

Art by Mary Jo Zorad

Mary Jo Zorad was born in 1952 during the summer months in Indiana. This was her family's home for the first five years of her life — a wooded place where children had no worries and played outside through all the seasons, and where the neighbors knew each other and talked regularly. From an early age she spent most of her time outside, exploring and viewing nature.

When Mary Jo was barely five years old, her family made the choice to move to the suburbs of Los Angeles, California. Her exploration of nature continued with almost daily outside excursions in the neighborhood hills and streets. During most of these years Mary Jo spent her time caring for her many animals. These included her rabbits (all with individual names), guinea pigs, parakeets, lizards, family cats and many dogs. It was in California that she learned about nature and the creativity of life, and began to draw.

Art was natural to her; as she states, "I believe it was part of my genetic makeup." Her family and neighbors encouraged her artistic talents. (Many years later she was contacted by one of her childhood friends who remembered her art hanging on the household walls and wrote, "I knew then you would be an artist.") It was in high school that she had her first art showing, exhibiting landscapes and abstract paintings exploring shapes and colors. The acknowledgment she received from the art patrons encouraged her onward, and her painting continued.

After high school, Mary Jo's path continued in fine art. In college she studied art history and behavioral sciences, both psychology and religious studies. It was a deep interest of hers to find out what motivated people to behave the way they did in life. Why were some people creative and happy, while others seemed unhappy and self-destructive?

During these years of studies Mary Jo never stopped her creative expression. She expanded it to include poetry, music and photography. She published a few of her poems in local newspapers and gave away most of her paintings to friends young and old. She was never far from her true calling of creative expression.

Mary Jo attended graduate school and pursued her Ph.D. in Psychology with an emphasis in art therapy. During her years as a psychologist Mary Jo continued to paint and explore. Today she continues part time in the psychology profession as a life coach consultant, and paints the remainder of the time. Says Mary Jo, "I am fortunate now to realize my expression and passion for art and to make a living with this creativity. It is the expression of life and nature surrounding me that I seek to portray. I paint what I see and feel in my soul." Of all the paintings that Mary Jo creates, she explains that the animals are the most exhilarating to paint. She is most fond of the domestic animals such as cats, dogs and horses, but the North American wildlife — elk, deer, bears and birds — also warm her heart.

Mary Jo now lives in Olympia, Washington, a wonderland of nature and landscape scenery. She ventures outside daily with her dogs to explore nature just as she did as a young child. She continues to find these excursions enlivening and spiritually inspiring. With digital camera in hand she documents the seasons and the wildlife. During these excursions she has encountered wild bears, deer, coyote and the plentiful hopping rabbits; observed cougar tracks in the mud and snow; and watched the wildflower seasons come and go. Her first gallery show since moving to Washington was hosted by Cosa Bella Gallery and Gift Shop in October 2004.

Her art is represented by Earth Works Gallery in New York and Rustics in the Barn in Olympia, Washington.