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Foreword

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*Is it possible that in one magical moment in time, my
destiny was sealed for life?*

— Paul Stankard

That moment in time as described early in acclaimed artist Paul Stankard's autobiography occurred when he was a child. Attending the Firemen's Bonfire and Carnival in Attleboro Falls, Massachusetts, on the Fourth of July, he was transfixed by a side table offering prizes of red plastic roses that were placed in glass bowls filled with water. With the fixed determination that has become a trademark of his approach to his art making, he set out to win one of those prizes for his mother. And, with the help of his beloved father, he did so. This humble item was seen as an

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object of great beauty by him. His adored mother recognized it as the genuine gift of love that it was, and she kept it on her dresser for the remainder of her life. It was when she passed away, forty-three years later, that Stankard re-encountered it and thought back to that long-ago night. As the memory came back to him — of the bonfire and the rose in glass — he wondered if that was the night, with its combination of fire, glass, and nature, that the seeds were planted that would eventually lead him to a career in glass and art.

Stankard's autobiography is much more than the story of one man's life. It is the story of many triumphs that come about through tireless commitment to hard work and perfecting his craft and his art. For those who think that artists attain fame and success through rebellion and flaunting of traditions and conventions, this story will be eye opening. For those who assume that artists all live somewhat disreputable Bohemian personal lives, it will be a phenomenal awakening. The only other thing to which Stankard has been as devoted and committed to as his art making is his wonderful and equally committed wife, Pat, and their children and grandchildren. To those who have been labeled in diminishing or pejorative ways, who have been told that they can't learn or aren't good enough, who have doubted themselves and what they can accomplish, Stankard's story will be nothing short of inspiring. And for anyone interested in art, particularly of the art scene and movements in the studio glass world in the United States, the story will be a delight, being not only incredibly informative but a lovely read in which one can easily hear the echoes of Irish storytellers from generations past in the gentle cadence of Stankard's writing style.

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Much has happened in this life well-lived. Stankard's history, development, and growth as an artist, an artist who is recognized internationally as the most important and accomplished paperweight artist in the world, parallels the rise of the studio glass movement and the coming of age of glass as a respected medium for fine art. In order to reach his present stature, however, there were many struggles for Stankard to overcome.

In the 1950s and 60s no one really understood or heard much about dyslexia. Children who had trouble reading or writing, doing mathematics, or dealing with any of the myriad other ways that this learning disability manifests itself were considered either lazy or stupid. As Stankard himself said during an artist talk, once he was put in the "dummy class" and was told that he would never be more than a menial laborer when he left school. This perplexed his family, who put a high value on education and learning and became a great sense of shame for Stankard that led to a lifelong struggle with low self-esteem and doubt. But Stankard, like many others with learning disabilities, was neither stupid or lazy — far from it, in fact. Despite the frustration he felt, Stankard never gave up trying to learn, a characteristic that he applied later to glass making and to the independent study of art history and literature. One bright spot in his stressful academic career was provided by a high-school teacher, Mrs. Reid, who read the classics aloud in class. Stankard could understand the spoken words in a way that he never could when trying to read something and this was confirmation to him that maybe he wasn't really stupid after all.

It wasn't until the late 1960s, through his sister Margaret who was studying Special Education, that the possibility of

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Stankard's being dyslexic was raised. Knowing that there was a name and reason for his difficulties, that it was a disability, was liberating. Stankard was able to find the means to compensate for this and, as he notes, compensating for a disability can be a means of nourishing unique creativity, expression, and success.

Since those early days, Stankard's accomplishments, awards, and honorary degrees are legion. While many others have received honorary degrees in recognition of their accomplishments, for someone like Stankard, who overcame the challenges of his disability and far exceeded the expectations of his teachers, there must indeed be a special sweetness and sense of vindication with the stature that he has achieved.

In Stankard's life, the pursuit of excellence in glassblowing, lampworking, and creating his art has gone hand in hand with a lifetime of learning, and of *learning how* to learn. He cites early on that the first significant intellectual discovery he made was while in his first semester at Salem County Vocational Technical Institute when he realized that hand skills could be enhanced by studying technical information. Something clicked. It made sense. Theory and practice and their symbiotic relationship became manifest and clear.

After failing his first year of glassblowing at Salem, an incident that now brings about wry smiles and head shaking from any and all who have witnessed the miracles in glass that are Stankard's works, he eventually graduated and began a career as an industrial glassblower. In compensating for his dyslexia he learned, through watching other glassblowers, that observation was key for allowing him to incorporate new skills and techniques into his work. He became obsessed with making his work

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the best it could be and that obsession has inspired and marked the work he has created throughout his life.

This obsession, however, wasn't motivated by a sense of personal glory or to satisfy ego. Stankard is a very devout, very spiritual man. Excelling at his work, making his art pieces the best that they can be, for Stankard is an act of prayer and a way of honouring the spirit of God in the best way that he can. His pieces — paperweights, orbs, and botanicals — are hymns of praise to the miracle of life and a celebration of the natural world that God has created. To create something that was second-rate or only mediocre would never be tolerated. And it is not surprising to learn that for many years in Stankard's studio a sign with the Benedictine motto "To Labour is to Pray" has hung above his workbench.

The journey from industrial/scientific glassblower to acclaimed artist was a long and challenging one for Paul. In the early years he and Pat were often living barely hand to mouth. And without Pat's unwavering faith in him and his art making, he would doubtlessly have considered pursuing a more stable, more traditional career in order to provide for his young and growing family. But she recognized, as did he, that residing within his soul was a desire to create, to be original, to find a means to express himself that routine and repetitive occupations would never satisfy. So together they chose the risk and path of art-making and adjusted their lifestyle to fit their means.

Stankard's story importantly includes anecdotes and references to the many artists, collectors, and dealers whom he worked with, who supported him, and who inspired him. Some readers may be inspired to research and find out more about some of

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these people, such as Ida McCray, a friend and co-worker of Stankard's in New York City in the 1960s. An African American, she was the first female glassblower he had ever met and her highly skilled craftsmanship was respected throughout the glass department at Fisher Scientific. Others are well known and pre-eminent within the art world. Erwin Eisch, Arthur Gorham, Paul Hollister, Jr., Harvey Littleton, Reese Palley, and Frank Whittemore all figure in this tome. Stankard's initial encounter with Reese Palley is told with a gentle and self-effacing humour. When they first met, Stankard didn't know who Palley was and he passed up Palley's offer of an exhibition — something that Stankard quickly rectified! And Stankard pays loving and genuine homage to Palley several times throughout his story. Likewise, characters who wouldn't necessarily be known in the art world, but who were important to Stankard and his work, are remembered. Mike Diorio, a dentist and collector of paperweights, was also a photographer who took detailed shots of nature — roots and wildflower close-ups — that Stankard used as models when creating his work. Diorio passed away in 2001. Afterwards, to deal with his grief and to honour Diorio's memory, Stankard paid tribute to his friend by creating a paperweight titled "Mike's Heart."

In the 1970s, when Stankard began exhibiting and selling his work in galleries, the studio glass movement in the United States truly began. Stankard speaks of the arguments and debates that raged in the art communities of the times — of the heated discussions over what makes something art and what makes it craft. Are paperweights kitsch? Can works in glass be sculptural and part of the art historical tradition? Once, feeling

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overwhelmed by the debates raging about him, Stankard asked Palley what he thought. The answer he was given was, “*Never let all that bullshit distract you. Just continue to make great work.*” It was an era of great fired-up passion within the art world — and Stankard did exactly what Palley had advised by continuing to make great work and to make it meaningful, regardless of the category that others would assign it. Stankard’s work pushed — and continues to push — the boundaries of fine art using a material normally associated with craft.

Stankard’s achievements have come at a cost — for many years debt was his and Pat’s constant companion and there was sacrificed time with his family. But no one can deny that his struggles were worthwhile ones. This autobiography is an honest capturing of his ongoing personal struggle to create the best work that he possibly can, to put aside his doubts and demons and to focus on what he knew was important and what he knew he was capable of achieving — regardless of what anyone else said. Stankard acknowledges this himself when he notes that “*. . . art making is a spiritual quest, and is as close to prayer as one can get to glorifying the Almighty. Being an artist requires dedication and sacrifice as a calling equal to that of clergy.*”

Ultimately, what anchors this story, with its many threads and layers, is love. Love of family, of art, of excellence, and of God. Stankard’s story inspires, educates, informs, and entertains. When he was a student at risk of having to leave Salem County Vocational Technical Institute due to bad grades, the principal told him that he should quit school and join the army. Stankard said “No,” because he knew that glass would be his life. Did that inspiration and tenacity come from such humble beginnings as a

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child's encounter with a bonfire and a plastic rose in a glass bowl? Perhaps. Whatever the source of determination that allowed Stankard to realize some of the greatest art works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries — regardless of medium — one can only echo and wholeheartedly agree with his mentor and friend Reese Palley who told him, "*Stankard, you should be making paperweights full time, and if you continue to do significant work, you'll be all right, and I'll guarantee it.*"



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Every Fourth of July, Papa would take us boys to the annual Attleboro Falls Firemen's Bonfire and Carnival. I always looked forward to going to this festival because there were so many games to play and, each year, the evening bonfire seemed to be bigger and more monstrous than ever before. When I was thirteen years old and went to this carnival, I discovered the most remarkable game booth I had ever seen. There, displayed on the side table, were red plastic roses, each one shimmering in its own glass bowl which had been filled to the top with water. I was fascinated by the beauty of the roses, magnified as they were by the water, so I decided to win one for my mother.

To get the rose, all I had to do was to toss a coin into one of the bowls. If I got the coin in, the bowl and its rose would be mine. Fortunately, the bowls weren't too far from where I was standing, and the somewhat constricted opening at the top of the bowl seemed large enough to hit with a coin. No problem, right?

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To my surprise, however, the coin-toss turned out to be a lot more difficult than it looked, and after five frustrating attempts to get my coin in a bowl, I ran out of money. Papa came to the rescue and gave me another fifty cents and, when my persistence finally paid off, I walked away with my hard-won treasure.

I carried the prize around with me for the rest of the evening and, after the bonfire was over and we had returned home, I was proud to give the rose to my mother. She placed it on her dresser and it remained there for the next forty-three years — until the day she died at the age of eighty-eight.

I rediscovered that soiled plastic rose when my mother died, and since that time I have often found myself wondering about that night so many years ago at the Firemen's Carnival in Massachusetts. Is there any possibility that the vivid images of the delicate red rose encased in a glass bowl and the destructive yet awesome power of the bonfire — such contrasting forces of nature, yet juxtaposed in my experience — might have ignited in my subconscious mind the notion that flowers, glass, and fire could be brought together as one? Is it possible that in one magical moment in time, my destiny was sealed for life?



Fire and glass aside, my fascination with plants and their flowers began long before I won the plastic rose at the Firemen's Carnival. My mother told stories of how, as a child, I would eat the leaves off of her prized rubber plants, which, in turn, would prompt my father to insist that I had some type of vitamin deficiency. Other stories had me constantly picking the blossoms off of my father's cherished poppy plant, even while knowing that a harsh reprimand would always follow. To this day, my fondest

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recollections of childhood revolve around how much I enjoyed playing outdoors and exploring the woods. Forever I will hold dear the memories of working in the garden with my father and grandfather and, as a Boy Scout, learning how to be self-reliant in the woods.

As I passed from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood, my life was complicated by difficulties caused by a learning disorder I had, but that went undiagnosed until I was well into adulthood. While I faced dissatisfaction and frustration daily with many aspects of my life, I also was constantly challenging myself to excel at much of what I could master and control.

Reading, one of the foundations of knowledge, was particularly difficult for me, whereas manual crafts were among my stronger areas of performance. In high school, I did well in wood-working and metalworking; at my vocational and technical school, I was introduced to glassworking; and when I started full time employment in the 1960s I found myself working in the scientific glass industry. Still driven both by a lack of satisfaction with what I was doing and, nonetheless, the need to excel at it, and gradually finding ways to acquire more knowledge, broader experience, greater satisfaction with my work, and increased self confidence, I found myself first being drawn toward working with glass as a craft and then toward the newly emerging studio glass movement. Still later, I became an integral part of the community of artists who had chosen to interpret and advance this beautiful and important new medium of expression.

Now, as a mature artist in glass, I can look back on the ebbs and flows of a life that has presented me with both challenges that have hindered my personal and professional development and blessings that have exceeded my grandest expectations. I

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also recognize that I have been successful at overcoming many of the obstacles that characterized my early life, and have witnessed and taken part in the development of an art form that I dearly love and respect and to which I have devoted most of my adult life. Increasingly, I am moved to share my experiences and perspectives, mainly, I think, for three distinct yet inseparable reasons, and it is for these reasons that I have written this book.

I am privileged that my art is recognized and respected by artists, critics, and scholars internationally. My art is, however, but an expression of the natural world that I value, the standards of excellence in expression that I have set for myself, and the answers to my prayers that I can represent my values and standards in ways that will speak meaningfully to others. I am anxious to share insights into my life that can reveal the paths that I have taken, many of which are unconventional, in my journey from an underachieving dyslexic youth to my present position so that the purpose, content, and progress of my art making may be more completely understood.

I believe that the difficulties I faced in coming to recognize, understand, and deal with my dyslexia can be instructional and inspirational to others who might suffer from this — or some other — challenging personal circumstance. In this book, I speak of the limitations that my learning disorder imposed on me, the opportunities that it placed — or nearly placed — beyond my reach, the meaningful revelations that came my way, and the milestones I passed as I sought and recognized and adopted methods for educating and improving myself. It is my prayer that my experience can inspire others with personal challenges to pursue their dreams and to persist in that pursuit until those dreams are realized.

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My background, and the pathways I took to become an artist in glass, are unusual among most fellow glass artists of my generation — itself the pioneering generation of the art form. Being employed in industrial glass as the studio glass movement began to materialize in the university art school environment, I was outside of the contextual, conceptual, methodological, and practical universe in and of which the movement itself was born. Yet, I sensed and was motivated by the creative potential within this new and vibrant movement, and I was challenged to adapt the methods I knew and skills I possessed in ways that would allow me to express myself at the level of excellence required for my glass to become art. With effort and opportunity, my work became accepted as art and I became accepted as an artist, stature which allowed me the further honor of participating in the establishment and strengthening of educational programs and organizations that celebrate and advance the appreciation and progress of art in glass. In the pages that follow, I provide insights into the history of glass worked as craft/art and the studio glass movement as I have witnessed and experienced them during the past forty-five years.

Collectively, I hope that *No Green Berries or Leaves* will inform and inspire others who might be interested in knowing about the personal side of an artist's life and about that artist's view of the recent birth and development of glass art in America.

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Lastly, I wish to acknowledge two of my dearest friends — Dr. Michael Diorio, 1936–2001, and Martin Abramson, 1945–2007. I present this book as a tribute to their memory.

Photographic Credits

The photographic essay that appears near the end of this book contains several images that were provided by friends and colleagues, and I am grateful for the generosity of these people and organizations. The sources of these photographs, identified in parentheses by plate number and position on the page, include James L. Amos (front cover, top; VII: all; VIII: top left and right, bottom; X: top left and right; XVI: top right; XVII: left top and bottom; XVIII: top, left; XXII: top, bottom; XXVI: all; XXXI:

all), Carol Bates (XXIII: top, middle left and right), Robert Bowe (XII: middle; XIII: top), Corning Museum of Glass (XIX; XXIV: top left and right, bottom left), Mike Diorio (V: lower right; XVI: top left; XXI: bottom), John Healey (XXX: top), Mike Hogan (IX: bottom), Jillian Molettiere (XIII: bottom), Museum of Glass (Tacoma) (XX: top), Muskingum College (II: bottom), Reese Palley (IX: top left), Mark Peiser (X: bottom), Penland School of Crafts (XII: top, bottom; XXIV: bottom right), Jennifer Richard for Team Photogenic (XX: bottom), Miriam Rosenthal (XXI: top), Salem Community College (V: top; XIV: all; XV: all), Douglas Schaible / Schaible Photography, Inc. (XXVII: all; XXVIII: all; XXIX: all; XXXII), Ivan Scott (II: middle), SOFA Chicago (XVIII: bottom), Joseph Stankard (XVI: bottom left and right; XVII: top right, middle right; XVIII: lower right; XXII: middle left and right), Pat Stankard (XXIII: bottom), Joshua Steindler (XXV: all), and WheatonArts and Cultural Center (XI: all). All images that are part of the mosaic on Plate I were provided by the photographers and institutions just named.

The photographs of paperweights that appear within the text were taken by Joshua Steindler.