





# art in the family



By **Karyn Spellman Ash**

**S**herry Kendall recognized and nurtured her daughter's creative talents from a young age, which wasn't difficult to do being an artist herself.

But her business, Wagging Tail Portraits, was pretty much her own venture of making custom paintings and ornaments of pets.

Sherry and her daughter, Natalie, now both contribute their talents to Wagging Tail Portraits, showcasing people's pets in paintings, cards, ornaments, glasses, and other collectibles. The business is rounded out by Sherry's husband, Steve, who is creative in his own right with his

own marketing and design company.

Natalie, now a college student, is the designer of the Wet Nose Greeting Cards, a line inspired by a class project. The resulting product grew so much in popularity that it claimed the family's second consecutive appearance in *O, The Oprah Magazine's* "Favorite Things List."

Sherry's hand-painted Christmas ornaments caught the eye of an *O Magazine* staffer last year while Sherry was at a pet event in New York. The ornaments ended up being featured in the 2011 edition. This year, Natalie's computer-designed cards made the exclusive list.

Sherry had been taking her paintings, ornaments and other products to pet shows for years, always drawing attention

for having such unique items. Natalie's work drew the same kind of reaction, and they knew they had something special.

"People would always smile when they saw my mom's stuff," said Natalie, who had been accompanying her mother to these types of shows for years. "But now I'm seeing it when they're looking at mine."

Wagging Tail Portraits makes its home in an old farmhouse converted into a studio on Frederick Road in rural Woodbine, Md. Every room shows the family's talent, the signs of a rapidly growing business, and the love of capturing pets at their eager best for devoted clients.

In a bright sitting room, vibrant canvases of all sizes and of varying breeds cover the walls. Sherry's own two Golden Retrievers appear lifelike enough to pop down from their perch to lick

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to add paint to one of her drawings, and it just didn't turn out the way she wanted. "It's never been a love of mine. And my mom doesn't like what I do."

a visitor's face. Samples of painted ornaments, wine glasses, and glass mugs line shelves and the mantel.

Sherry, who studied at the Parsons School of Design in New York, worked as an illustrator, and started making ornaments and portraits as gifts for friends before realizing she could turn that into a business.

Growing up surrounded by paints, canvases, easels, and brushes gave Natalie the foundation she needed for her particular talent. She preferred drawing to painting, and eventually developed her gift graphically, learning the complexities of computer design and adding a dimension to her family's business that piqued the attention of even more customers.

The two have two very different products to design, as well as how they design them.

"I'm old school, with a paintbrush. She's new school, with computer illustration," Sherry explained.

In fact, neither one is particularly comfortable with the other's artistic medium.

"I've never liked painting. I tried, but it didn't go so well," Natalie said with a laugh, explaining that she would try

So many orders came in to the small, Carroll County-based business last year because of the prominent "Favorite Things List" appearance that there was no way they could be filled by Christmas, Sherry said. So she and her husband came up with an idea to send a card to gift recipients to let them know what kind of special gift would be on its way.

They expect the same with the addition of Natalie's cards to this year's list. There are two options: Customers can order from a selection of breeds already printed and ready to go, or can send in a picture of a pet for custom cards.

They already had to hire extra artists to help both Sherry and Natalie, and a few more employees just to ship the products.

But the business details are just that to the artists – business details. What's important to them is their work.

The two have adjacent studio spaces on the second floor of the house, each reflecting their own mediums and open enough to see each other work.

Natalie has monitors and tables lining a wall, sparse and modern-looking. A few steps away, her mom has neat rows of

paint, brushes, workspace jutting out into the middle of the room, lighting to see the fine details, and boxes of ornaments.

"I'll be on one side of the room with my messy paints, and she'll be on the other side of the room with her tablet," Sherry said.

Sometimes they'll work at home instead, with Natalie on her laptop and Sherry at an easel. Their long hours together are something they're used to after years of Sherry homeschooling Natalie. The two have a close relationship they both credit for their ability to work so well together.

"It's awesome. I think it has a lot to do with the fact I've been homeschooled. She was the teacher, and I joke that my dad was the principal," Natalie said.

And the surge in business they're expecting from their latest endorsement on the "Favorite Things List" will ensure even more time together this holiday season. That, of course, works well for both mother and daughter.

"I just love her dearly and love spending time with her as much as possible," Sherry said. 🐾

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