

Religious dream inspires new art series

Kate Grigg, Special to the Packet & Times
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Artist Kathy Godfrey, a longtime and popular figure at The Shadowbox, is showing her Garden of Eden paintings at Westmount United Church on May 13. KATE GRIGG/SPECIAL TO THE PACKET & TIMES

In the dream there were a lot more people. In the dream thousands showed up for the Alpha meeting. So many it was intimidating. Kathy Godfrey had never liked large groups.

As a kid she preferred to play by herself, sit under a tree and draw, slide under the television stand and watch from below, slip beneath her bed with crayons and a colouring book. Her own little kingdom that's what Kathy liked. If, playing outside, the other kids got too noisy she'd knock on the back door and ask her mom if it was OK if she came in and draw-ed."

"A little waif," Kathy says, "a lost soul" in search of sanctuary.

Something she found painting and drawing, decorating the walls of her fort with Van Gogh prints she got cheap at Woolworth's, making an art gallery in a cove behind the furnace. And later, at Georgian College, where Kathy took a creative arts program, happily wandering off course, venturing into classes she wasn't scheduled to attend so she could try her hand at anything and everything, printmaking and batik, stained glass, photography.

As she wandered into art supply stores at every opportunity, unable to resist the paper and canvas, the paint and brushes, pastels and pencils Drawn to all the possibilities, the potential that lined the shelves. If she couldn't make a living as an artist -- and it wouldn't be for lack of inspiration, Kathy was never short of ideas -- she'd like to work in an art supply store.

Instinctively consoled herself, after an unsuccessful foray to the unemployment office, by dropping into The Shadowbox to buy a tube of pain She couldn't find a job she told the couple in charge (Will and Lucy McGarvey), venting her frustration. And Will and Lucy said if she was looking for a job why didn't she trying helping them out on Saturdays. And six months later, when they were in a position to take her on full-

time, why not try her hand at picture framing, they suggested. (Interestingly, picture framing was one of three career paths recommended by Kathy's high school guidance counsellor.)

For a long time, for years and years The Shadowbox (where Kathy has spent 34 years happily working behind the scenes) was the only shelter Kathy needed. That, and the home she'd shared with her mom since she was six months old.

Until, 12 years ago, Kathy found herself wandering into church on occasion. Always at the last minute, always slipping into the back row so she could jump up and leave before she had to start shaking hands. Staying just long enough to hear that God loved her, the closing words to each week's service.

Nipping into church now and then, until her stepfather died and Kathy's mom found it hard, losing a second partner. (Kathy's father, who used to take her to the drive-in or the swimming hole on the weekends, died when she was seven.) Wanted Kathy to go with her to the Alpha program, in need of some comfort and support.

Only Kathy became uncomfortable when at the Alpha meeting she witnessed someone swept away by religious ecstasy. She didn't mind learning about a loving God but seeing someone fall down and speak "...gibberish" (known as glossolalia or speaking in tongues) struck Kathy as insane. Run, don't walk to the nearest exit, she told her mother. She wasn't going back there. No matter what, she wasn't going there again

But then she had that dream about being at the Alpha meeting, and all those people around her, a throng of people. And how, coming upon a old school friend, she'd stopped to talk, only to look up and find everyone gone. They'd moved on without her, she was lost, didn't know where she was.

Kathy was sweating profusely when she woke up, still tangled in panic. The friend in the dream had been dead 10 years. Was someone trying to tell her something. Was it a message from God?

It's how she came to paint her Garden of Eden series, her way of giving back. Because Kathy did go back to church. Frightened and confused she went back and found not something to fear but a sense of peace, a healing, a release even from physical suffering. And in thankfulness put brush to canvas.

She hopes those who see her paintings on display at the Tea In The Garden event on May 13 will see more than paint, more than pattern and colour. She hopes they will see what she feels, "...the joy, peace and love of God," and will "take this feeling with (them)."

The Tea In The Garden sesquicentennial event takes place May 13 at Westmount United Church from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. For ticket information call 705-326-9252.