

# Walks with Wolves

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DOVER - When one enters artist Perley Murray's new shop, Walks With Wolves Creations, it's the bright colors that catch the eye right away. The warm light orange of an accent wall mingles with splashes of bright colors in a grouping of paintings straight ahead, which Murray calls his "Whoville" paintings. They depict whimsical bonsai trees in a range of configurations and bright colors.

The eye moves onto the rest of the shop, where Murray sits with seashells and jewelry supplies on a table in front of him. Surrounding him, on walls, shelves, and in cases, are a range of items with two common themes: they feel as though they're in some way connected to the earth, and they were all made by hand or foraged by Murray himself.

Which is no small feat. The shop, which feels like the kind of curated boutique that features a range of artists, is diverse in its mix of paintings, jewelry, bonsai trees, and other wares.

Each category of art has variety within it, too. Though Murray says he doesn't label the styles of his paintings, they range from abstract to intricate nature scenes to the aforementioned Whoville pieces. His jewelry offerings include amethyst earrings cut into shapes by Murray, wire-wrapped necklaces, bone necklaces, and pieces featuring polished stones that Murray gathered himself as a teenager. Dreamcatchers are abundant, as are bowls of healing stones and crystals.

The expanse of the materials, styles, and techniques Murray has employed to create the work is impressive, as is the fact that he's self-taught and hasn't been focusing on his craft, or, rather, crafts, very long. He took the plunge into the realm of the artistic after he had a heart attack in 2015. He was seeking a life that not only was free of major stress but also had an outlet for stress relief.

"So, I picked up a paintbrush and started painting," he says. "I always realized I had some talent, but I didn't realize I had this talent."

Many of Murray's paintings depict nature and are born out of Murray's memories and impressions of things he's seen in his travels over the years. Murray says he's always been drawn to the earth and the outdoors, and he brings his connection to nature into his art, either through using stones and feathers he foraged himself or by working actual sand, ash, and gold -- all foraged by Murray -- into the paint on canvases.

"Nearly everything in here has earthly additives," he says. "Whether it be ground flowers, sage, sweet grass. I mix it right into the paint."

Though themes of nature immediately present themselves in his art, it's kindness that's quickly evident in Murray. Talking to him, it's clear that spirituality, healing, and compassion are big parts of who Murray is. He's generous in conversation and has a warmth that makes talking to him feel easy. He has the gift of gab, he says, and in conversation, he frequently circles back to the ways he's helped others heal or control energies and pain through stones, crystals, and other techniques, many in the Native American tradition.

Asked where the shop's name comes from, Murray says it was a name given to him by a Native American elder when he turned 21. "I'm 25% Mi'kmaq and 25% Lakota," he says, though that knowledge was not always part of his life. He grew up in Burlington and was raised Catholic. His mother, who was of French descent, regarded his father's side of the family as Irish. Murray says he has since discovered through his own research that they were Scottish and that his father's side is where his Native American roots lie as well.

Murray says that while growing up, he always felt a connection to Native Americans and to the earth. He says that in his youth, he would feel compelled to spend days alone in the woods. "I always felt like there was something Native in our family," says Murray. "But we were never allowed to talk about it."

Murray was on a road trip on his Harley in his early 20s when he saw a sign for a roadside sweat lodge ceremony. "It was a \$40 roadside attraction," he said. He decided to go, and found himself inside a teepee. An elder came in and asked everyone to remove their glasses.

"When I did, he looked into my eyes and told everyone else that they had to leave the tent," says Murray. "He gave them back their money, took the peace pipe away from me and refilled it with something other than tobacco. Six hours later I'm standing in the middle of a reservation, watching a coming of age ceremony. And he gave me the name Walks with Wolves, based on what he saw in my eyes. At that time, the brown spot in my eye was the shape of a crescent moon."

Murray says it was that day that he recognized he had what he calls a gift, a sixth sense. In addition to Walks with Wolves, his other Native American name is He Who Knows, a reference, he says, to his ability to heal. He says he can see someone's story and pain, and how to heal it, by looking into their eyes. He hopes to give spiritual readings at the shop in time, though he says he's careful not to be invasive in situations when someone hasn't asked for his insight.

"I try to make eye contact with people when I talk to them," he says. "But sometimes I don't, because I don't want to invade their personal business. And I don't want to freak people out."

Murray is unselfish with his gifts, both healing and artistic. He says that more than once at flea markets, he's given healing stones to people whom he could tell needed them. In matters of art, he says that while it will be nice to sell pieces, money isn't his primary motivator. One of his big points of inspiration is meeting the people who may make his art a part of their home.

"The whole point of me being here is that I want to meet the people who are buying," he says. "If someone comes in here and they're staring at a painting but knew that the price was out of their range, if they want it, it's going out of the store with them one way or another. That's how I am. It's not about the money. Yes, I'd like to make a living at it, but I didn't go into it that way."

Murray is in his third week of business in Dover, and though it's been quiet, he has high hopes for what's ahead. He'd like to display some of his work outside once the weather warms, and he shows off a window to the rear of the building with pride. "Listen to this," he says, opening the window wide. The sound of the flowing river behind the building fills the shop. "All summer I'm going to get to hear that," he says, noting that he's looking forward to spending time in the shop creating whatever his artistic impulses encourage next.

Dover will officially welcome Murray and Walks with Wolves Creations into town with a grand opening ribbon cutting ceremony at the shop on Wednesday, February 7, at 10 am. The event is being coordinated by Dover Economic Development Director Steve Neratko, and members of the public are encouraged to attend.

Walks with Wolves Creations is located between Heather's Flowers and the laundromat in the Brook House plaza, on Route 100 across from 7-Eleven.