

Consilience: Paula Hanson + Junk + Fun = Art

By Erika Paleck

Consilience: *The joining together of knowledge and information across disciplines to create a unified framework of understanding.*

And what better example of tying all the threads together of art, recycling, creating our own reality, and evolving as we age than Paula Hanson and her “Put Togethers”? What a fun way to change people’s perceptions and maybe help change the world just a little bit. It’s the perfect demonstration of a prime ingredient of being creative: playfulness.

Paula’s life is another example of how serendipity changes our lives and allows us to grow and change as we acquire new skills-- if we let it. For instance, she met her husband, Vernonia native Bill Hanson, by rear-ending him in California. After raising two children and several moves around the country, here they are-- right where they belong.

We change and adapt when we move, otherwise we just end up miserable and stagnating. Paula, too, adapted and evolved using her potent, inherent streaks of creativity and humor to try new ideas. They lived in Texas for twelve years. For four years, she did window displays for a large Hallmark store in Katy, Texas, six to eight times a year. They let her pick and choose anything from the store as part of the display, and she had fun with that. She says she was like a kid in a candy store. And there you have it-- fun, the key ingredient. She’s still doing it here; check out the windows in the Black Bear down on Bridge Street.

When you look at Paula’s work, you gotta smile. No way around it. Oddly, this recombination of, well, junk, into something to make you laugh and think actually started out of a moment of anger back in 2005. Looking for an emotional outlet, she fashioned a curse word out of trash lying around and let her creation be her vent. It’s pretty hard to stay mad when you’ve been swearing in the odd language of rusty old hand tools. From this was born the newest version of “Paula’s Projects”—the Put Togethers.

While living in Denver, she dealt in antiques. Her creative outlet was their display and organization. On the face of it, isn’t it a big leap to go from selling antiques in a pleasant, organized venue, to scrounging through people’s old rusty tools looking for discards with which to create garden sculptures? Isn’t that stuff just junk?

Well, yes and no. As Paula says, “I’m takin’ your trash and makin’ it my treasures.” Most of her treasures are made from tools and agricultural industry discards. She inherited an affinity and appreciation for tools. It’s partly out of respect for her father and his respect for his tools that she salvages and reuses old tools as her primary means of expression. In fact, she has a number of old toolboxes, as well. Why toss aside something that still has something to say to the next generation, even if it isn’t in its original form of expression?

And why keep doing this? Once you’ve seen one old rake or basket or shovel, haven’t you seen them all? Well, heck no! Because they become odd birds in the flowerbeds, or scarecrows or barn decorations

or greeters at the head of the driveway or an emotional statement.

Serendipity is a key to her creations. Oh look, that old metal basket is now a bird’s torso, these springs are a part of a scarecrow’s anatomy, and that what-chamacallit is now a letter in a word on a fence. It’s all part of the fun for her, and she lets us in on her playtime. She runs across old tools of mysterious purpose and tracks down what they do. Questing for esoteric knowledge about how tasks were done in the old days is all part of the fun.

Wire twisting and bending and nailing keeps those endorphins flowing and the body young. She says she doesn’t feel her age here. She’s so engaged in her projects and their offshoots that she’s finally gotten to be herself. With the time working outside, not just on her creations but her gardens, too, she has found the happiness that comes with being here now-- happy in the moment. Stop now? There’s a lot more junk out there to be found and played with!

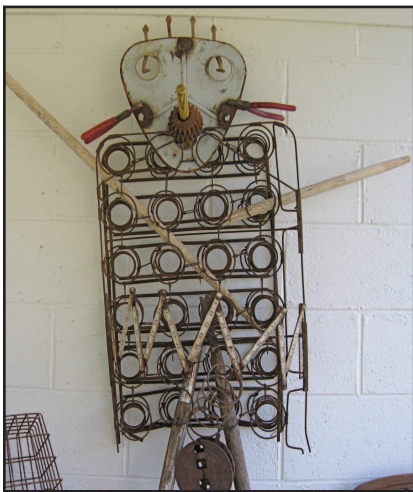
The people she’s met since moving to Vernonia have been inspiring to her-- folks like Shirlee Daughtry and Enid Parrow brought her out volunteering in the community. Robb Wilson with his whimsical sense of humor and love of all things rusty is another new friend, while Julie Prohaska and her wonderful garden has been an inspiration. And then there are the folks whose junk piles she’s looked through. What a way to meet people! That’s always the unexpected treasure for any of us-- the new friends we make.

If you’ve got old wooden boards or fences, or piles of old hand tools, you could be Paula’s next new friend. Give her a call at 503-429-9101. Help the planet by recycling instead of throwing away, and let Paula come play with your stuff. Look forward to enjoying Paula’s creations this summer as part of the First Friday events at the Learning Center, the first Friday of the month starting at 5:00 PM as she displays along with other members of Vernonia’s amazingly vibrant creative community.

If you know an artist or a creative person whose story we can tell, please give me a call at 503-429-0898 or email me: epaleck@gmail.com.



Paula Hanson



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