

From Sailing Seas to a Yellow Llama

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By Gail Pinckney, in her own words:

“T his past December completes our family’s fifth year in Georgia. It has been a transition not without adjustments as we’ve settled into our new ‘southern way’ of life. We moved to Smoke Rise/Tucker from Jericho Gardens, New York, a north shore Long Island community, about twenty minutes east of Manhattan’s midtown tunnel. We’ve certainly slowed down a bit from our fast pace New York existence. My husband and I moved here with our daughter Chase, 14, currently a student at Tucker High and son Devan, 21, attending Georgia State University.

Recently we opened a new shop on Hugh Howell Road right next to Publix. It is called Yellow Llama and I would like to tell you what we do there. But, I am writing this article for *Up Close & Personal Magazine* and I probably should tell you some ‘up close & personal’ things about our family first and what led us to open a shop called, of all things, Yellow Llama.

In New York, I worked with Jamaica Hospital, Flushing Medical Center and Brookdale Hospital within their Public Affairs department, where I was principally responsible for their graphics and visual marketing initiatives. I’ve been a formally trained and practicing graphic designer for over twenty one years. I’ve worked in senior role positions with companies like Gitano, Ladies Home Journal and American Lawyer Magazine.

My husband, Milo owned a medical management company in New York called Hinsdale Medical Management (HMM). He started the company in 1993, the year we married. We actually took a month off, which we spent sailing the U.S. northeast coast aboard our sailing sloop Lifestyle. As we touched upon shore each evening, Milo was immediately on the phone calling instructions into his office. I must say it was an interesting experience starting a company while we were shipboard on our honeymoon. Our life together began on an

adventure and each year together has presented another. Notwithstanding the business interruptions, it was some of the best sailing we had ever experienced. In that month aboard Lifestyle we only had one day of rain. We sailed to Mystic, Ct, Martha's Vineyard, Newport, Nantucket and Block Island. Milo was an avid sailor for many years and was a blue water experienced yachtsman, having sailed in the MORC and SORC yachting circuits since childhood. It was pretty amusing when we first met, because growing up in the Bronx, my only prior exposure to boats was the Staten Island Ferry. I learned so much about the man I had married and the life in store for us on that trip. Together we were going to make a difference in our lives and hopefully others. My husband introduced me to a new way of thinking, one that embraced the values of public service, creative contribution to the overall community good and a balance of personal pursuit of capitalist achievement. What an interesting recipe for our future.

While Milo presided over Hinsdale Medical Management, he worked with Andrew Cuomo's H.E.L.P organization, a non-profit company that provided affordable housing, developmental support and life improving opportunities for the previously homeless and economically challenged. He and his partners introduced a physician-vested private practice medicine business model to communities that had previously only had access to Medicaid clinics. The company had notable accomplishments in the northeast healthcare arena during the ten years of his ownership. Milo and his partners decided to sell HMM in 2003 and he wrongly thought he would go into semi-retirement. Not more than six months later he was approached by GMC Group, an Atlanta based company that operated a medical education finishing program that assisted foreign trained medical students in meeting the clinical requirements necessary for admission to U.S. Residency programs. He was excited that he had found a company that was addressing the U.S. physician shortage, a problem that was threatening the future quality of healthcare in America. The business had all the elements that stimulated his business creativity and interest.

1. A problem that needed to be addressed.
2. A community benefit.
3. A personal challenge.

They needed a business partner in order to refine the business model and Milo needed to get out of the house and back into the 'game', as he calls it. Shortly after a few meeting trips, Milo became a partner and we were looking for houses in Atlanta. It wasn't long thereafter that, he had improved operations, reduced overhead and increased profitability of the company. During our first year in Atlanta he became one of six owners of Xavier University School of Medicine in Aruba.

Over the years we've made a conscientious effort to set active examples of personal accountability and community responsibility to our children. We, with them at our side, have always been involved in to a displaced family. The problem was, the roads were closed and there was no way to get a family to the house. That was it for my husband; the challenge was on. Milo is an accomplished pilot and serial aircraft owner. Our family plane has the ability of carrying 9 people. It wasn't long before the discussion of recruiting other pilots to rescue families that were stuck in Louisiana and the gulf, that a plan was in execution. It literally took a day when I wrote press releases to a number of online aviation magazines and a few of the media outlets putting a request for pilots and planes. I received a call from the editor at AVWEB, an online general aviation magazine. The editor queried me whether I actually wanted to put my home phone number on a press release. I told him that it was fine and 7 a.m. the next morning the phone was ringing off the hook. Next thing I knew we were leading an ad hoc armada of pilots and planes from across the country, who like us, were volunteering their services and their airplanes to evacuate families from the impact zone. Volunteers came from all over GA, TX, NY, VA, NJ, and as far as California and Alaska—pilots who all wanted and were ready to help. In less than two days we had close to 170 pilots and aircraft. A project manager from the local IBM office showed up and set up a call center—she, supported by other volunteers, accumulated donated homes throughout GA and FL with rooms for Katrina survivors and supplies donated from companies and people alike.

We called our ad hoc group operation 'Operation Brother's Keeper'—we went from our living room in Smoke Rise to Epps Aviation, which donated one of their conference rooms for our operation base. We had flights going in and out of Louisiana. We had over 700 flights transporting people to their families and transporting supplies. There were people from all walks of life that helped with this operation—it was amazing how, as a diverse group of American people, we came together for the common good. It was truly inspiring and reminded me why we are so proud to be Americans. Our whole family was involved. Chase who was ten at the time made name tags for everyone; Devan was involved with supplies and loading aircraft; I designed a quick website and made updates as additional mission needs presented. Pilots were told to monitor the site in order to find out if they were flying the next day or if they had a special mission, like a pilot needed to fly from LA to VA. Milo flew 58 hours worth of missions personally in our plane.

It was an amazing operation that we could not have done successfully if it wasn't for the generous participation of so many selfless people throughout the U.S.

In 2008, Milo sold his business interest in GMC Group's Atlanta program and Xavier University School of Medicine in Aruba. We actually thought we might move to Virginia in order to pursue a real estate project there, but unfortunately the U.S. economy took a turn for the worse and it was definitely not a time to be involved in retail real estate development.

But what should we do with our new-found freedom from past ventures and adventures? That brings us back to our new shop, Yellow Llama—how and why we started it—and *what exactly It is!*

This brings us back 3 years when we met Tucker photographer John Slemm. John is an amazing artist who photographed our family. John is also an avid aviation photographer and we've often spoke with him about producing his images on t-shirts and other products. As a result of those initial discussions we began researching what was needed to make this possible.

Throughout our twenty years together Milo and I have enjoyed working on many projects. We have always wanted to be involved in a project that makes a difference in the way creative people share their artistic work product. Artists are very different than business people. Their work lives, it has it's own personalities and emotional connections to it's artist creators. Artists have always had a very difficult time transitioning their work from expression to product in the hands of the public. As an artist myself I have first hand experience with this problem, personally!

This dilemma was the impetus behind our current endeavor. We thought about how so many artists simply don't have the proper exposure and can't afford to promote or advertise their creative work product. We decided to address the problem. We looked for different printing processes—technology that would provide an alternative to conventional approaches, and we wanted innovative, green technology that would respect our environment.

One answer to our problem was a very specialized digital-direct-to-garment printing system. This new technology allows artists like John Slemm to print their artwork on t-shirts, and other materials at a low cost and in small to medium quantities (we will even print *one* shirt!). Our new machine, which we keep right by the counter so everyone can see and experience it, looks like one big ink jet printer, except it has some very attractive attributes. It doesn't waste ink to be discharged into the environment. When printing shirts, the dyes are absorbed into the fibers of the garment, and when worn the garments feels soft—a big improvement over screen-printed shirts where the dried ink often feels harsh and uncomfortable.

People often ask me, how did you come up with the name “Yellow Llama”. We wanted to come up with a unique name and icon. Coming from the east, we would always go to “Black Dog” a bakery in Martha's Vineyard. This bakery developed the “Black Dog” into a brand name which has expanded into multiple retail shops with a line of products with this iconic black dog. You can see people from Georgia, California and as far as the Carribean with Black Dog apparel. We wanted to replicate this with our Yellow Llama. The Llama considered an odd quirky looking animal but yet lovable brings a smile on everyone's face. What better animal to be representative of our new venture. Milo and I took our years of experience in business development, retail, graphics and marketing and came up with Yellow Llama business model.

Our cost-conscious customers can be almost anyone—a person who wants single shirt or other garment that says something catchy or funny or displays a photo or illustration, for themselves, or as a gift—a sports team which wants really cool uniforms—a business looking for sharp apparel—a membership club that wants to create group affinity—an artist/illustrator looking for new media—a student or teacher looking to promote ideas—a family preparing for a reunion or celebration—the possibilities are endless, and, most of all, creative and fun because it is all can be done right before your eyes! We even have a t-shirt birthday party room where kids have a ball.

We've created an online artist community that allows artists to sell their items on apparel. Each month, there is a featured artist in the store. We've also worked with local business owners for their business needs, but most importantly we've worked with our local Tucker schools. The other part of this business, which I must admit is just simply fun, are the t-shirt birthday parties we initiated. We're hoping along with the store we can work to assist other artists in exposing their art and assist in increasing their sales.

Tucker has been a place where there has always been a subtle, artsy feel about it. It's home, to the Tucker Arts Guild, the Stage Door, Aldos and a plethora of great community bistros and small businesses. We decided to invest in our local community and opened our business, Yellow Llama, here in Tucker. Ga. We've been welcomed with warm and open arms from the local residents and patrons in Tucker. We can now call Georgia home.”

© John Slemm

“ Our life together began on an adventure and each year together has presented another.”

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Our wedding day.

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*FROM SAILING SEAS TO A YELLOW LLAMA
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*“Operation Brother’s Keeper” was what we called our Hurricane Katrina relief operation.
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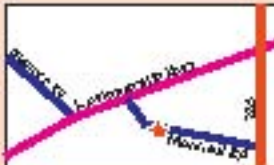
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on a press release. I told him that it was fine and 7 a.m. the next morning the phone was ringing off the hook. Next thing I knew we were leading an ad hoc armada of pilots and planes from across the country, who like us, were volunteering their services and their airplanes to evacuate families from the impact zone. Volunteers came from all over GA, TX, NY, VA, NJ, and as far as California and Alaska—pilots who all wanted and were ready to help. In less than two days we had close to 170 pilots and aircraft. A project manager from the local IBM office showed up and set up a call center—she, supported by other volunteers,

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Milo and me aboard Lifestyle.

FROM SAILING SEAS TO A YELLOW LLAMA (continued from page 11)
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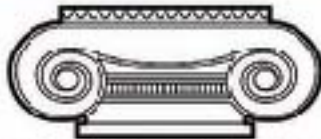
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FROM
SAILING SEAS TO A YELLOW LLAMA (continued from page 12)

The t-shirt design process begins with a graphic design, then the garment set-up and printing...voila!
next page

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