



Portrait of
an artist

Phil
Spaziani

Mornings with Morley cover artist Phil Spaziani has faced more than his share of uphill battles since surviving a brush with death on a Stillwater, NY hilltop in 1991. Although the gliding accident left him wheelchair-bound, the mild-mannered gent who in September 2018 will celebrate “the 45th anniversary of my 40th birthday” continues to make artistic leaps and bounds.

Indeed the latest in a series of drawings by the octogenarian promise to add even greater dimension to his legacy which has included exhibits in New York City and Washington DC galleries as well as works in private and public collections and a distinguished career as a high school art teacher.

Other credits include designing the markers displayed on historic homes in the Village of Ballston Spa, NY. Among them is the 1845 Federal townhouse on West High Street he and wife Lorraine meticulously restored in the 1980s.

Battling his way back from being “sidelined by life” many times over the past quarter of a century, (“I’ve had “more than my share of UTIs and kidney infections – a curse of paraplegia”), Phil credits recent drawing sessions at the Saratoga County Arts Center with helping him further improve his skills.

Phil also continues to venture out to snap photos of prospective subjects for his ever-expanding “Picturing A Village Series” using his iPhone. “I’m still out there looking for the right subjects, the right lighting and so on. I usually take three to six images to refer to while I’m painting.”

A sampling of the more than 40-piece collection was first shared with the public via a Strolling Village Artisans initiative in 2008. Other creations were showcased in “Views From the Saratoga Battlefield: Preserving Historic Lands.” Jointly sponsored by the Saratoga County Arts Center and the Saratoga National Historical Park, the invitational show debuted in Saratoga Springs where it received rave reviews before being moved to the Visitor Center at the battlefield.

Because so much of what the father of three and grandfather of four accomplishes takes place behind-the-scenes, many are not aware of his contributions to such educational institutions as Brookside Museum on Charlton Street and the National Bottle Museum on Milton Avenue.

In addition, Phil forged enduring bonds of friendship with many of the students he taught at Scotia-Glenville High School from the 1970s to the early 1990s.

As much as Phil enjoys painting and entertaining inside of his home, his favorite place to work and relax during the spring, summer and early autumn months is a spacious wheelchair-accessible back deck that affords beautiful bird’s eye views of surrounding scenery.

When the deck was completed in 2003 it was the first time Phil had been able to enjoy his backyard since the 1991 accident. In a bittersweet tale, he relates how the same year he became a paraplegic, his beloved brother Fred passed away from cancer.

“He was too sick to come and see me when I was recuperating from my accident and I was not in any condition at the time to travel to see him,” recalls Phil, but in a final act of caring, Fred Spaziani bequeathed a sum of money that was ultimately freed by his estate for the construction of the deck that today bears an engraved plaque in the late sibling’s honor. It is here Phil is now putting the finishing touches on works-in-progress that he hopes will complete the portrait of his own life.



Artist Phil Spaziani with a portrait of himself by former student Stephen Bennett as photographed by Lief Zurmehlen.

*Kindly turn pages to view streetscapes by Phil Spaziani
and to learn more about his talented artisan wife Lorraine.*

Phil Spaziani shares memories of long and winding road that led to his streetscape creations -- including this book's cover

A while ago I wrote a short story based on my experiences commuting from my residence in Ballston Spa to my workplace in Scotia. It opened with these few lines:

“Six years after taking a teaching position at an upstate high school and living in a cardboard house in a cookie-cutter suburban development, my wife and I decided we had to move. We wanted a better home, a more interesting environment — a place where you could mail a letter, buy a newspaper, borrow a book or see a dentist without driving, a house in which you might quietly cuss, cough or sneeze without getting a response from someone in a distant room. Besides, our young son wanted to take DRUM lessons! Drawing a half-hour circle around the school, we set out to find a place more like the small town in Massachusetts where we grew up. The village of Ballston Spa, though much smaller, fit the bill and we made the move to a wonderful old house a year later.”

That optimistic beginning worked out beautifully when we moved here in 1973, exchanged our spindly Danish Modern furniture for solid antiques and became involved in village life. Living among beautiful historic homes and a mostly intact traditional business district prompted me to join with a few village friends in a successful effort urging the establishment of a historic district to protect that heritage. I subsequently designed the bronze plaques for each house in the district and served as chairman of the Historic District committee for several years.

Another good friend and a similar urge led me to support the National Bottle Museum by designing and building exhibits when the not-for-profit was located in the Victorian-era Verbeck mansion on Church Avenue. That experience led to a commission designing a major exhibit space at Brookside Museum on Charlton Street when Field Horne was the director.

After the NBM relocated to Milton Avenue, now late Executive Director Jan Rutland brought me into her fold as a Trustee where I served for three years until health issues forced my withdrawal. By the time I met Jan, I'd been an artist most of my life, exhibiting all over the greater Capitol Region, in New York City and Washington DC galleries with works in collections private and public.

A “small” accident a few years ago plus my ongoing interest in village history led me to alter my personal artistic direction from large surreal ink drawings to the creation of small acrylic paintings of significant sites around town. Quite a few are in private collections here in the village. I'm honored to have some of them gracing the cover and inside pages of this book.



To view more
masterpieces
by Phil Spaziani
please visit
www.PhilSpaziani.com



Joy Ride

Patricia A. Nugent was inspired to pen this poignant tribute to Phil Spaziani after he made an indelible first impression on his then neighbor's heart and soul around the turn-of-the-millennium. The former teacher and administrator has since earned accolades for her 2010 book, *They Live On: Saying Goodbye to Mom and Dad*, and *The Stone that Started the Ripple*, her historic yet humorous play about early suffragists. She subsequently served as editor for *Before They Were Our Mothers: Voices of Women Born Before Rosie Started Riveting*, an anthology of real-life, first-person accounts written by descendants. Please visit <https://journalartspress.com/about/> to learn more about Patricia, whose latest work-in-progress is titled *Healing with Dolly Lama: Finding God in Dog*.

When other Boomers are honest with me (and I with them), they admit to feeling a lack of joy in their lives, the absence of the unbridled enthusiasm and passion that came so naturally to us in our younger years.

As I spoke with a friend one afternoon, we lamented that we didn't see any big drum roll or adventure in store for us. Life feels boring, humdrum. We talked about the pace, the stress, and the demands of our lives, coupled with the repetition of it all. We talked about the aging process and the nasty tricks our once youthful, virile bodies now play on us. *Where is the joie de vivre, we wondered? Is that all there is?* I left her concluding that perhaps I should just find a cyanide tablet and get it over with. Until ...

Until I drove down my street and there, at the end of his driveway, was a neighbor sitting on his bicycle. Big grin on his face, helmet on, ready to roll. I pulled over to say hello, and he asked me to join him. I hesitated but then agreed to do so, deciding the cyanide could wait a while longer. I parked my car, ran into the house, changed my clothes, and dragged my dirty bicycle out of the garage, noting that the tires needed air.

I walked my bike over to where my riding companion was waiting and asked to use his air pump. He directed me to where he thought it was, but I couldn't find it. I began to scour the rest of the garage while he pointed to the shelves from his bicycle seat. And then it hit me: I got a lot of nerve — a lot of nerve being depressed; a lot of nerve feeling like I have nothing to look forward to. I have a lot of nerve feeling sorry for myself when Phil — the grinning man on the bicycle — is a paraplegic who can't get the air pump for me because he can't stand up, who rides a hand-powered bicycle because his legs stopped working following an accident a few years ago. I made a mental note to cancel the call to Dr. Kevorkian.

We began our ride. Kids shouted to Phil, calling him "way cool" because his bike is so unique. People in cars tooted and gave him the thumbs up. He was a star and a hero for beating the odds, for getting out there and living life. Phil continued to grin, and we shared laughs. My depression lifted as I began to transition from the mindset of *get it over with to get over it!* While there are certainly justifiable reasons to be depressed as we age, I thankfully hadn't earned the right to be so at this point in time. And, apparently, neither had Phil.

Our ride ended, and I wandered back into my house, rejuvenated by the experience. I spotted a magazine article on the demise of the dinosaurs indicating that they were doing just fine until a big meteor wiped them all out. (They weren't even sick!) When you least expect it — BAM! It's all over. So until another meteor (or equivalent) strikes, we should relish every day we roam this earth.

Joy can be found wherever we look — and we don't have to venture too far. As Dorothy tells Glinda as she prepares to leave Oz, "If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard, because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with."

Following our joy ride, I resolved to start looking in my own backyard and to create opportunities to fully experience life. For joy isn't something that explodes on the scene. It's a process, not a product. It is a way of framing our life experiences. Joy is found in hearing a friend's voice on the phone, in watching a sunset, in a hug, in a cookie. In a life. My life, Phil's life, and yours.



Scenes from Phil Spaziani's *Picturing A Village Series*

The Old Chocolate Factory from Historic Horse Alley (above) and Abner Doubleday's Birthplace (below) represent but a small part of Ballston Spa, NY artist Phil Spaziani's ever-expanding series titled "Picturing A Village."



Lorraine Spaziani began stringing beaded necklaces as a newlywed

Lorraine Spaziani has been collecting beads for as long as she can remember. But only recently have the pierced cylinders of diverse organic origins, colors, textures, shapes and sizes been tenderly removed from vintage cigar boxes and cookie tins to assume places of honor on distinctive mixed media necklaces created by their artisan owner.

“The first beads I ever owned were pink pearls that had belonged to my Nana, Eva Barrile,” recalls Lorraine, who has been wed for six decades to artist Phil Spaziani. “I still remember Nana, who was born in the late 1800s, wearing the beautiful necklace, which became mine after the string was broken. It took me forever to take the necklace apart because each pearl was knotted at both ends.”

Another early beaded acquisition was a necklace crafted from antique ivory – which was in wide use among jewelry makers during Lorraine’s childhood. Many other beads were purchased at garage sales between the 1950s to the 1990s when discarded “junk jewelry” could be had for a song. Over the decades, Lorraine also picked up some interesting looking stones, shells, glass shards, pieces of wood – even nuts that struck her fancy.

What each find shared in common was that it resembled a bead.

But it took signing up for fused glass and ceramics classes at the senior center operated by the City of Saratoga Springs, NY in 2010 to inspire the dozens of necklaces Lorraine has since designed and strung together in her home in the neighboring Village of Ballston Spa.

Each necklace is a unique mixture of clay beads as well as old and new glass – the latter sometimes accented by whimsical nautical themes that celebrate Lorraine’s eastern seaboard roots. The fish, crabs and octopi are just a few of the aquatic shapes that serve as reminders of the years when Lorraine’s ocean-loving father gifted her with seasoned cod line for stringing her very first necklaces.

While Lorraine no longer owns even a single sample of her early jewelry making, both she and Phil share fond memories of how – and why – her very first beaded necklaces came to be.

As poor as church mice during their years as college art students in Massachusetts in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Lorraine and Phil came to depend on the sale of her single stringed necklaces to keep their financial boat afloat. Despite her studio talents, Lorraine insists she couldn’t roll a perfectly round ball out of clay so instead produced shallow cones — which had to be individually pierced with a fine straw prior to kiln firing.

“People loved Lorraine’s necklaces so much that it was often hard to keep up with the demand for them,” reflects Phil, who worked two jobs during the couple’s college years to supplement his income from the GI Bill. As he recalls, the clay used to fashion Lorraine’s hand-made beads darkened to a nice rich brown after kiln firing. She would then painstakingly string the beads with her father’s cod line.

“It was three-ply cord that had to go up, around and through each individual bead to securely hold them in place,” smiles Lorraine, who remembers creating “dozens and dozens” of the single string necklaces. “Looking back, I’m not sure how I managed to be so productive on top of my studies and a part-time job in the notions department at an F. W. Woolworths, but we were poverty-stricken so Phil and I both did whatever needed to be done to pay our bills.”

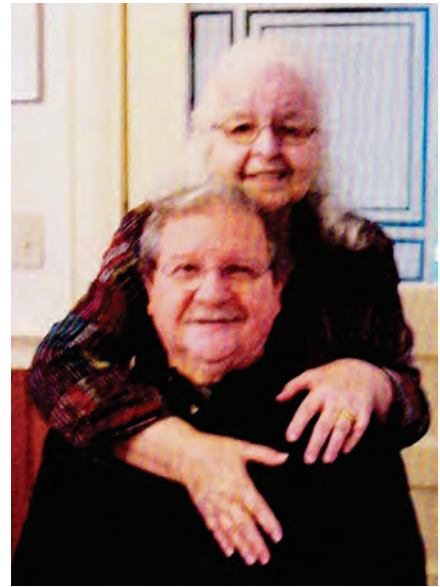
Stringing beads today is anything but stressful for Lorraine. Indeed she describes the process — which now takes place inside of a sunny home-based studio — as “very relaxing, almost therapeutic. If I’m worried about something when I start stringing beads, I usually can’t remember was it was by the time I finish,” muses Lorraine.

Memories of yesteryear prompt loving glances and nostalgic exchanges between her and the man who first caught her eye when he was Master of Ceremonies at an elementary school event at school in 1940s. “My mother has taken me to see the show because my older sister Nataline, who had a wonderful and powerful voice, was singing.”

Nataline was introduced by Phil, then in Grade 6 and five years Lorraine’s senior. “I can still see him standing there in his little yellow shirt and brown pants. He made a lasting impression.”



Anyone wishing to meet the artist who designed the historic marker identifying the magnificently restored 1845 Federal townhouse at the corner of West High and Court Streets in Ballston Spa need only inquire within. Just inside the twin front doors of the moss green landmark is a spacious studio where Phil Spaziani creates original masterpieces – many of which comprise what the artist calls his “Picturing A Village Series.” It is also within these walls that Lorraine creates jewelry such as the one-of-a-kind samples below. PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANN HAUPRICH.



Because of their five-year age difference, Lorraine and Phil didn’t reconnect until after he (a Winthrop High School Class of 1953 graduate) saw a grown up version of her (a Winthrop High School Class of 1958 graduate) in a hometown business known as Freddie’s Barber Shop.

“I wanted a cap cut shaggy do like the one Marlo Brando had sported in the role of Caesar. None of the lady hairdressers would give me the style I wanted, so I went to see Freddie.” His saying “I do” to doing the cap cut shaggy do ultimately led to I dos. At the time of their marriage, Phil said he “had just turned 25, but looked 15, while Lorraine had just turned 20, but looked 12.”

Needing to share a breakfast teabag to stretch their grocery funds and using tin cans to repair the muffler and tail pipe on their maroon 1951 Dodge Sedan – which often ran on spare tires that had been tossed away as refuse at service stations — are but a few of the memories that bind them together.

“There’s no doubt that we’re more appreciative of the bounty we have today because of all we did without as newlyweds,” muses Phil, who can often be found drawing or painting in a downstairs studio while Lorraine is being creative upstairs. In addition to creating necklaces and pottery, Lorraine also designs colorful fused glass pins and pendants, necklaces and earrings and decorative fused glass items for windows.

“My degree is in ceramic design and my focus has been on hand built pottery. Beading, fused glass and felting are all recent forms my creative juices have embraced,” explains Lorraine.