

# Art, and working at it, come naturally



Lori Van Ingen  
Senior Citizens

Tom Hermansader comes by it naturally, but he still works hard at his passion—painting.

“My dad, Allen F. Hermansader, was a portrait painter. He did ‘The Mighty Atom,’ Joseph L. Greenstein,” one of the 20th century’s best-known strongmen, Hermansader said. “He could

paint anything, but made his living with portraits of well-known people.”

Hermansader recalled that when he was a small boy, he begged his mother to take him to his father’s studio to watch him paint.

“I thought there was magic in it,” the 60-year-old Columbia resident said. “And it’s still like magic to me. You go from a blank canvas to an image and continue to develop it.”

Hermansader made a first attempt at painting when he was 2 or 3. He said one time when his father left the studio, he took a brush and slathered purplish paint on a person’s face that his father had been painting.

When he was about 12, he told his father he wanted to be like him—a painter.

So his father set up still lifes and marble statues for him so Hermansader could learn the basics of drawing and painting.



Justin David Graybill / Staff

**Tom Hermansader holds one of his paintings, showing Wheatland, inside his home in Columbia.**

As an 18-year-old, Hermansader said, he’d sit for hours with a pencil or charcoal and draw. An art teacher later told him that “drawing is the backbone of art.”

While in junior and senior high school, Hermansader went to the Baum Art School in Allentown on Saturdays.

After graduating, Hermansader spent a year at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

But when he heard that it takes seven years after you graduate before you make a living at fine arts, Hermansader decided to become an art teacher.

He submitted his portfolio and

took the SATs, but was soundly rejected by Kutztown University.

Hermansader was so upset that he went to Kutztown to see why he was rejected. He discovered his SAT scores were not high enough, but that out of 400 applicants, his portfolio tied for first.

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# Hermansader: Art

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Because they felt he would struggle with the academics, they encouraged him to go to a community college instead.

After driving home, however, he got the phone call he was waiting for — Kutztown would accept him on probation.

The first year he did struggle, but eventually Hermansader made the dean's list and graduated in 1973.

In 2007, Kutztown University honored him with the Rothermel Alumni Award. He now also is a member of the board of directors.

"It just goes to show you that if you're determined and don't take 'no' for answer, you'll find a way to achieve," Hermansader said.

After getting his bachelor's degree, Hermansader was hired to teach at Columbia Junior-Senior High School and coach tennis. While working there, he earned his master's degree in art education. He taught at Columbia for 16 years.

In 1981, a colleague told him that he thought his painting of the Wright's Mansion was a good piece to print.

"To have 1,000 prints made, it would have cost \$2,000, so I took the original and displayed it at Columbia Market House," Hermansader said. "In two nights I took in 54 orders. That convinced me I could make a living by painting and having it reproduced."

Since that time, Hermansader has opened an arts supply store and 10 art galleries, but he currently has only two art galleries — Hermansader's Victorian Mansion and Art Gallery, 420 Chestnut St., Columbia, throughout the year, and a kiosk at Park City Center during November and December.

"My life is art, and art is my life," Hermansader said.

To date, Hermansader has made 161 prints, more than 90 of them of places in Lancaster County.

"I'm working on a painting of the Armstrong Ceiling Plant in Marietta," he said.

Although Hermansader's paintings are in all mediums, he said he most enjoys watercolor.

His paintings have been used as fundraisers. His best-known fundraiser was for the MS Society in 1988, showing Lancaster's Penn Square. His latest is "Light Up a Life" for Hospice of Lancaster County.

"I'm working on a couple other ideas. I'm always thinking," he said.

Hermansader also years ago taught private art classes "and some of those students have become professional artists, illustrators, art teachers...."

He plans to start group classes at his Columbia gallery and home in the spring. He has a list of 60 people interested in the group classes.

"I would love to start something like Baum Art School someday. I want to share some knowledge of art. There's a lot of satisfaction doing that," Hermansader said.

Besides his paintings, Hermansader is known for his feats of strength.

When he was 16, he watched the Mighty Atom bend nails and pull trucks.

Later, when he was 53, "I wanted to learn, so I went to the best, Dennis Rogers of Houston. Pound for pound, he's the strongest man in the world," he said.

Rogers taught Hermansader the art of bending steel, including bending 60 penny nails and twisting horse shoes.

For more information about Hermansader or his artwork, go to [www.hermansadersartgallery.com](http://www.hermansadersartgallery.com).

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