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PV businessman, artist, entertainer proves: *You can do it all*

By ALLISON BLACKHAM
Special to *Gateway Press*

What does the owner and chief executive officer of a multimillion dollar business do when he retires?

He moves to Penn Valley and becomes one of the greatest pastel artists in the United States. And in his spare time, he does a hot Elvis impersonation.

Allan Berman always dreamed of being an artist and a musician. But, unlike most people, when he had to choose between making a living and following his dream, he didn't sacrifice one for the other.

He did both.

Berman was immersed in art and music from childhood. His parents gave him a set of coloring pencils when he was 5, and he set out to draw the world around him, always trying to make things look real, or "better than real." When he was about 10 years old, his mother and father took him to see an exhibit of paintings by William Harnett, a still-life artist, at the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco.

"I was amazed. His work was so real that objects seemed to jump off the page at me. I thought, 'That's what I want to do!'"

But time brought some discouragement.

"In the '60s, it wasn't OK to be an artist. It was kind of like you were a bum, and it wasn't a real macho thing. I was the art editor of my high school newspaper, and I was in a rock band.

My parents encouraged me, but they were very business oriented. They assumed that I would grow up, and someday I'd take over the family company."

"In 1964 I had to make a choice. I could try to make it as a singer, or I could join my dad working in scrap-metal salvage. A cousin who worked in the record industry said 'Allan, in order to make it in the business now, you've got to be able to sing, to dance, to write the songs.' I'm not a writer, and I didn't want to spend years singing in bars waiting for a break ... so it was the scrap metal business!"

For years Berman worked with his father, and pursued his art and music in his free time. It was when he met his mentor, Roberto Lupetti, that art again moved to the foreground.

"Roberto was amazing. He was a classically trained artist, a modern master of oil painting. And he was this big, burly man, a hunter and a fisherman. He changed my perception of what an artist could be. He recognized my talent and accepted me as a student. He told me that if I could develop my work in pastels to the point where they resembled oil paintings, I could make my mark in the art world."

Berman quickly began to work on making that mark.

In 1976, he had his first professional showing of his work, and from 1976 through 1980 he was the resident still-life artist of the New Masters Gallery of Carmel.

Berman opened his own gallery in Burlingame in 1980, and started the Berman Studios Publishing Company in 1981.

His celebrity portraits caught the interest of the entertainment



Gateway Press/Allison Blackham

Allan Berman, retired from a successful business career, has returned to his great love in life — art. His works have earned honors and acknowledgement. On the side, Berman takes to the stage with Elvis Presley imitations.

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Artist

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Submitted to Gateway Press

Allan Berman's "I Never Promised You a Rose Garden," is an award winner.

industry. In 1984, he was asked to design the cover of *Elvis Presley International Forum Magazine*, and Orion Pictures Corporation commissioned a portrait of Sylvester Stallone. His success with the Stallone painting brought him an invitation to attend the Academy Awards that year.

"We drove up to the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in our little old car, stuck in the middle of this big procession of limousines. My wife said 'I'm not getting out!' But I told her 'Nobody knows who we are. Just smile and wave. So we smiled and waved all the way into the building, with people screaming and applauding. It was incredible."

Through all of this Berman kept his day job.

"In 1982, my dad retired and I took over the business. The timing was good. We were one of the first scrap metal companies to get into computer asset recovery. We made the big time."

But there was a downside to the good business.

Berman no longer had time to paint. He decided he needed another outlet, and thus the *Elvis Impersonator* was born.

"I use backtrack tapes and do Elvis, Neil Diamond, and Buddy Holly. It's been fun to do sock hops and charity fundraisers. I took second place in a Star Search competition. I even performed at Bill Clinton's 50th birthday party. Music is such a release for me. Thank goodness for karaoke!"

By the mid-1990s, Berman's computer recycling business was more successful than he'd ever anticipated.

"I was just lucky. The company was making a million a year in the early '80s, but by 1995, it was 18 million a year. At that point, I was able to sell the business to my employees and retire."

Retirement for Allan Berman is just another word for a new full time job. At last, he's pursuing his life's dream to make his living as an artist.

And he's doing well. He's won first place prizes or major awards with all the paintings he's entered in competition, locally and nationally.

This fall, the Pastel Society of America invited him to become a member.

"It's a great honor, more than I

ever expected. Usually an artist's work has to be accepted into three of their juried shows over a 6-year period before they can become members.

They invited me after my first exhibition, my first year."

Berman focuses on still life and wildlife painting now.

His paintings are exquisitely detailed, almost photorealistic, with a wonderful, surprising use of color, and a feeling of serenity.

He selects the subjects for his still-life groupings from among his collection of silver and antique Wedgwood china.

"It's a challenge to me to take these beautiful things and make them look real, so that everyone

can see them. It's a constant battle to get it right, to make it better. But I'm a 'type A'. My whole life is a push to be better. Maybe I'm still trying to prove I'm not a bum."

Even with the dream realized, Berman still has his sight set on the future.

"Breaking away from industry into art and music is just one step on the way for me. I'd like to become one the best pastel artists in the world.

I'd like to make a movie. I'd like to continue to do all of this for as long as I'm happy. It's a doorway to a new destination."

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Linda Whitmore, Editor
Kevin Garrity, Advertising Sales
Dar Brown, Director of Marketing & Advertising

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