

I have always enjoyed creating things, whether it was crocheting, drawing as a teenager, painting Christmas ornaments, woodworking, improving my home, or honestly anything where I could be creative. I've always enjoyed making things that made people smile.

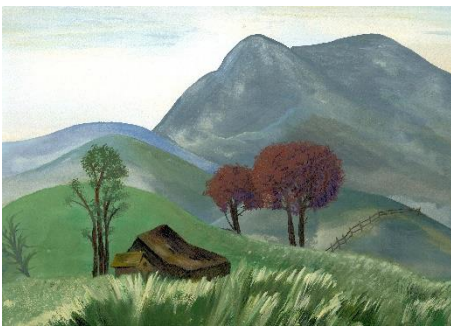
I was born in Portland, Oregon and have lived in the state all my life. I grew up in Tigard, and in 1993 I bought a house in Sherwood as a single mom. Ever since, Sherwood has been my home. I married my husband, Mike Boljat, in 1997 while I was working full time at the Fred Meyer corporate office. When I had my daughter a year later, my husband and I decided to take a leap of faith during my maternity leave. We decided I should stay home and raise my daughter even though money was tight.

When my daughter was just starting to stand, we began looking for a church here in Sherwood so we could raise my daughter with God in her life. Both my husband and I believed in God and wanted our daughter to have this belief as well. We visited Woodhaven Community Church (now Epic House) many years ago when the church was only a few weeks old and meeting at Middleton Elementary in Sherwood. We still attend there to this day, though the church now meets in its own building. Even though we originally were motivated to find a church for my daughter's sake, both my husband and I have found transformation in our lives as well.

During one of the small groups I participated in through the church, we were reading the book *The Power of a Praying Wife*. Each week, I prayed for God to lead my life and to show me what I was supposed to be doing. One of the other members of the group was a friend of mine, Teri Walker Thomas, who was a successful artist in Sherwood. At one of the meetings, I asked her on a whim how she created her acrylic paintings that she would sometimes bring and show us at group. At the time, I was more curious than anything. She invited me to her studio sometime to try acrylic painting.

As these things usually go, though, it ended up being a year or so before I actually went to her studio for the first time to attempt painting in 2004. I sat at one corner of her studio and she at the other; occasionally she would come look over my shoulder to offer suggestions. The first attempt to create a painting of the Badlands, South Dakota went in the round file after months of work on it. I did not think I could salvage it. Teri suggested I take a step back from that piece and maybe try to model a piece after a work from an artist that she had a book about. Following her tip, I tried painting a landscape from the book. When I thought I was finished, I called her over. She suggested I add a barn or some kind of building in that painting, to which I replied, "I don't do barns."

She said "try!"



What I learned was I can paint barns. When the painting was all finished, I realized that even though I would hardly call the painting a masterpiece, it was okay. I was okay with the painting. I remembered my grandmother loved pictures of old barns and had prints of them decorating her home in California. I then thought that I could send this one to her to brighten her day. When I called my grandpa, I learned he had been coordinating putting Grandma in hospice as she was ill. Following a suggestion from my uncle, I sent a scanned image of the painting to him. This printed out copy of my barn painting hung over Grandma's bed the two weeks before she died.

When my family drove to California for Grandma's memorial in July 2005, I was asked by my uncle to interview my grandpa (at midnight before the memorial) about my grandma's life. I was already tired, but willing to do whatever I could to help. I was in the process of jotting down things people felt were important to say at Grandma's memorial when my aunt interjected, "be sure and put down there that Grandma always wanted to paint". It felt like my mind froze for a beat. Paint? In all the time she had spent telling me about her life growing up she had never mentioned her interest in painting. Later, when I asked my grandpa about it, he told me he thought it was that she did not know where to begin.

Looking back, I realize that was my turning point when God answered my prayer. I remember that Fourth of July when I sat watching my husband set off fireworks for the family that I looked into the sky and said "Ok, God, I'll be an artist." Before retiring to bed, I announced to my family I was going to paint for the rest of my life. I was just going to do it. It upset me that my grandmother died without pursuing her curiosity, and this feeling was exactly what I needed to push me forward. Painting was what I think I was being shown I am supposed to do. My mom painted when she had time as a hobby when she was alive but it was not what she thought she could do as a job. She went to college, graduated as a nurse, and died shortly after that from cancer. One of her beach paintings hangs in my home now and I cherish it.

I continued to meet with Teri a few times a month after that and painted my second painting. As soon as I finished it, I showed it to my best friend. To my surprise, she not only loved it, but asked if she could buy it from me! Of course, I gave it to her. The next one I finished in November of '05; I planned to donate it to a fundraising auction for my daughter's school. As I took a step back, though, I realized that I needed to find a way to make money off of my paintings so I wouldn't be a burden on my family—paints and canvases were not cheap! As I was contemplating this, I ended up talking with my uncle, the same uncle who had asked me to interview my family about my grandma's life. As I was thanking him for the perfect timing of that request and how it actually had shaped my future career, I showed him my painting. He loved it. In fact, he loved it so much, he ended up purchasing it! Since I wasn't really sure how much a piece of art like that should go for at the time, I sold it for \$400, which was the value of my donated item at the auction where it was headed originally. Thus, at the end of 2005, I was officially a professional artist.

As a professional artist I set up a website in '06 (www.dkboljat.com) and planned art shows to get my art out there for potential buyers to see. That year, I won ribbons at some of those shows and



ended up selling original paintings to a few buyers. All the while, I was also trying to connect with other women who did not know where to begin but were interested in painting. I led a creating group (Sherwood Artist Guild) for four years in Sherwood where women could come and paint for a couple of hours. In 2007, I sold 5 originals. I supported the arts by being very involved volunteering in both the Sherwood Foundation for the Arts and the Cultural Arts Commission here in Sherwood. I volunteered at schools, Girl Scouts, and my church early in my career. Additionally, I

started an annual summer camp at my home studio, focused on teaching painting techniques to kids eight years old and up.

Despite the struggles of the last few years, I have continued to thrive as an artist, entrepreneur and art teacher. In 2019 much to my surprise I was diagnosed with MS and am currently on immune compromising medications to help keep any relapses at bay. In 2020 the world was dealt a huge blow with the pandemic, but despite these things I have learned to remain positive and paint each day.

If I were to go back to 2003, you could not have told me I would be a professional artist today. I can remember when I started telling friends and showing them my work, I would frequently hear "Wow- I did not know you could paint like that!" My response was, "neither did I!" My life has had so much more joy since I have started painting. I teach classes to help the people that want to try but don't know

where to begin, or they have started and get stuck. Maybe there are some out there like I was, that did not even know they would find such joy in painting. I am thrilled when I can facilitate that in my classes. Here is an article from the Oregonian in 2006.

Passions | Darla Boljat

Sherwood artist delights in lighting up a canvas

Landscape | A woman has been tapping her talent since last July and has two local shows

By **KATE TAYLOR**
THE OREGONIAN

For most of her life, Darla Boljat has been content to admire the light in clouds, on lakes and on mountaintops.

But a couple of years ago, the 42-year-old Sherwood woman decided she wanted to re-create it in her landscape paintings. The mother of two began tentatively, studying other artists, including the works of a close friend, Sherwood resident Teri Thomas.

She tried a few pictures, throwing them out and beginning again when the light seemed off or when something else about a piece didn't work. But in July 2005, she set down her brush and saw that she had done a pretty good job painting an old barn.

Since that picture, which she gave to a beloved and dying grandmother, she's been painting non-stop. She has an exhibition in Portland and an upcoming show at the Lake Oswego Festival of the Arts. She also displays and sells paintings through a Web site: www.dkboljat.com.

Among other aspects of her art, she loves the feeling she has when she's creating. It's as if she's not working alone.

"I feel like God is directing me to do this," said Boljat, who co-hosts a free painting gathering with Thomas at Woodhaven Community Church.

Since January, when her 21-year-old son left to serve in Iraq as a Marine, prayer and painting have given her comfort and hope, says Boljat, who paints in her son's room. "It's helped me tremendously. I know he is proud of me and



Photos courtesy of DARLA BOLJAT

Darla Boljat, who began painting in earnest in July, gravitates toward landscapes. She says her art has comforted her since her 21-year-old son left for Iraq in January. "I know he is proud of me and what I've done, and that means a lot," she says.

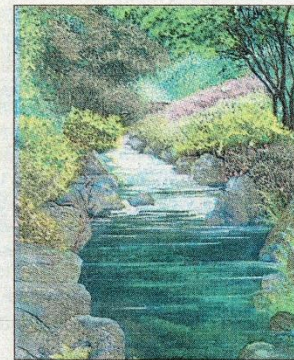
Darla Boljat's paintings

- On display at the Art of Change Gallery, United Way of the Columbia-Willamette building, 619 S.W. 11th Ave., Suite 300, Portland
- On display June 23-25 in the 43rd annual Lake Oswego Festival of the Arts. For information, go to www.lakewood-center.org.

what I've done, and that means a lot." God has given them a gift to create art, then I would like to give them an opportunity to practice it."

She wants to help others learn about art because she knows she's not the only one with a long-undiscovered talent, she says. "If

Kate Taylor: 503-294-5116;
katetaylor@news.oregonian.com



"The Bridge" by Sherwood artist Darla Boljat

What's your passion? Are you deeply committed to a subject or activity? Tell Kate Taylor all about it at 503-294-5116 or by e-mail at katetaylor@news.oregonian.com.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

