

## Everest Award October 2003 Story by Janice Meyers

My disability is a loss of an ability that once was a part of me. I am artistic and enjoy drawing and painting. I am also left-handed (a sure sign of being in my right mind I'm told) and my injury is in my left elbow, making it painful to handwrite, draw, paint, hold hands with my hubby, or ride a bicycle. I had always taken for granted that when my children were grown and life slowed down a bit, I could take up playing the violin again, and paint up a storm.

I was used to being very independent, like my 2 year-old grandbaby that, just "wants to do it myself." I had helped my husband build 2 houses, was an avid gardener and horsewoman. When I learned I had cubital tunnel, and the surgery only gave temporary relief, at first I was in denial, then determined that if I could just give my arm a rest it would get better, then I was angry and frustrated, then I was sad and felt a loss of direction.

My sense of self and relationship with God and my family and friends had to change. I had to learn to ask for help. I needed another channel to direct my God given talents towards.

Dr. Fryer encouraged me to pursue a Workman's Comp claim and warned me it would take perseverance. From there a wonderful team of people began to support me and open doors to places I did not want to go at first. My dear husband faithfully prayed for me and encouraged me to walk through these doors. I had been in retail doing display and customer service for over 25 years and enjoyed what I did. Its not easy to figure out "what do I want to be when I grow up" at my age.

Two different doctors told me that I needed to find an occupation using the computer. I thought to myself, "Please God, no!" The only thing I knew how to do on a computer was email and ebay, and it had been quite a feat for my family to get me to do that much. For cheap entertainment my family will hand me anything with buttons on it to see what I can't do with it.

I met Marcia at Wheeler and Beaton attorneys at law, and she guided me through starting the workman's comp process. Mr. Wheeler and Mr. Beaton both championed my going through vocational rehab and sent me to be counseled by Pat Aiken. She guided me to a wonderful school called Mac Teacher, and there I met the most patient teacher and best cheerleader,

Carolyn Hornbuckle. At Mac Teacher I met other teachers and students that had overcome disabilities or were facing similar challenges to my own. About half way through my schooling I felt I just wasn't getting it, and felt myself falling behind others in my class. I plopped myself down in Carolyn's office in desperation and talked with Janelle with tears in my eyes, ready to give up. Carolyn, the teachers and fellow students took it as a personal challenge to get me back on track. I ate more of Carolyn's M&Ms and stuck with the program and actually started having fun.

I was able to find work from home with my own web design business, from the many programs I had learned. It has provided a creative outlet, and I am meeting people from all walks of life that I otherwise would not.

Last April I was approached to apply for a job with EOC doing community work in my small town of 1,400 people due in part to my computer skills. As part of the Paso Robles / San Miguel Health Collaborative I work part-time as the Community Organizer for the Healthy Neighborhood Project in San Miguel. I have had the privilege to be part of bringing grant writer's training to residents, initiating the formation of a Youth Coalition, joining the Advisory Committee working on zoning issues, laying groundwork for bringing a Farmer's Market to town, partnering with Cal Poly on a Skate Park and town development and spearheading efforts to bring a community web site and newspaper to San Miguel. I love my job!

Thank you to everyone who was and is part of supporting me to meet the challenges of a disability and the blessings I continue to find I otherwise would have missed.