

Boca Raton: Long-lost sisters reunite, open boutique together

LIFESTYLES By Leslie Gray Streeter - Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

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Opportunity knocks, they say, and on a fateful day in November, a huge opportunity literally knocked at Rosalia Schabauer's Orlando hotel room. On the other side of that knock were unknown possibilities for friendship, family and even a fashionable career. All she had to do was answer.

She just wasn't sure she wanted to.

"I was hyperventilating," Schabauer, who lives in Boca Raton, says. "I hid in the bathroom for five minutes."

The person knocking was a young woman not much older than her, whom she would be meeting in person for the first time, if she ever opened the door. After two years of tentative Facebook chats, emails and phone calls, she knew so much about the woman — that she born in Peru, just like Schabauer was 28 years ago.

They were half-sisters, in fact, and that made Schabauer understandably nervous.



Rosalia Schabauer, 28, (L) and her sister Karla Inchigalo, 30, co-owners of Athyntiq, a fashion glam boutique they are opening in ... [Read More](#)

So Schabauer let her keep knocking until, "finally my friend says 'Open the door,' so I did and I jumped into her arms. We started jumping up and down."

Just months later, Rosalia and her newfound sister, Karla Inchigalo, 30, sit across from each other in the bright showroom of Athyntiq, the new styling and fashion boutique they're opening in

Boca next week. **cq** They've gone from strangers to siblings to roommates and business partners.

Sure, it's a crazy ride. But together, the two are all strapped in and willing to see where it goes.

Watching the siblings giggle at each other from across the room, it's easy to see not only a physical resemblance — they have the same wide smile — but what appears to be a natural ease together, finishing each other's sentences and breaking off into a verbal shorthand they've developed in a short time. They compliment each other, with older sister Karla being the more assertive: "I hold onto the rails, she pushes me," Rosalia says.

Our story begins in Peru, where both sisters were born. Karla's mother had a brief relationship with a man who was in an off and on romance with his high school sweetheart. (Because of the sensitivity of their origins, the sisters declined to identify their parents by name.) Karla and her mother moved shortly back to San Francisco, where she soon had three half-sisters.

"I didn't look like anyone in my family, so I wondered about my father," she says. "I always thought of him."

Meanwhile, that father had married his high school sweetheart, and the two had one daughter, Rosalia. The family lived in Peru until she was 7, and then eventually moved to South Florida.

She was "very happy being an only child," she says now, which is why she was surprised two and a half years ago to get a weird message on Facebook from a stranger asking about her father. Karla, armed with just his name, did a search on the site and found photos of him on Rosalia's page.

"He looked just like me," says Karla, who had "always wondered" about her birth father, and now she was looking at this face that was so much like hers. Could this young woman in the photos be her sister?

For two months, "I totally stalked her on Facebook for a while," Karla says, before she got the nerve to write her. "But I thought 'What if she hates me? Could I hurt her feelings?' I didn't want to cause any damage."

When contact was finally made, Rosalia says she didn't hate her as much as she didn't believe her. Her first thought was, "You're crazy. You're in California, and my dad's never been to California," she says. "I wouldn't have even taken a look at her picture, but she sounded a little desperate. She wanted me to believe her. So I clicked on the picture."

And there it was, her father's face, a resemblance so striking that she agreed to Karla's request for a DNA test to know for sure, because "she looks more like him than I do. Looking at that picture, she deserved to have it," says Rosalia.

"I overnighted that baby!" Karla confirms.

Two days later, the results came, proving that the two were, indeed, sisters. On the advice of her aunt, Rosalia told her parents, who are now divorced, that she had a half-sister she'd never met.

"It was a shock for my mother," she admits. "She (eventually) took it with a grain of salt." Her father was more nonchalant, taking an "out of sight, out of mind" stance, Rosalia says.

Karla has still yet to meet her biological father, although "he liked a picture of us on Facebook," Rosalia says cheerfully. "My mom's side of the family has been very supportive. The ones who have met her say, 'You two are exactly the same!'"

After months of talking, Rosalia was planning to be in Orlando in November, and Karla decided to fly out to meet her. After that initial hesitant door-opening and subsequent jumping up and down, the two hit it off, going indoor skydiving and to a festival. By "the time it was time for me to go back, I decided to stay for two more weeks," Karla says.

Over their extended reunion, Rosalia, a makeup artist who'd begun doing mobile makeovers for South Florida clients, and Karla, an assistant for a California oral surgeon, started talking and realized that they both had "the same passion" to open their own boutique, Rosalia says.

By themselves, it seemed like a dream, but together, "she made me want to take the leap," Rosalia says.

Both looked in their respective homes, agreeing to move wherever they found the right place for Athyntiq, pronounced "authentic." Things went fast, signing a lease on a space in an upscale shopping center in the east part of Boca Raton in December, and beginning remodeling a month later. Karla packed up and moved in with Rosalia, and they hit the ground running.

At Athyntiq, which held its first fashion show last month at Blue Martini in Boca Raton, the sisters hope to provide a "head to toe" full styling service as a client desires, from the outfit to hair, makeup and a seamstress, Rosalia says. Their clothes are targeted at young, stylish women in "a lot of different sizes, from petite to extra curvy and extra-extra curvy. We want everyone to feel good about themselves."

While they look forward to delighting future shoppers, Rosalia and Karla are looking forward to making up for lost time, and "in a couple of years, we'll have made up for all the years I didn't get to tease her," Karla says.

And even though it's funny that this happened so fast, they're thrilled that back in Orlando, Rosalia took a breath and answered the door. Gone are those doubts Karla had before she contacted her sister the first time, afraid that she would hate her.

"She totally doesn't," Karla says, smiling at her across the room.

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