

# COUNTRY ROAD

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CELEBRATING LIFE IN HASTINGS COUNTY

SCALING BANCROFT'S ICE WALL  
OUT ON A LIMB: CHRISTMAS TREE SHOPPING  
FOLLOWING IN FRENCH FOOTSTEPS



Cavanaugh was surprised to discover how her drawings accentuated the youthfulness of the residents she spent time with.

## Drawing *inspiration*

### Marmora artist brings talent to senior

Joanie Cavanaugh started drawing as soon as she could hold a pencil.

“Anyone can do art, it is just a matter of starting,” she explains. “Getting better is only a matter of practice.”

When she was younger, Cavanaugh painted mainly landscapes, seascapes, buildings and animals. At 15, she started painting in oils and then moved on to acrylics when they became readily available. Over the years Joanie has also created exceptional petit point, beadwork, sculptures, watercolours and pastels. She works in whichever medium moves her and she responds with genuine modesty when faced with complements regarding her artistic talent. She is forever trying to become a better artist.

“Art is a constant pursuit for me, because I rarely am satisfied,” she admits. “I am always trying to improve.”

Cavanaugh has been volunteering at Caressant Care in Marmora for just over a year. She started

out in the activity room sitting one-on-one with the residents with a pad of paper and a pencil.

“I asked them what they wanted me to draw,” she says. “Sometimes I got an answer but usually I suggested something like a flower or a cat or something. For example, if we agreed on a cat I would draw a quick sketch in a cartoonish style on the paper. I would ask, ‘What next?’ and I would fill in the paper with what we thought up to draw.

“I tried to make them funny, like I would put a hat on the cat. There was a man there that used to work on road construction when he was younger. I would draw a cartoon of him sitting up in a big truck. I got them to laugh at a lot of the drawings and that was how it started. Almost everyone could think up something to draw and would laugh when I made it look funny.

“One day, Janet Dies, the Activities Director, asked me if I would sketch the residents, one at a time, and she would get frames to hang the drawing in their room by their bed. They seem to like the

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"I received a letter from one family and they wrote how much they appreciated having the portrait of their loved one. It equally meant a lot to me that someone would take the time to write that I had helped them and that they felt comfort in having the portrait."

Dies is equally pleased with the arrangement.

"Joanie is wonderful and her drawings are wonderful," she enthuses. "She has a heart of gold. The residents love her."

Cavanaugh's mother was a semi-professional portrait artist who developed Alzheimer's disease. She had painted all her life, but she progressively lost her artistic ability as her mind and hands weakened. A collection of her own paintings was displayed on the walls of her nursing home room and this helped inspire and strengthen Joanie's desire "to help people feel useful and cared for" especially in such an innovative and artistic way.



The Caressant Care residents seem to like their portraits, Cavanaugh says, and she has received a letter from one family expressing their thanks for her art.

Joanie receives therapy from drawing the residents at the nursing home, making them laugh, understanding them when they struggle to speak clearly about what concerns them, holding their hands and listening to them when they want to be understood.

There are one or two who have not wanted to have a portrait drawn, but most of the residents at the nursing facility seem to have really enjoyed the experience. They have been appreciative and complimentary about the finished drawing.

Joanie is currently about three quarters of the way through the nearly 100 portraits. Each drawing takes about two hours.

“The challenging part is that some of the residents are busy talking and looking around,” Cavanaugh says. “Sometimes they wiggle around or take a nap in the middle of my trying to draw their face. It is hard to see features when there is that much movement or when they nod off. I sometimes use photos that the nurse’s station has of each resident, because a photo holds still.

“What I found so surprising when drawing these older people is that when I was studying their face as I was drawing, I could see the beauty that was in their face when they were younger. I could see that because of their deep set eyes, high cheekbones, the colour in their cheeks, the grace in the shape in their mouth or nose does not totally hide with age. I could see how beautiful or handsome their features were when they were younger. This really surprised me because I didn’t expect to see anything other than their present age as I drew them.”

The residents are all important to Joanie. She thinks of them like family. She feels that she is

helping to make them feel more confident and cared for. She likes to bring them humour, which is evident in the songs, gestures, and customs she plays out with many of them. She hopes that the time she spends with them might make their day a little more of a shared experience.

Cavanaugh is aware that the nurses at Caressant Care are devoted to the residents, she sees it everyday. However, “they don’t have much time to visit and answer all the questions or to amuse them, because they are so busy with the actual physical care that the residents require. That is where I come in and that is what I feel I can give to them and I see this as being more important than the art I do for them.

“I feel that I make them feel important and brighten their day. I always leave here feeling I have put part of my day to good use. I have always felt appreciated by the people who work at Caressant Care and by the residents.” ●



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