



Born and raised in Dallas, Texas, my life began as any normal, happy, healthy little girl. I played with dolls, had tea parties and followed my mom around doing the things she does so I could grow up to be just like her when I was a big girl. Life was good and I was living it to the fullest. Then, when I was 4 years-old, the unexpected (and seemingly impossible) happened and my life was changed forever. Literally in minutes, I began to lose the muscle control in both of my arms. The paralysis continued down my right arm to my right hand (though my left hand was – and remains, inexplicably mostly unaffected). A trip to the doctor confirmed that I had been struck with Polio, one of the few remaining cases in 1962.

I quickly learned that my life was changed but it certainly wasn't over. I simply had to learn to do things with my one good hand and my feet that other kids could do with 2 arms and 2 hands. Initially it was difficult for me to perform some of life's most basic tasks, but my learning curve ramped up quickly as my parents never treated me any differently than either of my younger sisters (and heaven knows that my sisters treated me like they did each other). My parents made me do chores, study for school and be accountable for my actions without ever letting me use the fact that my arms didn't work as reason not to do something. My sisters and I continued doing things sisters do, namely wearing each other's clothing, talking about boys and screaming at each other at the top of our lungs. I also still liked playing with dolls, having tea parties and emulating my mom.

I had no way of knowing when I was young; emulating my mom would be the very foundation of how I developed my passion for making jewelry. My mother, Barbara Wright, was an accomplished artist who expressed herself on canvas. She showed me that by simply taking a small brush, a few basic colors and an uninhibited imagination, there wasn't a shape that couldn't be drawn, a color that couldn't be created or a feeling that couldn't be artistically conveyed. My dad, a chemical engineer and the relentless organizer of an estrogen-charged home of 4 women, taught me persistence, planning, commitment, accountability, the value of hard work and determination. These skill sets have been as important to my success as the artistic, creative, boundary-less freedom I acquired from my mother.

I have spent a lifetime trying to convince my family that the event was not a tragedy for me, it just happened. Those who know me well, have difficulty labeling me as disabled. There is little I won't try or can't do.

I am married and have 2 beautiful children. My husband Greg, of 15 years, has remained supportive and helped me through the many challenges I have faced. My daughter, Brittany, graduated from the United States Air Force Academy, as Laredo, Texas' first female recruit and is a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force. My son, Austin Wright, is attending college at North Texas University studying Political Science and Spanish. I enjoy doing all the things that that any mother does such as spend time with my husband, work (though I'm officially retired now after a 30 year career in Federal Corrections), cook for my family, snow ski, ride horses, garden and hike.

But now, my passion is making jewelry. People that stop by my house are never surprised to see me on the floor or on the counter using my feet to make another authentic JoAnne Brooks original, using my one hand and both feet. As an artist, I strive to create great designs that are versatile, inspiring, stunning and unique. The right piece of jewelry should reflect your personality, favorite colors, and various styles. It should be the perfect fit, dressing up casual wear as easily as being the perfect accessory to complete your outfit for those special events. The perfect jewelry not only compliments your appearance, it should look as if "it was made just for that outfit". Customers comment that the necklace they selected goes with so many things and they get compliments whenever they wear it. I know that piece of jewelry found the right owner and I accomplished my goal as a designer.

I look forward to the opportunity to make a difference in other ways. I also hope to serve as an inspiration for others facing challenges in their lives; to teach by letting my actions reflect that "Disability" is just a word and a label. We each determine our own boundaries and choose what challenges we will overcome.

With hopes of eventually making the Texas Hill Country a full time home, we presently are part-time residents of Utopia. But, thanks to the help, kind words and advice, and complete support of the local artists, I have become one of the Hill Country's newest established artists.