

# Lycoming County Artist Paints Portraits, Local Historical Scenes

**BY BARBARA MILLER**  
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**FORKSVILLE** — Artist Joan Nicholas Moore and her family live at Happy Thoughts Farm in Forksville, located in the scenic Endless Mountains of Sullivan County.

Four years ago, at age 45, Joan became a full-time artist. Commissioned to do art work from the age of 20, Joan said a major portion of her present income is derived from painting portraits. Many of Joan's other works feature farm scenes with animals.

Through the years, Joan, a native of the Pittsburgh area, has done a variety of artwork. She has designed and painted scenery for theatre productions, has been commissioned to do portraits of people, including a senator and a Miss Pennsylvania, and has completed several murals.

Currently, Joan is working on a 5-by-7-foot mural for the Lycoming County Historical Museum, depicting the Sawdust Revolution, an 1872 labor dispute between striking sawmill workers and plant owners. Joan says she enjoys murals because of their historical subjects and because more people are able to see her work on a regular basis.

Although Joan's favorite medium is oil, she says she also enjoys using charcoal and pen and ink with color.

Joan's inclination toward art may have begun in the womb before she was born. Evelyn Nicholas, her mother, is a professional portrait artist. One of Joan's sisters is studying commercial art and another is in the field of art education.

"It helped me a lot to be around the fine arts and to see how colors were mixed and used," Joan recalls of her early home life.

But, Joan says, "a real feeling of accomplishment" came at 18 when she did a charcoal portrait of her father.

"It was a good enough picture that when other people saw it, they asked me to do pictures for them," she reflects.

Following high school, Joan majored in art for three years at Allegheny College in Meadville. But then Joan put her art career on

hold and married. Five children and 14 years later she was widowed. Eleven years ago, she moved from the Pittsburgh suburbs to her present residence and married Robert Moore.

Just as the wild trilliums Joan transplanted to her garden accustomed themselves to garden soil, Joan and her children acclimated themselves to their rural surroundings. Four of the children have attended or are attending college, with only Scot, the youngest, still at home.

During the years when she was rearing her children, Joan says she was able to paint only about four pictures a year. Now, working full time, she may average a painting a week. With portraits, Joan usually works from a photograph. Depending on the quality of the photo, a portrait may require from two to three weeks.

For a number of years Joan worked at various jobs to supplement the family income, painting as a sideline. But in 1983 she completed a painting entitled, "Morning Sentinel," of a duck guarding the entranceway to a barnyard on a summer morning. By the time Joan had finished the work, she had decided to become a full-time artist.

"The painting had power to it," she says. "I was able to get the depth and strength in a picture that I had always wanted." Joan said she thought the picture captured the character of the duck and the feeling of the morning light.

"One of the biggest challenges is to capture the caricature of the animal," she explains. "They can be comical or serious. But to catch that caricature..."

Joan hasn't regretted her decision to paint full time. This summer, she reports happily, she has exhibited her work at three area art shows and at an Artisan's Day in the Park at the county seat.

Gaining entrance to a typical exhibition, Joan said, may take a bit more doing than most people realize. After sending for an application, an artist must submit slides to be "juried." The artist's work is judged against about 350 other artists, with about only a third of the competitors accepted



Joan is working on a mural for the Lycoming Historical Society Museum. The mural will depict the Sawdust Revolution which occurred in Williamsport.

for the final exhibition.

When asked what intrigues her about painting, Joan responds with the passion of an artist, with a reply as old as the creative urge in mankind.

"It provides a challenge, pure enjoyment. I can't escape it. It's just there...it's always there. The ideas build up over a period of time and I have to put them down."

When a painting is complete, Joan said she feels a sense of accomplishment. "It's something to look forward to as well as something to look back on," she said.

Living in rural Sullivan County as opposed to a metropolitan area has had a few drawbacks, Joan reports. Art supplies are more difficult to find, so she often is forced to order by mail. She further notes that selling originals is difficult because the market is flooded with prints. And finally, she said, finding "good space" to exhibit her paintings is difficult.

But although the remoteness of the area where she lives hinders her access to art supplies, Joan enjoys her rural environment.

"As a child I always wanted a horse, and when I was 40, I finally got the horse I'd always wanted," she says with a chuckle.

Joan keeps two horses on the family's 28-acre farm and her son, a butcher, runs a small beef operation.

For would-be artists, Joan offers the following advice. "Even though the field is overcrowded and competition is stiff, if you feel

you have the talent, don't let the competition get you down."

And perhaps, just as importantly from her own experience, she

adds, "Even though you have to set art work aside for other priorities, once in awhile always go back to it."



Joan works on a painting entitled "Pulling Horses at the Forksville Fairgrounds."



A piece of shell fungus served as the base for a great horned owl carving. These and sculptures created from the galls that occasionally grow on goldenrod sell well for Joan at craft shows.



Joan displays a few of her paintings.

## Homestead Notes