

Robert Johnson, Moriarty, New Mexico

*Diné (Navajo) Nation
Silversmith*



I was born in Gallup NM in 1968, raised in Pinedale NM and graduated from Gallup High School in May 1986. My silversmithing career started when I was 14 or 15 years old, as a buffer for my parents, Roger and Betty Johnson, buffing their handmade sterling silver beads. When I graduated high school, my plan was to attend a vocational school in Phoenix AZ, due to lack of financial assistance, I was not able to attend the school I planned on attending.

Through an acquaintance I met the late Kirk Smith during the summer of 1986, Kirk mentored me on his style of silversmithing. Traditional Navajo stamping with an antique finish, sometimes high polished pieces all of which started from bracelets, earrings, Concho belts, rings, squash blossoms, hair tie's and so forth. It was an exciting time of my life learning a new trade and being able to support myself and my family.

The silversmithing business was a success for me and I set aside my plans of higher education. Business was great; in time, I designed my own styles of Navajo Jewelry and with my designs being unique, I've had to deal with other artists copying my designs which makes business difficult.

Silversmithing is my passion, once I start on my pieces, I find it difficult to come to rest. My ability to work on my jewelry is an addiction but I know I have to make time to rest. Since the price of silver increased by a high margin in 2011, that was the time to rethink my future. Silver business being so slow and difficult, I decided to pick up on my higher education and make a sacrifice and take a chance in starting a new beginning. I attended Tulsa Welding school March 2012 to September 2012. Welding may seem to be related to silversmithing, that is not correct. Welding is so much difficult, as challenging as it was, I took on the challenge and succeeded in completing the recommended time to graduate from Tulsa Welding School. I took my certification to Local Union 412. I'm still a member with the union but I love to create my beautiful pieces of Navajo Jewelry. I left the union for the time being. I believe I will continue my passion until I am not able to.

