

Teyjah opens gallery in Salmon Arm

By CJ Worrall

Teyjah McAren is a busy person. While discussing the opening of her new gallery in Village West Plaza, she was busy learning how to protect a topographical map with tape so it wouldn't get wet while she hiked in the backcountry. The week before she was in Vancouver taking black belt exams in karate, which she passed.

Moving to Salmon Arm and opening her own gallery has been a dream come true for Teyjah. Having the freedom to pursue her many interests is simply icing on the cake. "I have spent the last seven years saving 25 per cent of my teacher's salary so I could do this. The freedom is wonderful!"

Teyjah has always been an artist, though it is only recently that she has been able to devote herself to her art full time. Over the years she held many different jobs before she eventually became a late French immersion teacher in Coquitlam.

In one job, she worked in a cocktail sausage making factory in just over freezing temperatures and in another she spent hours screwing tape measure cases together. One of the most interesting jobs she had in her early years was colouring mineshaft maps for a mean but exacting boss. That job was like art, but not really.

Actually, in the beginning, Teyjah wanted to be a newspaper reporter. She studied history and political science at the University of Concordia and got a job with a west-end Montreal newspaper called the "Lakeshore News" and later the "Verdun Journal." Hours on the midnight shift covering murders, dead dog stories, doing editorials and making her own sales calls took the bloom from the job and she moved on.

Eventually, Teyjah left her native Montreal and moved west. Though Vancouver wasn't what she expected, it was a good place for Teyjah. She learned that her best red dress and high-heeled shoes that were mandatory for job hunting in Quebec were a little too flamboyant for the subtler and toned-down west. She also learned that it was an employers' market, and jobs were far and few between.

It was around this time that a friend recommended that Teyjah take advantage of the fact that she was bilingual. The friend said that French immersion teachers were desperately needed so Teyjah went to Simon Fraser University to get her teaching certificate. She figured teaching would be ideal; working winters with summers off to travel and devote to art.



Teyjah McAren in her new gallery at Village West Plaza

On her first day of classes, in her first posting in Whalley, Surrey, one of Teyjah's students went wild, kicking desks and ripping books. In her second term, a student committed suicide. Teyjah stuck with it though, and turned to her art when teaching became too much. She eventually went back to school to get her Masters of Art Education and set up Squamish's late French immersion program.

All the while, Teyjah took art classes and developed her skills as an artist. She travelled extensively and studied with other artists. Her style is eclectic with a fondness for colour and experimentation. She says her paintings are a quest to capture "time stilled," that transient beauty embodied in the momentary and the fleeting.

When the time came that Teyjah and her husband could leave the city, they jumped in their motorhome and did a tour of the interior, looking for a new home. It was fate that brought them to Salmon Arm; well, fate and a broken-down motorhome. Today the couple has bought a house in the Salmon River Valley and Teyjah has opened her own gallery and gives art classes that are sponsored by Golden Artist Colours. She can be found at Teyjah's Art Den, 804-6770.