

‘ART HEALS’

Woodstock woman paralyzed in accident shares how art has helped her recover

By **Ethan Johnson**

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A Woodstock woman who was nearly completely paralyzed after a diving accident in 2019 has found a new lease on life through her paintings.

“The thing I’ve learned through my journey is art heals,” Madison Johnson said. “It’s been a very therapeutic experience and lets me express myself.”

Johnson, a 2017 Etowah High School graduate, suffered a C5 vertebrae injury in August 2019 after diving into Lake Allatoona. The injury left her with near complete paralysis, though she continues to work on movement in her legs and hands through physical therapy sessions.

“It was a freak accident — I guess it was too shallow or there was something there,” Johnson said.

After her condition improved, she began painting. She realized that something she enjoyed doing as a hobby or for work when she was younger, was now a passion and a way to express herself.

“While I was a student at Etowah, I worked at Great American Cookies as a cake decorator,” Johnson said. “I was also the girl who liked to draw pictures to take home to mom and dad and enjoyed ‘doodling.’ I also had a book in college of designs for potential tattoos when I got older, and then a year after my injury I started painting and fell in love with it.”

Though she doesn’t have full mobility in her hands yet, she is able to paint with the help of grip strengthening tools.

Painting as a hobby led to Johnson displaying her creations at an art gallery at the Reeves House in down-town Woodstock. The gallery was up from Oct. 7 through Thursday.

“We had an art show that night (Oct. 7) where I was there with some other representatives of the Reeves House to talk to the public about my gallery and my story,” Johnson said. “There was probably about 100 people there — it was a lot of fun.”

Some of her art that was on display included “Life in Stone,” “Woman Warrior” and “Stairway to Heaven,”



Madison Johnson in front of some of her paintings from her gallery.

paintings that illustrate her journey, as well as scenery she sees every day, she said.

“What I want to show is that, by having a positive mind-set, you can cut through negative things that go on in life — in the ‘Woman Warrior’ piece, she is wearing armor and has a sword to symbolize this, which is why it’s probably my favorite piece,” Johnson said. “I feel like these three pieces are pretty symbolic and capture a little bit of my mindset and humor. My landscapes transport you to a place of peace and rest.”

Johnson said she sold six out of 10 pieces from the gallery. She added that she is keeping three of them for herself.

The artist added that she is also working on prints of her pieces to sell to those interested.

“I am going to work on some prints to sell because I sold all of my pieces so fast, I had people asking to

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buy them, but I had already sold them,” Johnson said. “It wasn’t my goal to sell the art, it was really to raise awareness — but it’s an extra blessing that people think my art is good enough to buy. I think this is really special.”

Johnson said she is “overwhelmed, but in a good way” by the positive reception she has received about her art.

“I obviously didn’t expect such an awesome turnout on that first night or how much I smiled that night (Oct. 7) — my cheeks actually hurt the next day,” she said. “I am just overwhelmed with happiness and so grateful to everyone who came that opening night and has seen the gallery. I was very nervous. I’m just proud of how far I have come since my injury.”

After her accident, Johnson spent over three months in different hospitals for surgery and recovery time. She was on a ventilator for a time and was also unable to sit up in a chair.

Johnson thanks her family and friends for their love and support, as well as her neighbor Debbie Veith, a re-tired nurse who she said has helped in her recovery over the last year.

“She started out as just a neighbor who lived on the

same floor as me, but she continued to offer her help and support as a nurse and friend,” Johnson said. “She’s also a really talented artist and is the whole reason I got on this journey as an artist, and she is responsible for get-ting my gallery at the Reeves House. Without her, none of this would have been possible.”

Veith said Johnson has grown a lot since the two met. “When I met her, she was so shy and withdrawn, but I introduced myself and recommended painting,” she said. “I started working with her behind the idea of therapy through art, but I saw a glow and felt she was really tal-ented. Luckily Reeves House trusted me when I suggested an art show and gallery for Johnson. I see her going very far with this in her future.”

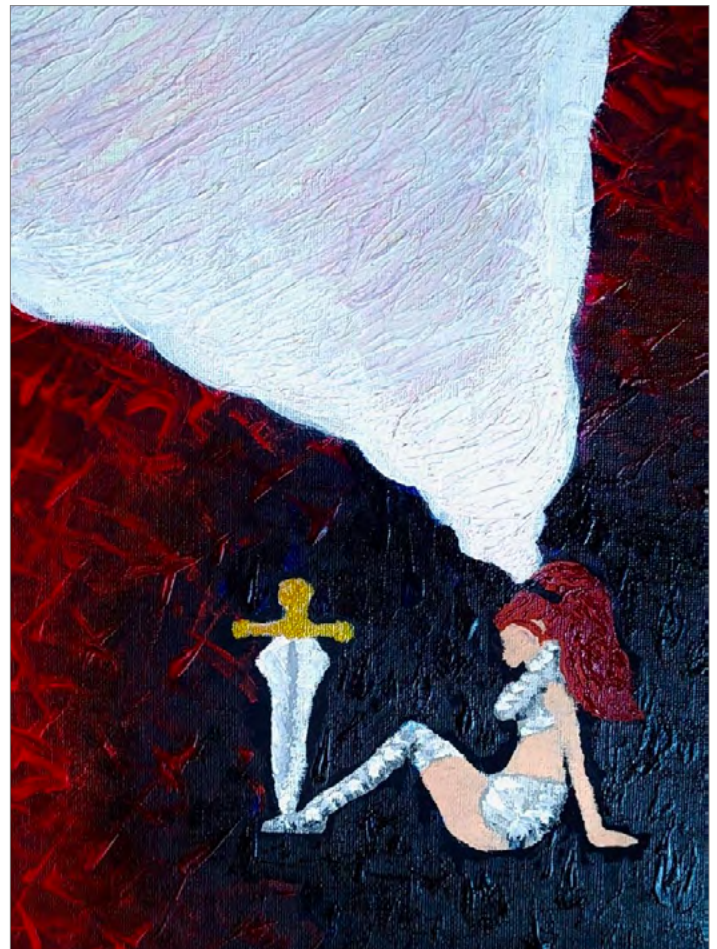
Johnson said she suggests that “for anyone with an in-jury similar to mine or going through troubled times, to live fearlessly, love deeply and laugh as much as you can.”

“Don’t give up and stay motivated,” she said. “The jour-ney won’t be easy but keep pushing through.”

Those interested in purchasing a print or looking for more information can contact Johnson at madisonj2998@gmail.com.



One of Johnson’s paintings, titled “The Swamp.” Johnson said she painted this for her father one day, basing it off of her love for the Disney movie “The Princess and the Frog,” as well her father’s love for the movie “Shrek.”



One of Johnson’s paintings “Woman Warrior.” This, along with her other paintings, help illustrate her journey, as well as scenery she sees every day.