

ENTERTAINMENT

# the artist within

A BRUSH WITH DEATH HELPS CHRISSANDRA NEUSTAEDTER DISCOVER HER PASSION FOR PAINTING

CATHERINE LITT  
THE NEWS BULLETIN

It should have been a typical Friday morning commute for Chrissandra Neustaedter.

She'd made the trip hundreds of times before, always catching a city bus, then walking the remaining blocks to her job at a legal firm.

But that Friday morning in 1990 would be different. It would nearly end her life.

"I remember getting off the bus and walking about a block," says Neustaedter who was living in Vancouver at the time.

"I must have walked another block and that's when I crossed the street and he ran the red light."

Neustaedter was hit by truck with such force that it sent her flying into a power pole, breaking her collar bone, her knee and causing head injuries so severe she lost basic language and motor skills.

"I had trouble getting my memory back," says Neustaedter.

"Everything was backwards. I couldn't remember what things were called."

The accident didn't end

Neustaedter's life, but it changed her in many ways. It forced her to re-examine what made her happy.

Working as a legal secretary didn't.

Painting did.

Life is too short not to do what you want to do, she thought to herself.

So Neustaedter quit the law firm, enrolled in art school, and hasn't looked back since.

Today, the 38-year-old is living exactly the life she wants. She's painting full time, enjoying the peaceful surroundings of her Nanoose Bay studio and finding steady demand for her work.

Neustaedter's distinctive acrylic paintings, with their raised outlines and vibrant colours, are exhibited in galleries across Canada.



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She's making a good living as an artist, but the monetary gains come second to the simple pleasure she derives from a life spent in such creative surroundings.

And on this day, as Neustaedter daubs a flash of green-blue paint on a canvas, sweeping it across a tiny section to fill it with brilliant colour, she can't help but be thankful for her brush with death 13 years ago.

For her, it was just what she needed to remind her who she is - an artist.

"I love what I do," says Neustaedter.

"I made the right choice."

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