

Painting at Mach One

By Craig Rullman
Correspondent

Sisters resident Jim Horsley flew 120 combat missions in an A6 Intruder over Vietnam. He is a former member of the Blue Angels, a humanitarian, a husband, a



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“Peekaboo” depicts Pancho and Cinder Red, rescued donkeys at Harmony Farm Sanctuary.

father, an author, and a man of abiding faith. He is also an artist — and a good one — though he won’t tell you that.

For a man with a laundry list of accomplishments that would make most of us blush,

Jim Horsley is also notably humble.

Horsley started painting eight years ago, though he has been sketching for most of his life. On a recent trip to visit his 92-year-old mother, Jim was sorting through boxes when he found one of his earliest sketches, a crayon drawing completed when he was in the first grade.

It was a Thanksgiving drawing, he says, complete with parading turkeys, and “It wasn’t bad,” he said, with a self-deprecating laugh.

As a Blue Angel, Horsley spent untold amounts of time hanging upside down at ludicrous speeds, and notes that this experience helped him tremendously when learning to become an artist.

With a nudge from a lesson in the book “Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain,” by Betty Edwards, Jim’s first step on the trail to becoming a painter was a drawing completed by working it upside

down. It was an old man carving three wood ducks.

Jim was so shocked and pleased by the result he couldn’t wait to show his wife, Sonya, who was equally amazed.

“As important as that principle is in drawing,” he writes in his book “A Different Kind of Courage,” “I had an opportunity to find that it had broader applications.”

Though he had no formal training in oil painting — and as passion to serve others and to create art grew in him — Horsley signed up for a workshop at a Ben Franklin crafts store.

“Which was totally unlike me,” he says. “I didn’t even have any materials. The instructor came over and showed me a few brush strokes and that was it.”

He was hooked from that moment on.

After the Navy, and a career in commercial real estate, Jim began his deep commitment to humanitarian causes, working with the international Christian relief organization World Vision. This work sent him on dozens of humanitarian missions, from North Vietnam to West Africa.

And it would be impossible to miss how these experiences inform his paintings.

“I have to have a personal connection to the subject matter,” he says.

After volunteering at nearby Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch, Jim has completed many paintings of horses. He says with a laugh, “If you’re gonna live in horse country, you better learn to paint horses.”

Horsley considers himself a representational artist, and cites as influences the artists Richard Schmidt, John Cook, and Tom Browning.

The pleasure Jim finds in painting is also rooted in his



PHOTO BY CRAIG RULLMAN

Jim Horsley is an artist and a community volunteer.

Christian faith, and the idea, which he holds close, that he is creating value for others each time he finishes a painting.

“I have a great passion,” Horsley says. “I work hard at it but it doesn’t feel like work, and I don’t like to not get it right.”

At the same time, he says, after years of working hard to properly order his personal priorities, “I have to be mindful of why I got into it. My identity isn’t what I do. I’m not a Blue Angel and I’m not an artist. I’m just Jim. I have a passion and a purpose for some things that hopefully make a difference.”

It seems fair enough to say that after a lifetime of service and giving to others, from water projects in Senegal to public speaking engagements with local school children, and with a growing portfolio

of accomplished paintings in his studio, there are people all over the world who believe Jim Horsley’s passion has made a difference.

Horsley’s work is currently on display at Sisters Gallery & Frame Shop, and his work will be represented in the Sisters Library Art Show, with proceeds to benefit Harmony Farm Sanctuary. His paintings can also be seen on his website, www.jimhorsley.net.



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“North Korean Child” is a 9x12 oil painting.



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“Bliss!” is a 10x8 oil painting.

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