



## The Sands of Cape Cod Always Bring You Home

by Jen Villa

"The Sands of Cape Cod Always Bring You Home." That's a line running through one of the pieces of art I created a few years ago. Little did I know I was predicting my own fate. Now, 23 years after my first summer residing on the shores of Cape Cod Bay, I have returned home.

Growing up summering in West Hyannisport, I was a beach baby from day one. Crossing the bridge from my home in Central Massachusetts every June was my favorite day of the year.

Subsequently leaving the Cape on Labor Day became the worst. Upon graduation, my parents sold our childhood home and the summer house by the beach became home.

Spending summers and college breaks on the Cape, my love grew deeper. After graduation from Trinity College in Hartford, CT, I desired an "endless summer" and quickly moved to Southern California.

I always insisted on being within walking distance of the beach, regardless of financial or professional sacrifices. I returned to the Cape for several weeks every summer and appreciated and loved the differences of the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

After living in San Diego for nearly three years and working for a film production company, I got the bug to pursue a lifelong hobby in photography and decided to go back to school.

I discovered Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara and must admit the location of the world-renowned school was more than a plus. A challenging program and a gorgeous backdrop made for an exciting few years.

Landing a job with the award-winning local newspaper, The Santa Barbara Independent was nothing short of a miracle. I was living in breathtakingly beautiful Santa Barbara and working as a freelance photographer, but it wasn't enough.

I was approaching my 28th birthday and realized making a life for myself in one of the nation's most expensive cities wasn't easy.

After a brief discussion with my family I made the best decision of my life. I was going to move "home" and start my own business.

Just over six years after I packed my car and drove West, I was headed back East, feeling invigorated and full of vision.

I wanted to open my own gallery and sell my artwork as well as represent and celebrate other local artists. It was a big move, a big change, and has been absolutely wonderful.

Upon moving back to Cape Cod, I was busy. Opening my own business wasn't easy, but I quickly realized it was fantastic.

Despite some annoying logistics involving permits, licenses, approvals and your typical rules and regulations, the experience thus far has been absolutely incredible and thoroughly enjoyable.

Greeted by the brisk March air, I jumped right into it and have been living and breathing The Little Beach Gallery (fondly nicknamed the "LBG") without looking back.

Spending a few months recruiting artists and future customers I geared up for a Memorial Day 2009 Grand Opening and have been moving steadily forward ever since.

I expanded after the first few months and had a fabulous first summer, shining with exciting monthly events ranging from poetry readings to promo parties for local music festivals.

I was floored when December ended up being my best month, nearly doubling August. More than anything, I was proud and thankful for the local support I received.

In just six months of existence, my gallery and I had managed to win over the hearts of LOCALS. Not only the summer residents and tourists, but the people that strive toward a 12-month functioning economy. That

is the part I appreciate the most.

Running The Little Beach Gallery and being a business owner on the Cape is awesome. I absolutely love my job and enjoy every minute of it... which is helpful when I'm on my eighth week without a single day off!

Thirty different artists show in my gallery, all of them inspired by the beaches of Cape Cod. Their work ranges from paintings, photography, glass, silk, wood and ceramic pieces, to jewelry, shell crafts, raku tile work and much more.

All works are locally crafted, which has become a driving force behind my business. I am a huge supporter of the SHOP LOCAL movement. I even created a small retail line available at the gallery with my own Support Your Local design and concept.

During this process and encouraged by the tough economic times, I have realized the vital importance of circulating your wealth back into your local community. I try to eat, drink, shop and exist as locally as possible.

This passion has led me, along with two fellow small business owners, to take over "Green Drinks Cape Cod," an environmentally-driven networking group that encourages awareness and discussion of our ever-changing environment.



The Little Beach Gallery, in Hyannis, provides a venue for local artists who celebrate the magic of the ocean to showcase their work fun and friendly atmosphere.

Having The Little Beach Gallery has opened up so many opportunities for me to be involved and make a difference within my own local community.

I feel blessed. I never have to cross the bridge on a Sunday afternoon or on Labor Day weekend. I provide locally crafted, gorgeous pieces of artwork to all kinds of people, created by all kinds of people.

I have a sense of community. I buy my eggs from a woman who has chickens in her backyard; I have to re-use the cartons. I get vegetables from a local farm; that is my produce. I go to a local networking event of some sort EVERY week.

I meet people, I promote my business, I make genuine connections. I am a female small business owner on the Cape and I am HOME.



Jen Villa is a photographer and collage artist, currently living on the street she grew up in West Hyannisport on "The Aves."

She insists on taking a moment with the ocean every day... feeding her creative inspiration and enthusiasm.

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