

Lerie's Hidden Treasures Antiques & Collectibles Opens in Alton

by Tara L. Cale

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Valeria Martin grew up “junking” with her mother.

“Mom tried to wake all us kids up to go,” Valeria (Lerie) said, “Back then, the thrift stores opened at 7:00 a.m., so to get the good stuff, you had to get up and about early. But the other kids wouldn’t get up, so usually it was just me and Mom.”

Lerie is the oldest of four siblings.

“I loved this time with my mother. But, at the time, I didn’t really know what I was doing,” she admitted. “All I knew is that I loved the ‘hunt,’ looking for treasures. Finding things that were different, unusual, and unique.”

As she got older, Lerie and her mother would split up, to cover more ground, and hopefully be able to acquire more treasures between the two of them.

“Then we would meet up and compare what we had discovered and purchased,” Lerie added. “At that time the hunt became more intense. And I learned as the years went on.”

When Lerie went to college, and friends would come to her apartment, they always commented on how “ritzy” her apartment was.

“And I was like... what? This furniture, these items, came from a thrift store, from junking, and I didn’t really understand their fascination with what I had.”

“I didn’t really grasp the essence of antiques at that time,” Lerie continued, “I just knew I liked the colors, and the elegance of the carvings and craftsmanship of what went into creating all of these things.”

Over time, she developed a deeper appreciation for the grit and meaning behind each piece... the history in the construction.

“How can you NOT love antiques?” Lerie asked. “They have so much personality!”

Lerie had such a love for antiques and vintage items that she eventually opened a store in St. Louis, selling the items that she loved. Her store was open in the St. Louis area for five years but she said the population in that area didn’t ‘appreciate’ what she had to offer.

“I decided to regroup and open a store where antiques were more appreciated. Alton seemed like the perfect place for this.”

Lerie’s Hidden Treasures Antiques & Collectibles opened in Alton just five months ago, and Lerie said it’s the best move she has ever made.

“I love being in Alton. It’s a small town in a big city,” she explained. “It’s very mellow, and welcoming.”

“So much emotion is involved when dealing with vintage and antiques,” Lerie explained. “This is Mama, this is Grandma, this is your beloved Aunt or other loved one... it’s memories.”

Lerie is also a Realtor, both in Illinois (Associate Broker at Landmark Realty - Godfrey) and Missouri (Coldwell Banker).

“Loving antiques and being a Realtor actually go hand-in-hand,” Lerie said.

“I make connections through real estate, and everyone knows that ‘Lerie loves antiques,’ “ she said. “So I get tips on estate sales, and the like, through my real estate connections.”

Lerie’s Antiques is not like most antique stores and antique malls. You feel like you are walking into an upscale boutique - without the haughtiness. Because Lerie is down-to-earth and welcoming. Everything is staged and displayed beautifully. If you need help figuring out how a certain piece would fit in your home, Lerie can certainly help. And most likely, she have plenty of information to share about the items within the store. Although self-professed to be a bit shy, you would never guess it once she begins talking about antiques!

I asked Lerie what she would do if nothing else mattered - time, money, etc.“Antiques. Loving them. Enjoying them. Hunting for them - that’s the best thing - the hunt. And sharing them with others.”

Lerie already has a huge following and loyal customers in the Alton area. She made sure to emphasize what a tremendous support group she has in Bryan Rudd, who was instrumental in getting the store ready to open, and her sisters Michelle and Tiffany Ross.

Lerie’s Hidden Treasures Antiques & Collectibles is located at 2522 College Ave in Alton. They are open Thursday-Friday 10-4 p.m., Saturday 9-4 p.m., and Sunday noon-4 p.m.

For more information call 618-433-1229 or find them on Facebook.

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