

321 East 9th Street 1980.

A cold dark March.

I lay on my mattress at 321 E 9th street - a basement apartment with a long maze of brick entry halls where an old piano harp leaned against the wall. Visitors would swipe their fingers across the strings as they walked in.

It was a half a floor below street level, so I could see people's ankles on the sidewalk as they walked by. I'd have wacky adventures with the East Villagers passing by. My bed was up high on a platform. I took a brand new Exacto knife and kept plunging the blade in and out of the mattress, making stabs and slow deep cuts. I was in deep distress. I had just returned from three months in South America. My tiny basement apartment had flooded and all my art work was wet on the bottom. I piled them on the hollow non-working brick fireplace where the rats would make guest appearances from underground. My phone was turned off. I had alienated most of my friends. I had isolated myself in my depression, when an old boyfriend Fred asked if I wanted to go to Brazil for a few months. He'd pay. I went.

"It doesn't mean we're going to sleep together" I warned, "Just because you're paying."

He may have heard me but he didn't believe me. One day in Rio we broke up after a terrible yelling match on the beach. I told him I'd continue on without him. I didn't have much money but I had sold my first order to Fioricci, an Italian boutique in Rio where they also sold gold cowboy boots and yellow jeans. I wore the gold cowboy boots and yellow jeans as I spent the days in Rio. My weight was less than 100 pounds when I finally got to a hospital in New York. They called it a fever of undetermined origin.



Wendy at less than 100 pounds. Rio 1980 with Mickey Mouse.



I made a gorilla mask, Here I am with my friends in the park. I'm on the left, above the boy, wearing the gorilla mask.

We had met a girl on the beach in Rio from a prominent Jewish family - the Landaus - Isa Mara Landaus. She was making friends with Americans to improve her English. She invited me to stay with her in an apartment with a terrace covered with bougainvillea.

I ran the blade into the mattress again wondering if I could do this to myself. I took another swig of Southern Comfort.

On the mantle above my fireplace was an array of my bejeweled bracelets and a figurine of a white horse. It reminded me of my father; when I was bleeding, I would remember to cover it in blood.

How did I get here, I wondered? My walls were covered with my earliest clippings, showcasing my jewelry in magazines like Vogue and Harper's Bazaar. I had started in 1975 on my kitchen table on Bleecker St and soon it was the talk of the town. People called me the Darling of Vogue. The New York Times wrote an

# The New York Times

## Trivialities: Fa



*A Note of Fantasy for the Wrist*

By RUTH ROBINSON

What Wendy Gell calls her "vibrates," or fantasy bracelets, are worn by such performers as Bette Midler, Paul McCartney, Barbara Streisand and Liza Minnelli, but their appeal—combining as it does nostalgia with a sense of humor—reaches beyond the show business world.

The whole thing got started when Miss Gell, a song writer and an inveterate punk collector, found some nineteenth-century metal watch bands on Grand Street and began plastering them with such things as shells, plastic flowers,

rhinestones, political buttons and beads (Miss Midler, for instance, has it known that she likes lips, triangles and hot dogs, so they're all there on her wrist), plus a map of Florida.) The bracelets range in price from \$37.50 to \$40 as much pieces as the eight band, 22 East Fifth Street, Room, 124 Fourth Avenue South, Brooklyn 75, 222 East 48th Street, Ninth Floor, 12th, East Sixth Street, and Jarring, Jack's Place, 221 East 34th Street, Far West, California, and so on.

Some of the most elaborate designs include, perhaps, a suspended ball basket or necklace—call Miss Gell at 869-8169.

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"I've had a terrible accident. Can I come to your house? I don't have money for a cab."

Soon, I was sitting safely in MaryEllen's kitchen, my wrists turned upward, with gauze wrapped around them." Don't make me look," she begged me.

MaryEllen slipped into the bedroom to call a doctor friend of hers and I sipped the strong sweet tea used with Molasses - "to raise your blood sugar," she said.

The docs and the staff were very kind at St Vincent's. I remember sitting there thinking that two weeks had slit my wrists but that I was safe now; safe - knowing they were there for healing. Sitting there, the sight of my blood flowing out of my wrists was in the room. I was interrupted when a beautiful black man in a white coat appeared in to take my blood pressure. He held my arm so tightly against his chest that the sensation of pain was no more.



I hadn't been diagnosed with any mental illness and wouldn't be for many years.

My moods ran from super manic – Feeling Fabulous working all night alone on the 11th floor of 37 West 37th eating only the rich divine chocolate from the Charcuterie and drinking Courvoisier brandy and espresso. Or at my sprawling apartment at 240 East 27th Street and Second Avenue. When I was in that manic state, I wanted to Buy Everything, stay up all night, or go to the Roxy nightclub and dance and dance in costume, on roller skates. My good friend Gene di Nino owned it. He was a big collector and bought a ton of my best wristies. He gave one to Madonna.

There were some years in the 90's when I didn't have any business but his. He bought my very best stuff and would fed-ex me cash in 100 dollar bills.





When I was in NYC, many years later, he took me to dinner and invited me to his place. He had taken some of my best vintage cuffs and added more things to them, gluing these new pieces all over the finished cuff. He called them Gellinos - a combination of my last name, Gell, his last name of di Nino.

He thought I'd be delighted.

I was shocked and angry.

I didn't like my stuff being altered.

I remember being at St Vincent's in the Village. My dad and mom asked, should we come there? I said no, but I really meant YES!

One day, I got a hideous letter from my Dad. I only read it once and, in a blinding rage, tore it into a million pieces. My sweet dad wrote: "Wendy, we don't know what to do with you! I wash my hands of you... I cut you off..."

It was the lowest point of my life and I could feel the blood flowing from the cuts on my wrist. Although my wounds were closed and healing I would have that somatic sense of the blood flowing and flowing many times in my life.

When I saw my mother, many months later, she kissed my wrists like a mother kissing a bruised knee or a bee sting.

A week or two passed. I was still locked up in the psychiatric ward. A lady Doctor asked if I would ever do that again. "Of course not!"

I lied.

She let me go.

When you are manic depressive, you don't ever know how high or how low you can go. Right now, writing this, I'm in a manic state – my first in three years. This time is different. This time, I'm totally focused, working on eBay, writing, going thru boxes. Mania is FUN!!! You are so creative and can do Everything!

The trouble comes when you come down. But, after being so sick, in the hospital for a month I deserve this high and am enjoying every second. I am happy to be happy.

Three years ago, Christmastime, I maybe made 30 Christmas wreaths. They were too expensive to ship - \$40. Which meant, I could only sell locally. I still have a ton.



One of my many Christmas wreaths.

I swear, I'm gonna get carpal tunnel syndrome just from looking through pictures for this book.

After the hospital, I was sent to a halfway house.

Soon, my friends had brought me my glue gun and some supplies and I put the other residents to work helping me make barrettes.



Me back in the 1980's – picture by Sandy Moon

I just always have to be working.

But I didn't like it there and soon left.

I stayed with different friends for months at a time, before I got back into stride and made some money so I could go on with my life. I got a commission from the fabulous shoe shop, on Fifth Ave, Charles Jordan. I was paid \$4000 to make an amazing Christmas tree they would keep and send from store to store each holiday.



I decorated angel dolls and shoes that lit up.

I had enough money to start my life over.