

Interesting lives, interesting artwork at Bancroft Gallery



Painters Olga Szaranski and her daughter Lucy Manley opened their show 'Roadside Painters' at the Art Gallery of Bancroft on April 1. JIM EADIE Special to This Week

By Jim Eadie

Isn't it interesting that the most remarkable artists always seem to have the most remarkable life stories? Such is the case with Olga Szaranski, who opened the April exhibition at the Art Gallery of Bancroft along with her daughter, Lucy Manley from Keene, Ont. Their show is entitled 'Roadside Painters.'

'Do you know how old I am?' demanded Szaranski, and after I guessed completely wrong by almost 20 years, she proudly declared that she was 92!

Szaranski was born and grew up in the Ukraine. But during the Second World War, she and other young students were loaded on trains and shipped to Nazi forced labour camps. There, they were made to work on the manufacture of tanks for the German war effort.

'We were considered a lower race,' she said. During that time, she met her future husband, who was from Poland. 'We were in the American occupation camps after the war, and they gave us the choice to go to the United States or to Canada,' she said. 'My husband was offered the opportunity to go into mining or agriculture, and he chose agriculture.'

When the couple arrived in Canada, the immigration officer wanted her husband to show his hands. Based on what he saw, the official deemed him a suitable agricultural worker. At first, he worked on a farm near Brampton, Ont. Later in life, the couple were able to purchase a resort business.

'In 1998, my husband died,' she said. 'I had always loved to paint, but I never had the time.'

Her daughter, Lucy Manley, suggested that Mom take some art classes and workshops, and offered to go with her as a roommate and that started something for both of them.

'One thing led to another,' said Manley, 'and we became serious about painting on location. I have a passion for landscapes, and Mom has a passion for buildings.'

'I love to paint old buildings, old barns, historical homes, sugar shacks,' said Szaranski. 'In Europe they have old castles; here we have old barns.'

Manley has been painting fulltime since 1990, and she is currently the president of the East Central Ontario Art Association. She is a very busy art teacher and her works are in a number of national and international colleges and galleries. Her mom has her works in many private collections in North America and Europe, including the Ukraine.

This show is mounted at the Art Gallery of Bancroft until April 30. It is sponsored by The Old Hastings Mercantile, and Gertrude Sorensen.