

## BACK STORY VIVIAN BLOOMS MILLINERY

As I watched my kids park their bikes behind their school in Guangzhou, China, I wondered to myself again about what I was going to do today. Yes, the kid's television show "Phineas and Ferb's" existential question of existence, meaning of life, and purpose.

"Go and learn something today," I said to them, and as they passed by me I kissed their foreheads in turn. I then returned to a messy but completely quiet apartment and let out a long sigh. Is this a "gilded cage" as my mother had described it to me? Well, metaphorical or not, my cage was again in a state of mess and disarray that only parents of young children could truly understand. In what universe do bubblegum toothpaste and a mini version of a monster truck go together? Well, I can answer that: mine. Maybe my old friend Anderson Cooper has something interesting to tell me today on CNN, my portal to the West.

At this time I was trying to sell handmade beaded earrings, crystal tea lights, lounge pants, feather bookmarks, and sock animals. I had socks transformed into elephants, hippos, zebras, dragons, and much more. This was just another attempt at self-fulfillment in the long hours that stretched out before me. I had in previous attempts considered a reusable shopping bag concept, each one made out of up-cycled material sewn by a disenfranchised part of the population and then sold at the eco-friendly, and environmentally responsible local market back home in Colorado. Before that, it was a website for custom-made jewelry, where you could design your metaphysical beaded jewelry, where each design element would be specific for the intended wearer. Pearls for purity, aquamarines for communication, talismans for protection, evil eyes, and hands of Fatima would dance through my head. But it all slowly fizzled and faded away. Put out by more pressing matters like soccer practice, what's for dinner tonight, and figuring out a good method of cleaning bubblegum toothpaste out of sofa cushions.

But I continued in my fruitless pursuits of small business viability, this time with a sale in Hong Kong. Yes, I was taking my show on the road. If nobody wanted my products in Guangzhou, I was packing them up and pitching my tent somewhere else. I believe it was the great American writer Mark Twain who once said, "To succeed in life you need two things: ignorance and confidence." And I was pretty sure I had plenty of both.

With my daughter Vivian as my assistant, we went to Discovery Bay in Hong Kong for an outdoor sale in May of 2014. I had my usual array of handmade goods but I had also included a few last-minute headbands that I had managed to glue together mere moments before leaving from Guangzhou. Unfortunately, as we were soon to find out, doing an outdoor sale in May in Hong Kong during the rainy season, is not a good idea. After we arrived at the hotel, I turned on the television to get an update on the weekend's weather. And it whereas gale-force winds smashed against our windows and the sky grew ever darker, we went down to the in-house dining room for afternoon tea.

And what to my amazement did we see? A Parade of cute hats and truly fascinating fascinators. There was a wedding taking place in the hotel and I was overwhelmed by the lovely array of beautiful ladies with feathers, crystals, bows, and flowers being worn on their heads. I was hooked. This was my destiny. Making pretty things for ladies to put on their heads. I am home.

As for the typhoon-soaked sale, I'm afraid, I didn't have a record-breaking day. The only sale I did make was the flower-covered headbands.

The train back to Guangzhou was canceled due to flooding. We had to cross the border by foot at Shenzhen instead, then wait under an overpass for two and a half hours for our alternative transportation: a bus back to Guangzhou. We arrived home at 3:30 am, exhausted but with a new spark and direction I wanted to go with my business. Vivian Blooms, a line of handmade millinery and accessories had begun to bloom