

BREAKING THE MOLD

A few years ago, a series of tragedies struck Maja Arnold and her family, but what she chose to do with the pain is nothing short of beautiful.

Like all of Maja Arnold's pieces of jewelry, the first necklace she designed was the product of a deeply personal story.

It started about seven years ago when Arnold became pregnant with twins. After a complicated pregnancy that left her bedridden for a month, Arnold had the twins (a girl, Isabella, and a boy, Lukas). The twins, weighing only two pounds each, spent two months in incubators gaining strength before Arnold was able to bring them home. However, two weeks after, Arnold and her husband lost Isabella to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). "The whole process was so difficult for me," Arnold says.

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PHOTOGRAPHY by MICHAEL MATTI



AFTER grieving the loss, two years later, Arnold started trying again for another child. “I prayed to God to give me a girl; I needed my girl back. And I got pregnant. God gave me back my girl, and I named her Ella,” Arnold says. However, the family’s trials weren’t over. Just one year after Ella’s birth, Arnold noticed there was something wrong with Lukas.

“Lukas was diagnosed with stage-three cancer. He had a kidney tumor. It was so scary. One day to the other, he was perfect one day, and then I was changing his diaper and noticed a bump on his belly,” Arnold says. “And I thought, oh my God, my other twin is going to die.” Arnold quickly took her son to Seattle’s Children Hospital where he endured surgeries, chemotherapy and radiation.

Lukas is now seven and a half years old, and he has been healthy for almost four years, much in part to Arnold’s passion for creating a healthy home and lifestyle for her children. But Arnold still wears the marks of all her struggles—literally.

Arnold, now 41, has been in the fashion industry for 20 years, holds a degree in typography and has always had a passion for drawing. So when tragedy struck, she fell back on those things to get her through the toughest times. After going through the loss and sickness of her children, she found herself sketching designs using all three of the children’s initials. “It’s meditation and healing,” Arnold says. “That’s how I heal—with art.”

Arnold says she then took the hand-drawn design of the initials, had it cast in silver and wore the necklace close to her heart as way to keep all her children with her. Pretty soon, people took notice of the piece.

“People were asking me about it, and they started talking to me about the initials they would use. And I realized we all have a story. I could tell that just talking to me about their loved ones was a healing process,” Arnold says. “One woman wanted me to use her mom’s jewelry, and we made a unique symbol of her family and her child using her mom’s diamond. Another wanted her husband’s initials. It’s inspirational to me because it’s about the story and what it means to people.”

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AND this is exactly what makes Arnold's jewelry so special. There are no preset casts, no standard designs. She creates each piece using inspiration from the person and his or her unique story and initials. "Each one is different because we are all different," she says.

The other thing that sets her designs apart is the style. These are not your mother's monogrammed necklaces. "I'm really into anything that's different, not average," she says. "I like very modern, sleek clean-cut lines. I'm just not traditional in any way, and when you start looking at spiritual jewelry, it's usually very old school. I wanted to bring a young, fun and chic look to it."

Now that everyone is healthy in the household, Arnold is able to focus on her jewelry, something she believes she was born to do. "Professionally, for the first time in my life, I'm doing what I really want to do," she says. "It's like watering a flower. It means that much to me."

For those interested in creating a one-of-a-kind necklace, the process takes about three weeks, and the standard piece comes with two design options, a chain and the final monogrammed piece. Also, clients have life-long rights to the final design and can use it in other ways if they like. While the price depends on the type of metal, pieces start around \$350.

"For me, ultimately spirituality is my business. That's my escape." ■

➤ For more information about Arnold and her work, please visit majaarnolddesign.com.