

Dangerous Glass? – Identify Appearance Before Purchase.

June 6th, 2011 – by Jennifer Harder, Delta, BC

What could be the harm in purchasing a bag filled with decorative glass from a thrift shop? Later, Jennifer would question her decision when she remembered her family vacation in Pennsylvania.

As Jennifer strolled around a thrift store, her eyes glanced along the shelves lined with mismatched cups. It felt good to take a break from the burning sun and be in a cool building.

As her eyes reached the end of a shelf, a football sized mass of globs with sharp ends jutting through a thin plastic bag caught her attention. She guessed the material might be the castings of a glass blower's shop. A fine, dusty grime covered the contents and the colours were not easily discernable. She bought the bag for two dollars and knew the glass chunks would enhance the look of her garden containers. As she left the store, the thought never occurred to her that she might be in possession of hazardous material.

At home, she carefully placed the bag's contents into a utility bucket filled with soapy water. As the water washed over the glass, it removed the sandy grit. The colours began to clarify. She was amazed by the rainbow flames that danced in the light, a display of colour with lemon yellow and lime green.

Days later, a disturbing memory occurred. At sixteen she visited the Corning Ware Factory in Pennsylvania. She looked at each historical exhibit and when she came to a thick glass display case, she stopped. Inside were large lemon yellow and lime green jewelry beads, made of radioactive or Uranium glass. Beside them was a Geiger counter to measure the radiation. As the device detected radiation it broke the silence with, a tick, tick, tick.

After this reflection, she researched her glass to see if it was harmful. To prevent any potential exposure, she put the material in a thick glass jar and stored it in her closet. A medical friend suggested she check the internet and call a local radiology department for advice. Unfortunately, the radiology department never responded. Nevertheless, the research on the internet indicated that the level of uranium in old glass could be up to 25%. Curiosity persisted, was the glass dangerous?

Jennifer followed instructions. She found a UV light bulb in the garage, retrieved the jar from the closet, turned out the lights and shone the dark light close to the jar. She watched for a green glow. Instead, she saw a purple reflection. Her glass was safe.

Later, she photographed the glass pieces in an attractive arrangement to create a digital art piece. Three years later she sold the glass to a woman that had the exact same idea. Garden containers.