

Putting her outdoor life on canvas

By Josh Olive
WaterLine Publisher

Kelly Reark paints lots of things — horses, Native Americans, sea turtles, pet portraits, maybe even your grandmother if that's what you want — but no matter how many other subjects she puts on canvas, she's got a reputation.

"I'm kind of known as the tarpon lady," says the South Florida native. "I've painted hundreds of them."

Maybe that has something to do with her dad. Mike Reark is the skipper of the Salty Cracker, a traditional Boca Grande Pass guide boat. Kelly grew up fishing and hunting with her parents and other family members, so it's not really shocking that she gravitates toward images of tarpon.

"They're really the only big game fish we have here," she says. "There aren't any marlin, so tarpon are what we've got."

Kelly loved painting from the time she was just a little girl. "I've painted and drawn my whole life," she says. "It runs in the family. My dad did illustrations and logos for local businesses in his spare time. And my mom's mother was a painter. She used to say she got her master's degree in being a housewife and then learned to paint."

She's also related to a well-known writer and illustrator Edward Gorey, who is her first cousin, twice removed.

But a career in art wasn't exactly what she had planned. After college, she came to Englewood to do one of her favorite things — a little fishing with Dad.

"And then I just stayed," she says. "Nat Italiano (of Italiano Insurance Services) offered me a job as a secretary and I said OK. I've been selling real estate, but in the last six months I've decided to go into art full-time. It's what I really want to do."

Fish may be her specialty, but they're not the only thing she portrays — not by a long shot.

"I've been working on a new cowboys and Indians of Florida series," she says. "I really like the history. I'm a native Floridian, and I can understand why everybody wants to come here to retire."

With so many potential subject, Kelly says choosing what to paint next is a difficult decision.

"I have way more ideas than I have time to create," she says. "And I don't want to try to get rich from my paintings. I want to get my artwork hanging on as many walls as possible. I never want my work to be unaffordable."

Fortunately, she's got a rock-solid partner in this venture: Her spouse, David Borza.

"I'm really blessed to have a husband who is behind me and lets me be the artist I want to be," says Kelly. "I couldn't do it without him — I just couldn't."

When Kelly produces a painting, she's not just putting pigment on the canvas — she's putting herself into her art.

"We've always done outdoor stuff as a family," she says. "Over the years, I've painted a lot of those memories. Art makes people happy, and I'm a happy person, so I just want to show that to the world."

Her work also reflects her surroundings. "There's so much natural color here, not like up north where there's a lot of black and white, so my paintings are just naturally colorful."

Kelly's prints and a few originals are available at her website, DragonflyExpressions.com. "The prices shown include shipping, so locals get a better deal," she says. She's also creating unique painted silk pieces, which can be hung or worn as scarves. You can see them at the Antique Boutique, located at the historical train depot in downtown Boca Grande.

"I actually prefer to work on commission," she says. "And I really enjoy painting in larger formats. It's just fun." In fact, she's painted a few murals, including one at the Lasbury-Tracy Real Estate building on Indiana Ave. in Englewood. If you have a wall that just needs something special, Kelly's services might be just what you're looking for. You can contact her at 941-268-7876 or KellyReark@gmail.com.



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"Kaleidoscope"



WaterLine photo by Chris Porter

Englewood artist Kelly Reark displays
one of her works, *Reigning Silver*,
which depicts a tarpon at night.



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"Breath Taking"



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"Reel Dreams"