

What is it about American Brilliant Cut Glass That Captivated Me?

by René Bana

Editor's Note: René Bana shares her story of how she came to appreciate not only cut glass but also the life-changing occasions such as conventions that collectors enjoy. She hopes to see you at the 2025 ACGA St. Louis Convention.

Many people have asked me about my collection of cut glass. What is your favorite piece? How did you get started collecting glass? What motivated you to buy your first piece?

While I can certainly answer those questions, for me they do not tell the whole story. Perhaps I am the exception to the norm, but my love of American Brilliant cut glass entails much more than the glass itself. Do not get me wrong. The spectacular beauty and craftsmanship that went into designing, cutting, and finishing each piece is definitely intriguing for one with my curious nature and love of history. However, cut glass has provided me so much more than beautiful glass to admire.

It is each memory from years and years of attending conventions and auctions with my father, Dr. Bob Henson, and my daughter, Heather, and learning about the glass, the process, and how it spread out across the world.

It is the joy I saw in Heather's face as she saw rooms of beautiful glass in the Dealers Show at the past eight ACGA conventions and at the many Woody auctions we were able to attend in person over the years.

It was the pride I saw in her when she knew I had the confidence in her ability to carefully touch or even hold these antiques and knowing she understood and appreciated that these were historical pieces of our country's past.

It is the history lesson each piece of glass brings with it, as each has its own story to tell. And the laughs I have had with Heather as we speculated what purposes different pieces were used for and how would anyone even think of them!

It is the friendships we have made over the years and how those people have enriched our lives, even as time marches on and we are beginning to lose some of them.

It is carrying on a hobby that I know was near and dear to both my mother's and grandmother's hearts and knowing now that the seed is planted in my own daughter's heart.

American Brilliant cut glass has taught me not only about the beauty that surrounds us through these timeless treasures of our American history, but also about the joy of collecting and of sharing interests and experiences with people across all generations regardless of our differences because our love for glass unites us.

I do not expect that I will ever be as knowledgeable about cut glass as the many ACGA members who surround me at our ACGA events or as those who are so active within our Facebook groups. But I do know I learn from you with each interaction and sit in awe of your knowledge and expertise.

ACGA is always searching for new members, and the ACGA Board has had numerous discussions about what steps we can take to build our membership in order to

sustain our wonderful organization in the years ahead. When I think back to the many times my mother and father asked me to join them for an auction and I politely chuckled and turned them down, I now cannot help but wish I had said yes. It would have gotten me started sooner!

Upon the loss of my mother, my dad remarked that he would not be going to any future cut glass auctions because he hated to go alone. Simply hearing Heather say to him, "I'll go with you, Papa" is what resulted in my finally going to a Woody auction, and the rest is history. My interest in cut glass has since provided us years of quality time with my father, treasured memories my daughter will never forget, and a bond through collecting that we had never expected, not to mention a great start to what we hope is a long-term relationship with beautiful glass. So, while you may never see me solving someone's mystery by identifying an unknown pattern or maker, you will see me admiring the cut glass and feeling such respect for the many individuals involved in the creation of it.

I challenge you all, do you have a family member you can invite to a convention who just might get hooked? Ask! You never know what answer you might hear, and who knows, you might be igniting a future interest in American Brilliant cut glass while also extending an opportunity to enrich one's life well beyond the glass! ❁



Dr. Bob Henson, René Bana, and Heather Bana enjoy time together at the 2019 ACGA Convention in Reno, Nevada. Heather, now a sophomore in college, was fourteen years old at the time and getting ready to start high school.