

Living a Dream

Life handed Barbara Robinson lemons. With the help of a life coach, she made 'pink' lemonade.

The little house at 238 Pier Avenue is a work in progress. There are window panes to be replaced, bare walls awaiting a fresh coat of paint, and plumbing that cries out for serious attention. It's doubtful you could find a way to reheat a cup of coffee in the battered kitchen, even if the exposed wiring in the front hall didn't cause you to shy away from the electrical outlets.

Barbara Robinson seems oblivious to the missing plaster and uneven floorboards as she walks through the cottage, stopping to admire the fireplace.

"Isn't it great," she marvels, although it's not clear whether she means the fireplace, the house, or life in general.

It's a warm afternoon in mid-August and autumn seems relatively remote. But by Oct. 1, just six weeks away, Robinson plans to transform the little house on Pier Avenue into a boutique called p.i.n.k.

It's a project that's near and dear to her heart. Robinson, who is in the midst of chemotherapy treatments to rid her body of cancer, will donate the profits from p.i.n.k. to support breast cancer research.

"I literally had an epiphany," she said. "I woke up one morning and knew exactly what I was going to do."

Such certainty is a luxury in Robinson's life. After her initial diagnosis with breast cancer in 1997, she underwent an aggressive course of treatment that involved surgery, radiation and chemotherapy.

"I beat it. Goodbye. I never wanted to hear the word again," she said.

But the cancer has returned twice; once in 2002 and again last fall.

Robinson is buoyed by the support of her family, a son and daughter, four step-kids and six grandchildren. But the physical and emotional challenges of fighting breast cancer, while going through a difficult divorce, have pushed her to search for meaning in her life, to see the big picture.

At first glance, she didn't like what she saw.

"It's really easy to do well when everything is smooth," she said. "But the real test of character is when these unexpected bumps in the road come along, whether it's cancer or the breakup of a marriage. I was so devastated and overwhelmed by it all that I just got lost."

Helping her find her way is Danielle Vindez, a health and career coach based in Redondo Beach who's been working with Robinson for several months to help her establish goals, boundaries and priorities in her life.

"Barbara was very ready for change," Vindez said. "She's intelligent, strong, caring, and driven, once she knows what she wants. Sometimes you just point a person in a new direction and they discover the strength and wisdom within themselves to go places they never dreamed possible."

In weekly meetings, either in person or over the phone, the two women have charted a path built on personal values, a vision for the future and hope.

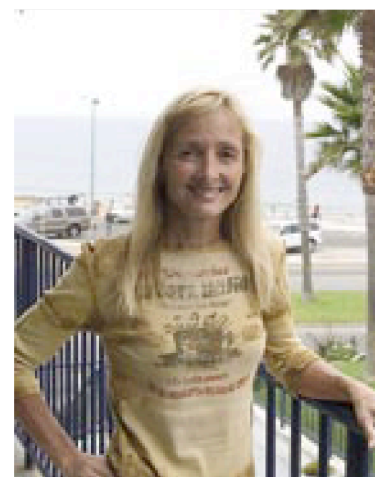
"We only talk about cancer 10 percent of the time," Vindez said.

Life coaches like Vindez have become an increasingly popular resource for people seeking to manage change in their lives. Most work closely with their clients to help them discover new possibilities in their lives, then provide a framework for helping them reach their goals.

Robinson believes her work with Vindez has helped her gain clarity and perspective in a time of potentially debilitating loss and change. Her first exercise with Vindez was to develop an overriding goal for her life. The goal she set that day, and continues to pursue, is elegant in its simplicity.

"I want to go to bed at night feeling good about myself and how I conducted myself and not have any regrets," she said. "At this stage in my life the most important thing is to know I'm tak-

Danielle Vindez (right) specializing in helping people like Barbara Robinson (opposite page) achieve their life goals.





ing every day and setting an example of how to live.”

The outward manifestation of that goal is the cottage on Pier Avenue. Even with its peeling paint and rusty pipes, the Craftsman style house is a diamond in the rough, promising to add the kind of value to downtown Hermosa that can't be affected by fluctuations in real estate prices or interest rates.

There's another expression of Robinson's newfound purpose in life, one that's probably only evident to her family and close friends.

“I have a focus now, not just what I want to do, but who I want to be,” she said. “I hold myself to the highest standard. That doesn't mean I never stumble, but I don't beat myself up anymore like I used to. Now I just try to fix it.”

She is, Robinson admits, kind of like the little house at 238 Pier Avenue.

“I'm a work in progress.”

To Learn More

p.i.n.k.
238 Pier Avenue
Hermosa Beach, CA 90254
(310) 374-3615
www.pink-store.com

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