

Patty's Story



Patty Silver sits at her workstand.



Patty designed this piece by holding a seashell and feeling its dimensions and then drawing it on paper. She reversed the bargello pattern to make the wavy background and sewed on brown beads to give the appearance of barnacles and crusty areas of the shell.



Patty holds the large floral needlepoint that was inspired by an oil painting done by her artist son, Adam, at the age of 13. His design signifies the dark red roses given to Patty by her children when she had eye surgery. The stitched piece will one day be given to Adam.

You will find no self pity in this story! Patty Silver is a spunky lady who is legally blind and wants to needlepoint and has figured out ways to accomplish this goal.

Patty was born prematurely and was placed in an incubator and developed what is known as "retinopathy of prematurity." With no sight in the left eye and the sight in her right eye severely restricted, she was mainstreamed in school and used large print books along with thick-lensed "coke-bottle" glasses. Not being able to see the blackboard, she learned shorthand and transcribed her notes (with nose pressed against the paper) on a typewriter. Concessions were not made for disabled students at that time.

She graduated from Drexel University, married and gave birth to two daughters and a son. In 1981 her left eye had to be surgically removed and she was fitted with an ocular prosthesis. Despite numerous retinal detachments and successful laser surgeries to her right eye, her vision continued to deteriorate. When her children were 4 years, 1 1/2 years and 5 weeks old, she lost the sight in her remaining eye due to complications of ROP. Now totally blind with three small children, she learned Braille, time management and organizational skills, as well as orientation and mobility skills. In 1988 she got a Seeing Eye dog and he served faithfully as her eyes for ten years.

In 1990 Patty became a single parent and four years later married her husband, Bob,

who has proved to be most supportive of her through the years. With advances in medical technology, eye surgery was performed in 1995 which restored a small portion of vision in her right eye. She is still legally blind and has tunnel vision, poor visual acuity and large quarter-sized "floaters" due to previous retinal and vitreous detachments.

In 1997 the family moved to the Houston area. Patty joined a local organization which had smaller interest groups, one of which was a stitchery group. "Learning to see is difficult, and I decided to try stitching - something I had never done. I started stitching in the fall of 1998 and in 2004 I started the Pecan Grove Stitchery Group. I am presently working on my tenth canvas. I use a basic lap frame with a scroll frame. My husband built me a wonderful wooden stand on wheels that is the perfect height. I use two large clamps to secure the lap frame to the stand and enlarge my canvas area with an 8MC 300-5 Dazor Illuminated Magnifier with a floating arm and weighted wheel base" explained Patty.

To assist Patty in stitching, she works on canvases that are 10 or 12 stitches per inch. She said "I cannot see or feel to stitch canvases smaller than this. I place my left hand under the canvas to feel the holes while I drag the needle across the top of the canvas

to feel where the lines cross. This principle is similar to how I slide my stylus around inside a six-dot cell space of slate when writing Braille. If I have trouble with colors of thread, I ask for sighted help and Braille the little plastic bags I use to hold each color thread."

"I continue to learn with each new piece. I use a closed-circuit-TV to read various stitching books. Each piece is tedious and slow to complete, but I am grateful to be able to do this kind of hobby. Many times my husband, Bob, has stood in front of the different pieces hanging throughout my house. He shakes his head in disbelief because he can't believe that I am actually able to do this" exclaimed Patty.

From the Editor:

Many stories cross this desk every year but this one is special and touched me deeply. How I admire the spunk, sheer determination and tenacity of this remarkable human being! It makes me proud, and humble, to be involved with the same kind of enjoyment in creating a piece of art. I was inspired anew when she ended her story with: "P.S. In case you can't tell by now, I am very determined to never let my visual impairment stop me from trying to do anything. Most of the obstacles we face in life are the ones we impose on ourselves."