



# For Keeps

VOLUME TWENTY-ONE | ISSUE ONE | SPRING 2022



**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW  
ABOUT NELLCO**

**BEHIND THE SCENES WITH SANTA**

**FUN FACTS ABOUT  
KEEPSAKE ARTISTS**

# Nello

## A name you can trust



What started off as a tiny oven manufacturer has since grown into a multiornament conglomerate thanks to one Keepsake artist's entrepreneurial spirit. And since that first oven was produced, Nello Williams has been creating an array of timeless Keepsake Ornaments, each of them sporting his very own Nello brand.

### **“It started with a magic ornament I had an idea for,”**

Nello tells us. “It was an oven that lit up to reveal cookies baking inside. There was even an air freshener pod installed on the back of it to give off a fresh-baked aroma.”

Like all Keepsake artists, Nello has an eye for the unique details. **“That first ornament was just calling out to have a brand on it,”** he says.

Unsure of what to do, he talked to a fellow sculptor to get their opinion. They suggested the name Nello. Nello loved it and it's been a part of his lineup ever since.

While Nello humbly claims that he only creates a Nello-branded ornament “every year or so,” we all know the truth about the empire of retro-styled ornaments he's managed to create. Over the years, the Nello brand has expanded at a steady rate. That refrigerator hanging on your tree? Chances are, it's a Nello. That jukebox all your other ornaments are lining up to play? That's a Nello. Popcorn machines, kitchen mixers, washers, dryers...the list goes on and on. Or as Nello puts it, “There are too many for me to be able to name them all.”

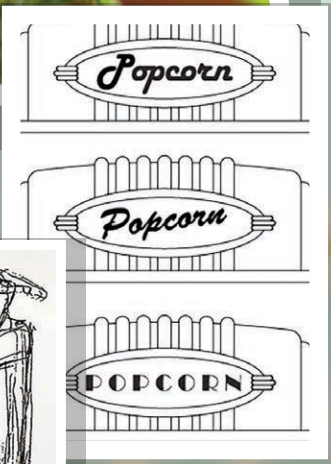
Not one to take all the glory for himself, Nello reminds us that he's managed to expand the Nello line to include pieces that are collaborations with the entire Keepsake Studio.

If you're a brand-loyalist, the only way to know if you have an official Nello is to look for the iconic logo. “The logo for that first ornament was created by one of our tech artists and simply printed on,” he says. “I've since tweaked it over the years—including a 3D version that I've been using for quite a while, though I've created variations of it for a couple of things that weren't done in my usual styling. One was a steampunk phonograph, and the other was a laptop ornament that needed to look contemporary.”

The Nello founder, while moving full-speed ahead on his growing production line, is always willing to promote and support other up-and-coming brands in the Keepsake Village. He reminded us that Sharon Visker did a phonograph with the Viskaphone brand. And that Orville Wilson's Wilsonic brand is also a solid household name. However, it's his “bitter rivalry” with Tom Best that caught this writer's attention.

“For the sake of historical accuracy,” Nello states emphatically, “I did it first. I don't care what Tom says or that he claims Tomco to be the superior product.”

While this may sound like a Keepsake Village divided, if you know much about these two titans of industry, you'll know they have a great relationship. We suspect Nello's jab at Tomco is nothing more than a friendly ribbing between two great artists.



“These are always my favorite ornaments to sculpt every year. And not just because they have my name as part of the brand. I really do love the retro styling.”

# Getting to know your Keepsake artists

We wanted to give you a little personal peek into the world of our Keepsake artists. From sharing their most memorable moments to favorite foods, words of wisdom that stuck with them and more, they had plenty to tell us. Read on to see some of your favorite artists in a new way.



EMMA LETURGEZ-SMITH

## *A fan of creatures big and small*

We know Keepsake artists have a love for all things creative, and Emma is no different. Even in her downtime, she's always looking for ways to make something. But it turns out she has another interest that keeps her plenty busy: animals.

"My husband and I have a small zoo," she tells us. "I've been an animal-lover from the very beginning. Our house currently holds the two of us along with a small dog, a couple of parrots, two hermit crabs and a 15-year-old gecko. Oh, and a few bugs."

Among those few bugs, we're told, is a collection of roly-polies! So if you're looking for a good icebreaker for Emma, you better brush up on your entomology.



GREGOR BENEDETTI

## *The question he's never been asked but loves to share*

For a new guy in the studio, Gregor already loves talking to Keepsake fans. There's one question he said Keepsake fans have never asked him, and we love his response!

"What's been the best advice so far that I have received from the more senior artists within the Keepsake Studio?' I think it's a fantastic question that I've never been asked. And it would have to be something Edythe Kegrize told me before her retirement. She said, 'Gregor, the more mischief you get into, the better! Calculated risk-taking is the key to success.'"

Perhaps that bit of mischievous spirit is what led to his Gnome for Christmas series. Hmm...

### *A story that had us on the edge of our seats*

---

We love asking our Keepsake artists about surprising life experiences. Needless to say, when Rodney began his story with “Well, let me tell you about my first skydive,” he had our attention. “We reached altitude and they told me to jump,” he continued. “As I watched the ground come racing towards me, I pulled my chute. It didn’t open. So I went for my backup chute. It malfunctioned! Suddenly, I remembered how, as a kid, I’d put a towel around my neck like a cape and pretend to fly. So I tied my shirt around my neck and it worked! I stayed in the air for 20 minutes and landed safe. Then I woke up from my dream.”

Rodney really got us with that one!



**RODNEY GENTRY**

### *A man who’s always up to something*

---

Everyone loves to know what Keepsake artists do in their free time. So, we checked in with Tom Best, and now we know how he stays in shape! Tom goes disc golfing every weekend—winter or summer, rain or shine. And he runs with a local running club at least two nights a week.

Tom has always had an adventurous spirit. Many years ago, he was a rock climber and made it to the top of Devils Tower TWICE! That spirit also led him to bungee jump from a hot-air balloon and parachute from an airplane.

These days, he’s happy with running and disc golf, as well as enjoying an occasional cold beer. We say cheers to that, Tom!



**TOM BEST**

### *There’s never a dull moment*

---

If there’s one thing Terri doesn’t have, it’s free time. That is, she can always find something to do. “I like to do things with my hands. House projects, paper folding, crocheting. I try it all. Though I really don’t crochet well. My girls get a laugh when I start on a scarf that ends up more like a placemat.”

But that’s just the beginning. When she’s really bored, she says, “I’ll go through all the states or books of the Bible and see how many words I can make out of the letters. I have a notebook full of them.” The one thing she hasn’t tried to fill her time with is skydiving. “I’d really love to do it, but I’m so afraid of heights that even the movie ‘Up’ made me so nervous my palms got sweaty.”



**TERRI STEIGER**

# Snowtop Lodge #18

**Don't worry. It's potty-trained.**

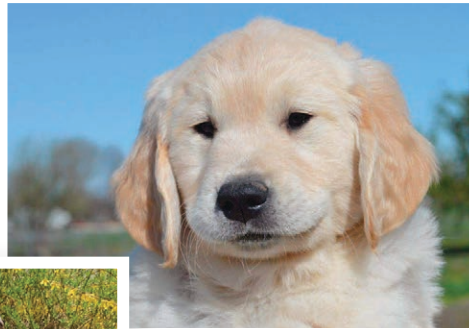
**Joanne Wright's** beloved Snowtop Lodge series has been a Keepsake fan favorite since it was first introduced in 2005. And while this fun and friendly snowman always has a story behind it, the newest addition to the series is inspired by the newest addition to Joanne's family: their dog.

"We adopted Gus in January of 2020. It was only later that we found out his breed, an English cream golden retriever, was one of the most popular breeds to be adopted that year!" she tells us. And although working from home for a year and a half was a challenge for many of us, Joanne tells us that Gus certainly made that easier as he's been by her side the entire time.

"I've grown up with animals all my life," Joanne continues. "We had a sheep farm back East. My brothers, sisters and I helped my dad raise everything from chickens and pigs to rabbits and sheep, as well as many cats and dogs!"

And from someone who had a life filled with animals, that should give you an idea of how highly she thinks of Gus when she told us, "He has blessed us in so many ways."

Take a look below to see a few pictures of Gus, the ornament he inspired and some of his adopted family.



## Holiday Parade #4

It's all in the details

**Tammy Haddix** is introducing the fourth ornament in her Holiday Parade series. Each year, she takes inspiration from one of her fellow artists in the Keepsake Village to create the personality and details that make the ornament so special. For the 2022 edition releasing later this year, Kristina Gaughran was her muse.

Knowing how much Kristina enjoys her fairy garden at home, Tammy decided to make that the focus of this unique piece. "My trucks always have a tree of some kind in the back," Tammy says. "So it was fun to turn the Christmas tree into a fairy house. It's the little touches that make these ornaments so much fun."

When asked about the Holiday Parade ornament series, Kristina said she loves seeing what Tammy comes up with. "She's always able to personalize each

ornament to truly reflect the artists they are inspired by."

But there was one detail that seemed like nothing more than a simple color choice, but turned out to be something uniquely Kristina: The snowman is sporting a purple scarf, and it turns out purple is Kristina's favorite color. Tammy had no idea!

When asked about this special series, Tammy tells us that she wants "each artist to know that they are an inspiration to me in so many ways. And these ornaments are a way that I can express that!"

As for Kris, she's "so honored to be represented in this series. And this ornament will have a special place on my tree for sure!"



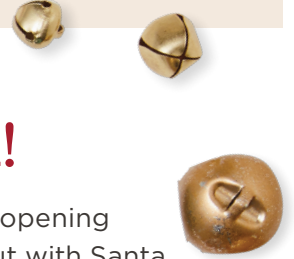
2022



Celebrating  
35 years!

## A YEAR TO REMEMBER

In case you haven't heard, 2022 is a big year for the Keepsake Ornament Club as we celebrate our 35th anniversary. We're excited to have you with us as we make the most of our anniversary year. Keep your eyes open for special events and announcements. And, most of all, remember to share all your favorite memories as a club member through the years. After all, we wouldn't have anything to celebrate without you!



## A ho, ho, whole lotta fun!

We hope you enjoyed watching our Trim the Tree Event opening video. As you can see, our artists had a great time hanging out with Santa. And judging by the look on his face, we wouldn't be surprised if Santa ditched the sleigh next year for a motorcycle! (If you missed the video, take a look at [Facebook.com/groups/KOCMembers](https://www.facebook.com/groups/KOCMembers).)



Santa stopped by to give Tom some ornament ideas and swap a few stories.



Check out Nello teaching Santa a few riffs on the guitar he built. Fingers crossed they start a band.



Santa asked Joanne and her daughters to get him in shape for his Christmas Eve deliveries.



Matt and Santa shredded the streets on their boards!



Rodney and Santa hit the open roads. We're here to tell you these two were definitely born to be wild.



Check out this book club! We can't wait to see what Jim and Santa read next.

## Save the date

**Ornament Premiere** | July 9-17 (Early Access on July 8)