



Rock star

A hobby that helped Patsy Pinch battle cancer evolves into a business

STORY BY INLAND NW HOMES & LIFESTYLES STAFF
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When life hands them lemons, some people make lemonade.

Patsy Pinch makes rock sculptures.

Pinch's lemon was thyroid cancer; her diagnosis came in 2005. The North Spokane resident always had loved stumbling upon interesting rocks, so to help her cope with the

Patsy Pinch in her rock studio, above. Her products include, mirrors, door pulls, unusual finds such as a rock that resembles a dog, at left, and soap dishes.



disease, she began polishing and manipulating ones from her collection in artful ways. Soon, she started trekking to riverbanks hunting for particular shapes and colors, and now the lower level of Pinch's home is a studio filled with rocks, sorted in wicker baskets, waiting to become candle holders, soap dishes, cabinet pulls, or other creations.

"It's energizing and calming to do what I call the four C's: collect the rocks, clean the rocks, coat the rocks, and create," an upbeat Pinch says.

During the last several months, Pinch's therapeutic hobby evolved into a business: Lolo Boutique and Revival Lighting, both in downtown Spokane, and Simply Northwest, in Spokane Valley, now carry her products. On Valentine's Day, her heart-shaped stones were hot sellers among men who popped into Simply Northwest on the way home to their sweethearts.

After "going rocking," as Pinch calls the collection process,

she gives her found treasures a bath in her kitchen sink. Then, she coats the rocks with a varnish-type product. After experimenting with numerous finishes, she finally settled on a gloss that gives the rocks a patina that's neither too shiny nor too dull.

Pinch sorts her rocks by shape—"fatties," "flatties," and hearts among them. A basket labeled "fudge" holds block-like rocks that resemble the chocolate treat.

Eventually, she begins to see how the sorted rocks should be used, and she gives them a purpose, either as part of an art collage or as something with a practical purpose, such as a cabinet pull.

Pinch says there's nothing complicated or scientific about her creations.

"They're just supposed to make you smile. There's not enough of that," Pinch says.

Pinch always loved rocks, but grew a deeper appreciation for them after befriending Dr. Stephen Hegedus, a retired heart surgeon in his late 80s, five years ago.

Hegedus' apartment was filled with rocks, and each time she visited him he gave her lessons about their characteristics and origins. Hegedus died last summer.

Working with rocks helped Pinch through her battle with cancer, which included radioactive iodine treatment. During that procedure, a doctor dressed in a protective suit administered a radioactive pill to her in a plastic-wrapped room at a hospital. She had to stay in isolation for 24 hours, then was scanned with a Geiger counter before she could be released.

She downplays the seriousness of her cancer experience compared with people who have more grave forms of the disease, but the loneliness of that procedure has stuck with her.

"I'm sure chemo(therapy) and radiation are worse, but that wasn't fun," Pinch says.

Today Pinch is cancer free.

"I love every day," says Pinch. "Nothing is more important than spending time with people you love."

Pinch credits Mother Nature for the beauty of her rock creations, saying "the river does most of the work," and she's thankful for the hobby-turned-business she

found just when she needed it most.

"It's a lot less expensive than sitting in a therapist's office," Pinch says, laughing. □



INLAND
NW Homes
& LIFESTYLES

Reprinted from the April/May 2007 issue of
Inland NW Homes & Lifestyles, Spokane, Washington.
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