

# Master Glass Artist James Stone



August 9, 2021

By Alice Roche Cody

When the pandemic hit, master glass artist James Stone was forced to close his Stone & Glass gallery in Escondido, CA. The 71-day pause essentially crushed sales of his custom designs and shuttered his studio's glassblowing classes. Like many small business owners across the country, he feared his livelihood would perish.

"Our cash flow disappeared," said Mr. Stone, who attended St. Bernard's School for boys from 1965-67. "We spent the first few months of the pandemic closed, trying to figure out how to support our few employees and pay the bills. We quickly realized that we had to adapt, or our 20-year-old business would not survive."

Thanks to the suggestion of his eldest daughter, Mr. Stone changed his business model almost overnight. Starting in July of 2020 with 25 customers, [Stone & Glass](#) launched a

“Collector’s Club” subscription service to sell one-of-a kind hand-blown drinking glasses. Within the first month, the gallery had four times as many enrollees.

“We started mostly with family, friends, and regular customers and advertised through social media,” he said. “Now we have customers from all over the country. Once you become a customer, you are family. My wife, Carol, knows every customer by name, and she knows their preferences. Our business is growing, and it’s amazing.”



With the subscription service came new creative challenges for Mr. Stone. At first, he planned to repeat designs, but then chose to make unique ones.

“Creativity is an interesting thing, I have to dig inside and ask, ‘What do I feel today?’” he said. “Sometimes I dream on it, and if I’m lucky, I’m touched by the creative spirit.”

[On his website](#), Mr. Stone described his process: “Every time I pick up the pipe and dip it into the hot gooey stuff, it is a new experience. Even when I mold, blow or make multiples, every piece is a different ride...I like the process of adding colored bits of hot glass to whatever I am working on. There is something very magical about taking a molten bit of glass, sticking it on to whatever you are making and knowing that you have

about 10 seconds to do whatever you have to do before it becomes cold and too hard to work.”

Mr. Stone, who recently turned 70, also spent the past year writing his memoir titled, *The Glass Thread, One Artist’s Lonely Journey*. It details his 30 years in the television business and how he started his craft by making glass medallions, belt buckles, and boxes and within six months had enough money to buy a house. Yet nothing in his past compares to his most recent experiences. “I find myself on fire and in the most exciting part of my career,” he said. “Despite the horrific pandemic, this has become one of the best years of my life.”

A former St. Bernard’s high school student, he fondly recalls helping with the horses and fishing in the stream every morning before school. He hopes to visit campus this spring to teach his glassblowing technique to current GSB students. “I’d love to plant a seed for someone to follow this trade,” he said. “St. Bernard’s School did so much for me, and a highlight of my life would be to leave an artistic legacy behind.”