of it out. I use as much of the fleece as I can by using the smallest pieces for monster clothing, and then any scraps left I give to my roommate to use with her elementary school art students.

Got any future projects in mind for Missing Monsters?

Kinda...I've got a friend who does silk screening and we might work together to do something really fun. I'm imagining silkscreening an outline of a monster onto a t-shirt so that people can color in their own monsters.

If you had to give up Missing Monsters tomorrow, what you miss the most?

Definitely my customer. I get really connected to them while making their monsters. I absolutely love getting to meet them and hear them talk about their monster. Plus, their reaction to my work has made me much more confident in my art skills.

Any advice for someone wanting to be more crafty or creative?

Just start making stuff. No matter where you start, it will evolve. It's like I tell my art students, you can figure out where its going after you get started.