

“A person paints the way she feels,” says Ellen Winchell.

By Cindy Sandelin



Ellen Winchell, wearing a balliked shirt, stands beside a glass painting she did.

“The World is a beautiful place. Everywhere you go you see new and beautiful things. I’d like to think that I’m showing some of the world’s beauty to people,” says Ellen Winchell, adding with a chuckle, “I’ve always been interested in painting, but it’s only recently, the last two or three years actually, that I’ve started doing it.”

A local artist, Mrs. Winchell has lived in the Steamboat Community for about 27 years. Born in Wisconsin and raised in Iowa, she had not been to Colorado until she decided to go to college at the University of Colorado.

“C.U. was an up and coming university. It wasn’t as big as it is now by a long ways. Only 5-6,000 students were enrolled then. It was a good university and I wanted to get away from home—so I did. I didn’t know a soul, but I liked Colorado—liked it ever since. After I left college I got married, had a couple youngsters, and life just took over, the way it does.” Born an only

child, Ellen now has a pretty large family with two sons and six grandchildren. “I wish that I had a real brother or sister, but I do have almost a sister. She is a cousin and we grew up together. I call her my sister.”

Besides painting and being with her family, Mrs. Winchell also works. For almost 26 years she has worked at the Routt County National Bank.

“I handle the time certificates. It’s quite a job, but I really like it. It’s a real challenge. I’ve only been working on time certificates very recently, though.

“Timed savings accounts are savings deposits made for a certain length of time. In other words, they cannot be withdrawn until a certain length of time has passed. You can go in and take out money from a regular savings account any time, but you can’t with a timed savings account.

“I was a teller for something like 12 years or

more. It's kind of fun to be a teller because you meet people. People are interesting and you get to know so many of them when you wait on the public. Some come in with a chip on their shoulder, and you try to let none of them go out unhappy, yet you still have to protect the bank. It's really a challenge. I am not going to continue working all my life. Someday I'll start thinking about retiring from the bank, but not right away—not for awhile—even though I'd like to have more time to work on my paintings.”

Smiling, Mrs. Winchell exclaimed, “And painting's fun!! It's almost the most exciting thing that there is for me to do. I really enjoy it, probably because I'm finally able to do what I want to do. I guess I'm really, just now, getting to the point where I can do paintings that satisfy me. Up to now, for some reason, any painting I did I didn't REALLY like. Also, a person paints the way he feels, and if he doesn't feel right with the world and like himself pretty well, no way can he paint. In other words, you've got to get yourself right with the world in order to paint well. I haven't done that until the last few years.

“That's part of why I haven't painted up to now, but I've always really wanted to. I've always really had the desire to express myself in painting. I finally am able to find the time, and I feel good. I feel right with myself, I guess, so I just find myself painting. It's hard to really say why, but that's the beauty of art. It's such a delicate ability. It's easy to kill it—to squelch it. If you feel squelched, unhappy with the world, or unhappy with yourself you can't paint.”

Getting along with the world, herself, and other people is just one of Ellen's many talents. Besides painting she likes to do batiks, loves dancing, and enjoys writing.

“Batiks are fun. You start with white cloth and put hot wax on it in a pattern. It's a wax and dye process. Then you dip the cloth in a dye. The dye colors everything except where the wax is. Say you'd dipped it in a blue dye, your cloth would be all white and blue. You leave the wax on and put more wax on where you'd want to save the blue color. Say your next color is green. You dip the cloth in the green dye. After that dries, you put more hot wax on where you want to save the green. Then you dip the cloth in your darkest color. The wax cracks and lets a little dye under it. It's almost more fun than water color, and it's easier. It doesn't require the skill and practice that water color does, and yet if you develop the skill, you can do some fine things with it.”

Choosing painting over writing, Ellen starts out, “I don't even remember when I first got interested in painting. I've always done a little. I took it in college at Boulder, but I didn't really take time to do very much with it, even after that. Now painting is beginning to become so important to me that I'm spending most of my free time doing it. Always before, I wasn't

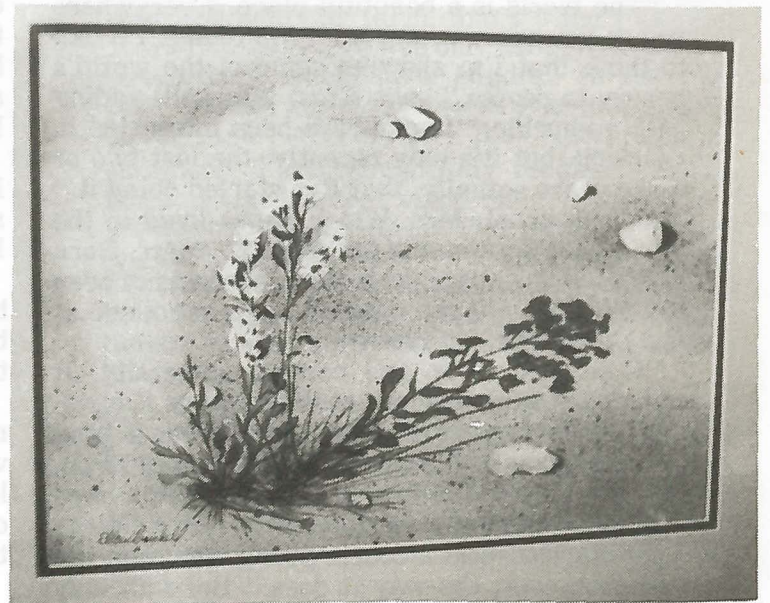


Ellen's favorite.

enthused enough about it that I'd do it. I really feel very enthused about it right now. It's beginning to open up almost like a career, even though I work full time at the bank.

“Also, I sell my paintings so it's encouraging to have people pay for a painting that I've made. That makes me want to do more. I've been selling more because I've been doing more. I have a line of cards that Mrs. Brown sells for me at her bookstore.” (The bookstore referred to is The Brown Book Corner at the corner of Oak and Sixth streets in Steamboat Springs.)

“I've done about 15 or 20 designs, most of which I have on hand all the time that I can sell. That's fun. I don't think I make anything on them because I don't charge enough. But it's fun to have people enjoy them, and probably I get advertisement from them. I like to keep the price low enough so that people can buy them. That's



the way I feel about my paintings, too. I don't like to have prices so high that most people can't buy them. When somebody says, 'Oh, I have that painting of yours, I really enjoy it,' it makes me feel good. It makes my day and that is more important to me to have people be able to have them and enjoy them.

"It does take a lot of practice, though, like everything else. The more you do of it, the better and more satisfying it gets. Your skill increases, and your knowledge of what you want to do. A great deal of painting a picture is having a vision in your mind of what you want that painting to look like. Once I know that, I can do it, but when I don't know, I can't do a good job.

"Just very recently I've found my style, you might say. Lately, as my source material, I've been using photographs that I take myself, instead of doing the whole painting out where the subject is. I go out and sometimes make a sketch or sometimes a little part of a painting, but I don't do the whole thing outdoors as I used to. I find that when I get back into my house, where I can sit down in the studio and take all the time that I want to, I can do a much better job. But, you also lose something of the scene—something that no photograph can bring—even though you remember the scene, remember taking the picture, and remember how much that you liked it at the time. So I put some of the scene down on paper right there. Then, even if the sketch doesn't turn out well, you still, usually subconsciously, capture something. It's almost like shorthand on sketch paper. Then I bring it home and finish it. It works pretty well—sometimes. Nothing is foolproof, though, believe me. Sometimes I just can't bring it back. If you put it down on paper, to some extent, you can bring a lot of it back, though. There's a lot more recall than if you just came home and tried to put it down all from memory."

To get started on a painting, Mrs. Winchell first decides what she is going to paint. Her favorites are winter landscapes.

"I mostly do water color, and I like doing scenes or landscapes best. I don't like painting still life, although I've done a few that I liked of flowers and that kind of thing, but it's not very exciting. It's not nearly as much fun as something from the outdoor world. I enjoy painting winter because of the big expanses of untouched white. Also, the contrasts are so much greater between the snow and everything else. So, I'm really partial to winter.

"Summer is much harder to paint. Everything's green. All the colors are dark and bright and deep. It's hard to get contrast, but every picture has to have a certain amount of contrast in it to pick it up. It's the same principle as photography. If you don't have any contrast, you haven't really got a picture. The important

part of the picture needs to be the one that has the highest contrasts, usually.

"Sometimes I'll be out driving, and I'll see a scene that intrigues me and I want to paint it, so I take some pictures. Then I sketch it and maybe paint some, enough to catch the colors. I then come home and paint it, right then if I can. Other times I just take the pictures like if I go out for an afternoon. I take several pictures of things that have aspects in them that I'd like to paint. Then I have a whole source of pictures. If I feel like I want to paint something I can just go back to all those pictures, pick out one that appeals to me, and paint from it. Sometimes I just paint parts of the picture. I decide what I want to put into my painting, what I want for the composition.

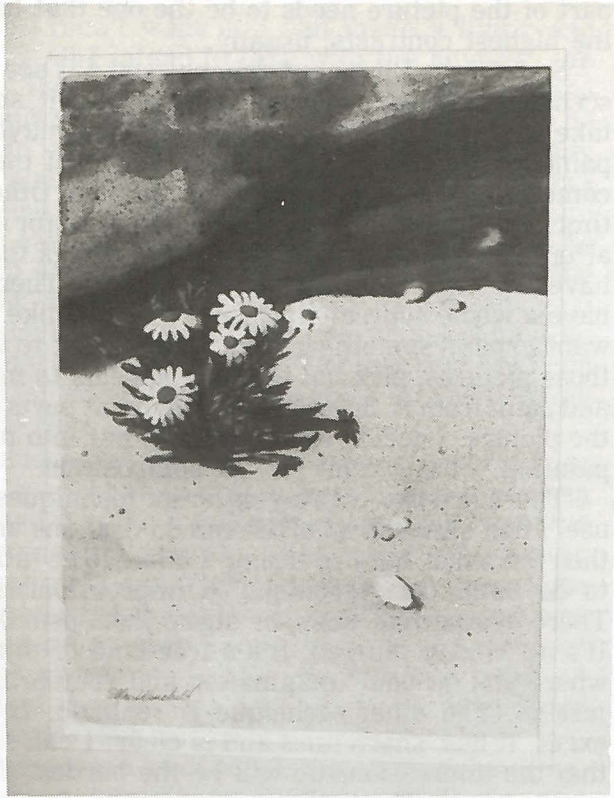
"There are two entirely different techniques I use. I don't know if an artist can do first one and then the other, but I'm trying. I'd like to be able to do both. One technique is impressionistic. There are no fine lines, or sharp lines usually. It's all kind of blurred. It's a free kind of thing where you let your imagination and your brush just go. The other technique is realistic. It is exact. It has sharp lines and is clear. I can see that the impressionistic will be the hardest if I succeed in it. The realistic is easier to do even though it takes quite a lot of skill, for me anyway."

One kind of painting that Ellen generally doesn't do is portraits, although she has a self-portrait done in pencil.

"I've done two or three portraits but not enough to have any of the skills. Doing portraits is probably the hardest kind of painting that you can possibly do—at least it would be for me. It's hard to make portraits that really look like individuals. The little subtle variations in the face make all the difference in the world as to whether or not the picture is a likeness. It's so touchy. You can make it look like a person, and it looks like the person to you, yet to other people, it doesn't. So it's very difficult. Maybe I don't want to badly enough. I don't know if I'd have the skill to do it, but I think that if I really wanted to badly enough, I probably could do it.

"I took a few private lessons when I was a kid but just a very few. I never really did any painting to speak of before I went to college. And then I didn't for years after I left college. Now that I'm kind of free and my own boss, and I don't have anyone to worry about or earn money for but me, I can have fun and do what I want to do. So, more and more, I've been painting. To a person who appreciates and enjoys expressing herself on paper, it's the funnest thing she could possibly do. I really have a good time painting."

When asked how many paintings she has done, Mrs. Winchell exclaimed, "Oh, heavens! I wouldn't even want to say. I've done many, but say, for instance, if I've done 100 paintings in the



A realistic type painting.....

past eight years, probably only about 25-30 are really worth talking about. They're the only ones that I'd ever sell or let anyone see. It's like anything else that you do—some bad stuff and some good. Like any skill, you have to practice and keep at it. It's a matter of how intensely you want to do it, and how much you keep at it.

"Usually it takes six or seven hours, or more, to do one painting. The impressionistic type of painting should be faster, but right now, there's very little time difference between the realistic and the impressionistic. If and when I ever get so that I can do it the way that I want to, it should be fairly fast. I should be able to do one in about three hours. I'd say, when I'm home and not involved in something else, I do one a week or less. It takes leisure time, which I don't have much of.

"To start a painting I'll first draw my composition on the paper with a pencil. If I have any detail in the foreground, sometimes I cover it with a rubber cement and paint the background in first. When I put the background in, I can paint over the rubber cement and then the paint won't touch or affect the paper that's underneath the cement. Then, when I get the background in to satisfy me, I rub off the rubber cement and paint in the foreground. It works

beautifully.

"Another thing that I'm doing right now is a winter scene. I'm using some acrylic paint on it. I can paint over the acrylic paint and it won't wash off or change. If it was a water color, it would fade or run. The acrylic is permanent once it's dry. I very seldom use it, but I'm using it to spatter white spots on my picture. I spatter the paint on with a toothbrush, and it makes it look like snow.

"I'm teaching a class in water color. It is fun, at least for me, because I've found that anytime I teach anything, I learn it far better than I'll ever learn it for myself. Probably I'll get as much out of it as all the six students put together. I did a workshop last summer, but there were not enough students. But at this workshop, since they're all beginners, I started out by giving them a little bit of philosophy behind painting. Something to the effect that painting is an expression, or at least an attempt at an expression, of the way down deep subconscious of the artist. Call it soul if you want. Nobody can express what they individually desire to express without first learning the technique. No one can tell if painting is what they want to do until they have somewhat mastered the technique, and mastering the technique takes practice.

"In fact, you never really get it mastered, especially with water colors. The paint has a way of doing what it wants to do, and you just learn how to take advantage of those happy accidents."



.....and one done in the impressionistic style.

The pictures of her paintings were taken by Ellen Winchell.