

CLASSIFIEDS | SPECIAL SECTIONS | OBITUARIES | EVENTS | ONLINE FORUMS

ALERTS | CUSTOMER SERVICE | CONTACT | SUBSCRIBE | ADVERTISE | WEATHER

The Pueblo Chieftain

Your print and online news source for Southern Colorado

84° F

HOME | NEWS | SPORTS | BUSINESS | LIFE | EDITORIAL | CLASSIFIEDS | RECENT ISSUES | SERVICES | ABOUT PUEBLO

Weather | Daily Photos | Obituaries | Contact | Feeds | Yellow Pages | Subscribe | Archives | Crossword | Comics

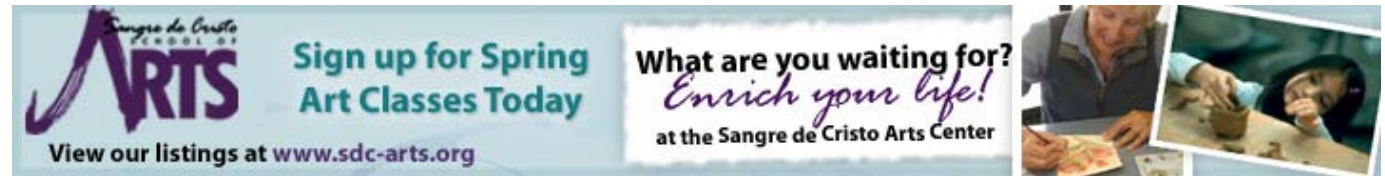
SEARCH Archives (2008) Go

Friday, May 30, 2008

You are not logged in. [Login](#) [Register](#)

CHIEFTAIN CLASSIFIEDS

- CLASSIFIEDS
- REAL ESTATE
- EMPLOYMENT
- RENTALS
- AUTOMOTIVE
- PLACE AD



Sign up for Spring Art Classes Today
 What are you waiting for?
Enrich your life!
 at the Sangre de Cristo Arts Center
 View our listings at www.sdc-arts.org

Archives > News > Local

Published: May 25, 2008 11:42 pm | [No comments posted.](#)

Font Size:

'On behalf of a grateful nation'

Local artist pays tribute to soldiers

By LORETTA SWORD
SPECIAL TO THE CHIEFTAIN

T Branson grew up surrounded by art and artists, among them her mother, Bettie Wilson, whose work no doubt hangs in homes around the world.

But Branson, 51, never even thought of picking up a paintbrush until she was 46 and a new transplant to the prairies of Pueblo West from the deserts of Arizona. She was, at the time, a refugee from places with too many people, and jobs that exposed her to the darkest sides of



COURTESY PHOTO/T BRANSON 'On Behalf of a Grateful Nation' is one of five original works by Pueblo artist T Branson that have been commissioned to hang in the Pentagon's public gallery and museum.

Photos

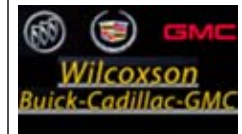
[Browse Our Galleries](#)
[Upload Your Photos](#)

Find Ads

[Search for Ads](#)

Find a Business

[Pueblo Links](#)



2007 GMC Canyon Crew



Bronco edition, priced recently reduced

2008 Cadillac STS

the human spirit and soul.

As her own spirit opened up and began healing beneath Colorado's big skies, she realized she had no interest in continuing in either of her former careers - surgical nurse and forensic medical examiner.

She pondered her future while staring at one of her mother's paintings hanging on a wall across the room, and she asked herself if she, too, might have something to say with color and light and paint.

Something inside her (what she refers to alternately as "the divine voice" and "my little people bringing messages") told her that, yes, of course she could. And she should. She grabbed a sketch pad and pen and lost herself in that first effort.

And she was very pleased, but not astounded, to find that yes, she had a talent.

But what would she paint?

The answer was easy. She would paint hands.

Since she was a child, Branson said, she has been fascinated with the stories hands tell about the humans they belong to - where they've been, the work they do, whether they have a gentle soul and a kind heart.

Hands, she believes, tell as much about a person as their eyes do, or their smile.

She studied and trained beside her mom, and over the past five years or so has amassed a varied collection of



'Green Ramp'



COURTESY PHOTO/LORETTA SWORD T
Branson works on a sketch in her living room.



'Heritage of Valor'

Introducing all the insurance companies who offer more discounts than Farmers:

No one offers more discounts. With all kinds of ways to save on your policy, the choice for auto insurance in couldn't be easier. If you want a great rate, great service, and a great agent, there's really only one name you need to know. Call now to find out more about our new lower rates.

Tara Valpando
NADENE M. VERNA INS AGCY INC
910 W US HIGHWAY 50
PUEBLO, CO 81008
(719) 546-1100
Cell: 719-250-4000

Gets you back where you belong.

TV Mag

Services

[Find a Home](#)

[Find a Job](#)

[Manage Your Subscription](#)

[RSS Feeds](#)

Contact Us

[Staff Directory](#)

Office

825 W. 6th Street
P.O. Box 4040
Pueblo Colorado,
81003
(719) 544-3520
Toll-free:
1-800-279-6397

[Map](#)

Newsroom

[Email](#)

(719) 544-3520 x 418

Subscriptions

[Subscribe](#)

Problems with your
subscription?
(719) 544-0166

Advertising

[Email](#)

(719) 544-3520 x576
Fax: (719) 595-4334

Classifieds

[Email](#)

(719) 546-2274
Fax: (719) 546-3235

2008 Rate Card

hands on canvas - the delicate hands of her mother atop a Bible; the weather-worn, dirty hands of a cowboy atop a saddle horn; the hands of a monk holding a string of red prayer beads, and many more.

Her own hands flying as she tells the story during an interview last week, Branson explained that it was a painting inspired by a family photo that set her onto a journey which, today on this Memorial Day, has her meeting with some of the nation's top military brass and mingling with soldier's families in Washington, D.C.

Five of Branson's original paintings, each with a military theme, have been commissioned to hang in the Pentagon's public gallery and museum.

As she prepared for her trip to the nation's capital last week, Branson was still a bit breathless about the whole idea and the serendipitous path that brought her and her art to this point.

Her first "military" painting was "Green Ramp." It depicts a man's large hand holding the tiny hand of a girl. The man's hand was her nephew's, and the girl's hand was his daughter's.

The painting shows only the elements that struck Branson's heart when she viewed the photograph of the pair walking down the "Green Ramp" together before her nephew boarded a plane bound for Iraq.

Several tours later, that nephew is planning to soon retire from the military.

The image from his first goodbye launched Branson into a most unexpected relationship with military members and families nationwide.

The original of that first painting hangs in her nephew's home, but it wasn't long after he hung it there before



COURTESY PHOTOS/T BRANSON 'Quiet Courage'

CLICK HERE

NEW! www.shopbeenvied.com

Be Envied...

The Place To Shop For All Things Designer

3022 FARABAUGH • 719-564-9210



Special Sections



Special Section: Active Years

2008-04-01

Get **Firefox** with
Google Toolbar

Ads by Google

Break into Broadcasting

Denver Broadcasting
School Start a Career
in TV or Radio!

www.beonair.com



Download our
2008 advertising
rate card.

Branson was besieged by requests for prints.

Soon, "Green Ramp" and several new images that followed in quick succession (including one of an elderly Pueblo man's hand holding his Purple Heart medal for a young boy's hand to explore) were hung in military-base lobbies, commander's offices, gift shops and chapels, including several that hang at Fort Carson.

That's where Branson met Cmdr. Gen. Mark Graham and his wife, Carol. Branson was invited to a cocktail party at the Graham's home shortly after Graham took over command at the mountain base.

She wanted to give Carol Graham a hostess gift. She knew the couple had lost two sons within a year of each other, one to the war in Iraq.

And she had been told that Mrs. Graham "was moved to tears" by the large reproduction of Branson's "Taps," a painting she had seen in the Fort Carson chapel.

Even so, Branson said she questioned her first instinct, but followed it anyway.

She wrapped a framed print of "On Behalf of a Grateful Nation" and took it to the party. Unsure of how Mrs. Graham would react, "and not wanting either of us to ruin our makeup if it happened the way I thought it would," Branson said, she propped the painting against a wall with the image facing inward as soon as she entered into the couple's home.

Then she introduced herself, and explained that she had brought a gift that might not be something the couple would want to see every day in their home, but which might bring meaning and comfort at some other location.

Mrs. Graham, gushing with praise for "Taps," wanted to see the newer work immediately. It depicts a woman's hands clutching an American flag - folded military style as all are at the end of a military funeral before being presented to the next of kin.

"She lost it. She was just beside herself, and I thought, 'Oh, my God, this was a mistake,'" Branson said.

"Then she took me by the hand, picked up the painting and took me into her bedroom. She showed me a quilt that is made of both of her sons' clothing that she sleeps under every night," Branson said.

"She threw her arms around me and said, 'If I didn't embrace this grief, it would eat me alive.'"

"She took down a beautiful, cross-stitched depiction of a church that she and her husband attended years ago in Arkansas, and she hung my piece right there where it was, above their bed. That moment validated everything I've been doing and trying to do with my art and brought it full circle because it reached someone who needed it most - this sweet, brave woman."

By that time, Branson already had been in touch with the Pentagon and knew her work would someday hang there, but the public gallery was still being rebuilt in the aftermath of the destruction wrought by the terrorist attacks of 2001.

In the meantime, Mrs. Graham put Branson in touch with the T.A.P.S. Foundation, a national organization that provides support of all kinds to families of fallen soldiers. Today, she is their "official" artist.

Ironically, Branson also was invited by T.A.P.S. officials to take part in the group's annual convention Saturday through today in the nation's capital, so her work is making its national public debut outside the Pentagon, as well.

Although she has resisted "marketing" her art since she began painting, the events of the past few months finally convinced her to establish a Web site where anyone who's interested can see it, and buy it if they like it.

BransonHands.com

is the result of many long hours and sleepless nights for Branson and her sons, Matt and Mark Branson. The site includes "galleries" of her military series as well as an assortment of other paintings, all of them depicting hands that Branson couldn't resist translating from her mind's eye to her sketch pad and then canvas.

There are too many serendipitous events (Branson doesn't believe in coincidences, but rather in "little miracles") that have taken her from the afternoon when she first sketched a copy of a pair of hands her mother had painted years ago and hanging five of her own originals on the walls of the Pentagon.

"It was the lightning strike way that I first received my art that started it all, and I knew then it was a path I'd have to follow," she said.

"It's got a life of its own now and it's literally dragging me by the arm to follow it. I'm just doing what I'm told by the divine voice inside me, my 'little people,' and I'm learning to really pay attention to what I'm told. Every time I pay attention and do what I'm told, the lightning strikes all over again, and now this. Holy cow."

While she says she is grateful to possibly have found a way to make a living by following her passion (rather than as a showroom designer for a major Colorado furniture retailer), she is even more grateful that her military series brings comfort to people who have suffered great loss - and that it just might add to Pueblo's stature as "the home of heroes."

"This opportunity gave me an outlet to give my art to people who need it and understand it, and that's important, because it's not all terribly 'comfortable' art for the general population. And it gives me a way to give something back to my town, this place where I found my art. I wanted to honor my town and the heroes who've come from this place, and I'm being allowed to do that. Isn't that just amazing?"

ON THE NET

Branson Hands: <http://www.BransonHands.com>

Relates Articles

[Previous Story](#)[Next Story](#)[E-MAIL](#)[PRINT](#)

Reader Comments

The following are comments from the readers. In no way do they represent the view of our paper.

Submit a Comment

We encourage your feedback and dialog. All comments are subject to deletion by our Web staff.

Login:

*Member ID:

*Password:

[Forgot Your Password?](#)

You must be registered to post comments

Return to: [Local](#) « | [Home](#) « | [Top of Page](#) ^

Sections

- Homepage
- News
- Obituaries
- Sports
- Editorial
- Entertainment
- Classifieds

Online Features

- Calendar
- Online Photo Gallery
- Special Sections
- Syndicated Features

Services

- About Us
- Advertise on Our Site
- Contact Us
- Make us your Home Page
- Online Forms
- E-mail Updates
- Subscriber Services



RSS Feeds - RSS is a format set up for sharing content on the Web. The following sections are available as RSS feeds:

- | | |
|------------|--------------|
| - News | - Life |
| - Sports | - Editorial |
| - Business | - Obituaries |

Copyright © 2008 The Pueblo Chieftain Send feedback to webmaster@chieftain.com.

All rights reserved. View the The Pueblo Chieftain's [Privacy Policy](#) . This material may not be broadcast, published, rewritten or redistributed without written permission.

Powered by [TownNews.com](#)