



Photo by Beverly A. Hoy

Artist on a Divine Mission

■ The confluence of art, nature, and religion shaped the childhood of Stephen Hoy. Now in his seventies, Hoy draws on the memories and values from his youth to create dazzling works of art. **BY KARIN M. LAZARUS, BFA**

Nature and nurture have had a strong influence on the person Stephen Hoy is today. He now draws on nostalgic memories in his work as an artist.

His parents were missionaries on a Native American reservation by the Okanogan River in northern Washington. “It was a very rustic setting,” he says. “We lived on an apple orchard bordering a small sweet clover farm.” He and his family worked in the orchard, picking apples, pruning trees, and making apple boxes. “We were very poor in those days, mostly living off of our half-acre vegetable and fruit garden,” he says.

His father earned a living as an itinerant preacher and by selling Bibles and other books. “He traveled on foot, preaching the Gospel and distributing Bibles,” Hoy says. “I say ‘distribute’ because he gave away far more than he sold, not wanting anyone to not have a ‘Good Book’ of their own.” Meanwhile, Hoy’s mother was a fine artist who worked with linen thread and quilting materials. He and his five siblings all learned, to varying degrees, to crochet, knit, and sew.

A lifestyle U-turn in middle age

Ever since childhood, Hoy had dreamed of following in his parents’ footsteps and becoming a missionary. In 1987, he was working as a real estate manager in Edmonds,

Washington, when he and his wife Beverly decided to make that dream come true. Two years later, at age 50, he entered the Denver Seminary, embarking on five years of disciplined training through which he earned a Master of Divinity.

In the course of his divinity studies, the school sent Hoy to Brooklyn for urban studies. “I had never considered the idea of moving to New York,” he says. “However, when Beverly and I met the pastor and his wife there, we fell in love.” They moved to Brooklyn in 1996, and for nine years Hoy worked with an inner-city church on Coney Island. “I was very much involved as a missionary pastor with the homeless and projects community there,” he says. “It was a full-time ministry that included having people in our home and taking youth on special trips.”

Then, in January 2004, Hoy’s life took another unexpected turn when he discovered a second long-buried passion. He and Beverly were celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary. As they were driving to a bed and breakfast in Newport, Rhode Island, Beverly asked him, “What do you want to do when you retire? What is something you have always wanted to do but have never done?” His answer: “I would love to put down on paper the things I see.”

Beverly had a good laugh. One of their favorite pastimes was playing the game Pictionary, and she reminded her husband

how she would beg him not to be her partner because his drawing wasn't good enough. Then she got serious and encouraged him to try. "Through her ways of asking questions and probing my unfulfilled interests, Beverly 'discovered' me as an artist at age 65," Hoy says.

Two passions, one vocation

When they got to Newport, they found a small art supply store and bought art pencils and paper. "My first subject was an antique toy horse that sat beside the huge stone fireplace on one wall of our room at the bed and breakfast," Hoy says. "I sat on the floor and drew that horse until I was satisfied."

Back in New York a month later, Hoy completed his first painting—a watercolor rendering of the Sea Gate lighthouse. When he finished, he knew that he was blessed with the gift of visual expression. "It was beautiful," he recalls, "in soft blues, grays, and the brick red of the houses on either side. There were the red highlights of the beacon light, and the blacks of the wrought iron rails. That painting sent the message to me and my wife that God has given me a generous gift. We gave that painting, matted and framed, to another missionary family in the community, whom we honored as a lighthouse for God. It still hangs in their home in Sea Gate."

Hoy began studying how-to books and videos on drawing. He purchased a drawing table at a local art store and set it up by the full windows in the living room of his and Beverly's apartment. "Later, we added a midsize tabouret and easel. I had developed an allergy to the sun while in New York, so much of my painting was—and still is—done indoors," he says.

Terry Dunlap, the mother of one of Hoy's employees, traveled to Brooklyn when she heard about his artwork. An artist from Morrison, Colorado, Dunlap guided Hoy

with a light hand. He says, "Terry helped me get a strong start with watercolors, and later, after Beverly and I moved back to Denver, she helped me begin learning to use acrylics. For several months, I painted with her in her studio one day each week. She also introduced me to the art center where I had my first formal art classes."

Hoy moved back to Denver in September 2005 and reduced his missionary work to half-time so that he could also pursue his art career. Since then, he has taken art classes to hone his skills and overcome his fear of painting in public. In the process, he has received instruction from many of Denver's finest artists, including Victoria Kwasinski, Jackie McFarland, and Alice Carol. Kwasinski once read a poem that Hoy had written and then painted from. She encouraged him to continue to write down his thoughts. "See it, write it, then paint it" became his mantra.

Strong belief fuels intense beauty

Hoy's creativity is driven by his deep connectedness with the divine. He is as passionate about his art as he is about his spirituality. "My work is the expression of my heart's responses to objects, people, flora, fauna and landscapes, skies, or bodies of water," he says. "I began by painting realistic representations of the things around me. From there, I've moved into representational abstract; objective abstract; and, recently, non-objective abstract painting. My style now is impressionistic realism. I love this form of art, whether I'm just abstracting something from nature or painting totally from within my being."



The Reader, Stephen Hoy. "It's a piece that always gets a great response," says the artist.

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 + If you'd like to learn more about Stephen Hoy and his work, you can contact the artist at stevehoyart@me.com.



Gateway to Heaven, Stephen Hoy.

The first things you notice about Hoy's artwork are the refined sense of composition and the subtle nuances of color and light. He paints with a sense of honesty and integrity. His natural warmth and intelligence shine through in pieces that are delicate and sensitive, yet powerful. What I like most about Hoy's work is how the richly luminous colors complement one another. The images

provide a sense of sophistication, harmony, and beauty that spark the imagination.

For his part, Hoy says that Beverly remains the greatest spark to his imagination. "She sees so much more in me and my artwork than I see," he says. "She's my main fan and encourager. In the past couple of years, sales have been slow, which has sent me into a blue funk. Beverly knows how to bring me back to the easel. Without her, I never would have dreamed of becoming an artist. She has made me what I am today, and she's the focus of this artist's life."

He also gains enthusiasm by reading about the lives and works of great painters. "From the time I began painting, I've desired to be able to express in paint the thoughts that spring into my soul. In the past year or so, this has begun to happen with my new abstract paintings in watercolor, acrylics, and oils. That's inspiration!" Hoy says.

Whether he works from memory, uses his imagination, or refers to one of the many photographs he has taken over the years, Hoy works in a style that is entirely his own. When he's ready to begin a new piece, he chooses a subject by answering two questions: "Does it strike some response in my heart? And can I put it into a composition that I can feel good about painting?" he says. "With some exceptions, these guideposts work for me. I'm still an artist in progress, so I often don't discover that something won't work until after a painting is in progress or even finished."

When the beautiful converges with the divine, Hoy knows that he is fulfilling his life's mission. "The greatest lesson I learned from both my father and my mother is that what really matters in life is that whatever we do is meant to be done to bring glory to God. I have made a commitment to Him that my artwork will, in some way, bring honor to Him. Some may think these are just lofty words. Those who know me, especially my dear Beverly, know better." Hoy's continued commitment to spirituality is now mirrored by a vow to captivate and inspire others through his artwork. He is doing what he loves and what he was born to do. ■



Karin Lazarus has been writing about cooking and art for more than a decade. As a former artist's representative, she has always been fascinated with the art world. You can reach her at karinlazarus@gmail.com.