

A MODEL LIFE

Pensacola native returns to follow dream as an artist

TARIS SAVELL

Margaret Biggs walks into the Pensacola Yacht Club, and heads turn for a second look.

Walking talk with the confidence of a former model, Margaret is a Pensacola native who has come home.

The daughter of Walter and Molly Biggs, Margaret left the comfort of East Hill after one year of college at LSU for the lure of New York and the life of a much sought-after model.

"It actually fell into my lap after Michael Belk took some pictures of me. I became a Ford model, which turned into a 10-year career traveling to cities like Paris, Milan, Hamburg and Chicago," said Biggs, who turns 50 in January.

"A lot of time, I was lonely, even scared a bit.

When I arrived in Milan someone stole my wallet right away, though I did get to keep my passport," Biggs said as she recalled those early days.

Biggs' modeling career was seen through the pages of Paris Vogue, Women's Wear Daily and even Cosmopolitan. She also did TV commercials and worked for major department stores and catalogues. Think back to the early '80s, and the large Pepsi billboard that was seen all over the United States ... that lovely Pepsi lady was Margaret Biggs.

She acknowledges that much of what we think models go through is true.

"I was encouraged to sleep with agents who could help me, the drugs were there in Europe, and in New York, the bored rich men wanted you because you were pretty. They were not nice men, but I came out of that career with my integrity intact," she said.



PHOTO BY TARIS SAVELL

Above: Margaret Biggs, shown at the Pensacola Yacht Club.

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It was an exciting career for Biggs, who traveled to such locations as Istanbul, North Africa and East Berlin — before the fall of the Iron Curtain — Venezuela and the Caribbean. She said she has fought a bull in Spain, waltzed with a Russian and driven over the Atlas Mountains in the desert of central Morocco.

Biggs started a second career three years in Chicago real estate, but a deep-seeded desire was beginning to finally surface.

While her life to that point sounds wonderfully romantic and exciting, for Margaret, the pull of Pensacola and the yen for the hometown she loved finally won out — and her third career as an artist is now in full swing.

“It was time to take my painting seriously, or I would never be happy, even though I would not trade those earlier years for anything,” she said.

The memories remain, but her artistry is what’s important.

Biggs sees when we only look. Her love of the water, the beach, the shells, the movement of life’s nature are, for her, a spiritual experience.

“A good artist speaks from the soul,” she said, expressing her hunger for the reality of what she envisions. Her paintings, currently being exhibited in Destin, reflect the emotional love

she feels for this area.

“My heart has always been here because my family is here, and Pensacola is such a beautiful place. When I’m walking on the beach or swimming, a person can feel the peace.”

You can see the joy and happiness in her face, in the bearing of a model whose eyes light up when sharing her feelings about her love for painting. The response has been fulfilling, and her sales continue to climb.

Biggs has lived an interesting life and experience has taught her a great deal. She’s delighted to share that knowledge:

ADVICE FOR YOUNG MODELS

“The points I would give a young woman considering a modeling career,” Biggs said:

- **Learn to be discerning.** There are many men who get involved in the business primarily out of a desire to prey on beautiful young women. Learn to look past the charm for strength of character, honesty and integrity.
- **Always go with a reputable modeling agency.** If you have the desire, the height and the looks, go with a company with a strong clientele and strong affiliations with reputable agencies in other cities.

• **Save as much money as you can.** It is a short-lived career in a world where money is spent far too freely.

• **Take your career very seriously.** Take good care of yourself. Be on time. Watch your weight. Dress well. Always be well groomed.

• **Maintain your sense of self worth.** No job is so important as to compromise yourself for it, yet that is at times expected. It is not necessary.

STARTING A NEW CAREER

And for those starting a mid-life second/third career:

- It is never too late to follow your dreams.
- Be prepared to make sacrifices.
- The finest of homes and the most extravagant of lifestyles, is not at all worth it if you are living an inauthentic life.
- It will be scary at times, but don’t let your fear stop you.
- Believe in yourself, have faith, stay focused, work hard and be persistent.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

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