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## Aspiring artist in pursuit of her dreams

Darren Lum

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Teachers have a way of just knowing, and for one aspiring artist it may very well be the best thing that could have happened.

"I remember my mom always told me that my kindergarten teacher had told her that I was talented from looking at my kindergarten drawings," said Brynn Higgins-Stirrup, laughing. "I don't know how you could possibly tell from kindergarten drawings."

Such statements would seem almost overtly complimentary to any parent, but for Higgins-Stirrup it almost seems prophetic now.

Only two years ago the 17-year-old Gravenhurst High School (GHS) student had very little idea about her future, except for an interest in history, English and political science.

Now art has manifested into more than a course at school. It's something she gets excited about. She even feels exhilaration when faced with a challenge during the artistic process.

"It's less like work than those (other subjects)," she said. "I enjoy the process, the actual act of doing art than other things. If I was sitting down and writing something I wouldn't enjoy it as much as painting something. I want a career where I'll actually enjoy the work . . . even if it's challenging, it's still enjoyable."

Higgins-Stirrup said she owes her newly found direction into the art world to high school art teacher Sue Buckingham.

"For students she believes in, she is very supportive and pushes them to do their best. If she thinks you can go to art school, she tells you. It was all of that," she said.



**Brynn. SUCCESS.** Brynn Higgins-Stirrup's efforts did not go unnoticed at the Ardour Eruption '08 Young Artists of Northern Ontario at Chancery Art Gallery in Bracebridge February 15-23. She not only captured 'Best in Show' for the oil painting 'Bull', but also sold the painting. *Photo by Darren Lum*

She added GHS teacher Peter Fyfe was an encouraging influence and helped with the portfolios sent with her university applications recently. The positive feedback in class and at an exhibition earlier in the year at Gravenhurst Opera House also contributed to her artistic pursuits.

"Before this year I wasn't sure what I was going to do before that," she said.

Now, after a showing of her work completed in the school year with other students in the Ardour Eruption '08 Young Artists of Northern Ontario at Chancery Art Gallery in Bracebridge, she has discovered a future in something she loves to do.

The showing proved to be profitable as much for her bank account as it was for her personally. From her seven-piece collection of assorted paintings and drawings, her oil painting *Modern Bull* not only captured the Best in Show award, but also the eye of one collector who purchased the \$800 oil painting that measures 48 inches by 96 inches. It depicts a black and blotched red bull against a black and dark brown backdrop with long drips of black, streaking from top to bottom of the clipboard in a style reminiscent of the prehistoric paintings found in caves.

Inspired by one of the Pablo Picasso's 11 "Bull" plates and the theme of strength in five of her seven-piece collection, she couldn't think of a better connection than the bull as an archetype for that character trait.

She also won the J.B.S. Art Scholarship at the Chancery exhibition and will put that \$200 toward more art supplies for future projects.

In her final year of high school, the teenager has since applied to the fine arts programs at Concordia University, Ottawa University and Queen's University. Each university offers something different for her future as an artist and a person.

"For Concordia (in Montreal) and Ottawa they are both pretty cultural cities and I want to go to a big and exciting city," she said. "I think they are all good schools. Queen's has a program that I would like to get into where you go to England for the first year. It just seems a really good school, academically. They all have good fine arts programs."

In April the teenager plans to visit Concordia after her required interview with Ottawa University and expects to acquire a better idea about which school to attend.

Canadian artist Tony Scherman, an encaustic oil painter with an established reputation, is one artist she counts as a favourite. Though she has not painted in encaustic, she hopes she can get the opportunity with one of the universities.

Her preference right now is oil, though. It is more organic and natural looking and provides greater possibilities of expression for her than acrylic.

"I just like it better," she said. "The colours blend more . . . it's more flexible."

Higgins-Stirrup earlier in the year completed a co-op with local artist Amanda Greavette, where she sold her first oil painting *To seek the Breast of Darkness and be Suckled by the Night*. Some of her time was also spent with Annie Veitch as the three often spent time together working. From this experience the Gravenhurst teen received a thorough education about the creative process and the work aspect of the professional art world.

"Now if I do decide to be an artist, I will know what I will be doing. There are a lot of other things you have to do besides painting," she said. "It's not an easy profession. Who knows what will happen? It's worth a try."