

## Reverence for Nature

By Sue Simpson Gallagher

It is said that timing is everything. In regard to most things in life I have found that to be true.

In the mid 1980's I lived in Jackson, Wyoming. I first worked at Trailside Gallery then the National Museum of Wildlife Art. I was in the perfect spot at the perfect time to meet artists. They came from all over the world making pilgrimages to one of the most beautiful places on earth.

In those early years I met Skip Whitcomb, along with many of his talented friends who were painting in the Valley. I met Ralph Oberg soon after and then a couple of years later Matt Smith and Dan Young.

From the beginning, these men acknowledged my passion and appreciation for art and they drew me into the magic of their lives. I watched them paint. I followed them around. I went to their critique sessions. Even though I was not an artist they gave me access into the ways in which they saw the world.

I was in awe of their reverence for the natural world. I still am. I was intrigued by the way they could each notice the way the light falls on a sandstone ridge or the ripples of a steam but actually see it quite differently. They helped teach me the art of seeing by focusing on what really matters.

Their relationship to nature was and is not purely aesthetic. Each of them has a strong connection to nature. They not only appreciate it, they play in it. Biking, climbing, hiking and fishing have brought them closer to nature. Their adventures in nature help them as they interpret and paint the world around them.

Thanks in large part to Skip, Ralph, Matt and Dan I fell in love with plein air painting. When I started my own gallery in Cody, Wyoming I focused on the style. I loved the spontaneity of it, the freshness and the intimacy along with its tradition and history.

For many years I held "art camp" at my family's ranch on the Southfork of the Shoshoni River. It was a retreat from the world. It was a time and a place where artist friends could paint together and look over each other's shoulders as paintings were constructed. There were comments shared about ability and process; about color and composition. It was a gift to everyone involved.

I have represented "The Boys" for decades now. I have watched how they have shared each other's lives. They have rejoiced in each other's successes personal and professional. They are pained by each other's misfortunes and commiserate until all hours of the morning if one of them has been "skunked" at a show. In a world where it would be easy to be envious, they are not. They raise each other up.

Their enjoyment of one another, their admiration of other another and their mutual respect is evident when you are with them. Seeing their paintings together on the walls of the Steamboat Art Museum tells the story of a long and loyal friendship between four men. You can almost hear the laughter and smell the cigar smoke in the background.

I would not trust an artist who only has their own work hanging on their walls because it speaks to a self-focus that prevents one from growing by thinking you are "better than". These four friends hang each other's paintings on their walls with honor and delight. A painting can bring back a memory or simply make one smile with the thought of a shared story or joke.

The joy these artists find in their work is evident in every brushstroke. These four are appreciators of life, of art, of family and friends. They realize their great fortune being able to do what they do, live when they live and love how they live. They embrace the wonder of the world around them.

I couldn't imagine my art world without Skip, Ralph, Matt and Dan in it. They enhance my life immeasurably with their creations, their humor, their kindness and their friendship. Exhibiting their work together in one place is impressive. It is also inspirational.

- Sue Simpson Gallagher, Owner – Simpson Gallagher Gallery, Cody WY; First Curator and Trustee of the National Museum of Wildlife Art, Jackson, WY