



## THE CAST

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STORY BY TRACE SHELTON

# CHARACTERS

THE  
BIG  
STORY

**IN A PERFORMANCE**, a “character” is a part played by the person inhabiting the role. But outside the theater, “character” generally refers to the moral fiber of a person — specifically, the qualities of honesty, courage and integrity. On life’s stage, each of us defines ourselves by our actions while leaving it to others to judge our “character.”

When we set out to write this article — a sequel to one that appeared in the December 2009 issue of **INSTORE** — our goal was to uncover 10 more extraordinary jewelry retailers to profile. What we found was a group of people who’ve not only made a name for themselves by breaking from the norm, but who give meaning to the word “character” by having the courage and integrity to follow their hearts.

What role do you play in life? We hope you’ll draw inspiration and maybe even a sense of camaraderie from this year’s crop of characters.



# THE COWGIRL

KICKING DIRT? THAT CAME EASY.  
A LOVE OF JEWELRY? THAT TOOK A WHILE.

**THERE** are many things in life that will catch your eye ... for me, it's horses and diamonds.

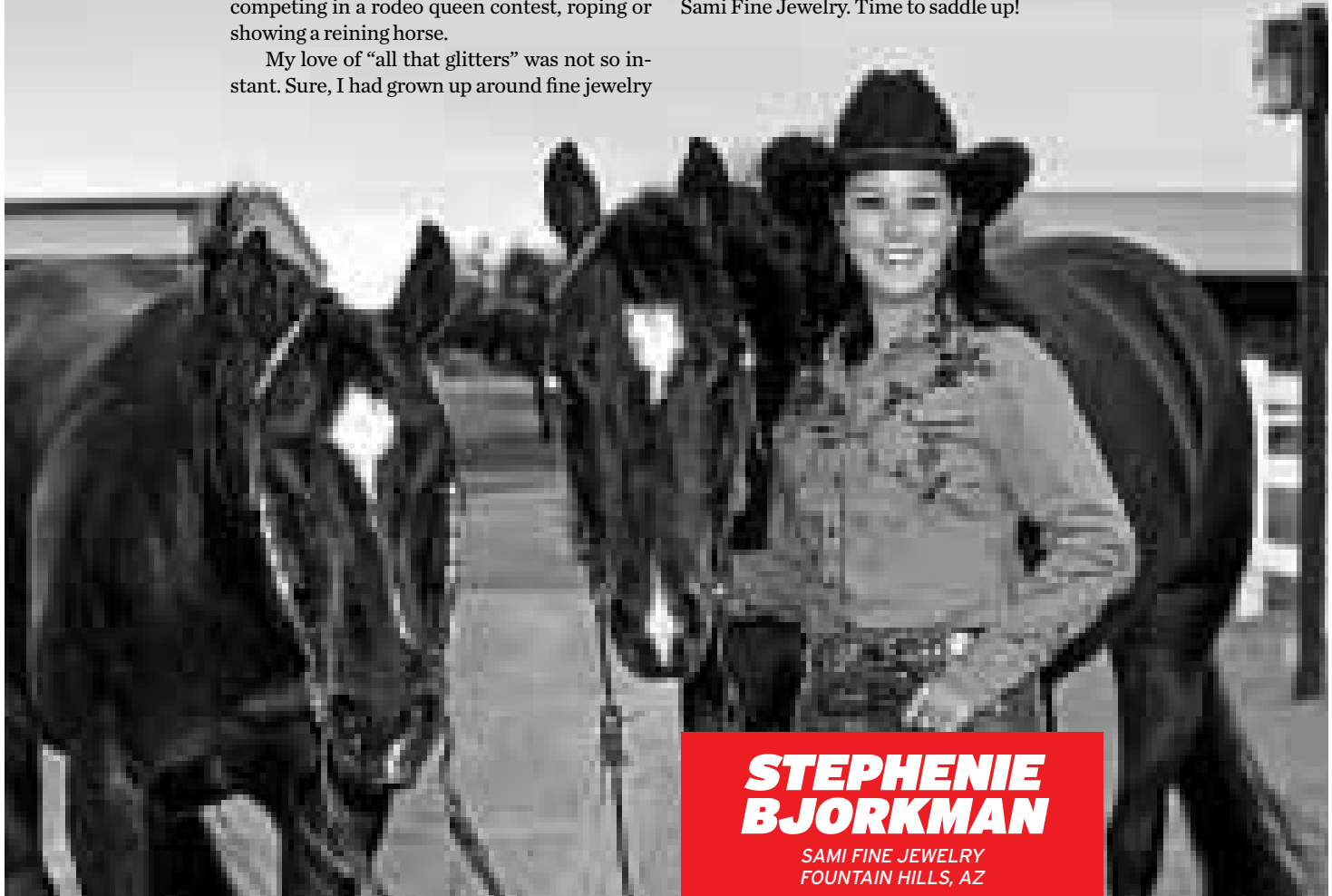
Mothers always dream of dressing up their little girls in pretty dresses, doing each other's hair and spending a day shopping at the mall. It was a sad day for my mom when she realized that boots, a cowboy hat, and kicking dirt were more my style.

It all started when I was a kid. One day, I woke up and said, "Mommy, I love horses." My mother hoped it was a phase, but I never grew out of it. My mom decided to feed my "horse brain" with riding lessons. At the age of 5, I rode my first horse. From that point on, horses made my life whole. A tomboy to the extreme, nothing felt better than riding bareback through the desert in the sun and dust. And nothing could beat the thrill of competition, whether it was competing in a rodeo queen contest, roping or showing a reining horse.

My love of "all that glitters" was not so instant. Sure, I had grown up around fine jewelry

and was grafted into the industry as the daughter of renowned GIA graduate gemologist and jewelry designer, Sami Jack. But it was not until my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1997 that I was put in a position of helping run the jewelry store. At first, I just worked at her store to help her out while she was recovering, but soon jewelry became a part of my identity. Jewelry has become an outlet for my creativity and my drive for success. I don't think our jewelry store would be what it is today without the confidence, backbone and "cowgirl spirit" I have learned through my love of horses. Besides ... horses and diamonds are expensive, and selling jewelry has helped me afford both carats and carrots!

As of 2012, my mom has "handed over the reins," and I am now the owner and president of Sami Fine Jewelry. Time to saddle up!



**STEPHENIE  
BJORKMAN**

SAMI FINE JEWELRY  
FOUNTAIN HILLS, AZ



**TRAVIS  
PIPER**  
PIPER DIAMOND COMPANY  
VINCENNES, IN

PHOTO BY RYAN ROUSH

# THE OPTIMIST

OUTLOOK IS A CHOICE. SO ALWAYS CHOOSE POSITIVELY.

**I FEEL LIKE MY LIFE** is like a radio station that is always on, transmitting my attitude to the world. Every day, I have the choice to broadcast my attitude on POSITIVE 106FM or Loser-ville 88FM.

Growing up with a very supportive mother made me realize that I had the power to create the life I wanted. I could choose my friends, my hobbies, my job, my spouse, but most important, I could choose my attitude. Every day I

wake up, and every day I have the choice to look at the glass as half empty or half full.

Having a good mental attitude tends to attract other positive people into my life, whether that be customers, friends, employees or new acquaintances. My favorite quote by Charles Swindoll hangs on the wall above my workbench and sums up why I believe that being positive is so important: "Attitude is more important than facts. It is more important than

the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than success, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill ... I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it." I am a firm believer that my past, present and future success are based on my understanding that I must have a positive mental attitude in order to charge toward my goals without fear.



**EVE  
ALFILLÉ**  
EVE J. ALFILLÉ GALLERY  
& STUDIO, EVANSTON, IL

# THE ARTIST

HER GOAL: LEAVE SOMETHING FOR THE FUTURE  
AND MAKE A MARK ON THE PRESENT

**AS AN ARTIST** back in the 1970s, it was difficult to find materials. I would go to the department store and buy pieces of jewelry on sale and take them apart. The commercial jewelry industry was very closed, and artists, like me, believed we were on the outside.

Over the years, jewelry artists became more of a force. We began to have outlets for our work such as galleries and art fairs. In the '80s, the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York presented the first development seminar for jewelry artists, which gave me the opportunity to see how many of us there were fighting to find

our place in the industry. Competitions opened up, and I was lucky to receive prizes in some of the major ones, including the Spectrum Award in 1990 and 2007, and two simultaneous Japan Pearl Competition prizes in 2005.

I participated in many art fairs and galleries until it made sense to open up my own personal gallery. In 1991, shortly before we enlarged the gallery, I had a chance to interview with John Loring in New York. Loring was the celebrated artistic director of Tiffany's. He liked my work.

I presented the idea to come to New York once a month to design and remain in Chicago

where our gallery was taking off. John's memorable response was that our new relationship was a marriage. I wasn't ready for marriage, I just wanted a date. I turned down the offer and continued down the path for a gallery reopening. Our neighbor had moved, and we doubled our space. I believe my role was important.

As an artist, I've always seen myself as an ant in a long line of ants. But, like those before me, I want to leave something for the future. I imagine someone digging up a piece of jewelry 400 years from now that I created, and it would still stand for something. It would be meaningful.

**CATHERINE  
ANGIEL**  
CATHERINE ANGIEL  
NEW YORK, NY



# THE RENEGADE

MOVE ASIDE, NAYSAYERS, SHE'S GOT A DREAM TO LIVE OUT.

**AS A TEENAGER** growing up in Queens, I played drums in the underground rock 'n' roll scene in New York City. My mom told me I had to get a job, and I found one in a jewelry store. Every chance I could, I would watch the jeweler make jewelry, and I fell in love with it. Taking an idea and bringing it to fruition was something I found powerful, creative and exciting. I told my boss I wanted to learn to make jewelry, and he said women weren't strong enough to do that. That made me want to do it even more.

I applied for a bench job at a female-owned company — one for which I had zero experience — and they hired and trained me. Eventually, I bought some materials and began creating my own line of jewelry out of silver. I sold to boutiques, made some capital and opened my own business at the age of 28.

I was approached to be on the June 1993 cover of *Newsweek* because of the movement for gay and lesbian equality. Of course, I was afraid to do it, but someone had to. It was a groundbreaking issue and very exciting — a

little push in the universe in the direction of equality. I also coined the term “commitment rings” at that time. Gay couples wanted to shop for rings for each other and would sometimes be humiliated by salespeople. I wanted to provide a space where gay and lesbian couples, or any couple, could celebrate their union.

At that point, I had a small booth on 47th Street, and it wasn't the environment I saw myself in. I wanted to turn my business into something less sterile — something cool, hip and edgy. I found a location on Greenwich Avenue and designed my own showcases and showroom to fit my personality.

Along the way, so many people have said: “You can't do that. Girls can't play the drums. No one wants to buy black diamonds. No one's going to come into a nightclub atmosphere and buy jewelry.” But they were wrong. You *can* achieve all these things if you focus on what you want, regardless of the obstacles. You have to just stay true to yourself, love what you do and believe in your dream.

# JOEL MCFADDEN

JOEL MCFADDEN DESIGNS  
RED BANK, NJ



# THE PERFORMER

HIS HIGHNESS STRIVES TO BE A LEADER  
AND SHOWMAN IN ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE.

**I WAS RAISED** by my grandparents, who were both fairly successful, and gaining their attention was difficult. I learned performing was necessary both in the sense of being a showman and in the sense of carrying tasks to completion at a high level. Working in my family's jewelry store at a young age, I quickly realized that cleaning or polishing a piece for a customer would gain me a lot of positive attention. I knew how to do something unusual and I could show off those skills.

In the 1980s, I joined a club called the Society for Creative Anachronisms, which re-enacted and studied medieval life. Just like in the Middle Ages, rank equaled attention and power. So, as "Sir Barry McFadyen," I strove to attain the highest rank: King. It took me a

while because the king is chosen by combat — everyone who wants to rule enters a tournament and fights it out. The victor reigns for a year. I accomplished this twice back to back.

From then on, I wanted to be a leader and showman in every aspect of my life, and since I know how to make jewelry, I find ways to perform within the industry. One aspect of our store that differs from the other six in our downtown is that our benches sit right out front in the middle of our show floor. Everything is about showing off our workmanship. When the SMART Jewelry Show asked me to run the Bench Pressure Challenge at both their shows, it was a perfect fit. Hand me a microphone and let me talk about craftsmanship and design; I love it!





# THE CELEBRITY

ON THE RED CARPET, IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS.



**ROBIN LEVINSON**  
LEVINSON JEWELERS  
FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

WHEN MARK AND I started the business 30 years ago, Levinson Jewelers was basically four booths in an exchange. It's thanks to our loyal customers and the amazing relationships we've developed over the years that the company is what it is today.

We are often asked about the celebrity aspect of our business. Our celebrity clients have really come to us based on referrals. I think the celebrities come to us for the same reason all our customers do: We strive to show beautiful, quality pieces; we want to give everyone excellent service; and we care tremendously. We also respect our clients' privacy, and that is important to everyone, not just celebrities.

Word of mouth has been key for us. We work hard and focus on doing a great job for our clients, and because of that, our clients have been generous in referring their friends and families. Getting to know people over the years and growing with them and their families has been really special. I love it when customers we've had over the last 30 years bring in their children and grandchildren to buy jewelry. It's a great feeling to be a part of so many people's special moments in life for generations.



# THE JACK OF ALL TRADES

BE DIFFERENT. GET DIFFERENT RESULTS.



**CHUCK KUBA**

IOWA DIAMOND, DES MOINES, IA

**I HAVE TWO BASIC SAYINGS** that drive much of the way I do business, and I believe they contribute greatly to our success at Iowa Diamond. The first is, "If you do the same thing everyone else does, you should expect the same results that everyone else gets." The second is, "Never ask a customer to do anything that a professional diamond buyer wouldn't do."

Now, nearly 100 percent of our business

is bridal and engagement jewelry. Not that unusual? All right, we're on the second floor of an office building in an office park, we don't have a showroom, we don't use display lights in any of our offices, we have over 1,200 engagement ring styles in stock and over 300 loose diamonds, and we have a 71.3 percent closing rate.

Is that different enough for you? No? OK, we have a house band, The Iowa Diamondtaires,

that performs at weddings and other functions (I play upright bass). We sponsor a Sprint Car at the Knoxville Speedway. We have mascots, The Internationally Famous Iowa Diamond Dancing Frogs. I write and voice all of our radio. And, I have officiated at weddings, mostly for customers who don't know a friendly judge.

Could you possibly have more fun in the jewelry business? I think not!



# THE **STYLIST**

IT'S HIS PERSONAL QUEST  
TO MAKE JEWELRY A FORCE IN FASHION.

**TO ME**, style means comfort. I like to wear suit coats and a nice T-shirt — I think that's really sharp. In our gallery, we're not trying to dress to impress, but our clean, modern dress gives us self-assurance that in itself is impressive to clientele. That goes for the jewelry we design as well.

Jewelry needs to become a force in fashion. Ask somebody who the coolest jewelry designers are, and they'll look at you funny. How do those names compare to fashion designers like Gucci or Versace? I don't think jewelry needs to mimic clothing fashion, I think it needs to be a statement in itself. We should enjoy our jewelry as much as our clothing. It's not just a gift; it's wearable art.

I am intrigued by two sides of fashion: vintage and modern. I'm a jewelry pack rat, but I'd much rather be in the Rat Pack. I enjoy the late '50s and '60s styles because the suits were so clean and crisp, and the way the men wore

their suits, jewelry accessories and fedoras was so slick. They dressed for success. They were interested in style; they felt good about themselves, the women of the era did, too. Men's cufflinks, watches, tie bars, pins — I just love it! It's time for men's style in jewelry to come back. And I do think it's coming back.

I don't see myself as larger than life; I've always been this way. I just enjoy looking sharp. Personal style should not be about getting attention — it should be about enjoying your own style. You don't have to try so hard. Just let it happen.



**PAOLO  
SALAMONE**

PAOLO A MODERN JEWELER  
CINCINNATI, OH

# DAN SCHUYLER

LILY & CO. JEWELERS  
SANIBEL, FL



## THE ADVENTURER

THIS SEAL-KISSER JUST CAN'T SIT STILL.



**SINCE I WAS LITTLE**, I've never liked to sit still. I love life. I love to get out and see people, places and things. The jewelry business has been good to me, allowing me to fulfill that dream of traveling and seeing the world.

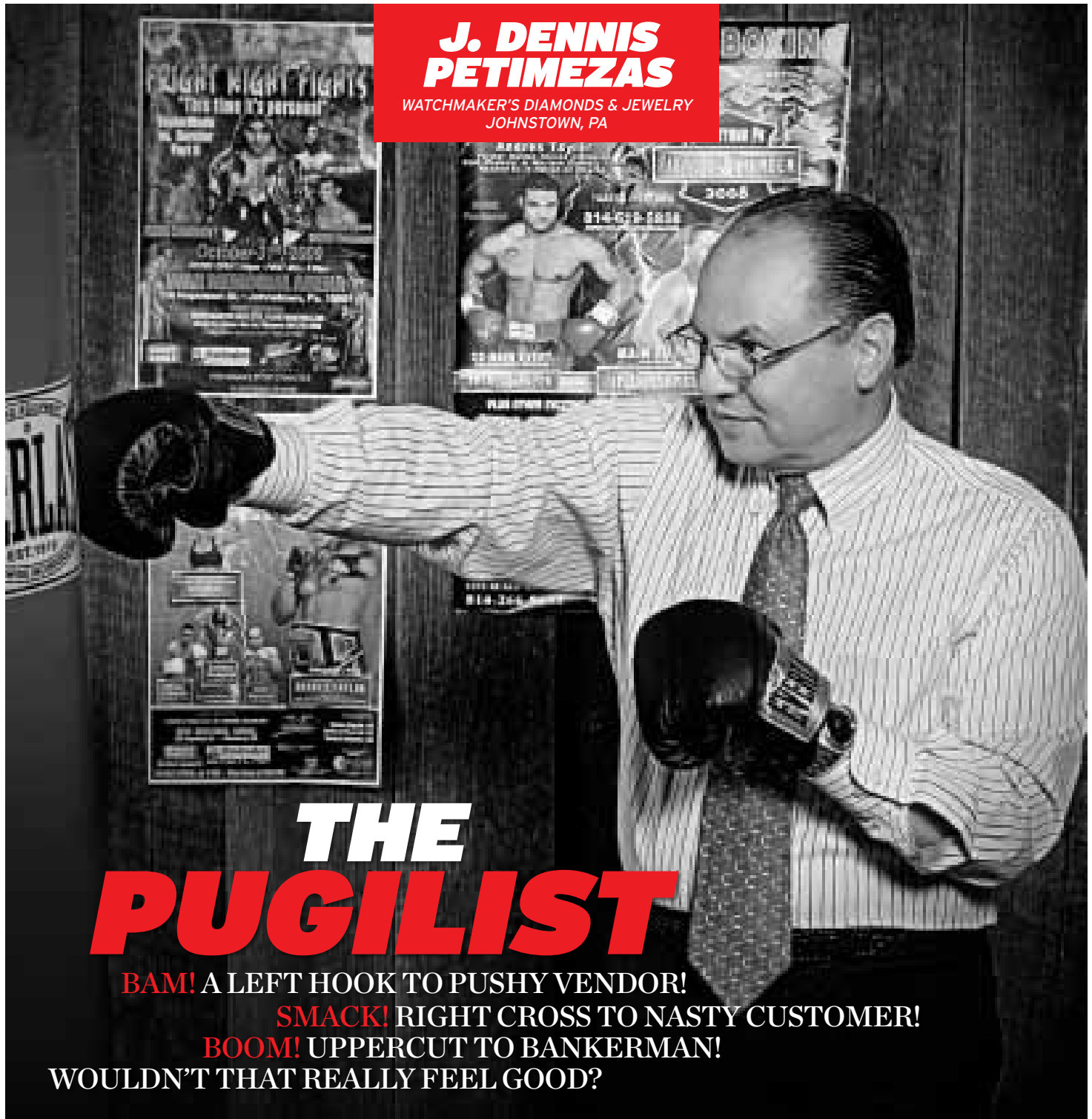
I was always blessed to work for great people before I opened my own store. Early in my career, I took a year-long sabbatical and lived in India to study Eastern philosophy. Our store owner gave me his blessing and told me

my job would be waiting when I returned. A few years later, the Albert Smyth company sent me to Africa for two weeks with ABC News. We did a safari, went to Sun City, and visited platinum mines as well. It was an incredible experience.

I also love to travel for pleasure. My brothers and I meet once a year to ride motorcycles. This year, we crossed five states and 2,000 miles. We saw Yellowstone and all the beautiful country out west. Next year we'll be doing Canada and

Glacier Bay. Last year, I also did a 21-day rafting trip down the length of the Grand Canyon.

When I first got into the industry, I had a bad alcohol and drug problem. Arthur Wodiska, the owner of the jewelry store that originally hired me, helped me to get clean, and I've been sober ever since — 27 years in May. I was given a second chance because of Arthur. I got my act together, and it's given me an opportunity to pay back what was given to me.



**J. DENNIS  
PETIMEZAS**  
WATCHMAKER'S DIAMONDS & JEWELRY  
JOHNSTOWN, PA

# THE **PUGILIST**

**BAM!** A LEFT HOOK TO PUSHY VENDOR!  
**SMACK!** RIGHT CROSS TO NASTY CUSTOMER!  
**BOOM!** UPPERCUT TO BANKERMAN!  
**WOULDN'T THAT REALLY FEEL GOOD?**

**WELL IT'S OK TO DO**, as long as they're not in front of you. Thank God for punching bags — standard in boxing clubs and now as much a staple in my store as a loupe.

I recently read how rejuvenated you can be after a short break with mini-exercises and deep breathing. With that in mind, I walked down Memory Lane to my amateur boxing days (and aspirations of becoming a contender, of course) by remembering the rejuvenating,

even exhilarating feeling after a fight or rounds with the heavy bag.

During physical exertion, your body releases endorphins similar to opiates in nature with no side effects. And the quickest exertion is hitting the bag. Focus on your "adversary" in the bag, start punching, and voila, the stress and frustrations fade. YES! You can face the world again. Hey Barack?! ... Bam! Bam! Hey Mitt?! ... Bam! Bam! (Note: Equal "bams" for each.)

Will you punch and go back to work sweaty? You won't. For a dress clothes workout: Take coat off, hit bag one minute, focus breathing two minutes, repeat four times. Ahhhhhh... just like the old days, and with a benefit: The heavy bag doesn't hit back.

My record as an amateur? Perfect: 0-11. But in life, boxing, and the jewelry business, it's not how many times you get knocked down, it's how many times you get back up. BAM!