

MAKING ART

by William "Paco" Strickland



Deborah Cavanaugh

An Artist's Muses: Motherhood & Home

Never underestimate the power of a gift. Just ask Wilmington artist Deborah Cavanaugh, whose life was transformed by a Mother's Day gift from her son in 1992.

"On Mother's Day I opened a box with a little set of student watercolors, a brush and a pad of paper. I did not think of myself as a painter and, in fact, I did not even think of myself as someone who could draw," recalls Cavanaugh.

A year later, she took some of her paintings (mostly to make the kids happy) out from under the bed where she stashed them. They'd look nice in the bedroom if they were framed,

she thought. The frame shop/art gallery where she took them offered to display the paintings. Three sold that first week. Thus began one of the Cape Fear region's most successful and lucrative artistic careers.

Fifty exhibitions later, Cavanaugh is represented by art galleries from Maine to Florida and in 11 countries. She has a popular website with an online store that offers about 200 different prints and an extensive card line. Her work has been featured in movies, magazines, large-scale festivals, and 23 images have been published by Gibson Cards in the *Artist's Corner*. She has been featured in newspapers, magazines, National Public Radio (NPR), and on television.

Motherhood is at the heart of Deborah's art. "Being a mother is everything that drives me. It makes me work harder and with more focus because my children have such faith in me. It is not an easy way to make a living, but it was a great way to raise the kids. They are both in a university now, but until they were 16, they came to my studio each day after school. Being an artist was a way that I could keep them with me and work. They never complained and always pitched in. Really, we are a team," beams a proud Cavanaugh.

Cavanaugh paints what she knows best - home, a place she describes as "comfortable scenes and familiar images from life as we know it."

Fans of Cavanaugh's work connect with the stories she paints. "I paint stories about my life, and in doing that I am painting about a lot of people who are mothers, daughters or sisters. I turn some of the paintings into prints and cards. I turn some of the paintings into books. I have painted on furniture, ballet slippers, a body cast, book covers, shirts, picture frames, walls, tiles, floors, tins and of course paper, canvas and board," explains Cavanaugh, whose personalized inscriptions on each piece are "about making life a little easier, a little more joyful, and helping us all to recognize that on any day - while the list of all that is going wrong could be written down - the list of all that is going right could never be finished."

During Cavanaugh's 14 years as an artist, illustrious moments include an article in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* that described her work as "Matisse-like." A professor at Barton College compared her work to Walter Anderson or Minnie Evans. She's been interviewed on NPR in Washington, DC. And most recently, she was signed by a Literary Agency in New York City for one of her books that couples a series of paintings of mothers and their children, along with essays about being a mother.

Custom house portraits are another recent direction. Your house at the beach, in the city, or any neighborhood can be immortalized by Deborah Cavanaugh's colorful and playful artistry. Simply working from a photograph she creates a lasting memory of the home you grew up in or the one where you're raising a family. If this sounds like something you or someone you love (perhaps Mom?) might enjoy, visit Deborah's website at www.deborahcavanaugh.com or call 910-297-5383. Also view her work on display this month at the Merrill-Gallery in Davidson and in Wilmington at TAG @ Lumina Station. ●

William 'Paco' Strickland is a professional Flamenco Guitarist, recording artist and freelance writer whose radio program Flamenco Café is heard each Saturday at 1pm on National Public Radio affiliate member WHQR, 91.3FM. Paco is a fan of Cavanaugh's work.