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MORE THAN A DESIGNER: ANNA BALKAN BRINGS BEAUTY AND EMPOWERMENT TO WOMEN ACROSS THE WORLD

Balkan uses her own unique experience to inspire, encourage and create

ATLANTA (Jan. 10, 2011) – Nearly two decades ago, Anna Balkan began an American journey that would transform her life – and ultimately the lives of so many women who have, and continue to, come into contact with her. From soap opera stars to models, brides to everyday shoppers, Balkan inspires women to feel beautiful through jewelry – and to create realities through love and trust of self.

A Journey Begins: From the Ukraine to the U.S.

A Ukrainian political refugee, 20-year-old Balkan immigrated to New York City in 1992, unable to speak English – though highly-educated in her home country – and with barely enough money to keep herself fed for a week. She was able to land a job distributing flyers in Times Square, but when the position ended abruptly, her circumstances became dyer.

“I remember walking blocks and blocks – I believe it was close to 50 – crying and thinking to myself, ‘What will I do next? I cannot speak the language, I am alone along millions of people and I am without any means to live,’” says Balkan. “Then I felt a tap on my shoulder, and in an instant, everything changed.”

The man tapping her shoulder was a New York-area dentist who, after hearing her plight, offered Balkan a temporary filing position. Though initially hesitant due to her lack of communication skills, Balkan accepted. As fate would have it, during her week-long tenure, both office managers left their jobs, and Balkan – though functioning with minimal English and without training – revitalized the office and shortly after earned a permanent position as office manager.

“It was the beginning to a new life. Through one kind gesture and one chance taken on me, I was able to learn conversational English and earn enough money to relocate and return to school – this time in the U.S.,” says Balkan.

She enrolled in Michigan State University, eventually earning a degree in economics. Upon graduation, Balkan was immediately recruited to the project management department of one of the nation’s top five IT consulting firms.

“Though I was experiencing a corporate career any person would envy, I felt that there was another purpose for my life. As a child in the 1970s and 1980s, I used my creativity to color the often bleak landscape of Ukraine, many times making my own jewelry to add beauty to my surroundings,” says Balkan. “That innate need to create would not abate, not even with my career fully established.”

Creativity With Caution

After giving birth to her daughter, Balkan began to explore her creative nature when coming home from her day job, eventually putting together enough pieces to begin showing. Her trunk shows were so impressive, Bloomingdale's took notice, as did the 2007 Hollywood Oscars, which chose one of her designs to include in 50 swag bags. With such great success in a relatively short amount of time, Balkan decided to take a leave of absence to apply to jewelry industry trade shows throughout the U.S. and further explore her new career frontier.

Though the road was not easily paved, Balkan took notice of signs around her to give her strength, many times relying on encouragement from excerpts of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* to battle personal doubt. At the end of her sabbatical, she knew designing was the path for her – as was solidified when she learned that her corporate position had been eliminated as a result of a company buyout.

Jewelry for a Purpose

In just three years, Anna Balkan jewelry has grown from one woman's creative dream to a company set to earn half a million dollars in 2011. When many in the industry experienced heavy losses due to the falling American economy, Balkan only flourished. Her pieces have been sold in over 250 international locations and worn by such recognizable stars model Janice Dickinson and cast members of both *All My Children* and *One Life to Live*. Additionally, her flagship retail shop in north Atlanta continues to gain in local popularity.

Her unique Spring 2011 designs boast three new collections: Russia, with rich colors signifying the reinvigoration of her homeland; Simone, highlighted with tones representing inner female tranquility and serenity; and Pop Art, using bursts of color to express today's contemporary woman.

"My new collections have pieces to speak to every woman, not just in beauty, but more in what they represent," says Balkan. "Jewelry needs to not just compliment fashion or a skin tone, but it needs to compliment a woman's inner self – her attitude, her passion – who she is. When I make these pieces, I think of what each woman is capable of and how adornment can illuminate what's inside."

Though she is thankful to the success of her own personal journey, Balkan does not forget women who, like herself, are in circumstances that seem altogether hopeless. As a member of the Board of Directors for Stop Trafficking of People (STOP), an international organization helping female victims of sex trafficking, Balkan uses portions of her profits to aid women through support, freedom and hope.

"Sometimes it is just a tap on a shoulder than opens up limitless potential for someone. If I can be the tap on a shoulder for one woman who is an unfortunate victim of international trafficking, I know I have made a difference," says Balkan. "As I was given the chance for a new life, I so too want to help others do the same. My jewelry has and will continue to be representative of the journey of every woman, no matter her life's path."

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