



Sisters Tania (left) and Abeer Srouji

# THE SROUJI SISTERS –

## Generous Acts of Dedication and Kindness

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALAN WYCHECK

**FOR TWO WOMEN BUILDING** their own jewelry business from the bottom up, channeling the perfect balance of confidence, ambition and refreshing optimism could be enough.

For Tania and Abeer Srouji, running a business means unlimited opportunities for community outreach and supporting those in need.

Along with volunteering their time, the Sroujis donate purses to nonprofit organizations and contribute percentages of their jewelry sales to worthy causes.

"I think that's how our jewelry business has really grown – because who doesn't love jewelry? We all do, but what sets us apart is what we give back," acknowledges Abeer.

From February through April, the appropriately named EyeCandy Accessories devoted 15 percent of sales to Abeer's Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Woman of the Year fundraising campaign, where every dollar counts as one vote. Nominated along with four other women, Abeer focused on raising money with a personal motivation: giving back for friends suffering from these diseases. Her remarkable \$28,808 total was enough to honor her with the "Woman of the Year" title and to provide significant financial support toward research aimed at improving lives.

These acts of dedication and generosity make all the difference in the world, a commitment that comes as naturally to the Srouji sisters as breathing or eating a sandwich – it's in their blood.

"My parents have always raised us that way. Tania and I both believe that we want to see what we can do to help, physically put our sweat and tears into helping people," describes Abeer.

"My parents used to have a restaurant in downtown Harrisburg. The mission is not

that far, and every day we would take food there. It was really more their example that it's just second nature... We were raised with the philosophy. 'When the hands open to give, it's open to receive,'" adds Tania. "That's how we live our lives as individuals – that's how our family is – and it's really rewarding."

Supplementing their desire for giving with a passion for jewelry garners a different type of reward: a chance to demonstrate their strengths as female business owners and introduce other women to fashion accessories that we can improve both their wardrobes and self-esteem.

"That's the one thing I love about this job: when you put a piece of jewelry on a person and their face lights up," Abeer explains.

"It's something as simple as buying yourself that one piece of jewelry that's going to make you feel better; people are going to notice your attitude. You stand up a little straighter," Tania describes of her attraction to the craft.

Synonymous with their lifestyle choices, the goal for EyeCandy has always been to create an affordable line of accessories, enhanced by their tagline, "You don't have to pay a million bucks to feel like a million bucks."

Remembering their roots as novice jewelers searching for wholesalers and basic equipment, the self-proclaimed jewelry addicts express desires to share their mistakes and successes, mirroring guidance from a pair of mentor sisters whose advice propelled EyeCandy's start three years ago.

When sisters share more than just a last name, the unique relationship can add honesty and flavor to a business or tear a bond apart.

In the Sroujis' case, personalities and styles may clash, but at the end of the day, their differences define their successes.

"We fight like cats and dogs because we're sisters, but the great thing is that we have opposite tastes. Things that I think are so ugly that Tania picks out are our bestsellers. For example, her bracelet. I didn't want to order that, so she tries it on and sells like four in a matter of a week," Abeer laughs.

"I actually sold seven, and it was the day after I wore it," Tania insists, earning a "whatever" response from her sister.

Abeer and Tania's relaxed sense of humor and backgrounds in banking and marketing respectively give their business an ideal touch of creativity, diversity and credibility. Their jewelry boasts pieces for all ages, from Hello Kitty necklaces to versatile casual and evening wear.

"It does work out perfectly because we do believe in our product, we believe in our company and we really feel like we could do something great," Tania elaborates.

Feelings for greatness continue to manifest in the perfect match-up between EyeCandy Accessories and Pink Hands of Hope, the

thrift store whose proceeds benefit families facing breast cancer.

Mix a nonprofit business with two charitable women searching for a storefront, and walk away with a mutually beneficial relationship and home for EyeCandy merchandise. In exchange for selling space, Tania volunteers the weekly hours that allow Pink Hands of Hope to remain open during the day.

Though jewelry and purse sales don't directly assist the store's mission except during breast cancer awareness month, the Sroujis find room for the organization that matches the theme of their lives.

Perhaps the greatest support comes from a fundraiser that Abeer describes as a surprise for Pink Hands of Hope owners. "We put together a \$400 gift basket and sold \$5 raffle tickets. We told them we had a raffle basket, but they didn't realize they were getting a check out of it."

With the "pay it forward" attitude that drives the sisters' support of nonprofits as well as their chosen careers, the abundance of ideas for EyeCandy expansion come as no surprise. They picture their business growing to a full-time job, with orders placed online and pieces sold by other retailers.

"We have a vision for EyeCandy that we want to see it explode," Abeer explains.

For women with so much on their plates, fatigue and frustration are constant hurdles detrimental to their overwhelmingly necessary work.

Is there a guaranteed remedy?

Tania concentrates on her natural desire to share more than just financial aid. "Why not? I think it's just your obligation to help people. It's not even about being in the position... that's really one of the best lessons. At one point, I lost my job, but I used my talents and my time."

Abeer relies on the reality check provided by the lives she's helping to change.

"It's exhausting, but it's worth it in the end. I always have to find a motivation inside. It's just remembering that you're doing this for a good cause." **HBG**