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How I Got Here: Samantha Jackson And That Influential Flight Attendant

By [Karen Dybis](#) | February 09, 2022



Semisonic's hit song "Closing Time" famously says: "Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end." Jewelry designer Samantha Jackson has lived that line, going from a management consultant at a Big Five accounting firm to IBM to a layoff that had her reeling.

When she found herself out of work after 18 years, Jackson had a nice severance package and a choice to make. She had an MBA. She had years of experience in IT and business. She thought for a minute about spending her severance on jewelry when a different idea entirely struck her: It was time to start making her own pieces to wear.

Since she as a kid, Jackson had loved jewelry, whether it was her grandmother's antique rings or the vibrant Mardi Gras accessories she saw growing up in New Orleans. Jackson says she was always asking her parents to take her into jewelry stores or to buy her a necklace or ring for special occasions.

"I came out of the womb loving jewelry," Jackson says. "It wasn't an evolution for me. I must have had some fabulous jewelry in a previous life."



Samantha Jackson says her Lock Stories collection is a natural progression because it is rooted in symbolism. Her first contemporary design, the collection features hand-engraved, three-sided combination locks with a tactile key.

Jackson says she had thought about a career in jewelry at one time when an Uptown Square jeweler she loved to pester put the idea into her head, but a more traditional path felt safer. Then, she lost her safety net. A chance encounter on an airplane with a flight attendant who had a jewelry line got Jackson thinking.

“I thought: ‘If she could do it, I can do it. How hard could it be?’ Famous last words,” Jackson says. “I had the audacity to follow my dreams because of her.”

The switch truly flipped when Jackson discovered something called an opera token. She went down the internet rabbit hole, researching these tokens that London theatergoers got when they went to a show as a souvenir. Some were made from ivory, which Jackson knew she could never reproduce. But that took her to her next discovery: love tokens.

When you work with historical objects, one of the most interesting things is trying to figure out the origin story. For Jackson, that mystery is what fuels her work and her huge collection of Victorian love tokens. These were items friends, family, or lovers gave one another, mostly as remembrances of them. Sometimes, they were used to apologize, something Jackson adores.

Love tokens spoke to her, Jackson says, reminding her of New Orleans and its decorative and ornamental atmosphere. She began turning these coin-shaped items into rings, earrings, and pendants through her jewelry business, **Heavenly Vices** (<https://heavenlyvicesfinejewelry.com/>). The name is a play on Jackson’s irreverent sense of humor. But it also speaks to how it feels to be a jewelry devotee: You love your vice because jewelry is so wonderful.



Samantha Jackson became enamored with love tokens, collecting an estimated 3,000 examples. She “reimagined” some of her favorites as new pendants; this one says, “Love One Another” and is made in 14k gold

Every love token has a story behind it, Jackson says, and the ones with words or phrases on them are among her favorites. The most intriguing? She's seen love tokens engraved with words ranging from *Flirt* to *Wild* to *Pickles*.

Jackson began setting them in modern diamond and gemstone bezels as well as creating reimagined tokens inspired by originals, and in just seven years their popularity began booming.

Now, the Atlanta-based jeweler has developed a new collection: Lock Stories. Jackson has created a contemporary design that feels like a natural progression of her brand because it is still rooted in symbolism. The collection features hand-engraved, three-sided combination locks with a tactile key.

Given the tactile nature and inclusion of braille, the locks also open up the jewelry experience to the blind. As a self-starter with no formal jewelry design training, Jackson says the process was full of ups and downs, but the result is something that is beautiful, refined, and personal.

“When I first started designing, I said if this all goes nowhere, I'd still be happy keeping [the jewelry I made] all to myself,” Jackson says. “I love them that much. I consider myself a matchmaker more than anything. I'm always excited to find a match between my jewelry and my clients.”

Top: Because so many love tokens include a word for mother, Heavenly Vices jewelry designer Samantha Jackson says she had to include it in her latest collection, Lock Stories (all photos courtesy of Heavenly Vices).