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Photo by Leita Cowart

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After a paralyzing diving accident, an entrepreneur and visionary finds the divine plan for his life in operating an organic farm.



Photo Courtesy of Alyson Roth

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### ABOUT THE COVER:

Andy and Hilda Byrd were childhood friends in Walnut Grove, Ga., and married later in life. They operate Whippoorwill Hollow Farm and sell their organically grown produce to restaurants and in two Atlanta-area farmers' markets. *Photo by Leita Cowart.*

*If you would like to make a gift to support the work you have read about, please contact the Shepherd Center Foundation at 404-350-7305 or visit [shepherd.org](http://shepherd.org).*

# SHEPHERD SISTERS

Once thrown together by chance, Brandy Pounds and Alyson Roth are now roommates by choice.

BY SARA BAXTER



Photo: Courtesy of Alyson Roth

**Last fall**, Brandy Pounds packed all of her belongings in her car and drove from her hometown of Murfreesboro, Tenn., to southern California. She had no job, but she did have a place to stay: Brandy moved in with Alyson Roth, with whom she'd roomed at Shepherd Center seven years earlier.

It was July 2000 when the women, both 21, sustained complete spinal cord injuries in accidents that happened a day apart. Brandy was injured at the T-7 level, Alyson at T-8. At Shepherd, they found themselves on the same therapy team and in the same room. A bond was formed.

"While at Shepherd, we went through everything together, from therapy to outings to bathroom issues," Alyson recalls. "We clung to each other for emotional support, enjoyed good laughs and shared our tears."

At the end of their therapy, the friends parted ways. Alyson, an Atlanta native, returned home to finish college, while Brandy went back to Tennessee and started college. The two traded emails for a while, and they saw each other at a Shepherd Adventure Skills Workshop in 2001. After that, they lost touch.

Six years passed when Brandy started to think about Alyson again and wondered how her friend was doing. "I regretted not staying in touch with Alyson and wanted to reconnect," she says.

Last fall, she found Alyson on MySpace.com, and the two started communicating again. Their first phone call turned into a three-hour conversation, with the friends laughing, sharing stories and recalling their time at Shepherd. Alyson was living in southern California. Brandy was still in Tennessee and anxious to move away.

"I just happened to have a spare bedroom in my apartment, so I invited her to check out California," Alyson says. "Within a few weeks, she was driving across country with all of her stuff!"

Brandy found a job as an executive assistant to the founder of a start-up communications company, helping with sales, marketing and logistical planning for two talk radio shows. Alyson, who has been in California since 2005, is a development manager for Free Wheelchair Mission, a nonprofit organization that provides free wheelchairs to people in developing countries. She helps with fundraising, marketing and event planning.

When not working, Brandy and Alyson enjoy socializing, traveling and participating in outdoor activities such as adaptive surfing. They are happy to be together again.

Brandy and Alyson say Shepherd taught them how to be independent and successful women with a disability, and it gave them an opportunity to form a genuine friendship with someone they might have never known before getting hurt. For that, they are both grateful.

"Seven years ago, we met each other as roommates in Shepherd through unfortunate circumstances," Alyson says. "And now, we are back to being roommates again – but by choice! It's truly amazing, and it's almost as if no time has gone by. We still click, just as we did while at Shepherd."

**Top:** Alyson Roth, left, and Brandy Pounds were roommates at Shepherd Center when they were inpatients in the summer of 2000. They lost touch with each other for six years and recently found each other again on MySpace.com. Now, they are roommates again and living in southern California.

**Left:** Alyson Roth moved to southern California in 2005. When she's not working as the a development manager for Free Wheelchair Mission, a nonprofit organization that provides free wheelchairs to people in developing countries, she enjoys adaptive surfing.



Photo: Courtesy of Alyson Roth