

An Artful Soul

By Marla Miller

Valinda Martin opened her first Art For the Soul shop on Balboa Island a few years after a bizarre boating accident left her a paraplegic 11 years ago, primarily to maintain her focus on what she loved to do: sell and shop for beautiful things. Filled with handcrafted furniture and artworks of all kinds, collectibles she has acquired mostly by traveling to trade shows around the country, Martin's two shops (the other on Forest Avenue in Laguna Beach) are stocked with colorful, bold, whim-

gency room the day of her accident – interventions were done that shouldn't have been to a spinal cord injury patient – she is quick to add that that was then. Today, Martin doesn't waste time looking back. She's too busy looking at what's ahead.

A family trait. She tells a story about moving to Sacramento to live with her sister just weeks after the accident. Her sister had her house modified to accommodate Martin's wheelchair. She also had three rules Martin had to agree to before she let her move in.



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“I had to promise to work out daily, keep the common areas of the house clean and keep my hands off her magazines!” says Martin. To jumpstart her adaptation to wheelchair living, her sister showed up at the airport in a rented car with hand-controls. It was time to get behind the wheel again.

Professional women’s groups have honored Martin for her business savvy as well as for the inspiration she offers women dreaming of owning businesses. “It’s about following your passion,” says Martin. “I love every piece of art I put in my stores. If I don’t love it, I don’t sell it.” She gets a kick out of discovering up-and-coming artists, then tracking their careers. And if you’re in one of her stores shopping, don’t ask her to haggle price because she won’t. “If you don’t like my price, you should go to another store,” she says to customers who try to negotiate. Her artists’ works are worth the price she’s asking, thank you very much.

Sense of humor is key, says Martin, whether you have a disability or not. She has lots of stories about being wheelchair-bound she tells to entertain; the one about the beach is a favorite. She loves to spend time at the beach for all the obvious reasons; also because she doesn’t feel disabled there. Her longtime boyfriend, a former Newport Beach police officer, almost always accompanies her. When he does, he likes to carry her down to the water’s edge. That always attracts attention. “Women have approached us and said things like ‘How romantic!’ because they don’t know I can’t walk. We get a kick out of it.”

Ever the saleswoman, before ending the interview she makes a pitch for her stores. “My prices range from \$1.25 to \$10,000 so something is bound to catch your eye,” she says. “And did I mention corporate gifts? We have great ones!” Then she laughs a laugh that’s simply contagious.

Our community is filled with entrepreneurs; many have extraordinary stories to tell. Tell yours to Marla Miller – ocwriter@earthlink.net. ■

sical, delicate, and one-of-a-kind objects, just like Martin – a woman always searching for the light though she easily could have wallowed in self pity.

If wallowing ever crossed her mind, there’s no hint. “My disability is obvious, so you know trouble’s coming the second you see me.” She laughs before shifting to a more serious tone. “We all have them, disabilities, mine is just more obvious than others. This was supposed to happen to me so I could appreciate life more.” Though she wishes she had been treated differently in the emer-