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Inked:
The Mogul Behind the Flowergirl

By Daria Smith

A bracelet was carved on to Jackie's arm, the first segment of a series of art. Jackie walked into Anonymous Tattoo where she met Ricky McGee, a local tattoo artist. "I was upset that I hadn't found him first," said Jackie, reflecting on her previous tattoos. Ricky owns two tattoo shops: one in Savannah and one in Bulgaria, where he lives half the year. Two weeks later, the collection of sketches on Jackie's body had grown to reveal another fragment of her story.

Jackie Blair has a son and daughter, owns the Flowergirl, a local flower shop that does 75-100 events per year, is getting married to a fellow entrepreneur next week and teaches floral arrangement classes at Ogeechee Technical College amongst her many hidden talents. Jackie is not a "bossy boss" or an alpha as she doesn't like to be controlled or control others.

Rather, she's more like, "Hey come make pretty stuff with me and I'll pay you while we sit, chit chat and watch Netflix."

As Jackie claims, she is very picky about her help. "I wouldn't know that. I walked in and we just talked," said Sarah.

Sarah is a Georgia Southern University recreation management student and began working for Jackie about a year ago when she took an interest in working with flowers. Jackie stated that Sarah was just "cool," but she does look for creative, self-sufficient employees who possess a willingness to learn and complete tasks in a diligent fashion.

Jackie finds it difficult to give commands because she has to interrupt her creative trains of thought to reflect on the task at hand, but Sarah is really good at "seeing what needs to be done and just doing it."

Jackie admits, she doesn't like dealing with the logistical side of owning her own business: dealing with numbers, orders and how many stems or specific ingredients are needed to curate shopping lists for floral arrangements. Since flowers are a limited resource, you can only work with what you order, which puts a strain on Jackie's creativity. Jackie really never knows what an arrangement is going to look like until it's in front of her.

"In my dream world, I would just walk in and have a cooler full of flowers and just make what I want," said Jackie. "I tried to do that with my wedding until I got my quotes... Oh no, I guess I'm not going to be doing that, well not as much as I thought."

Unsure about her recipe for success, Jackie concluded that her style, creativity, listening skills, and empathy may be responsible.

“I just want to be back in my little corner of the world making pretty things,” said Jackie.
“Creativity is just something you’re born with.”

There’s no explanation as to how Jackie creates floral arrangements, she just goes with it because thinking about the process only instigates frustration. Most Friday nights around midnight, from February to July, Jackie can be found in her shop barefoot with a glass of wine and Netflix on in the background, arranging flowers into a bouquet like pieces of a puzzle, until it looks perfect from every angle. She’s on her last hour for the night, finishing the final accessory for her bride's wedding. Jackie’s favorite part of the entire process is when she gets to give a bride her bouquet on her wedding day.

“A lot of brides cry, probably about one out of every three. It’s a great day when I make a bride cry because I know I did my job,” said Jackie.

Jackie defines success as happiness, which does not come from a number in your bank account. Seeing other people smile brings a delightful grin to Jackie’s face.

“That’s success to me, letting the people that I love know they’re cherished and making them happy,” said Jackie.

The Flowergirl never planned to own her own business but realized her aspiration after working under two other florists and many fruitless 9-5 office jobs. Initially, Jackie worked for an older, traditional florist who struggled to sell brides the vision she had for them.

“You need to give them what they want! I think we all have a style, it’s like an art,” exclaimed Jackie.

According to reviews left on The Flowergirl’s Facebook page, Jackie’s customers report that she goes above and beyond, and they recommend Jackie to their friends. What customers seem to remember most is the experience that Jackie provides.

“She’s friendly, outgoing, and you can tell that she loves doing flowers,” said Terry Mullis, one of Jackie’s previous customers. “She is just always helpful.”

Jackie worked a bridal expo in which her daughter was a flower girl in the fashion show and aided vendors in the setup of their booths. Someone said, “Hey, where’s that Flowergirl at?” That was it. “That’s my name,” thought Jackie, it was a perfect fit.

Running a home and a business simultaneously is not an easy task. On the topic of Jackie’s organization, Sarah’s abrupt response was, “That’s a weakness.” Despite Jackie’s collection of stilettos, 150 pairs neatly lined up heel to toe, color-coordinated, on bookshelves in her closet, she just kind of goes and does, as creative souls do. Jackie wears her stilettos in the flower shop regularly, as she does not fit inside the box that the world attempted to construct for her.

Upon the celebration of her birthday, Jackie attended another consultation to have an additional chunk tattooed on her back. Later that evening, at 5 p.m., Jackie received a phone call with notice of her grandfather's death. The tattoo served as a double-edged sword to denote a double meaning, like many of life's lessons that originate from a single event. Life has taught Jackie to trust no one because everyone is out for themselves. "If you want something done, you have to do it yourself," said Jackie.

When Jackie realized that she was going to divorce her husband, and another piece of her story was written in the form of a phoenix. "The phoenix curves right underneath my butt cheek and you would think you'd be good because you have more cushion there, but it really doesn't work that way, it was by far one of the worst parts," said Jackie. On the day that Jackie moved out, another experience was epitomized on her body.

Travis Shugg, the "Painted Chef," caterer and owner of Hames Hall, an elegant manor on a historic 1950s Southern plantation that has boasted many grandiose events and weddings, walked into the Flowergirl to purchase flowers on a run-of-the-mill day in 2014.

"I was married, and he was married at the time, we were just friends," said Jackie.

Both independent industrialists found themselves divorced, continuing to do business together. Words were exchanged, and eventually, Jackie moved in with her best friend. "He's my best friend and it's a good thing," said Jackie. Jackie's tattoo continued to flourish, and then once more, another section was added when Shugg proposed.

Events at Hames Hall include flowers from the Flowergirl, the venue's exclusive florist, accompanied by catering. "If I have four to five weddings on a Saturday, then 95 percent of the time, he's involved with at least three of them," said Jackie. A wedding equipped by this dynamic duo is unforgettable, a memory you'll cherish forever.

Next week, Jackie is getting married for a second time alongside the GSU jazz band in her wedding parade and has so much planned that it's "unreal." Think New Orleans style with umbrellas, jewel-tones: reds, blues, peaches, greenery, handkerchiefs, dancing, a tattoo artist and a two-page list of different species of flowers. Would you expect anything less from an entrepreneurial power couple who own businesses in the wedding industry?

All of Jackie's friends are female business owners and they all stick together, like Shannon, founder of Cake Bakery and Olivia, owner of a Shane's Rib Shack franchise. In fact, Olivia will serve as Jackie's maid of honor on her big day. Jackie surrounds herself with friends who understand what she goes through as a business owner and mother.

"It's all the same because it all ties in together; trying to run your own business and run a home at the same time is taxing," said Jackie. "You just get busy, you don't really have time for a bunch of nonsense."

Jackie's tattoo artists are her therapists, who create the art that allow her to pinpoint her struggles and bring them to light. Portions of Jackie's tattoo represent different experiences throughout her life to tell her story. Humanity is always learning and advancing, a work in progress. Our stories are continuous, like Jackie's tattoo.

"In the past three years, I've had more happen to me than in the past 20 years," said Jackie. "It's been my coping mechanism, but it represents a growing and learning experience. It's just different things that have happened in my life, that I've just put on my skin. Every time I think it's stopped, it keeps on going. Something else significant happened and that's my need, coping mechanism, how I deal with it instead of other things."

Next week, Jackie gets married to Shugg and a tattoo artist will be present at their wedding, but Jackie is not getting a tattoo.

"Ricky McGee is amazing, I will not see anyone else," said Jackie. "I don't want to get a tattoo at my wedding because it's not Ricky...But, there is a lock and a key that I might get Ricky to do afterwards."