Passionate Painter

Veranne Graham's life is characterized by three interwoven passions – her love for art, her husband and serving the Lord. Her roles as wife, artist and Bible teacher have become so intrinsically intertwined they are impossible to separate.

Veranne was born in Nashville in 1930. Her family was shielded from the worst of the depression by her father's professional reputation in restorative dentistry on staff of Vanderbilt Hospital – where he treated patients from as far away as Europe. Little could she have guessed as a girl attending Lipscomb Bible School that her future would be interwoven with that prestigious university, as her future husband would someday teach at Vanderbilt.

She met Harold at Bible College in Arkansas, but Korea came knocking, and Harold served in the U.S. Navy for four years. While he was away, Veranne went back to Lipscomb to earn an art degree. After marriage, she worked as a graphic artist at Abbingdon Press. She would visually set all the design of a book, create the cover and select the font.

Harold eventually completed degrees including a Ph.D. in chemical engineering, teaching at Vanderbilt himself in the process. Veranne describes Harold as having a genuine charm and appreciation for all people. Veranne had their three daughters, Gayle, Linda and Deeanne. In the early 1960s, the family moved to Houston as Harold took a position with Exxon.

“The first time I saw Houston in 1960 it was a sleepy little town on the bayou. Now it is an international city with cowboy boots,” Veranne said. When Harold traveled to Africa or the Middle East, she and the girls would stay in Houston, although they did accompany him to Venezuela in 1969, and Norway in the early 1980s.

A turning point in their life was when the Grahams became acquainted with Dave Wilkerson and his evangelical book, The Cross and the Switchblade. They found the ministry so compelling they formed a home church of like-minded Christians. The decades-long friendships remain, even after Harold’s death in 2014.

The fellowship group especially enjoys gathering to celebrate the Easter holiday, and they’ve created some special traditions for their Easter Eggstravaganza. They start with a Passover Seder. The next day, friends showcase beautiful, handcrafted, blown eggs that are works of art. They hold contests and hunts, with various prizes and bragging rights for both the most gorgeous entries and the most successful hunters. Literally hundreds of these treasures decorate the shelves of Veranne’s home at Independence Hill Retirement Community.

While some are decorated in the painstaking Ukrainian wax method, Pysanky, others are fashioned in other ways. Some favorites: An egg painted to match The Hobbit book cover, another decorated as a pumpkin with a wee Peter Pumpkin Eater's wife inside, and one with a photo of Veranne and Harold developed on the shell by a photographer friend.

It was her close ties to friends from the fellowship that drew Veranne to Independence Hill. Many have now left Houston and retired to the Hill Country. Her new home is within easy visiting distance and close to her daughters in Austin and Rockport.

Veranne recently served as one of the judges for an art contest Independence Hill held for the third graders at Las Lomas Elementary School, where she was able to give the winners some one-on-one advice.

“I was stunned by how well they did,” she said. “You could tell the students had been taught to effectively present their ideas without curbing their individuality.”

She has transformed a room into an art studio, and her own creations cover the walls. Veranne still teaches workshops with her daughter Linda about unleashing the power of creativity found in the right hemisphere of the brain.