



**2016 marks Just Merino Sheepskin (JMS Products) 30th Anniversary!** People often ask how I got started. It's an unusual story that involves making the best of a hurt shoulder, burnt hand and sore bottom!

I've worked since I was seven years old and learned as a little girl that I liked to make people happy with good customer service. Whether delivering newspapers or mowing lawns. In my first year of college I sewed and sold fake fur Panda Bears to pay for my college books.



After college I wanted a career more active than being a secretary or teacher, two that I had already tried. So I became a Corrections Officer and Reserve Deputy Sheriff with Pima County in Arizona. It felt good to keep people safe.



Sadly, my chosen career was ended by a shoulder injury that kept me sidelined for nearly a year. While recuperating, I burned my hand on our car's shift knob in the

hot Arizona sun. Geez, I thought, people cover their steering wheels with sheepskin - why not these hard plastic shift knobs?

One sleepless night, kept awake with shoulder pain, I got up and sewed a gear knob cover that would protect my hand from being burned again.

An advertisement in a weekly paper yielded ONE order for my new "**SHIFT MITT**". That was disappointing. But I had prayed that if I got just "ONE ORDER" I would go ahead with starting my own business. By this time I had one daughter and was expecting a second child. I needed a 'safer' line of work that would allow me to be home with my babies and still work around the shifts of my husband's law enforcement job. So I quit my career - making the change from dealing with hardened criminals to surrounding myself with soft sheepskin!



In June of 1986 I named my company using my initials: **JMS Products**, which appropriately came to stand for: **Just Merino Sheepskin.**





My first cold sales call to an auto seat cover store was successful. The owner liked my **Sheepskin Shift Mitt Cover** and asked for matching **Sheepskin Seat Belt Strap Pads**. My second sales call to another store was not as nice but gave me an idea for a new use of the seatbelt strap pad - on LUGGAGE STRAPS! So, I went directly to a luggage store where a very kind manager introduced my **Sheepskin Luggage Strap Pads** to his buying group. My first Christmas in business was hectic. My sheepskin supplier failed to deliver and I had to cut-up brand-new car seat covers to fill orders. I didn't know what FOB or COD meant and hadn't a clue about packaging and displaying products in the stores. But through the kindness of the shops I called on and other people in business ~ I learned.



By 1987 I was the mother of two little girls. One day, while riding our horses with my husband I complained that the saddle hurt my behind. He quipped, "*Cover it with some of your sheepskin.*" I did and it worked! Later, while competing in a rodeo, others saw my sheepskin covered seat and suggested I sell them to tack stores. The same thing happened as with the car accessories. Buyers wanted my **Sheepskin Saddle Seat Cushions** and they asked for other items like **Halter Pads, Girth Covers and Stirrup Strap Covers** to be made from REAL SHEEPSKIN instead of the fake fleece they were getting. I was going to need a steady supply of sheepskin hides!



That summer, a man came to Tucson with a trunk load of sheepskin pelts from a close-out market. Immediately I recognized something special about these sheepskins. Putting my Deputy Detective training to work (this was pre-internet) I found the tannery in Australia that made these impressive sheepskins and became a lifelong buyer of **THE BEST QUALITY WOOLSKINS** in the world:

**AUSTRALIAN MERINO!**

Now, when customers asked what "JMS" meant, I replied: "**Just Merino Sheepskin!**"



JMS Products started out in my house. The first cutting board was the top of our chest freezer. Before there were computers, every catalog was hand-typed and photo's were cut and pasted with real glue. I listened to one wise customer's suggestion that *"No matter how big you get - never forget your Quality."* Resisting the temptation to have my products sewn in foreign countries or punched out with cookie-



cutter dies, **each sheepskin product to this day is still proudly hand-traced and hand-cut, then machine sewn by American labor in the U.S.**



In 1990, our family moved from the big city of Tucson to a rural area in Southeastern Arizona, where there are more cows than people. In 1992 we bought ranch land and in 1993 we started building a passive solar stucco-ed straw bale home using recycled



windows, doors & beams - going "Green" before it was



fashionable. We even re-used my sheepskin wool scraps as insulation and soundproofing inside the interior walls! (It worked so well we now sell our wool scraps for other builders.) In 1995, after 2 1/2 years of building on weekends, we happily moved in. My business went from being around the kitchen table to having its own rooms! I hired more employees and expanded to new

markets manufacturing pet toys, medical comfort items, and travel accessories.



My business was like a third child maturing with my daughters. Little steps became bigger steps. In 1991 I started attending trade shows where I could meet my customers face-to-face. JMS continued to grow with the consumer's



needs dictating new products and a wider selection of colors.

In 1994 a NEW BUSINESS was created from the imagination of my children: **HORSEPLAY Rugs! (1-866-PLAYRUG)** It was an exciting time with three rug designs, all "*Created by Kids ~ For Kids*" hitting the stores and catalogs. Presently we offer 2 rug styles:

**English-Countryside** and **Western-Rodeo**. Completely made in the USA they are a hit! Giving kids a safe area for imaginary play on a large cushioned mat specially printed with colorful scenery, realistic buildings, roads, riding arenas and trails. *PERFECT for kids to play on with their model horses and toy cars & trucks!*



**In 1998 my company won the Arizona Small Business HOME-BASED BUSINESS of the YEAR Award.**



By 2000, JMS had outgrown the home office and a 3000 square foot building was moved on the ranch. My commute to work went from 10 feet to 300 feet. After 14 years the business was finally out of the house!



My daughters took turns traveling with me to the tradeshows. They earned a sales rep commission on orders and got to have fun and see the country. In 30 years, my baby girls are now grown women traveling the world in their own careers. Both have married, giving us extra hands on the ranch when they visit 😊

My oldest, Sarah, is in the Navy as a Linguist. She speaks Korean, Pashtu, Italian and Spanish. After being honored as Junior Sailor of the Year for her Command in Hawaii, she moved to the D.C. area and continues her Navy career. Married in April 2013 she promoted us to "Grandparents" in March 2014.



My youngest daughter, Erin, graduated from the University of Arizona with Honors. She speaks Japanese and Chinese - using those skills as she traveled four years in China teaching English. In May 2014 she returned to the states,

and married. She is still traveling and working – presently in the Virgin Islands - enjoying the freedom and opportunities America offers.

JMS continues manufacturing on the ranch and I still travel to see our customers.

**Our products ship AROUND the WORLD making HUMANS & ANIMALS COMFORTABLE!**



After 25 years my husband retired from law enforcement and started a new career as a Saddle Maker and Leather Craftsman. Now I mentor him in business. Need a holster, gun belt, or custom saddle? Contact: [SperlingSaddlery@gmail.com](mailto:SperlingSaddlery@gmail.com)



Growing a business today requires technology that didn't exist when I started: Computers, the internet, email, websites and social media networks. My daily challenge is to learn new skills and promote business sales to a World Wide audience. Please “Like” us on Facebook and check back often to see what’s new on: [www.jmsproductsusa.com](http://www.jmsproductsusa.com)



**\*WELCOME 2016 ~ our AMAZING 30th Anniversary\***

**My company grew from one product to over 200; from 2 colors to 10; from just me to several employees. Proud that all our products are still MADE IN THE USA!**

**Who would've thought that a hurt shoulder, a burned hand, and a sore butt would have been the incentive to start a business that has lasted so long?!**

**Thank-you to all the kind people who believed in me and particularly, OUR CUSTOMERS, who have made these 30 years such an interesting journey!**

**Best Wishes, Sincerely and Always,**

Judith M. Sperling, Owner, **JMS Products**

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