

MY BRUSH WITH PATRIOTISM

Thomas Bateman is an artist who works in Tucker for AT & T. While he devotes himself to advertising art during the day, his off hours are often given to the fine arts. Recently he had the opportunity to paint portraits of soldiers who have lost their lives overseas, as well as to meet their families, the eventual recipients of these portraits.



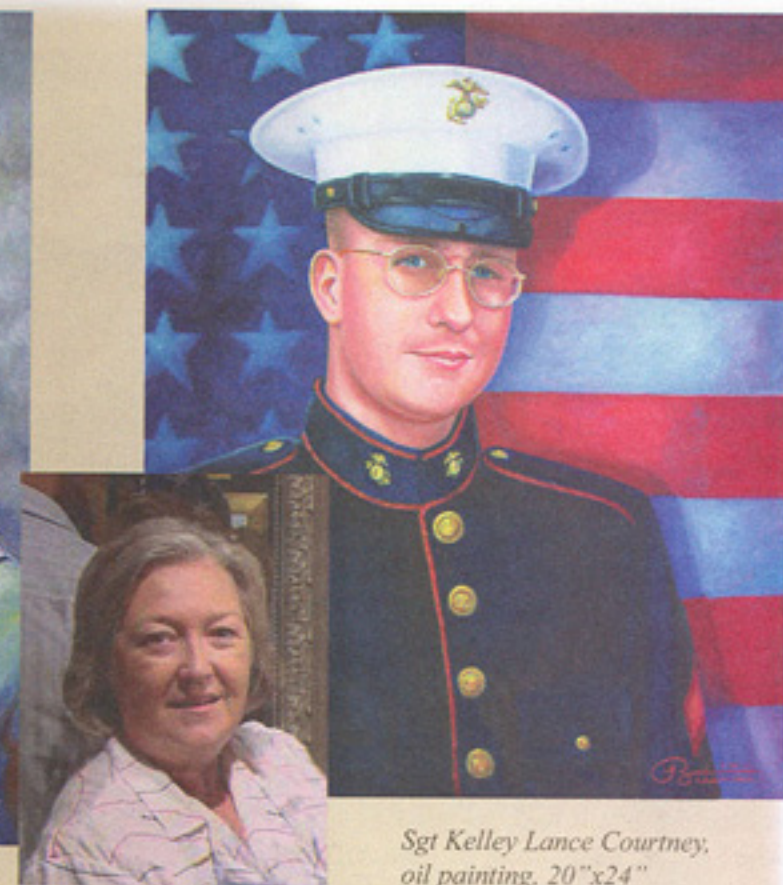
By Thomas Bateman, in his own words:

“My true experience with Art From the Heart, a project created by the Atlanta Fine Arts League, basically created to give something back and show its appreciation to the Georgia families that have lost a member of their family to Afghanistan or Iraq, all started with me searching the Internet like I always do. I was looking for more and more impressive art that would influence me to create my next best art piece and suddenly I came across the Atlanta Fine Arts League website. Searching the pages I then found the page asking for Atlanta artists to volunteer their time and patience to create a portrait for Georgia Fallen Soldiers families. Now I’ve got to tell you, volunteering to give my art away isn’t something I practice all the time. But this project was a no-brainer for me. I immediately got in touch with Geraldine Zaki of the Atlanta Fine Arts League and she sent me contact information for my soldier’s family. My first family was the Courtneys of Macon, Georgia. Representing the family was the soldier’s mom, Gena Courtney. With her outstanding charm and personality, she guided me on the facial features of her son USMC Sgt. Kelley Lance Courtney. Sgt. Kelley Lance Courtney, born August 13, 1976, in Macon, Georgia, to proud parents, Robert and Eugenia Courtney, was a United States Marine Corps

next page



CSM Donovan Earl Watts, oil painting, 20"x24"



Sgt. Kelley Lance Courtney, oil painting, 20"x24"

Sergeant Courtney's mom, Gena Courtney

continued on page 68

My Brush With Patriotism (from page 67)

counter-intelligence specialist, killed in action in the Al Anbar province, Iraq on October 30, 2004.

When I finished painting the portrait it was like I was contributing to the brave souls that fought for our way of life everyday. ‘This moment in my life was one of the greatest I will ever experience,’ I thought. I always get a rush from the unveiling of my portraits. It is both nerve racking and pure excitement in one moment, and it is what I live for. Now, even though I had sent Gena the email of her sons portrait and she responded by saying how the family was more than pleased with the finished portrait, and how well I captured Sgt. Kelley’s features and expressions, I still did not feel as confident until I met the family and they saw the painting in person. As it turns out, the Atlanta Fine Arts League had scheduled a traveling exhibition starting with the Museum of Patriotism, which would have a reception for the Art From the Heart event on September 8, 2007, which by the way is my birthday. I thought this day would be special because of that fact, and it was!

Then the day came September 8, 2007. I was so excited that I must have perspired all day. My beautiful wife Sebrina, whom is my biggest fan along with my Mom and the rest of my family were there to lend support to me all that day. Finally we rushed downtown

and found a parking spot. On arrival there were many families and distinguished members of the community present for the Art From the Heart event.

After receiving my nametag I proceeded to search out Gena and her family and just as the event was beginning to start, it happened. There she was waving from across the room at me. I almost forgot that I had my nametag on with a picture of my soldier that I painted on me. I tell you she was as sweet as I had imagined her to be. She brought Sgt. Kelley’s children with her to meet me, and I felt so special that she did. She also was accompanied by her Husband, Bob, as well as a friend of the family. We hugged and I even got a chance to hold, Sgt. Kelley’s son. I think I grew muscles I didn’t know I had. What a family full of energy and delight; they are truly some of the finest people you would ever meet. I felt as if I was receiving a gift and I know that I will always be connected to this family.

Sgt. Kelley’s portrait is on tour now and will be at the National Headquarters of Coca Cola until November 14, 2007, and from there it will be shipped to the Courtney family where I know it will bring the family generations of comfort in knowing that he was and is an American hero and will not be forgotten. This is my wish for the family as the painting hangs in their possession.

I have since also painted another soldier and hero, Army Commander Sergeant Major Donovan Earl

continued on page 70

My Brush With Patriotism (from page 68)

Watts of the 82nd Airborne Division, a career soldier and the senior NCO for the 1-505 Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd ABN DIV. CSM Watts served our country for almost 27 years. CSM Watts was killed in Bayji, Iraq, on November 21, 2006. He was due to begin his retirement rotation in January 2007. He volunteered to take the place of another soldier in his unit, for a patrol on that day—he was the only fatality in the IED attack on his Humvee. Commander, Sergeant Major Donovan Earl Watts is survived by his daughter, his parents, two sisters and one brother.

My contact person for this portrait was his sister Bridgett Watts. She was also a great person to meet and work with. Her art instruction was clear and precise and I am very grateful to her for her soft and sweet personality.



Meeting the mom (Teresa) of CSM Donovan was also a treat. She too was warm and friendly and I could tell very intelligent and proud of CSM Donovan. Meeting such wonderful people has really humbled me on the strength of the human spirit of giving. Meeting Gena and Teresa, I could tell why their sons were outstanding.

Painting the portraits of these fallen heroes means a lot more to me than volunteerism; it is a reminder for me to appreciate the things I cherish, God, Family & Friends. May God always continue to watch over our brave soldiers and their families forever?”

To learn more about The Atlanta Fine Arts League, Visit the website at www.atlantafineartsleague.org