

Remembering Vivi

by Robin Beaver

She was known simply as Vivi...

A skillful horse woman and hunter who turned to wildlife art and found enormous success. She was gracious in her cowgirl hats, western skirts and boots.

Vivi Crandall's home was secluded on Casper Mountain, but her paintings were hot throughout the West, selling for up to \$100,000. When she died of cancer April 30 at age 56, Vivi left a void in the lives of the people who knew her personally as well as those who captured her personality solely through her art.

"I don't think I even thought of the definition of life force until I met Vivi," say friend Kim Fedore. "She affected everyone she came in touch with. You never encountered a woman like this."



The Eye of the Storm"

A generous philanthropist...

One of the things most often mentioned about Vivi is her generosity. "When there was a benefit auction, she'd but half the art there," says Navarro. The Crandall's have long been supporters of various charitable organizations. In about 1990, Gary created the feature artist concept whereby each attendee of the annual Rocky Mountain MS Art Show and Auction would receive a print of an original painting created for the show. "They [Gary and Vivi] were the guiding light for our art show," says Margaret Salisbury, president of the Wyoming Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

"Gary has been a real business manager and support for the show. They both nurtured it along to its growth as we know it today - they were a team," says Salisbury, adding, "the world is robbed of Vivi's talent." The piece "Teddy McBear" sold for about \$40,000 during one of the years Vivi volunteered as feature artist, an all time record breaker for an original painting at an MS benefit, Gary said.

"She left one terrible emptiness around the town of Jackson WY," says close friend Bill Andrews. He first met Vivi about 10 years ago at his ranch on Fish Creek near Jackson where he and his wife, Joan, were hosting a party for a CES (Community Entry Services) celebrity ski extravaganza. Vivi contributed one to three paintings a year to CES auctions in support of brain damaged people, say Andrews, and they sold for about \$40,000 to \$60,000 a piece. Studying one of the 10 Vivi originals in his Jackson home, Andrews said, "You only know it's winter because of the little flakes of snow in the hair on the face above the eyes of the wolf. She has all that there without taking up space with snow around it." Not a day goes by that she isn't mentioned, says Andrew, "and there's a lot of pain with that."

'She was my best friend'

Gary and Vivi met on an elevator at the Washington Post in the early 70's. "I heard there was a pretty woman on the floor below us," Gary said. They became partners in life and in business - inseparable in almost everything they did. And she was his best friend. Vivi had an "uncanny ability to shake the lethargy out of people," says Gary, "and if they had creativity in them, she'd bring it into the forefront". She was a "whirling dervish - a walking ball of energy".

The first time they renewed their wedding vows was on their 12th anniversary, a year after having survived a life-threatening blizzard together and facing their mortality. They had to leave their car and walk five miles in the storm to the ranch house they occupied near Muddy Gap WY. "We had the conversation about sitting down to die, or both going back [to the ranch house]. Your eyes are frozen solid and you're breathing by turning around, away from the wind, the stuff you see in Hollywood movies," says Gary.

Vivi wasn't dressed to combat the weather, but she had the "moxie to keep going," he recalled. She was badly affected by hypothermia and couldn't paint for three months.

Humor & art Vivi's unique blend...

"Vivi painted personality and soul into the animal," says friend Deb Penk Reeb. The Crandall's were professional hunting guides at one time, and thus Vivi knew animals anatomically. She touched them and experienced their texture, Reeb said. "She was one of the first artist's that painted breath. You can see speed and the fog of a cold morning," and these are techniques that people now use, says Reeb, an artist who describes her own work as "graphic realism with a twist."

One of the most distinct things about Vivi's art is the funny titles. "The I.R.S." (Irate Raging Sow) is a frighteningly furious grizzly bear looking ready to devour.



Gary and Vivi 1984

They saw good times at the ranch, too, says Ruth Best, who has worked for the Crandall's for 26 years. "Working for Vivi is the greatest pleasure you can imagine," she said. "They had a camping spot at the ranch and we always dined with a tablecloth, crystal, china and fine wine."

The second time they renewed their vows was last year, on their 25th anniversary. Vivi had been diagnosed with cancer.

Vivi felt fortunate that she'd live on through her art, Gary says. And he has every desire to keep Artist's Choice Gallery in Casper open as the "underlying support group behind existing work and new pieces."

People have wanted to know if he'd be closing the business, but "her work isn't going to go away," Gary said, indicating there are many great originals that are worth going to print. Also, a small number of prints will be made from existing prints, particularly now that technology has improved since the first pieces came out, he said.

Remembering Vivi...

If one thing about Vivi Crandall is to stay in focus, it's how people will remember her. "Talk about a woman for all seasons," says Andrews. "She did so many things well, Vivi was a consummate individual, one of the most well centered beings I have ever known."